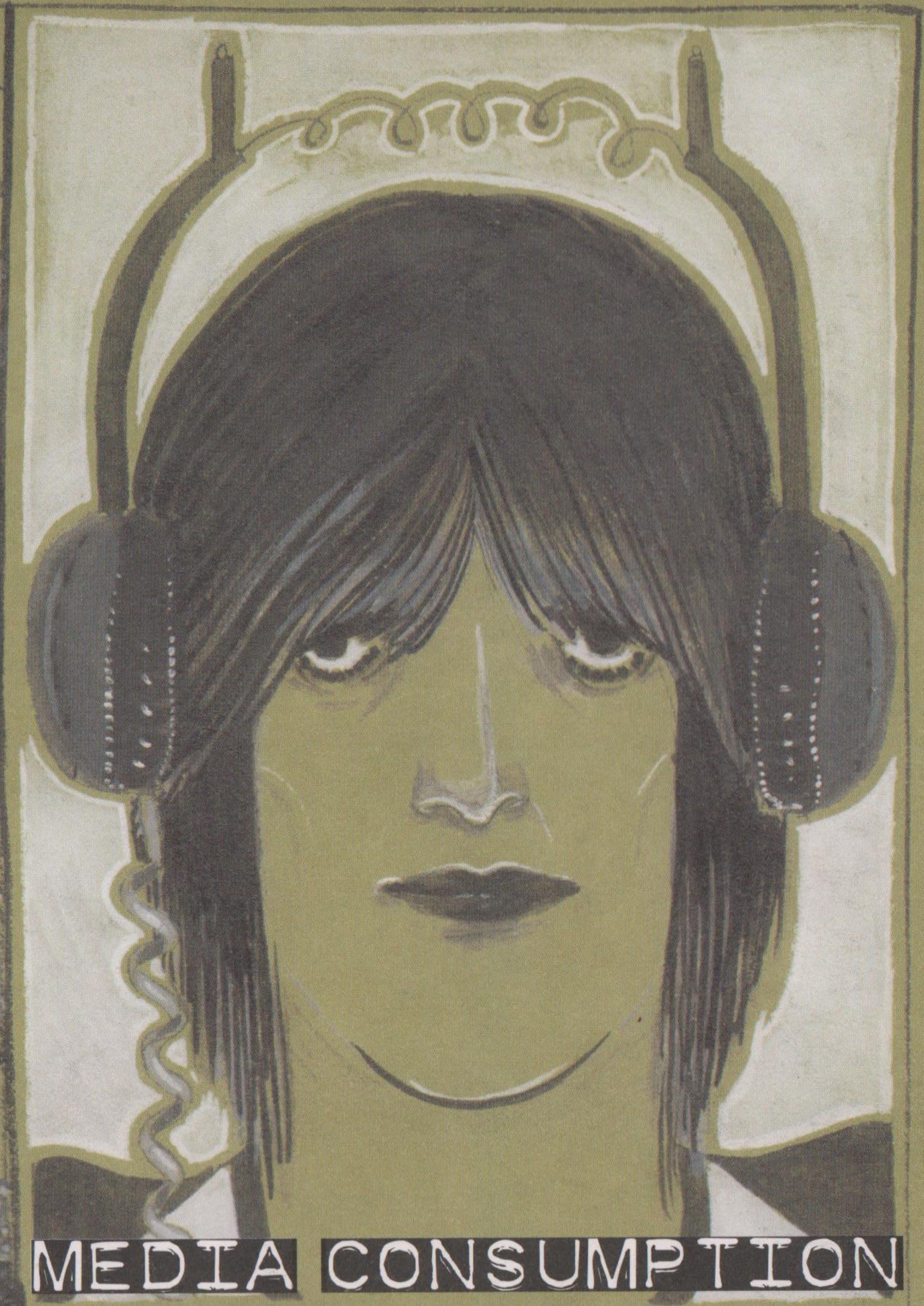




SEX WORK IN NZ



MEDIA CONSUMPTION



CREATIVE PROTEST



BURLESQUE

The Rag #5



WITCH HUNTS



PREGNANCY



DIY PATCHES



DEATH AND GRIEVING

INTRODUCTION

Dear Reader,

Thank you for picking up a copy The Rag #5!

We are RAG (Revolutionary Anarcha-feminist Group), a group of women based in Dublin, Ireland. We have been bringing out a yearly publication since 2005, as well as doing lots of other interesting and fun stuff – such as organising workshops, open meetings, participating in panel discussions, putting on gigs and attending demonstrations (see RAG year page 3).

This year we have tried hard to stick to our goals of discussing articles and doing collective editing. This is time-consuming work, yet incredibly rewarding! As usual, we've covered a range of topics in the magazine, with different themes emerging as people thought through and discussed their ideas. In this issue, we explore the idea of performance and burlesque, the folklore of widows' curses and the witch hunts, and the impact of New Media and our perceptions of the media all around us. We interview a Black Panther about the gender politics of the organisation. The magazine also includes personal stories about death and bereavement, childbirth and the decision to have or not have kids, and tips on aromatherapy and on how to be nice to yourself.

The economic crisis has continued and deepened in Ireland during the past year. We have witnessed bank-bailouts, with the government donating an estimated €45 billion from the coffers of the state to keep these floundering capitalist powerhouses alive. To support this ludicrous move, the government has slashed public spending with, possibly, the worst yet to come in December's budget. One of the worst hit areas is the community and voluntary sector. These imposed cuts have a severe and devastating impact on the lives of many women, particular those in already vulnerable situations. The Irish State continues to support the ultra-rich, to the detriment of the majority. Yet it is refreshing that in this seemingly dire situation, resistance continues and new debates emerge to help us understand, highlight and fight this latest crisis of capitalism.

This year we welcomed the creation of new feminist groups in Ireland: the Irish Feminist Network, Cork Feminista and the Belfast Feminist Network, which are all exciting initiatives full of motivated people. RAG members continue to engage and build links with our allied groups, such as Lash Back and Choice Ireland, as well as taking part in debates hosted by the Feminist Open Forum. We have also happily witnessed other anarchist-feminist groups develop and grow in Edinburgh, London and Glasgow.

We won't stop now. In these times of economic crisis, the anarchist alternative to capitalism is relevant now more than ever. We must fight to keep feminism in the spotlight, fostering collaboration between groups, informing, educating, learning and listening to each other.

In solidarity and struggle,

RAG x
 ragdublin@riseup.net
 www.ragdublin.blogspot.com
 facebook.com/ragdublin

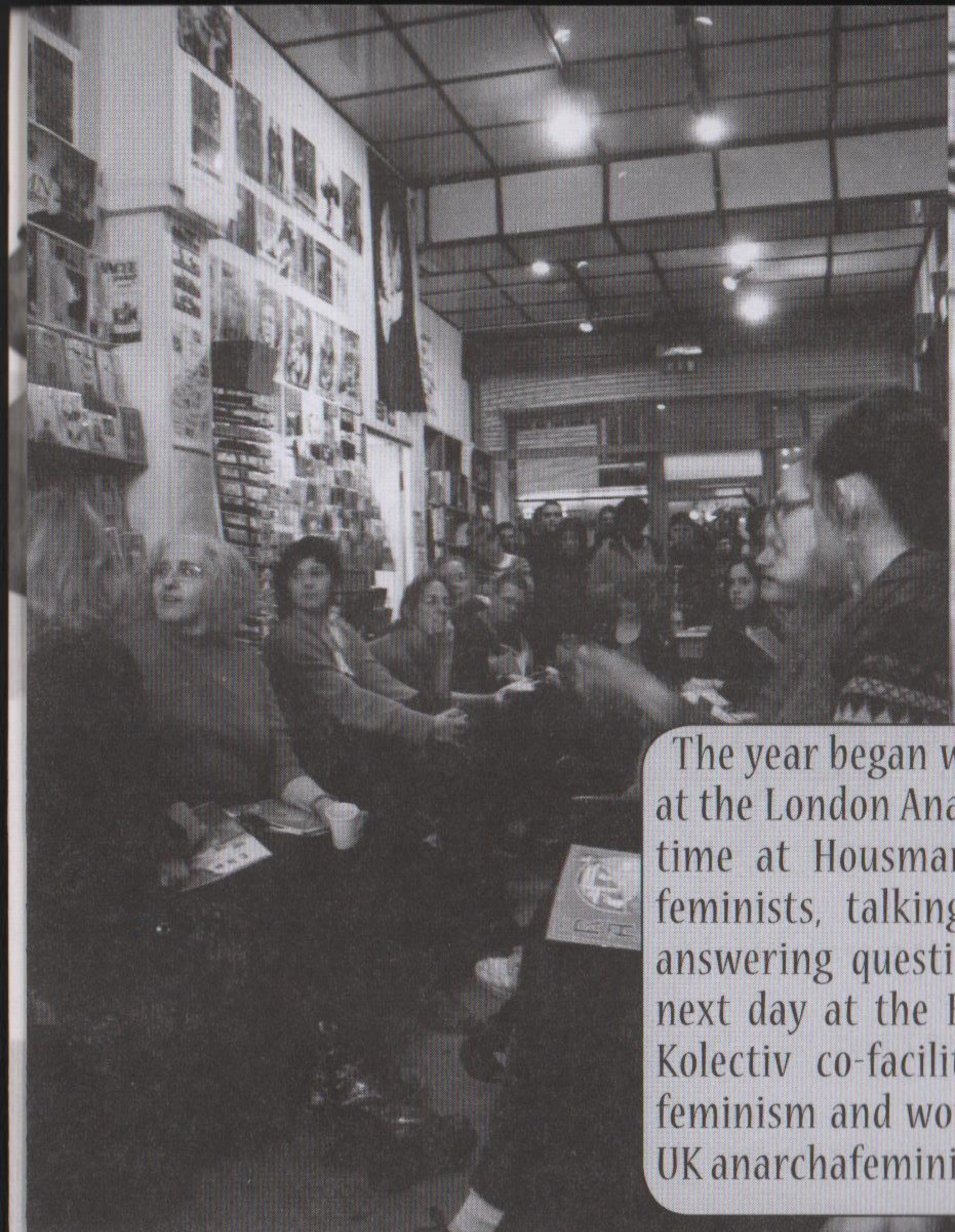
New members welcome! Please drop us a line with any comments or feedback. We'd particular love to hear form other anarcha-feminist groups. Also, if you would like to order a copy of The Rag no.3 and no.4 get in touch. Postal Address: PO Box 10785, Dublin 1, Ireland.

A big, giant thank you to:

Seomra Spraoi and all the fantastic volunteers; Exploding Birds; Workers Solidarity Movement; Grehan printers; the wonderful Andrew Flood; Angela Nagle, Fionn Kidney, Vanessa Monaghan, Caroline Campbell; Baby Beef; Choice Ireland; LashBack; Feminist Open Forum; Dublin Community TV; Indymedia; Klara; CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo); Laura Sheeran; Damo C; Human Rights in Ireland blog; Anto and Independents' Day; Irish Feminist Network; Mark Malone; Radio Solidarity; Mark Tyndall; and Laura McAuliffe.

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The year began when The Rag, Issue #4 was successfully launched at the London Anarchist Bookfair in October of 2009. We had a great time at Housman's Radical Booksellers meeting other anarcha-feminists, talking about the process of making the magazine, answering questions from the audience, and drinking wine. The next day at the Bookfair, RAG and the London Anarcha Feminist Kolectiv co-facilitated a very engaging discussion on anarcha-feminism and women in activism. We also attended a gathering of UK anarchafeminists, which began a UK and Ireland network.



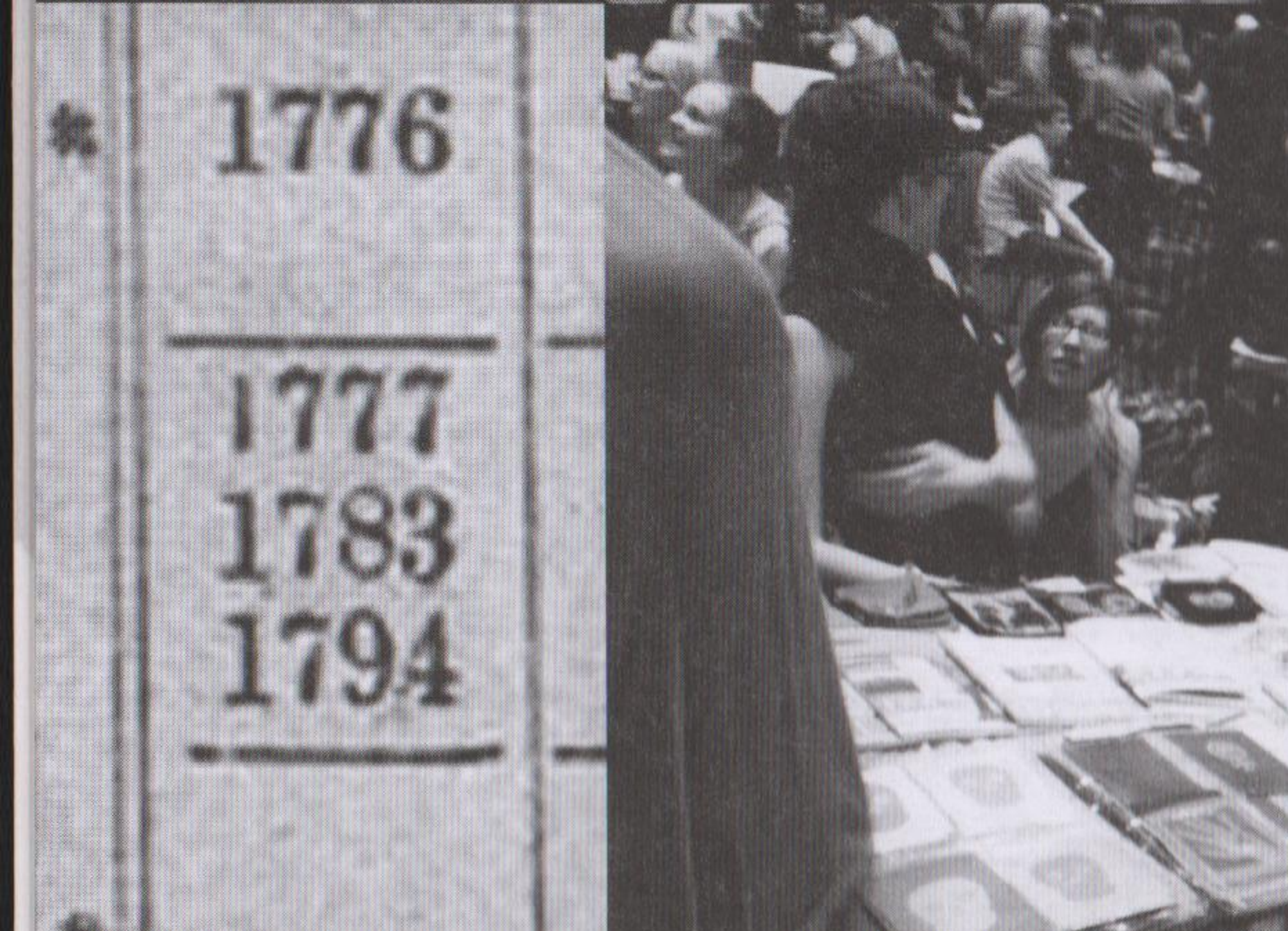
RAG hosted filmmakers Angie Young and Sarah Diehl, who showed films they have made on the subject of abortion. The first one is called *The Coat Hanger Project* (<http://www.thecoat-hangerproject.com>) and the second is *Abortion Democracy: Poland/South Africa* (<http://www.abortion-democracy.de>) The filmmakers answered questions about the films afterwards. We look forward to tracking their future work!

In February, we held an introductory meeting for people interested in joining RAG which earned us some fantastic new members. That same month Angela and Clare took part in a DCTV programme *Looking Left - Banshee* magazine, which you can read more about in this issue.



This year RAG sadly didn't join Choice Ireland and Lashback in organising the Third Annual Feminist Walking Tour on March 7th to mark International Women's Day but RAG member Ariel spoke at the tour, and all of us who attended were very proud.

In April one of our newer members facilitated a facinating and well attended open meeting on women's groups in Palestine/Israel with a discussion and short film.



Sept.
Dec.

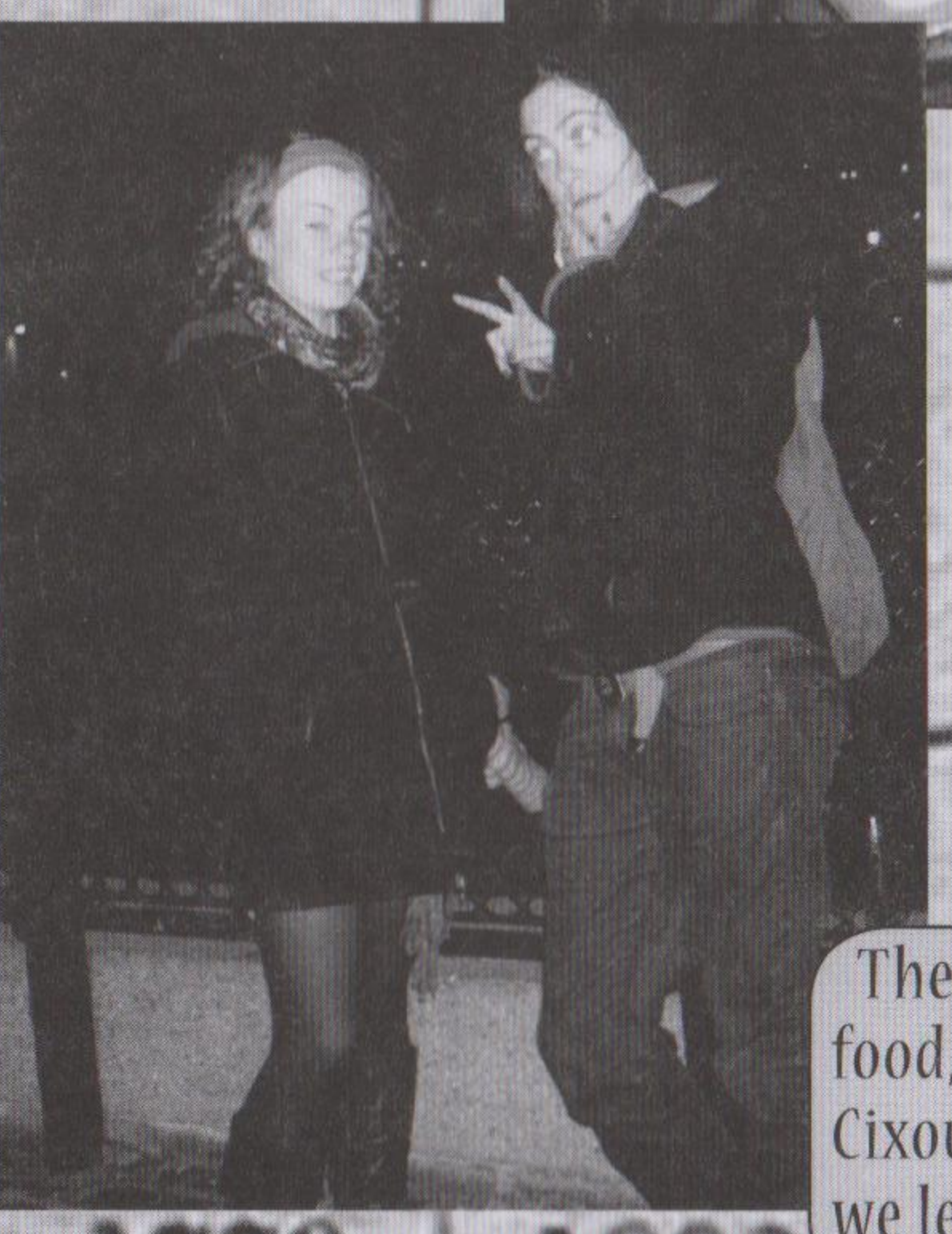


1923
1934
1945
1940



The RAG distro had a table at the Dublin Anarchist bookfair, organised by Workers Solidarity Movement, while Suzanne and Sinéad gave a mental health workshop. Thanks to Irish zine *Baby Beef*, RAG was available at the London Zine Symposium in May. Also during that month, RAG took part in the Stop the Bank Bailouts demonstrations taking the RAG banner onto the streets.

The Year in RAG



1829
1835
1846



The Dublin launch was celebrated in November with yummy food, party dresses, and performances by Meljoann, Ewa Gigon, and Cixous Ghost (featuring Emily from RAG!). After all the hard work, we let loose and partied the night away with our amazing friends.



An open meeting in June, coordinated by Emily, took a look at the uses and dangers of new media and included a very interesting panel discussion.



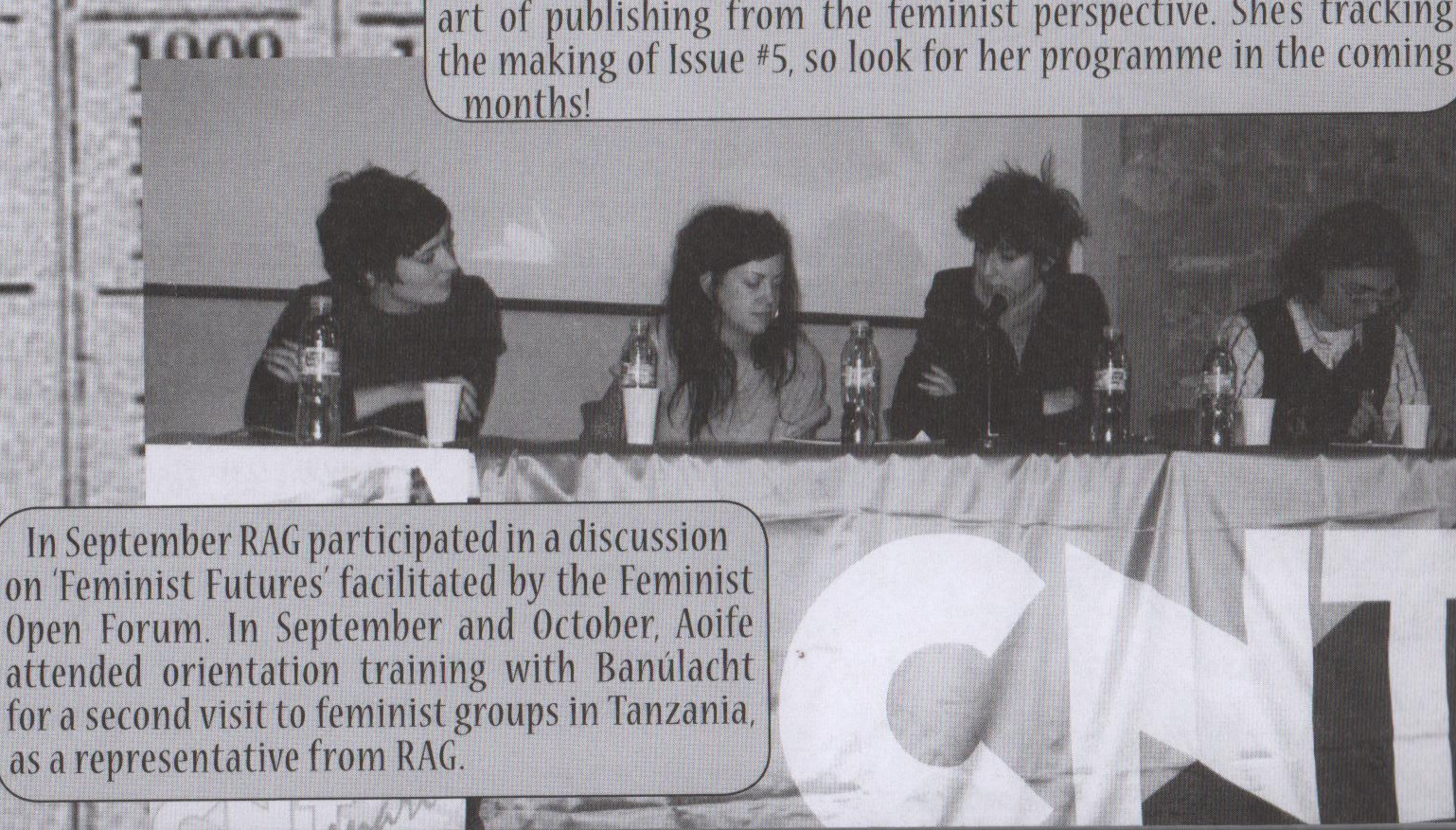
Emma from Dublin City Radio is working on a documentary for the programme "Making Art," which will focus on the collaborative art of publishing from the feminist perspective. She's tracking the making of Issue #5, so look for her programme in the coming months!



1865
1871
1882
1897
1892
1887
1898



In July, RAG hosted a gig in Seomra Spraoi with the band Exploding Birds. In August Emily and Ariel contributed to a panel discussion at a seminar on new media and the protection of human rights organised by the website humanrights.ie.



In September RAG participated in a discussion on 'Feminist Futures' facilitated by the Feminist Open Forum. In September and October, Aoife attended orientation training with Banúlacht for a second visit to feminist groups in Tanzania, as a representative from RAG.

CAT

MNÁ SASA IN SOLIDARITY

by Aoife

Since 2007, groups of Irish women from the community and voluntary sector in Ireland have been involved in an exchange with our peers in Tanzania. The purpose of the exchange, coordinated by the feminist development education organisation Banúlacht, is to act in solidarity on women's issues across the global north / south divide by sharing knowledge and strengthening understanding.

Mary Senior got down on the floor on her hands and knees, with her limbs evenly spaced. Liz, the enthusiastic volunteer for this activity, followed suit in a spirit of participation and fun. The rest of us, turning red with embarrassment, shrieked with laughter. As a bit of light relief on the second afternoon of the workshops, Mary Senior (as she is teasingly named, to distinguish her from Mary Junior) was demonstrating a traditional dance that Tanzanian grandmothers teach their granddaughters in preparation for their wedding night. As might be imagined, it involves gyration of the hips, sweeping low and, in this instance, a lot of mirth. Cheering them on, some of the Irish women in the group felt an inherited Catholic shame rise to the surface, while the Tanzanian women sang and clapped along despite our puerile mortification.

This was October 2009 in Dublin. I was participating in a two-day intensive workshop with participants from two Irish groups who had visited Tanzania in 2007 and 2008. Women from Tanzanian organisations had now come to Ireland in this third stage of the exchange. Two days together discussing feminism and women's rights, this was a space to share and explore the similarities, as well as very pertinent differences, between

our activism in both continents. There were two outcomes of this process – the formation of a collective, Mná Sasa (meaning “Women Now” in the Irish and Kiswahili languages), and the development of a draft manifesto of solidarity.

I first got involved in the exchange with the initial group in 2007 when I travelled to Tanzania as a representative member of the RAG collective. I also travelled in my role as the coordinator of a drop-in centre for marginalised refugees and asylum-seekers in the Dublin suburb of Tallaght. This was pretty far from Tanzania's capital, Dar-Es-Salaam, geographically of course, and also emotionally. After a number of days in the capital, we spent a weekend in Zanzibar, before moving to the northern city of Mwanza, situated on the coast of Lake Victoria. In each location we met Women's Groups participating in projects working towards the progress and emancipation of women. I went to Tanzania to learn, to reconsider what I knew of feminism and to grapple with the ways our Tanzanian peers struggle against patriarchy.

We sat at tables with women who had lost family members to witch-hunts. Actively outlawed by government, the vastness of the country as well as the power of rural based witchdoctors means that local influences prevail. An increasingly common phenomenon, witch-hunting predominantly affects albino people (whose body parts are believed to contain potent ingredients for potions protecting against HIV/Aids) and older women. Often these older women were the inheritors of land after the death of their husbands. Indeed, it was explained to us (sitting around a smart office table in an innocuous office of the Kivulini Women's Rights centre, gobsmacked in horror), that these women were often murdered by their own children.

We were brought to a project working to protect older women from this threat. A craftswoman sitting with a clay pot between her legs invited us into her workspace. As she fashioned the clay into a finished product, smoothing its surface, she explained in Kiswahili that red eyes are believed to be a sign of witchcraft. We were shown the simple technology of the cooking stove she was making. It was explained how they reduced red eyes caused by years of cooking over a smoky fire. This was a quick fix, I knew. It failed to address the root causes of why these women were being targeted and how their society was

failing to protect them. Yet, by making these stoves, the women working in this project are taking control over their future and that of their sisters, mothers and friends. The urgency of the threat against these women makes these simple clay ovens a literal life-saver.

We visited women growing small businesses with loans from micro-credit schemes. Newly independent women farmers explained how they would set up a small enterprise before reinvesting in the community by sharing newborn chicks or pigs with other women in their locality. These women were gaining an economic base and independence for themselves and the other women involved in the schemes. These women had a greater power now. They had more control over their own lives and could make their own decisions, regardless of the income of their husbands. It is a quick and fast antidote to extreme poverty. Yet, these farmers are the privileged few among their peers. This is what success looks like within the capitalist logic; inequality is perpetuated.

Some of the Irish women were most challenged by the initiatives working to prevent violence against women. One project we visited works with women and their husbands together in situations of domestic violence. It was difficult for us to remain open towards projects which encourage women to work with the perpetrators to reduce the violence. It jars strongly with the approach of many feminist organisations in Europe who encourage the

We confidently claim our knowledge as grassroots feminist activists. Our knowledge is from direct experiences, our involvement in community development and women's organisations, our social analysis, and our search for new ways of making sense of power and of women's place in the world. We refuse to be 'foot-soldiers' plugging the holes of neo-liberal policies.

-Extract from the Mná Sasa Manifesto

independence and self-determination of victims and survivors of domestic abuse. However, in situations of extreme poverty, the outcomes for an independent woman looked bleak. Tanzanian society holds huge respect for the institution of marriage, reflected in customs concerning inheritance, property rights and kinship. A woman who falls outside the safety net of her husband's extended family risks untenable isolation.

Every night I went to bed with my head spinning. I couldn't speak at times. My eyes and ears were full. I couldn't read the book I had brought (what would Graeme Green understand about African Transformative Feminism anyway? Bah!). For the most part I felt young, inexperienced and naïve – and utterly humbled.

My experiences were throwing up many questions for me around difference and culture. Is it not time to discard cultural traditions once they fail to protect? Surely culture and kinship are only beneficial when women, as well as men, are nourished and protected? In our willingness to respect the diversity of others, where do we draw the line? It makes sense that answers to my questions were out of my grasp. In two weeks, I caught only a glimpse of another society and culture with its own manifestations of patriarchy and its own challenges to this status quo. But I am glad I have taken the opportunity to formulate these questions. They continue to challenge me with in my cross-cultural work with Traveller women. It is essential to work from a strong feminist analysis. Yet this analysis is never complete until the voices of women from all cultures must be empowered to speak and argue their perspectives. The Tanzanian women were showing us what works for them and my role was to be both open and critical.

Though I often could not fully understand how the women we met worked to challenge the worst of their oppression, I could sense and feel their power, their utter commitment. We met women who were being given a chance, hope, for a better life, inspired by feminist understandings of their situations. The community workers and leaders we were lucky enough to meet and discuss these issues with, like most feminists, come from a long tradition of struggle for women's rights. We were introduced to the ideas of African Transformative Feminism, an approach to women's rights which places anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and the urgency of poverty alleviation at its core.

After the second group of Irish women travelled to Tanzania in 2008, six Tanzanian women made the return trip to Ireland the following year. I had finished working at the drop-in centre shortly after my trip, and moved to a community development organisation where I now run a women's education programme. The course I coordinate, composed of women from the Traveller Community, were host to three of this group for a morning of exchange and learning. The Tanzanian women arrived in heavy rain to be greeted by handmade bunting

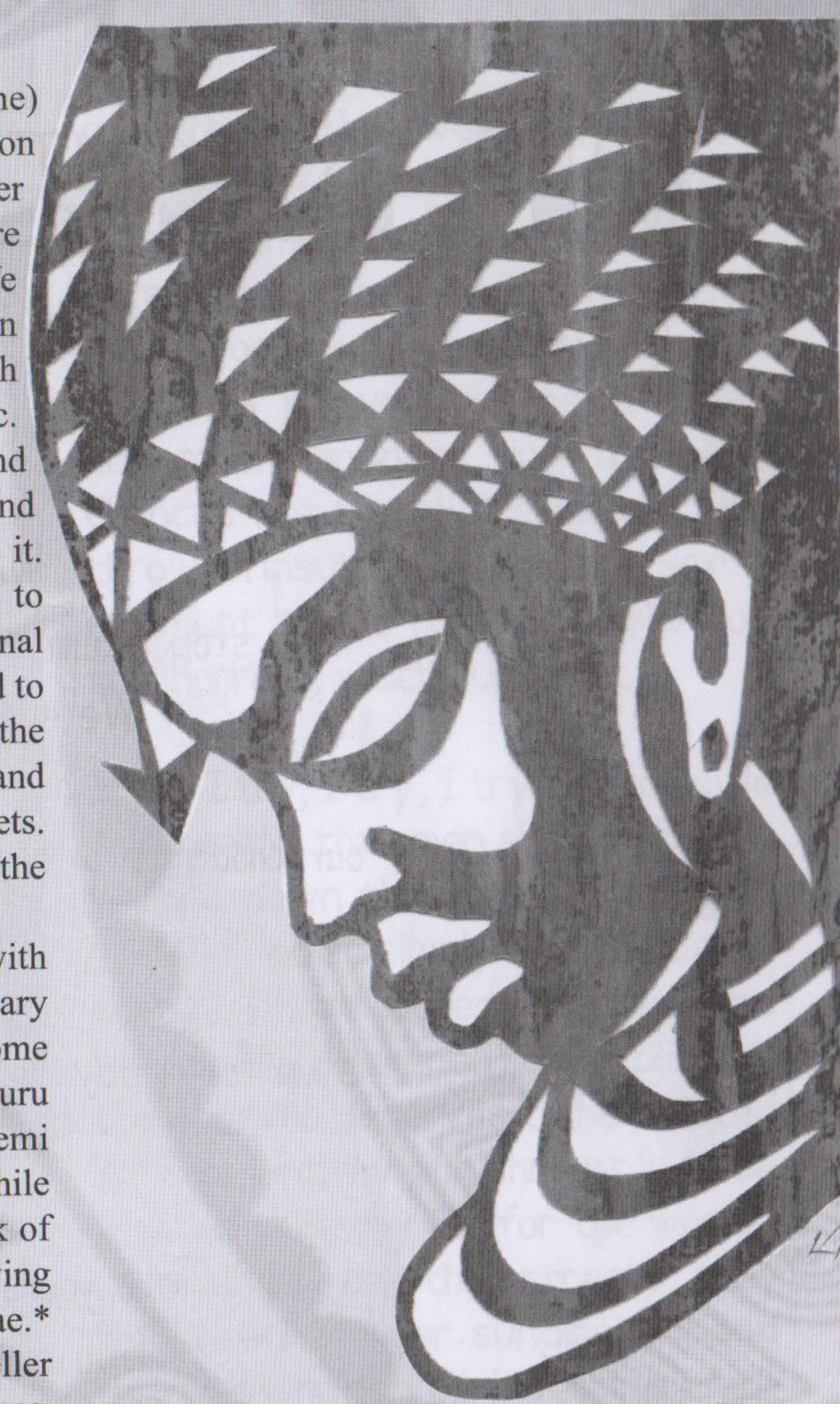
around the walls and 'Karibu' (welcome) posters. Three women from the education group gave a presentation on Traveller culture and another on primary health care initiatives in the Traveller community. We showed a DVD the group had made on identity and accommodation issues, which also showcases traditional Traveller music. A quilt depicting different aspects of past and present Traveller culture was displayed and explained by one of the women who made it. The Tanzanian women were then invited to take part in another craft project, traditional paper flowers, which Traveller women used to sell door to door. Moll McDonagh sat with the women and showed them a few techniques, and we soon had beautiful crepe paper bouquets. This could be a good business in Tanzania, the visitors enthused.

The Tanzanian women then shared with the groups about their own projects: Mary Kabati told us about the Tanzania Home Economics Association, Tony Ndunguru explained the work of Mwanza Chemichemi Community Based Organization; while Catherine Kamugumya explained the work of 'Women's Dignity,' who support women living with the after-effects of obstetric fistulae.* The Tanzanian visitors asked the Traveller women about traditional cures and medicines. This links with the work of Mary, Tony and Catherine, who drew comparisons with the return to traditional or herbal cures that they promote in their organisations. Photos were passed around, and each anecdote, explanation of a photo and peal of laughter brought the subject alive. A spirit of common understanding filled the community centre. When I overheard one woman exclaim, 'They're actually just like us!' I felt the efforts of the exchange were worthwhile and that solidarity was possible.

Only a few days before, I had found myself standing in a circle with others from the three exchange groups, together in Dublin for the first time, giggling at Mary Senior and Liz as they oscillated their torsos almost in unison. While probably not the pinnacle of our learning experiences from the solidarity exchange, this intergenerational dance tradition exemplified the richness of women's knowledge and bonding in Tanzania to which the Irish women present could aspire (behind our red cheeks).

Next month I'm returning to Tanzania with a group of women who have been involved with the process and women who are only beginning to engage. The Mná Sasa collective will be maintained and solidarity links will progress. Our manifesto will be developed. Our bonds as women and as grassroots activists will be strengthened. For me, I know this will be an experience that will continue to challenge and inform, while gifting to me flares of hope and energy for positive change for all of us who experience gender and economic oppression.

*A severe medical condition in which a fistula (hole) develops after severe or failed childbirth when adequate medical care is not available.



Near FM podcast on the 2007 Exchange Community Radio Programme which follows the Irish women over the two week visit to Tanzania, and attempts to capture our impressions and the questions we raised. nearfm.ie/podcast/index.php?id=291

TGNP Tanzania Gender Networking Programme aims to contribute to the building of a vibrant transformative feminist movement that challenges patriarchy and neo-liberalism at all levels, and advocates for gender equality/equity, women's empowerment, social justice and social transformation in Tanzania and beyond. tgnp.org

Banúlacht Ireland based feminist development education organisation. banulacht.ie

Kivulini Women's Rights Organisation Tanzania based community group, mobilising communities to prevent domestic violence. kivulini.org

St Margaret's Travellers Community Association Community development organisation which brings together settled and Traveller communities (my current contact details) trainingstmargarets@gmail.com



BE NICE TO YOURSELF

words and images by Sinead

Sometimes...Just sometimes
We forget to take care of ourselves.
We stop listening to what our bodies and our intuition are telling us.
We eat crappy food, smoke and drink too much,
miss out on important sleep and give no space for
our thoughts to rest, preventing freedom of creativity and playfulness.
We voluntarily punish ourselves.

Stop for a day. Turn off your phone, forget status updates and email.
Sleep well, eat well, and take a day off.

Take yourself somewhere beautiful and breathe some
clean air, close your eyes and fuck the daily grind.

Really basic tips to help with this:
Breathing exercise.
Inhale to the count of five...Hold for five...exhale to five.
Do this for as long as you feel comfortable.
Try to concentrate on the numbers and how
the breath goes through your body.

Spend some time alone.
We're constantly surrounded by people, noises and images.
Your thoughts can gain speed; it's important to only hear yourself once in a while.

Yoga is deadly for learning to have a peaceful mind.
If you live in Dublin, you can go to classes in the Open Minds Centre
on 95 Lower Erne Street. The teachers are amazing and the project is donation-based.

Burning citrus oils in the morning is a really good way of lifting your mood.

Something as simple as drinking water every day can help you de-stress.
Caffeine, cigarettes, alcohol, and sugar are well known to cause anxiety.

But for me the best thing is just getting enough sleep for three days in a row.
Of course we should always sleep properly. But occasionally life gets in the way of these things.
My point is...Be nice to yourself, and be nice to each other.

MY PLACE

Words by N
images by Emma and Daquella Manera



Someone decided in my place
That this is not my place
Someone collected myself for me
And put me by the entrance or the exit
Someone took away my sneakers
And told me "run now"
Someone covered my lips
With his cold hand, blocked them
And told me "speak"
Someone told me to leave
To move from here
The thing is he didn't give me an address
And on top of that he took away my sneakers
-Ayat Abu Shmeiss'

Here I am in Tel Aviv again after
one year. Same old heat, same old
Mediterranean temperament, same
old filth. The daily difficulty of the
heat (in Europe people might fondly
describe this weather in their
imagination as "nice and warm",

until they got to experience it)
is well visible in people's faces, in
their tired and nervous looks. I see
it looking back at me from the bare
cement, from the thousands of
sweaty feet walking around the city
in sandals; I feel it in the yellowy,
heavy air surrounding me without
mercy. Everything feels like home.

This air is as direct and sharp as the
people themselves. In our culture
there is no time for manners. You're
too hot and you want to get things
sorted out quickly and rush to the
next source of air conditioning.
"Where is the train station?" I am
suddenly asked by a young man who
came in front of my face. "I'm not
sure, but here's an information sign

over there. That would tell you", I
reply with a smile. When I lived here
I never smiled to strangers on the
streets. In the unofficial survival
guide for women in this region it
is a well known rule: never show
too much kindness to strangers.
Chances are they will exploit it and
throw an insulting, obnoxious, sexist
comment at you to try to make you
feel horrible, which succeeds.

I try, I try, I try, I try not to inhale
this feeling that men aim to give me
walking down the street, leering at
me. They do so simply because I am a
woman. I have sinned because I was
born as the weakened, the exploited,
the one who deserves to be treated
like shit, and my punishment is to be
treated this way. As for the women
themselves on the street, they
would rather wear sunglasses, and
the ones who don't are wearing a face
supposedly covered in sunglasses
— seemingly lacking in expression,
totally avoiding any eye contact,
and in fact nervous, fearful and
aggressive: Don't look at me again!
I'm tired of your looks!

People are helpful but suspicious.
Warm but nosy, bossy and have no
respect for personal space. Cheerful
but aggressive; open but so hateful
towards strangers.

There are many positive aspects
to my culture which I will not write
about. I am writing about what I
want. There are many people who
feel they belong in the joy, action
and creativity, interest, and human
warmth that this heat allows for;
people who feel natural in and native
to it. I am not one of them. I have
always felt like a foreigner here.

This feeling intensified after in the
11th grade, at the age of 16. I started
to discover who the Palestinians are
and what their story is. Until then
they were always "marketed" to
me as dangerous bloodthirsty killers
who live across from us and would
"throw us all into the sea" if we don't
"fight back to protect our country".

I never stuck to those beliefs and took them in, but as a child of course I wasn't condemning or challenging them either. My family wasn't presenting me with an alternative, to say the least. Then, at 16, I suddenly grew up all at once. When everything came to me as lightning, so powerful, in the intensity typical to the intense Israeli mentality – the atrocious injustice, the face of death and despair – I started to throw it all up, to reject it and to try to act against it with the same level of intensity.

It started around the time my classmates received their first letters by post calling them to start their exams for recruitment². Soon the issue thundered in the corridors of secondary school and was present at any small talk; the preoccupation with it never ceased until the very end of school.

During this time, in my reality, angry and desperate Palestinians were exploding themselves on the streets in the state of Israel on a daily basis, causing many deaths, and causing the Israeli society anxieties and traumas. What happened "across from the mountain", only a few tens of kilometres from me – I did not know, except that "our forces have entered city X for an extensive military operation", as the news told me.

One day I too received my green letter in the post. "Oh! What am I supposed to do?" I thought, "Probably go to the recruitment office and take the exams like everyone else". But something new had started ripening in me already, and something there was restless because it knew – although in a latent way – that it wasn't the place for me.

At the beginning of the same year, I met new friends. When one of them first told me that he was not going to the army, I thought, "How odd. Everyone is going". But with the

exposure to the process that my friends were going through, I too began to give acknowledgement and expression to my critical analysis of society, a form of thought which I began to develop naturally around that time. I could somehow see a repetitive pattern in the history books we were taught from: We were threatened, but we fought, we conquered, and we won the land and the glory that we deserve. My criticism of this began because, naturally, I felt resentment towards the prominent male-dominant and war-loving components of these myths.

Through attending events organised by "the radical left" in Israel I began to expose myself to new facts about the intense, absurd and anxious reality I lived in: there are people living across the "border"; we don't really know much about their identity, customs and culture; they have been deported from the land on which the Israeli state was built; they are going through hell in their daily lives – restriction on movement, expropriation of land, economic exploitation and oppression, military violence in many forms; their voice cannot be heard, and indeed it does not reach the people who live across the wall that is being constructed.

It was painful. I realised there was an unfathomable abyss between my awareness and will to change, and my environment – even at home (where all the members of my family have served in the army and were expecting me to do the same), and even with most of my friends. Why is the media not giving an hint of what these people are going through, and why is it presenting the news in a way that fuels the hatred? Why are people so blocked to the suffering of the other? Why do they stick so happily to the common spirit of militant patriotism? Why are they being proud in their violence? I thought about the suffering of the Palestinian people a lot and it affected me emotionally.

"Are you not going to the youth military camp [a fascism-encouraging preparation for military life]?" I was asked by quite a few classmates on the morning they all went there enthusiastically. "No, I am not going to the army. I don't like this culture and I oppose it. And I strongly oppose the occupation and I think you shouldn't cooperate with the army for that". Some would reply solely with a look of "you are weird", while others would get into an argument with me, always using the same lines: "Aren't you ashamed to not protect your country, after it has given you so much all your life?"; "Our country is under constant threat and we must do something about it. Why, do you encourage or justify their violence?"; "I don't mind girls not joining the army if they are doing Civil Service³ instead; but for full two years, like the ones who serve in the army"; "You could serve in the rear and have no direct support of the war"; "You could be a teacher-soldier, work with weakened communities, make an important contribution towards society"; "It is an entry ticket to the Israeli society [well then, thanks very much, but no thanks!] It would be difficult for you to be accepted at work and at universities";⁴ And so on and so on, in fact by nearly each and every person at any age whom I met in any circumstances.

I began to be very active. I met with Palestinian youth. I tried to shout out my crying protest among the Israeli society, and I tried to join actions that aimed at ending the manifestations of injustice. I tried, and I did for a while, and then, after about two years, I slowly cramped and crawled away. I could not bear the levels of anxiety that activism involved. One part of it was experiencing constant opposition from society wherever you went – first of all, by seeing the racism and disapproving of it, internally, and second of all by having people argue with you aggressively all the

time. But this is something I have gone through ever since I grew up, regardless of being "active" or not. At the time it was overwhelming because it was new to me, and I was alone in this feeling. The second part of what activism involves is encountering and experiencing harsh violence, rage, poverty, oppression of women, meeting our own racism, being spied on, detentions, running from bullets, and so on and so on, things that scared me to death, made me angry and confused, or made me feeling helpless. The consensus I felt, common among anarchists in my region, was that if you're not standing in the front line to receive the bullets, if you're not attending the demonstrations organised by Anarchists Against the Wall⁵ – you're not an activist, period. So I felt defeated and drew myself away from activism.

Slowly and safely, two years later, I crawled back to activism through two opportunities that I recognised as supportive groups. The first was an amazing women's group which looked at feminism, history, economics and everything that we wanted to learn about in the context of politics and gender – a discussion group in which we discussed solutions of one state, two states, or no states, and into which we brought the shit we carry from our society and criticised it; an awareness group in which we went through a beautiful process of discovering the strong women we are and our feminine strength together; we also had regular meetings with Palestinian women. The latter part was very meaningful for me, but it's a story for another time. If you're interested, you can watch a film online about this challenging and important dialogue project⁶.

The second group through which I rediscovered my activist-self also deserves a separate article to itself. I am speaking about the Middle Eastern battalion of CIRCA – the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army⁷. The Clown Army is an international idea

of clowns acting as a unit of soldiers. We are out there to be seen and to raise a smile, to heal a difficult or an intense situation with a laugh, and of course to mock the army. We are an army of love. We want to transform gun powder into pixie dust, to open stiffness of thought to creativity, to convert the grey and serious routine into a relieving giggle, and we are armed with hugs and tickles, the creative mind, a never-ending source of nonsense, and another vital ingredient: protection. There is an emphasis on support within the group.

Here I am, still in the heat of Tel Aviv, during my current visit to the Holy Land, looking back, contemplating, exploring my contact with this place that is not mine and yet is myself. There is more to think and to write about, and there is no one moral to this partial portion of my story. Thanks for listening.

¹Published at "Mitan", Israeli magazine for thought and action, issue no. 17, summer 2010, Tel Aviv-Jaffa.

²In Israel there is compulsory military service after graduating from secondary school, for all genders, for Jews and a

number of ethnic minorities. For men the compulsory service is for three years and for women about two years.

³An alternative of voluntary work in community (sometimes in slavery conditions) offered to people who got a legal exempt from the IDF under the brainwashing argument that "everyone must contribute to society as much as everyone else". The common idea is that 18 year-olds are parasites on society and selfish egoists unless they join a very demanding and a mostly very emotionally and physically challenging system of voluntary service.

⁴In regard to the first claim, it is unfortunately true that in many job interviews I had this issue was an obstacle. Interviewers would try to doubt my "normality" on the basis of the fact I wasn't in the army. The latter claim, about damaging the chances of acceptance at institutions for higher education, is baseless.

⁵A direct action group composed of Israeli anarchists and anti-authoritarians who oppose the construction of the Israeli Gaza Strip barrier and Israeli West Bank barrier. <http://www.awalls.org>

⁶http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xa3i5w_women-defying-barriers-english-subt_news

⁷If you want to explore the Clown Army meanwhile, you can go to: <http://clownarmy.org> and <http://www.tsif.info/drupal/> (see interview on page 17)



Impacts of Legalisation:

An Interview on Prostitution

by Marianne

Artwork by Kendrah

In 2003 the Prostitution Reform Act (PRA) was passed in New Zealand decriminalising prostitution. While not "endorsing or morally sanctioning prostitution or its use", the legislation states its aims not only to decriminalise prostitution but to safeguard the human rights of sex workers, to promote their welfare and occupational health as well as public health. The "use" of sex-workers under the age of 18 is still criminal. It details health and safety requirements, protections for sex workers, protection for those refusing to work as sex workers and licensing laws for premises used for sex work, to name just a few of the extensively covered topics.

As an anarchist and a feminist I question legislation as a means to solving the problems faced by sex workers. But as someone who works with vulnerable women I see that the issues around prostitution in Ireland are not going anywhere, and as a job it is incredibly dangerous. In Rag issue 4, I wrote a bit about prostitution in Ireland, so wanted to find out if women working in prostitution were safer in New Zealand and speak to someone about how the laws worked or failed to work for sex workers.

I was fortunate enough to meet Michelle when we crashed her friend's party in Wellington, New Zealand. Michelle works as a prostitute under this new act. I was able to ask her some questions about her work.

M: How has the Prostitution Reform Act (PRA) worked to protect women working in prostitution?

Michelle: I think that the law change has provided heaps of positive changes for workers - not being illegal means that workers can now complain to the police with less fear (I say less, coz I've had dealings with police where revealing my profession has definitely changed their attitude towards me). Many girls don't pay tax though, which makes them feel like they are unable to complain about corrupt practices by brothel management. I'm unsure of what the PRA says about the ability of people who were operating brothels before the PRA to continue doing so post-law reform, but I know that in Wellington there are at least two operators who were running illegal brothels before 2003, and still continue a lot of their practices which serve to pressure women into staying in the industry and working when they don't want to. I'm inherently dubious about giving the state more power, but I do think it's a gap in the law that the measures [introduced in the 2003 act] prohibiting workers being coerced into staying in sex work, aren't being enforced.

M: Do you think there would have been a better way to bring these improvements about without the state getting involved?

Michelle: I don't know. I think that while the coercive power of the state is legislating against a sex industry, there is no easy way to remove that power other than the state removing it from legislation. Now, I'm not a huge fan of the government having control over workers bodies, but I do think it was a necessary step for the state to remove their prohibitions on sex work, before real positive steps could be made. Prohibition is not the way to reduce harm, and I also think it was important to retain the legislation against underage workers and trafficking. The government did not set up any brothels, nor did it substantially change the way they must be run, other than requiring brothel operators to hold certificates and requiring workers to pay tax (which doesn't happen much anyway). What the legislation did do is REMOVE the penalties for workers, and introduce prohibitions about age and trafficking.

Unlike Melbourne, the only other place I've worked, the NZ legal situation does not require workers to get regular sexual health checks (in Melbourne you MUST get a monthly swab, and a blood test every 3-months, from what I saw most places won't employ you without proof of these.. I'm dubious about legal situations that 'decriminalise' the work but introduce stringent state controls over workers bodies). From memory, in Melbourne any brothel was not allowed to serve alcohol. And street work there is illegal, I think.

What I would love to see, and what I think could be one of the most positive steps in reforming the industry, is a move towards more worker control over industry

standards, and some action being made about working conditions in brothels which continue illegal practices such as charging bond (a fee per job) and fining their workers (eg for refusing a client).

M: Do you think that the legislation has gone any way towards tackling the stigma around prostitution?

Michelle: I don't think it's changed social attitudes in a huge way, you still see/hear people complaining about street workers ruining neighbourhoods, workers still are largely secretive about their employment, clients are still generally secretive about their activities, and despite the fact that girls can now go to the police about sexual assault or clients stealing or any other thing, street workers are also still largely mistrustful of police. Of course, removing criminal sanctions is always going to go a large way towards removing stigmas, but I think there are many other aspects of discrimination against sex workers that clearly need to be addressed in other ways

M: Is there still street work going on or do most women work from brothels?

Michelle: There's a woman named Jan Jordan who lectures in the Criminology department at Victoria University here in Wellington who's done research into the percentage of the industry who work in various ways, and the way the PRA has affected that. She found that the legislation did not change the numbers of workers (I think she just focused on cis-female¹ workers) in any part of the industry, and that there's still a significant percentage working in the street. I've never done street work but it's definitely still visible, in Wellington, Christchurch and Auckland there are very visible street workers.

M: How did you get into sex work?

Michelle: I was working as a dancer before getting into whoring, and was basically already very interested in prostitution and had read lots about feminism and sex work. I was already pretty slut-positive and enjoyed casual sex, and still enjoyed sex with men but was only dating female-identified people at the time. It just seemed quite logical, already working near brothels and knowing lots of sex workers, and having one night stands, to be making some money from it. So I scoped it out, looked around a few brothels, thought about it for around a month, and then one night just decided to work in the brothel attached to the strip club I was working at that night. So I did my first shift at "Splash Club"- which is run by one of the most horrible, exploitative, asshole men in Wellington. I made heaps of money, got to have a MMF, and went home about 700 dollars richer and feeling quite great about myself.. I haven't looked back since, tho I did go onto working for better bosses.

M: I'd query the step from one night stands to prostitution... In that having casual sex is having sex with someone you are feeling attracted to and you choose to have sex with. But in prostitution you could get anyone...

Michelle: Haha I guess it's not necessarily an entirely logical connection, but what I was getting at is that I think once I traversed that 'bad girl' boundary and managed to escape a lot of the moralising I was bought up with around sexuality, I started having casual sex and enjoying that- and feeling that my body was really my own and I could use it to have sex for pleasure. Then when I started stripping and was

¹ non-trans women

already making money off my body, and met some escorts and learnt more about the industry, I eventually got to a place where I realised as well as using my sexuality for my own pleasure, I could also use it for financial gain. It was also important to me that I never went through with a client I wasn't comfortable with. Almost every booking I have had (especially when in brothels) I have had a chance to sit down and talk with the client first, make some small talk and get to judge how I feel about them. Physical attraction is not a huge part of my ability to get off during sex, feeling safe and having clear communication is, and I have always had the chance to turn down any client I didn't want to see.

M: Have you always worked from brothels?

Michelle: I'm currently working as a supervisor in a brothel (although I finish that in two weeks) and am not whoring anymore. When I was, I experienced working night shifts in a brothel, working illegally from a peep show in Melbourne, working for myself (booking hotel rooms one day a fortnight and arranging all of my bookings myself via cellphone/internet) and before I quit the industry was working for an 'agency' called the Funhouse (www.funhouse.co.nz). This was probably my favourite way to work, I set my own hours of availability, never had to be on the premises unless doing a booking. I missed out on most the negatives of the job- there was no night work, my calls and enquiries were all dealt with by the madam, I made almost 200 dollars for an hours work, and didn't have endless waiting around. No drunk clients, either!

M: How easy do you find it to separate your work from your personal life?

Michelle: I have always been quite laid-back in both my service and in my privacy- obviously I didn't give clients my real name or personal details, but many of my regulars slowly got to know more about my real life. The main thing for me is that when I was working I was "Michelle", not 'me'. The way I have sex is usually quite different in bookings, too- while I'd always still let my client know what I liked, in my personal life it's much less of a 'goal' to get the client off.. And I don't usually shave body hair or dress up in fancy lingerie and full make-up for 'personal' sex. I have two clients that I'd seen initially as clients and am now close friends with- and for me that worked because of a clear and honest discussion about the fact that we were transitioning from a work relationship to a 'real' one. I think my essential answer would be in having clear boundaries, telling clients quite honestly (but nicely) if they asked a question that was inappropriate, and trying not to roster myself for so many shifts that it got in the way of my real priorities in life. My view's always been that making heaps of money for as little time input as possible is awesome, but should not get in the way of the things I really wanna achieve with my time- should merely be a tool to help me.

M: There's a strong link here between prostitution and drug use. We have a really severe heroin problem in Ireland since the 1980s, with mainly working class areas being targeted by dealers. Is there much of a problem with heroin in NZ and do you see links between heroin/other drug use and prostitution?

Michelle: I haven't seen any heroin use in NZ at all, let alone in the sex industry- I'm sure that there is some but I think that methamphetamine [crystal meth] is much more of an issue here in general. I have definitely seen links in NZ between meth/'P' use and I think that there is definitely a problem with P addiction within New Zealand.

M: Do you think street work is more dangerous than work in Brothels? Why would people choose to do this instead of work in brothels?

Michelle: I haven't worked on the streets at all, so I cannot say definitively about the reasons or dangers faced by sex workers. However, I do know that every news story I have seen in recent years involving violence towards sex workers has involved a street-based worker, and I do know that my street-based workers seem to have more tales of

unpleasant or threatening customers, and often complained of getting hassled by passers-by, police, etc (and a lot of this is often motivated by transphobia). The street workers I personally know are, without exception, transgender or underage, and they do street work because they cannot get employed in a brothel and either don't feel they will get many bookings working privately, or they don't want to put in that much effort and cover the overheads involved with working from a private venue. I have heard of only one agency which catered for transworkers and their clients, and that was in Auckland, and I think it is a real shame that there is not a safe agency or venue for male and trans workers entering the industry.

It also appears that many street workers use P and I have seen how this affects workers ability to work well in a brothel and to stick to rostered shifts and other rules that management enforce- and street work allows much more flexibility about when you work, how you work, how much you charge.

M: Why do you think sex work pays more per hour than most other jobs?

Michelle: I think that this is down to the importance that society attaches to sex, the idea that it's not something women would easily want to give up... But sex work is also a demanding job. Even the loveliest clients still take a lot of energy- you have to be physically involved, socially skilled, empathetic, attentive, well-presented, and I think even the workers who are not interested in any sort of professional reputation and view this job as solely short term will still find the job more emotionally and physically demanding than most other sorts of jobs- having sex is a much more involved job than waiting tables.

M: You seem very positive about sex work as a job, do you think this is a common opinion among sex workers? Were most of the people you worked with happy in their work?

Michelle: I definitely realise that I've got a lot of advantages in terms of the situation I approached sex work from, and that many workers have less opportunities in their life. However, all of my friends I know who are working at my old agency, or are self-employed sex-workers have similar attitudes to me. I definitely see them struggling with some of the downsides of the job (the social stigma, the occasional demanding clients, and often keeping their employment secret from some people) but I think that most of my friends working in those areas are generally positive about their jobs and their choice to be in the industry. I think that in my time managing a brothel I also saw lots of girls who were very positive about the industry, but I also saw many girls who were clearly tired of the industry or dealing with emotional problems that made working a more negative experience for them. I think a lot of this is down to the fact that at the more expensive 'agencies'/working privately, you have much more control over how you work than you do in a brothel, and you get paid more, work less hours, and generally are closer to self-employed than girls doing shift-work in brothels (where the brothel has more control over you.. for me logically meaning less enjoyment out of work)

M: Why did you stop and why are you stopping the work altogether?

Michelle: I stopped primarily because I decided it was time for me to start learning how to budget- and an important first step of that for me was having a regular income. Earning anywhere from 180-800 bucks a week meant that I was very used to just living off cash and not planning long-term, and having a fixed income has helped me learn how to budget my money. However, I also have returned to law school, and achieving well in academic life is much easier without having to work nights or frequently be 'on call' I was also very aware that a lot of workers start to feel the burn-out after a while, and I'd been working for longer than 2 years with no longer than 2 weeks break at a time, and thought it was best to get out before I stopped enjoying my work overall.

Since speaking with Michelle, a woman I work with was violently attacked and sexually assaulted while out working on the street. Another woman, due to the severity of her and her partner's addiction, worked on the streets right up until the week she gave birth, then went back to working just days after. I wonder what life is like for street prostitutes in New Zealand and what the benefits have been for them from the change in legislation. I wonder how a change in legislation would affect women working on the streets and in brothels in Ireland. I find it really hard to separate the lifestyle and chaos of drug abuse from the work, but speaking to Michelle I could see that women work in prostitution for reasons other than addiction. When you have the power to say no and the work takes place in a safe environment things are very different. There are many different experiences of prostitution. I still feel very conflicted about the issue, but I know that if prostitution were legal things could be very different here.

CHEAP AND CHEERFUL GUIDE TO AROMATHERAPY

WORDS BY SHEILA
IMAGES BY HELEN

Properties of Your Basic Care Kit

This list of properties may seem overwhelming and full of technical terms, but it is only the tip of the iceberg! Nature has much to offer in way of healing and nurturing ourselves. Delve in!

Lavender: anti-septic, anti-fungal, anti-bacterial, anti-inflammatory, anti-spasmodic, anti-viral, detoxes, sedative, tonic, analgesic.

Lemon: anti-acid, anti-septic, anti-viral, anti-fungal, homeostatic, stimulant, tonic, uplifting.

Tea Tree: anti-septic, anti-inflammatory, anti-viral, anti-bacterial, immuno-stimulant, sudorific (makes you sweat), tonic, vulnerary (help external wounds heal).

Peppermint: anti-septic, anti-spasmodic, anti-viral, anti-pruritic (stops itching), brings down fevers, stomachic, cephalic (clears and focuses your mind), uplifting, helps low blood pressure

Eucalyptus: anti-septic, anti-viral, anti-spasmodic, analgesic, expectorant (gets the crap out of you) stimulant, depurative, uplifting, prophylactic (prevents disease and illness yay!)

Chamomile: anti-inflammatory, anti-septic, anti-spasmodic, anti-bacterial, emmenagogue (brings on menstruation), sedative.

Geranium: anti-inflammatory, diuretic (increases pee flow), balancing, stimulant, uplifting, tonic, vulnerary.

Rosemary: anti-spasmodic, anti-viral, anti-septic, cephalic, emmenagogue, astringent (tightens things), increases blood pressure, diuretic, tonic, uplifting, stimulant, nervine (strengthens and tones nervous system).

Clove: anti-septic, anti-viral, anti-fungal, aphrodisiac, stimulant, expectorant, stabilizer.

Thyme: anti-biotic, anti-bacterial, anti-septic, anti-bacterial, anti-spasmodic, emmenagogue, diuretic, aphrodisiac, expectorant.

Remedies

Get a book to help you or look up online for treatments and recipes. It is important to remember when sorting anything, to treat not only the symptoms but try to get to the cause also. For example, acne is a symptom caused by hormonal imbalance.

Headaches: lavender and peppermint for most types of headaches- geranium, chamomile, rosemary and lemon can help too. It just depends on what kind of headache it is: nervous, sinuses, gastric, or general.

Insomnia: lavender and chamomile are good for knocking you out.

All Things Snotty: tea tree, eucalyptus, clove, lavender, thyme.

Congestion: rosemary, thyme, peppermint, geranium.

Bad Skin: tea tree, lavender, lemon

Bruises: lavender, geranium and rosemary. For black eyes, just use lavender.

Anxiety: lavender, geranium, rosemary

Toothaches: clove, chamomile, lemon.

Muscle Pain: eucalyptus, peppermint.

Insect Repellants: lemon, peppermint and lavender.

Depression: lavender, lemon, chamomile, rosemary, geranium.

Buying Oils

Only buy pure oils. It's pointless to buy anything else because they won't be pure enough. Oil suppliers tend to be lovely, small, quirky ventures. However, as with most things, there are a few assholes out there. Immoral folk mix pure oils with many other oils to make profits go further. The EU seems to have no problems with false labelling in this arena. Strange but true! And yet, you can't buy a kiwi unless it has a certain amount of hair. Hmmmmm...

Don't let this detract from the loveliness of it all though. I'll share some tips to keep you savvy and away from such evil souls!

Oils should vary in price i.e. lavender is far cheaper than rose oil.

The products should have information on the oil, such as the Latin name, how it was extracted, and where and when it was extracted.

Oils can be tested on blotting paper. Generally they impregnate blotting paper, then evaporate leaving no mark.

Speedy History

Women, as we all know, have disappeared from history. Very few are ever noted. Since time has dawned, women have played a huge role in medicine by growing healing herbs and plants and treating people. Unfortunately, it is men who get the praise for their hard work.

Many ancient cultures used oils. The Egyptians used oils in preserving their dead. In fact, many prescriptions were found engraved in Egyptians tombs. Egypt was once known as the cradle of medicine. Ancient Greeks travelled to this area, including Hippocrates, known as the father of modern medicine. Hippocrates was instrumental in the development of plants being used medicinally.

A Persian by the name of Abd Allah ibn Sina contributed much to historical and modern medicine. He wrote many books detailing over 800 plants and their medicinal uses. He also can be credited with discovering the distillation process.

The Romans used oils as an integral part of their bathing culture, which itself was integral to Roman culture. China and India have long histories of using plant materials in their treatment of ailments. These were documented within their respective texts 'The Yellow Book' and the 'Ayur Veda'.

At the start of the Crusades much knowledge in medicinal healing was exchanged between east and west. Europeans began to experiment with their own herbs. It was usually women who engaged in the healing arts, by gathering plants, extracting oils and making tinctures. The position of women within healing was usurped at this time and gave rise to the current male dominated medical philosophy that's still in place.

Aromatherapy vanished and was not resurrected until an incident involving a man called Gattefosse. He was a prominent perfumer in France, which during the Crusades had become known as the seat of aromatics and retains this title until this day. Gattefosse badly burnt his arm in a near fatal laboratory accident. He plunged his arm into a lavender mixture, the nearest coolest vat of liquid. He had expected to get gas gangrene and to die. However, he was amazed when not only did he remain alive, but found that his arm healed at a very fast rate and left no scarring. He thus devoted his life to researching aromatherapy.

Oils are used in many industries today for their sheer versatility. The food industry use oils for flavour, aroma and preservative properties. The medical industry use oils as active ingredients in many products. The cosmetic industry use oils or oil syntheses for their cell rejuvenation, healing and beautifying properties. Other places where oils are regularly used include perfumes, cleaning products and hygiene products. More and more time and research is being invested in oils — from developing better deodorants to exploring drug-free treatments for psychiatric patients.

Why I am an Oily Freak

Capitalism and consumerism means that we are rarely the masters of our own universes. I work with oils because I feel I can separate myself from those systems. Constant brainwashing leads to a glut of possessions, damaged eco-systems, inequalities of many varieties including race, sex, and class divisions. There is detachment from ourselves and from nature.

I use oils for everything. From the mundane household cleaning tasks to treating ill friends and families. I make candles, cosmetics, cleansers, deodorants and mouthwashes for my sexy bleeding gums. I use oils for my son's stinky, tiny feet. I sometimes make comforters for my son. I use oils to create study aids, as travel essentials, and as part of my first aid kit. It's pretty infinite what you can create with oils.

Oils are really versatile. Take peppermint for example. It has anti-inflammatory properties, so it's great for swelling. It's also a great insect repellent, it treats headaches, it can be used to make after-shave lotion, air freshener and so much more. Lavender is another great all-rounder that can be used for insomnia, anxiety, spots, burns, cleaning your kitchen and even sorting athletes foot.

When I make something tailor-made for my needs, it's like I am reclaiming ownership of myself. This is the opposite of generic one-size-fits all products, with another bland advertising campaign. Nah, I'm worth a lot more and screw you, L'Oréal,

BASIC CARE KIT

Using these oils together and separately, you can deal with so many ailments. Starting with these ten can end up saving you a fortune.

1. **Lavender**- *Lavendula Angustifolia*
2. **Tea Tree**- *Melaleuca Alternifolia*
3. **Peppermint**- *Mentha Piperita*
4. **Eucalyptus**- *Eucalyptus Globulus*
5. **Rosemary**- *Rosemarinus Officinalis*
6. **Chamomile**- *Matricaria Recutita*
7. **Geranium**- *Pelargonium Graveolens*
8. **Thyme**- *Thymus Vulgaris*
9. **Lemon**- *Citrus Limon*
10. **Clove**- *Eugenia Caryophyllum*

Oils can work independently. They can also work synergistically i.e. together. When oils are blended together it changes the chemical structure. Kind of the same thing as baking a cake. You have your raw ingredients, great in their own right, but together? Now you have amazing muffin... Ta-Da! Or in this case, a pile remedy!

when I say that! It's a true statement, not part of your warped profit making campaigns!

The more I engage in using oils, I understand myself a lot better. My headaches come from a different place than yours, my pms is all mine, my skin has its own pattern going on. There are over three hundred oils out there, invest in yourself and begin to understand how you tick, not how you are told to tick!

Science Blah

There is a huge science element that I'm leaving out, simply because I have two pages to work with here and science-y language, unless you are into it, is snoozy complicated language. Plus, it's possible to go on for a lifetime. Here's the science-y bit short-and-snappy style.

How oils come from plants is a process known as biosynthesis. Look it up, because there's no way to explain it in a sentence! Oils work on the body in three ways; pharmacologically, physiologically and psychologically.

Pharmacological: Oils are chemicals. So are humans! Wham-Bam! Lots of lovely chemical interactions take place when you use the oils, sorting your good self out.

Physiological: Oils alter the messages sent round our bodies e.g. relaxing oil tells your heart rate to slow and your breathing to deepen. Unlike medication, oils leave the body within twenty four hours through sweat and urine.

Psychological: Basically, your brain stores smell memories. So, say your favourite cat got run over whilst you were standing next to a rosebush in bloom. From then on, the smell of roses isn't likely to put you into the throes of positivity. Or, if you went to a fantastic house party and stood next to some jasmine as you were listening to brilliant music, the aroma thereafter might bring you to a wonderful, happy, smiley place.

BOOKS TO GET YOU STARTED

The Fragrant Pharmacy by Valerie Ann Wormwood
Aromatherapy: an A-Z by Patricia Davis
The Directory of Essential Oils by Wanda Stellar

WAYS TO USE OILS

There are loads of ways to use oils. Get stuck in, have fun and fill your world with fantastic smells.

MASSAGE: Mix 2 drops of essential oil to 5ml (1 teaspoon) of massage oil. Use half that ratio for kids.

COMPRESSES: Place a piece of fabric in water. Add a drop of your favourite oil. Put on afflicted area. Compresses are great for aches, pains, and drawing all sorts of gunk from spots and wounds.

BATHS: Mix six drops of oil with some milk or liquid soap and add to your bath. Get in, breathe deep, and enjoy...

VAPOURISERS: These can be made in so many ways: with an oil burner, by placing a drop on a light bulb before lighting, by placing two drops on a cotton ball and putting it behind a radiator.

INHALATION: Place a drop in a basin of hot water. Cover your head and basin with a towel and breathe in. This is great for all things snotty and congested.

DIY all the way! Make creams, soaps, balms, room-sprays, toothpastes, drawer fresheners, even personalised cards! The only limit with oils is yourself.

THE CONTENTIOUS STRIP:

OBSERVATIONS ON NUDITY AND SEXUALITY IN DUBLIN'S BURLESQUE SCENE

by Emily
images by Julia and Laura

One of my earliest and fondest memories is watching Elvira Mistress of the Dark turn coffins on her nipples. That my Mother actually allowed me to borrow Elvira Mistress of the Dark from the video shop is obviously a matter of fate. I later realized what Elvira had been spinning weren't coffins at all but my imagination, and that I should definitely turn coffins on my nipples at some stage in my lifetime. When I first started working and hanging out in the Burlesque scene in Dublin I had returned home from living in a 'frauenlesbentrans' (women lesbians trans) squat in Berlin to pursue a Masters degree in Women's Studies. Around the same time, I got a number as an usherette in the biggest and most mainstream cabaret show in Dublin at the time, The Tassel Club. I'd get up in a red satin pillar-box hat, little porter jacket, halter-neck mini dress with stockings and suspenders, run around passing messages, placing props on stage, picking up afterwards, flirting with the crowd and being coy eye-candy. My manager was a statuesque and gorgeously strict looking woman with a signature top hat and tuxedo by the name of Miss Epiphany DeMeanour. She wore white gloves, carried a cane and could walk swiftly and easily in impossibly high heels. I adored the spectacle, the fantasy and the wit of the burlesque and cabaret show. It is a surrealist playtime for adults, a rare opportunity for those grown-ups who long for Mammy's dress-up-basket, or another world. Burlesque is a branch of performance and theatricality that suits me for its controversy, dynamism and gaudy glamour, a site of satire, mutability and ingenuity.

In my formative burlesque year, I was spending my days immersed in material examining struggles for equality and the fight for social justice. Every day, I was saturated in the devastating knowledge of desperate social and personal injustices women experience globally. I was recognising and writing on the social normalities and governmental policies which made injustices and inhumanities socially acceptable. I was tearing at destructive capitalist ideologies; I was clawing out the eyes of sexist social norms; I was trying to fight gender oppression in how I dressed, consumed, lived, fucked – and much of this material was about sex: oppressive, violent, stolen, exploitable sex. My burlesque apades were a much needed departure into a world of make-believe, where sex and nudity were playful again. For me, Burlesque is an opportunity for sexual creativity, performance and expression. The burlesque performers and audiences that I know in Ireland don't take sex too seriously, but they do take feeling good seriously, and they do feeling good very well indeed. When I first started hanging out on the burlesque scene, I was very happy to leave my worldly burdens at the door and observe another way of being, talking, doing and enjoying life. It was a very different way of living than my housemates in Berlin enjoyed; it was much more extravagant and much less angry. It



was just as fond of discussion and booze, but was less likely to judge someone by their physical signifiers. It was a place where performativity reigned - and women, it was mostly about women, in all our guises.

About three years down the line, in March of this year, I discovered an unabashedly outspoken troupe of queer feminist burlesquers. An advert had been placed outside a pub in Oxford town; the sign read in large letters, "TONIGHT: QUEER FEMINIST BURLESQUE". I was intrigued. Not only did they use the word queer openly, but feminist? I was determined to go. What did queer feminist burlesque look like? Who were they, these Lashings of Ginger Beer? What kind of feminism were they interested in, and what would they be wearing?! That night the show sold out. People were leaning in over the banisters and sitting on the stairs holding out for a chance seat. Luckily I came early enough to squeeze in near the front.

Embedded amongst joviality, political wit and comic feminist satire, it was one of the most courageous and emotionally powerful performances I have ever witnessed. The performer Galla came on stage, dressed coyly in school girl-like clothing and danced around a chair. She danced off stage and up against the other performers from her troupe who looked at her admiringly, some leering. The music was folkish in style with eerie female vocals. It sounded soft, but as the song progressed the lyrics became continuously more violent and explicit. Galla striped to reveal her bruised and bloody body. She danced off stage again, blindly and emotionally absent, not seeing her troupe looking horrified as they pushed her away. She took some duct-tape from the chair and gagged herself with it, but continued to force her body into typically erotic-dancer moves. At the end she collapsed exhausted on her knees at the front of the stage and was met with stunned silence. Her co-performers rushed to assist her

and moved quickly on to a comedy routine. Soon the audience were laughing and at ease again.

The striptease is a point of contention for those who see it as an objectification of women and women's bodies, inseparable from sex-work at a strip-club. One such naysayer and former burlesquer Laurie Penny believes, 'Burlesque stripping, like lap-dancing, is about performing – rather than owning – your sexuality. It's about posing provocatively for applause. The transaction is one way: you give, they receive. You pout, they clap'. Galla, a member of the Lashings troupe, explained that with the performance described above, the group had wanted to deconstruct 'mainstream burlesque' but not condemn, dictate or censor: 'we absolutely do not want to be telling other women what they can and can't do – that's not feminism. Really we just want to raise questions about the kinds of things that our generation is being told are empowering. Not to say, "you can't do this" but maybe to say "have you thought about why you are doing this?"'

Crash Test Cabaret's Beast Woman, also known as Emma (or Specky Pony when she's got her harness on!) says that although she enjoys striptease "when routines disturb or jolt the viewer in some way", she dislikes it when the strip is but a young woman removing clothes seductively and little else: "It's the element of comedy, spectacle or humour that keeps me coming back for more. I also love anything that challenges the viewer, or makes them question the act of voyeurism". Emma has been conducting interviews with burlesque audience members for a radio documentary series and points out that many of the men she spoke to "are perfectly happy to see young ladies removing their clothing; the narrative of the performance is lost on them". Female audience members however "tend to be interested in the costumes and make-up, love comedy and rock-influenced performances, and find Burlesque a positive environment for women with figures of all shapes and sizes". So are contemporary burlesque and feminism compatible? Or is the burlesque cabaret aesthetic as Laurie Penny demands, 'just another part of our own modern, sexed-up "culture of consolation"', where us women 'tired of fighting for equal pay, reproductive freedom and the right to walk down a dark street without fear' embrace the striptease as a three-minute opportunity 'to feel a little bit better about the hand we've been dealt'?

Out-spoken feminist burlesquer Lucy Rhinehart of the gruesome Sedition Inc. reckons it's sad to reduce burlesque to striptease: "The beauty of burlesque is that it can be anything and everything, as creative as your imagination and the boundaries you put on yourself or the show describes. Similarly, feminism can mean a multitude to many different audiences. So for me, what is my feminism? That women are respected fully and treated completely and uncompromisingly equally in society and never discriminated against on the grounds of their sex, including having freedom of movement without fear of being exposed to violence, rape, sexism and sexist language, harassment, violent pornography among other forms of institutional and individual acts of oppression. Burlesque can be sexist, like any art form can be sexist. I never do sexist burlesque. In fact, often I try to play with gender and hyper femininity/hyper masculinity to show it up for the farce that it is, so I guess occasionally I try

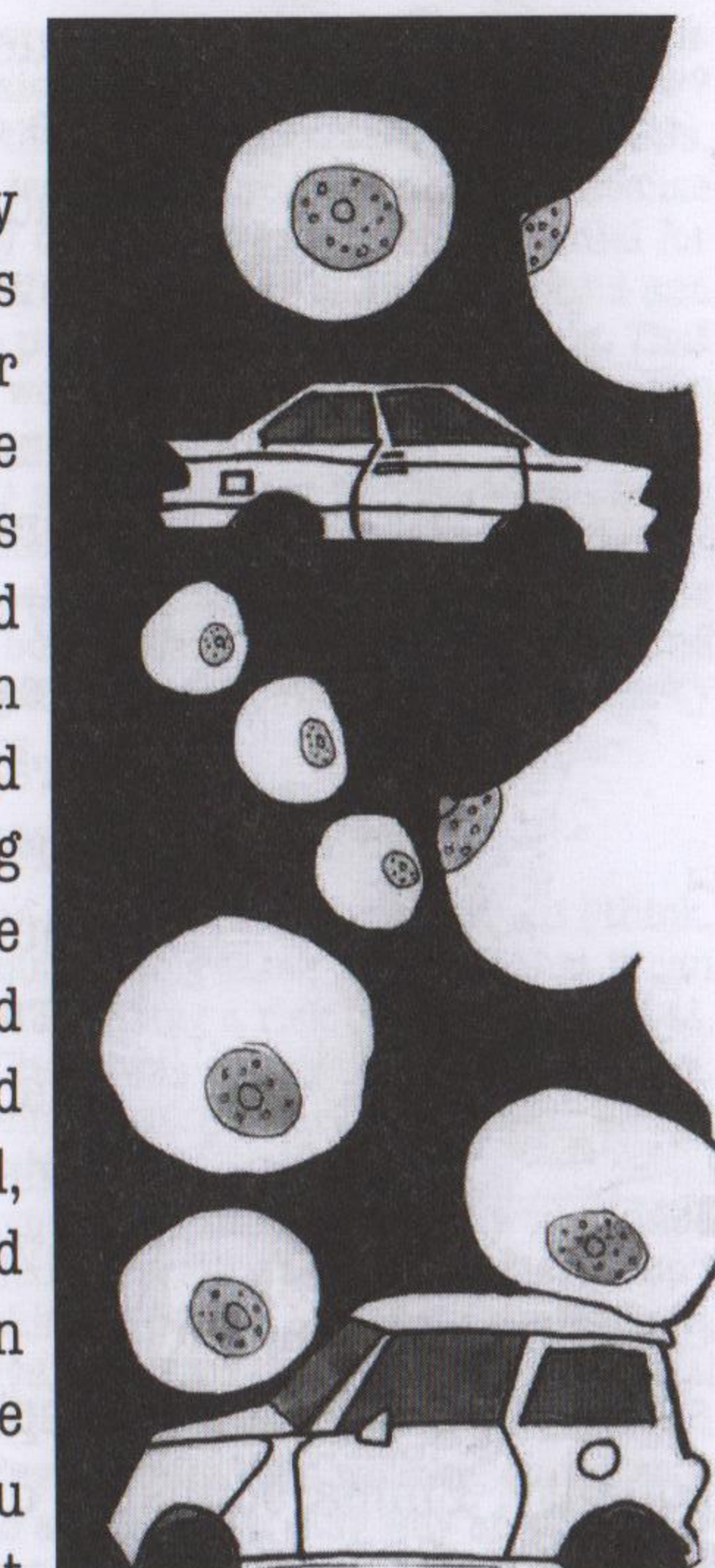
and do feminist burlesque".

Preempting the obvious rebuttal Lucy asks, "what is feminist about knickers and knockers?" She answers her own question: "As a feminist, the stripping element of burlesque is very interesting. Decontextualised women's bodies are everywhere in society. Disembodied perfectly round arses in reebok trainers, floating breasts selling car insurance... the market and our world is saturated with nudity, implied nudity, and women's body parts, exposed, scrutinised, made grotesque and vilified or portrayed as perfection and symmetry personified. Burlesque performance is one place where you get to see real women's bodies... not

on display for the male gaze, nor for "auntie Gok" to truss up like some Christmas Ham and stuff into magic knickers to try to fit into normative beauty standards, but just – celebrated. Cheered. Whooped at and hollered for. Breasts, bellies, smiles, none of them detached from the woman they belong to. In fact, firmly in context as the woman performer (in the case of female performers...) is not only showing off her body but her creativity... her body can be tattooed, pierced, decorated with body paint, her breasts adorned with carefully chosen nipple tassels to tell a story, they have meaning, they have context. These are queer bodies, "abnormal", individual, all appendix scars and jiggy bits. In a society where nudity has become so... meaningless... here it is loaded with meaning. For me it is loaded with feminist meaning".

As Emma's interviews suggest however, the polemical nature of striptease seems an issue addressed only by women and affecting only women, while many male audience members are happy to see naked women whatever the context, seemingly unaware that they should or could expect anything more. This is an example of unchallenged male privilege. Whereas women performers are forced to contend with issues of objectification and either ignore, debate or perform these ideas, many men continue to exist external to the issue, as pure spectators, commentators or aesthetic enthusiasts and mostly, photographers. But as Lucy Rhinehart made clear, sexism operates in all art and as with all art, burlesque is a potent medium to challenge expectations, questions presumptions, destroy stereotypes and make bold statements on risqué subjects and queer burlesque is particularly ripe for gender and sexuality mischief.

Drag King and one half of the queer burlesque duo Coin Operated Girls, Lisa Connell, argues that burlesque can be used to parody femininity and sexuality or exaggerate it: "As a feminist and a performer, burlesque was an obvious choice of performance in which I could explore all these ideas and thoughts on my gender and sexuality! ... In an historical context, burlesque was a bold expression of sex and sexuality in a time when freedom of expression was not the done thing... I feel that in our modern society we can use the striptease as an empowering act and





much like the words cunt/bitch/faggot we can reclaim it for our own purposes and employ it as an assertion of our power!"

Emma concurs: "I feel that Burlesque performance offers a safe place to explore my sensuality. For various reasons I feel pressurized to keep my femininity under wraps in day-to-day existence. Due to a string of sexual assaults as a child and young adult, all instigated by complete strangers, I no longer felt safe outside the house, and became compelled to hide my appearance from passers-by. I developed a very androgynous style of

dressing, keeping myself physically obscured, which saw me safely into my 20s". Despite the post-feminist assumption of equality, Emma connects discrimination against women in the workplace to a narrow perception of identity and gender under capitalism, and compares these restrictions to the mutability and playfulness of burlesque, elements she suggests are lacking in the world of young professionals: "As a woman in the workforce, I realized it was so easy to get pigeonholed as a 'lovely girl'. There are really few promotional opportunities for women in my experience (unless you are in a specific profession or very highly educated). So you feel like you have to act like a man in order to get some respect. In my late 20s I began to 'get in touch with my feminine side', a strange experience which involved wearing a pink jumper and crying in the office. When I began to perform, in my early 30s, it was a wonderful liberation to be able to dress up, slap on the make-up, totter around in hooker heels and still feel safe, accepted and empowered. Almost like getting into drag I guess". It is drag!

Burlesque is playing dress-up for adults. It is a fantasy realm, a space in an otherwise all too grown-up world, for the grown-up world in all its licentiousness is fundamentally puritanical. Burlesque is an opportunity to be playful with sex, and to witness sex as personal, contextual, empowering and fun. Sex is more than the act itself; it is a source of expression above and beyond the act. Burlesque, to a great degree, is an exercise in anti-neurosis. It encourages people to be outrageous, theatrical, expressive, outlandish and imaginative. It marries thriftiness and crafty, innovative glamour. It promotes a sense of light-heartedness and a commitment to camaraderie. Burlesque brings to our awareness how liberating it is to breach the boundary of propriety - to be 'too much' - too gaudy, too cheap, too physical, too flamboyant, too loud and too bold! Burlesque reveals sex and sexuality as dynamic rather than static and objectifying. From this perspective, nude bodies and the Burlesque striptease exercise freedom in an otherwise regimented environment.

Try it!

Haw Haw and Guffaw!

A questionnaire with Lashings Of Ginger Beer Comedian SALLY OUTEN!

Women comedians are staggeringly underrepresented in the mainstream, so it is pleasing and inspiring that funny women dominate cabaret circles and frequently outnumber the funny men. Wanting to know more, Emily and Ariel wrote to Sally Outen with some questions about her stand up, her politics and her experience as a trans performer.

"So I was assigned male at birth, transitioned, and now I've got an F on my passport... but that's OK because I didn't really revise..."

RAG: Do people 'get it' when you use trans-satire in your comedy routine?

SALLY: I stress about that before every performance - and I stress about the possibility of encountering open hostility - even a lot of feminist and queer-friendly spaces can be scarily transphobic. But so far, every time, the wave of relief has hit me around 5 minutes into my act, when I've got through some of my most personal material and still haven't been lynched. And I get the impression that audience members are sometimes just as relieved as I am to realize that we're on the same wavelength - at one point, I talk about the popular fascination with so-called "sex-changes", and the resultant objectification of trans women (and trans men, but the media seems to prefer to focus on trans women for the most part). I point out how I object to my body being used as a vehicle for other people's fantasies or politics, and I can usually see people readying themselves for the obvious heckle. When I make the point myself - "ah well - welcome to womanhood..." - there's this sense of relief that, yes, our perspectives are compatible. I feel that I've been really lucky in our audiences to date - they've laughed at the bits that I mean to be funny and seem to be listening to the serious points I'm trying to make. We've had people say that, having not really got trans perspectives in the past, my stand-up has helped them to gain some insights. And that's an amazing thing to hear.

RAG: In your performance, you address the fact that people ask you about being trans in a very casual, personal way. What do people ask you about most and how do you deal with that, within and outside of your performance?

SALLY: My operative status is the big one, I think. Trans people are frightening - the idea of moving from one social caste to another is frightening, and gender is one of the most significant castes our society maintains. There's a tendency to try to stabilize any instances of transgression by reducing the person down to boy-bits and girl-bits, which can at least seem comparatively uncomplicated. But that means that the question can, perhaps, all too often be reframed as "I reject your perspective on your identity - please provide me with extra information so that I can privately reclassify you." In my performance, as in conversation, I ask whether that's a useful question. I use actual (!) science to erode people's trust in the helpfulness of 'biological sex' in stabilizing the sociological complexities of gender. I'm usually happy to talk about my operative status, but I emphasize the extent to which, y'know, it's none of their business...The thing I find most interesting is the really weird questions I get asked. "What happened to your old boy-bits?"; "How can you be bisexual and trans?"; "What would happen if you had sex?"; "If you're a feminist, doesn't that mean you wish you were a man? So you're regretting transition, right?". In conversation, I usually don't have to wait for the person to finish the question before they realize what they've just said. In my stand-up, I just follow such questions through to their logical, surreal, conclusions.



HOW DO YOU USE HUMOUR IN YOUR ACTIVISM?

CHELLA: I have to be honest - as far as Adventures in Menstruating goes, I was definitely doing it as humour before I realised it was also activism. I've always been involved with different activist communities, and we always offered skillshares and workshops with our shows. Using humour in activism in general is something I'd recommend, though. As a performer it's always worked well for me, and as an audience member, I'm always more receptive if the message doesn't hit me over the head with its earnestness. **SARAH:** Sarcasm and parody are pretty much hard wired into me. If there's one thing that really makes me uncomfortable, it's over-earnestness. So I don't think I've ever done any kind of activism which didn't involve humour. I learned about insurgency and protest from watching Life of Brian, so I don't have much patience with activists who take themselves too seriously. It's all a bit 'People's Front of Judea'. I particularly love using humour in the context of lesbian and feminist activism, because feminists in particular are always accused of having no sense of humour. If we can disprove that, it makes it easier to challenge a lot of other misconceptions about women.

WHAT DOES HUMOUR HAVE OVER OTHER FORMS OF ACTIVISM?

SARAH: I'm a huge believer in the use of humour to disarm people. If you can make someone laugh, even if they disagree with your point, they'll be more willing to listen to you. **CHELLA:** I find that I can tell a joke and run away. It's a bit like middle school - bullies can usually be put off by the element of surprise. Oppressors are just big, rich, powerful, jerky bullies. Yeah - I reckon humour is a good attention-getter, as long as it doesn't overpower your message, and crossover into attention-seeking. Then the message is lost.

WHAT CAN USING HUMOUR AND FUN AND LAUGHING IN PROTEST DO FOR ACTIVISTS?

CHELLA: Well for one thing, it can boost morale. Most types of activism involve a lot of teamwork and tense situations. Humour is an amazing tool for diffusing tension and communicating effectively. In terms of addressing issues publicly, there are few methods as feel-good as humour. People protest because bad things are happening. There's horrible stuff going on all over. Humour is an excellent, necessary escape sometimes, mainly for sanity and perspective. **SARAH:** It can make it more fun, first of all. It also gets people on side and makes what you're doing feel familiar to your audience. They might not be comfortable with the idea of political protest, or activism, but they're fine with comedy so their defences come down. Some of the most influential activists I can think of are comedians: People like Bill Hicks and Jo Brand have really challenged people's perception of our culture. Jo Brand actually was the first person I ever saw do menstrual comedy where women weren't the butt of the joke. That was far more influential for me than listening to an 'activist'.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR STINT IN THE CLOWN ARMY!

SARAH: We got involved through helping with the Sharrow Lantern Carnival, which is a big community event in Sheffield with a definite anti-war political feeling to it. Friends we made there were involved in CIRCA (explain blah) and invited us to some of their recruitment sessions. I love how CIRCA critiques the pomp and circumstance of the military by parodying it, but somehow the idea of being in a clown battalion really scared me. It sounds crazy but the clown army was too military for me. I'm a clown pacifist. **CHELLA:** I was the 'offshal fotografer' at one of the actions and was in total clown mode - it really appealed to my trickster sensibilities and I found that people didn't challenge me while I was taking photos because I was in this weird status place somewhere between authority and protester, which is the traditional role of 'the fool', so from a comedy and drama and literature point of view, I'm quite proud of that.

DO YOU THINK GENDER/ SEX/ SEXISM/ MISOGYNY ARE ISSUES IN COMEDY?

SARAH: A lot of the 'traditional' comedy we were raised on ridiculed and belittled women so much that it's actually a challenge to remove that sexist element and have something that's still recognisable as comedy. It used to be seen as normal that the joke would be at a woman's expense, and that a man would be telling it. It's so strange to me that people act like female comedians are from a minority community - Shappi Khorsandi lists being female along with being Iranian as one of the 'minorities' she belongs to. I do know what she means, but it's ridiculous when you think about it. Of course women are not a minority, but female comedians are. On top of that, 'minority' comedians are often viewed as having a political agenda. If they talk about the female/black/queer experience, it's seen as somehow transgressive - as if being straight, male and white were the 'natural' way to be, and anything else was

The women behind the fanzine talk to RAG

just being referenced for attention. Rhona Cameron is a 'lesbian comedian', Shazia Mirza is a 'Muslim comedian', but Ricky Gervais is just a 'comedian', you know? **CHELLA:** I'd like to think we're coming out of that time now, actually. In the '90s, Janeane Garofalo's announcement that she was leaving Saturday Night Live because of the 'old boys club' feel it had at the time really opened my eyes to the potential for women to be truly overlooked in comedy circles. In the past year or two, Jo Brand and Sandi Toksvig have both called out several British panel shows for the same thing. That stinks. I don't really believe the old chestnut that women don't find other women funny, and even though it's commonly trotted out as the reason there's only ever one woman on a panel show each week it's clearly a pointless argument. There should be as many women as men booked on shows and at live venues, all the time. I particularly hate it when there's a 'women's night' on the bill at small town comedy clubs - like maybe once a year or something. It's like... "Here's your bone. Catch." Younger performers and promoters on the mainstream circuit are changing that, though, and the DIY community has been rocking a pro-gender-parity vibe for years.

DO YOU THINK IT IS MORE DIFFICULT FOR WOMEN DOING COMEDY?

SARAH: There's definitely a lot of sexism within the entertainment business, but I think, more fundamentally, women have had so much trouble being taken seriously that it can be more difficult for us to let go of that in public. It's taking a risk of being laughed at, as opposed to making people laugh. It's like what Chella was saying about being a clown. You have to have high status with your audience before you can start playing with status and take the risk of that laughter turning against you. **CHELLA:** Every now and again professionally I come into contact with a guy who kinda subtly ignores me, or dismisses my work. I'm not misinterpreting people who simply don't like my stuff - those people make that very clear! - this is different. Looking at our fan base, though, which includes a surprising number of guys, we've managed to make menstrual comedy accessible and enjoyable to people who don't menstruate. It's given me the...um... ovaries? to approach a broader range of topics. I've recently been working on material for a project that's fairly gender-neutral. I don't do anything the easy way around, do I?

TELL US WHAT IT'S LIKE WRITING COMEDY.

CHELLA: In my case it's mostly accidental. If I sit down to write by myself, I find it very difficult. The pressure of a deadline helps immeasurably, though! I like to improvise, and I tend to rely on the audience to help me stay on track. I love working with a partner, though, because I can bounce my ideas off them straight away, and give and receive feedback immediately. I write most of my stuff by talking out loud to myself and touch-typing what I say at the same time. I like trying out new material, but I'm a bit of a wimp and tell everyone that's what I'm doing, in case they think it's rubbish! Working with old magazines and adverts (like in the Adventures in Menstruating zine) is great for me, though, because they give me a starting point. Generally speaking, my best ideas come to me when I'm either half asleep or a bit fluey. Clearly, my subconscious knows all the best gags. **SARAH:** If I say to myself, 'Okay, now write some comedy!' it won't be funny at all. Writing comedy can be difficult because as soon as I try really hard, it becomes forced and stops working. I have to be relaxed to do it, which ironically can add even more pressure. When it works, though, it's really fun.

ADVENTURES IN MISCHIEF

Chella and Sarah's SKIDS campaign:

"...About Skids. They don't really exist - sorry. We can't really condone more disposable products anyway, and at least underwear is washable. This isn't really a scatological campaign - it's mainly about showing up feminine hygiene ads for what they are."



"Off road or on, now I ride with confidence!"
- Parker, 19



ADVENTURES IN MENSTRUATING ARE CHELLA QUINT AND SARAH THOMASIN
HTTP://CHARTYOURCYCLE.WORDPRESS.COM/

THE EDINBURGH ANARCHA-FEMINIST COLLECTIVE

Words by Soph, member of the collective
Illustration by Emily

In 2009, the beginnings of an anarchy-feminist collective emerged in Edinburgh. For a city as eclectic as Edinburgh, and a tradition of thought as long established as anarchy-feminism, such a development is long overdue.

People in anarchist collectives were active in protesting against a range of oppressions including war, environmental destruction, racism, and poverty. However, few anarchists seemed willing to organise under an explicitly 'anarchy-feminist' banner. It wasn't that people weren't concerned with feminist issues because they definitely were. It was just that those particular issues never managed to take centre stage.

Unable to find the outlet I was looking for in the anarchist community, I began to seek out feminist groups in Edinburgh. Here at last were people who had decided to make gender a primary focus of their activism and who dedicated whole meetings to some of the key topics I was interested in; control over one's body and sexuality, elimination of stereotyping, alternatives to the nuclear family, the dismantling of patriarchal relationships. However, I soon found that integration into these organisations was problematic. It was impossible for me to reconcile my views with those of feminists that accepted capitalism and the state as legitimate and necessary entities.

THE NEED FOR A NEW COLLECTIVE

The experience of both anarchist collectives and feminist organisations made it clear to me that an explicit focus on gender within an anarchist framework was not possible in either of these forums. I wanted to be part of something that embraced feminism but at the same time was rooted in a clear anti-authoritarian base and neither of these two groups seemed to allow for the full expression of this desire.

While it is clear that the philosophy of anarchism is inherently feminist (being as it is against all forms of hierarchy, dominance and oppression) it does not detract from the fact that, in practice, there is a distinct lack of focus on gender issues within anarchist groups. The establishment of anarchy-feminist collectives, with an explicitly feminist focus, is a step to addressing this imbalance in the movement.

Most feminist groups do not identify as anarchist. In fact the term anarchy-feminist is often received with apprehension by many feminists, either because they disagree or are unfamiliar with the principles of anarchism, or because they hold the view that a specific political affiliation is divisive to the feminist movement. For the anarchy-feminist however, oppression is intimately linked to hierarchy

and power and this analysis is key to achieving liberation. The same system which oppresses women, upholds the class system, and sustains a system of discrimination based on race. The fight for gender equality is intimately linked with the fight to create equality between all peoples regardless of gender, race or class.

"Feminism doesn't mean female corporate power or a woman President; it means no corporate power and no Presidents. Challenging sexism means challenging all hierarchy - economic, political, and personal. And that means an anarchy-feminist revolution." — Peggy Kornegger

COMING TOGETHER

The creation of the Edinburgh anarchy-feminist collective in 2009, made it possible for like-minded people to come together to focus on the issues that we cared passionately about, and for this alone it is an incredibly important creation. Being part of a group of people where you know you share the same desire for change, if not always the same idea of how to achieve it, is extremely empowering.

"The collective has an important role to play in raising awareness of women's issues, and also in forming a local community group to share ideas, skills and support. Being part of this group has introduced me to people from all walks of life that I would otherwise not have met, and I feel that together we can address important issues, effecting positive change. I know quite a few women who feel they have been floating adrift since the white hot heat of radical seventies feminism, while younger women are saying they are 'looking for something to be part of', this is it!"

— Fiona from the collective

The group formed to create a space in which anarchy-feminists can share knowledge and skills with each other, explore interesting issues, and plot direct action against gender oppression and patriarchy in all its forms. We want to build an anarchy-feminist group that is capable of responding to the many challenges that people face on a day to day basis, and empower everyone in the collective in the process. It can be isolating to feel that you are up against the world on your own, but together we are strong!

True to our anarchist origins, we try to organise the collective along non-hierarchical lines. This translates as ensuring that we have some basic structures in place so that decisions are made collectively and everyone can have a say in the process. We have planning meetings at the same time on the second Wednesday of every month at the Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh (ACE). We chose this space as it has child care facilities and is wheelchair accessible. We rotate roles so that each month somebody different

facilitates the meeting, writes up the agenda, or sends the minutes around the mailing list. That way, everyone gets an opportunity to develop their skills, and nobody becomes stuck in a certain position of authority or power.

People in the collective appreciate the desire for women only spaces when and where they are felt to be needed, but the group invites anyone who identifies as an anarchy-feminist to be involved in the collective regardless of their gender.

CURRENT PROJECTS

The Edinburgh anarchy-feminist collective currently holds a monthly social on the last Friday of every month. At this we have a pot luck dinner, provide beer at minimal cost, and show a topical feminist film (it's sometimes hard to find good ones and suggestions are always welcome!)

We recently held "Herstory - A fundraiser celebrating radical women through the ages" to raise awareness of the little known feminists and women whose contribution to the revolution has either been ignored or forgotten. The evening featured a feminist pub quiz, raffle, zine stall, and prize for best dressed radical feminist from herstory!

We also organised "Feminist Soapbox" a weekend of workshops, discussion and entertainment in Edinburgh in September. Workshops included a discussion on anarchy-feminism, mental health, queer politics, gendered violence, international feminist campaigns, militarism, and body image. The event was accessible, kid friendly, and open to all.

The group right now is very small (meetings average about 7 people) but our socials are well attended and we hope to grow! We are working on making ourselves better known by holding events, generating publicity and maintaining a website. Recently we have been building links with other feminist and anarchist groups in Edinburgh by working on joint projects together.

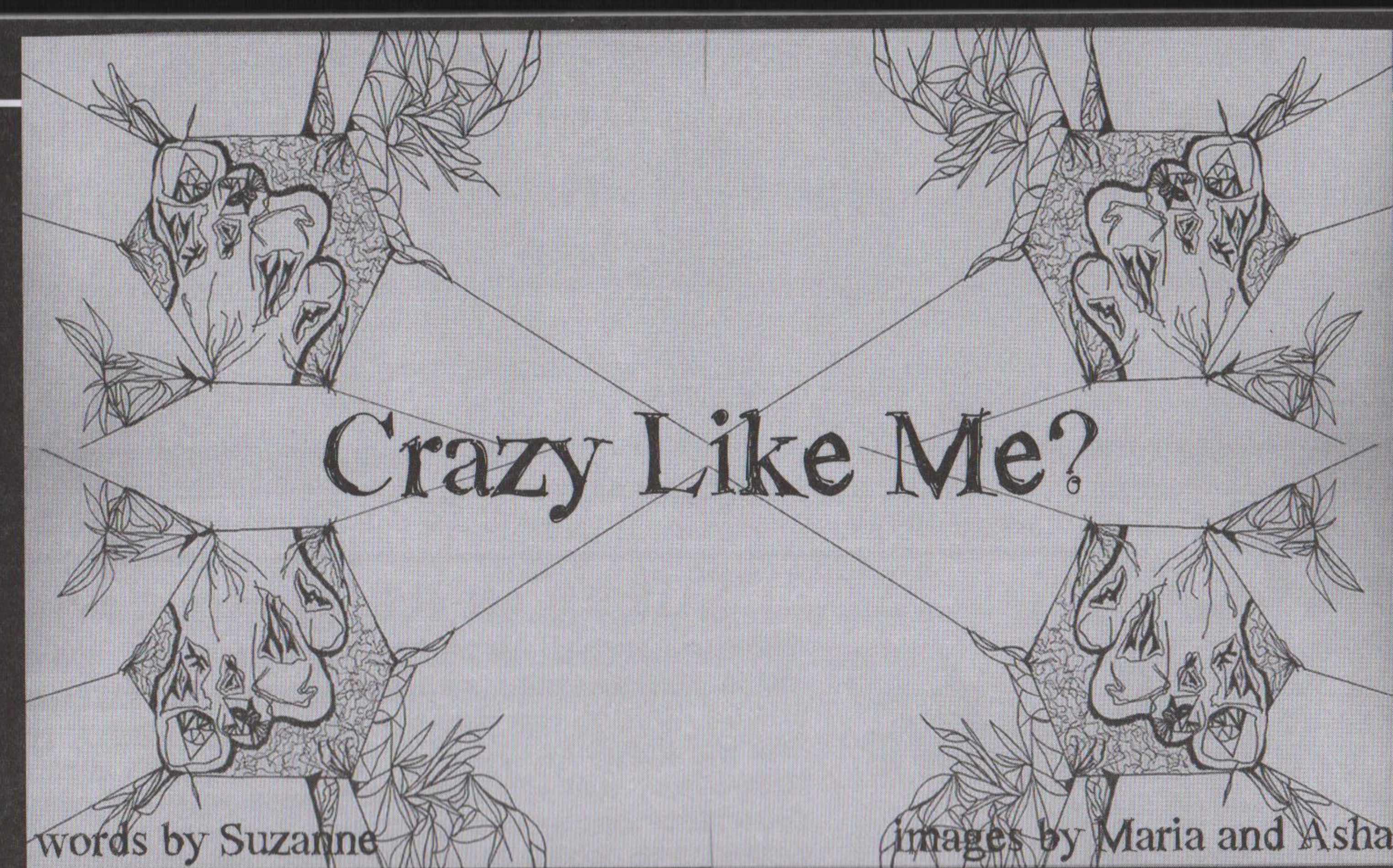
We are currently debriefing the Feminist Soapbox event and documenting what went on in a zine. We hope to draw on our experience of this to help us plan more successful things in the future. The groups interests are diverse, so what our next focus will be is still being discussed - come along to our meetings to take part in this process!

"We should always be making trouble for patriarchy - we should always be actively engaging in and creating feminist activity, because we all thrive on it." — Cathy Levine

For more information on the Edinburgh anarchy-feminist collective please visit our website:

www.edinburghanarchafeminist.noflag.org.uk





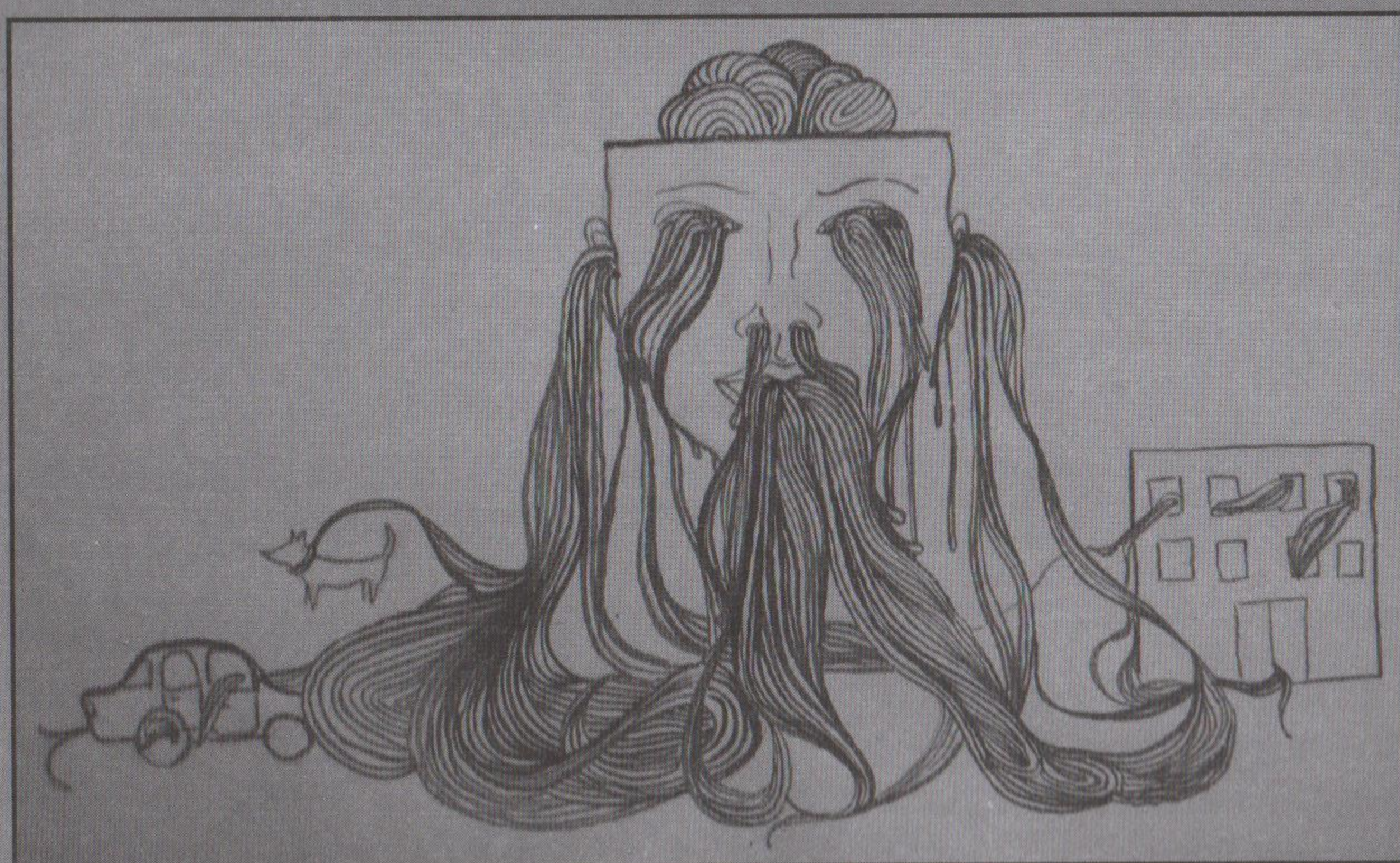
Mental health in Ireland, and I suppose in many other countries, seems quite the taboo subject. It seems no one wants to talk about it, no one wants to share their experiences. This is my own little way of trying to counteract that. I should pre-warn you I have no qualifications to do with mental health in any way; this article is completely based on my experiences and online research.

So I should probably introduce myself, as you're going to hear a lot about my innermost thoughts. My name is Suzanne and I have been diagnosed as having Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). Seems general enough, right? Actually not really. When you look into it, so many people actually doubt the existence of this particular condition, many people criticise the criteria used in diagnosis, and of course many believe in it.

Borderline Personality Disorder or Borderline Psychotic Personality Disorder or Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder or whichever way you want to refer to it, in a nutshell means that people who suffer from it experience emotions in tidal waves rather than general waves like "normal" people. As one of my friends once told me, "No one is normal. We all only have a degree of normality". The actual medical definition of BPD is "A personality disorder marked by a long-standing pattern of instability in interpersonal relationships, behavior, mood, and self-image that can interfere with social or occupational functioning or cause extreme emotional distress."¹

One of my fears is that the diagnosis of BPD is given to so-called problem patients: patients who won't follow the rules, who question everything, and who feel that they already know what is wrong with them. I was the classic example of this, refusing to take medication,

as I am incredibly suspicious of what it does to my body and who is really benefiting from it all (but that's a story for another time). It also seems that doctors don't really listen to those they are supposed to help. I have heard time and time again of people complaining about this and yet still nothing seems to happen. They seem far too willing to stick people in a box and keep them there, whether the patient suggest things have changed or not. A lot of this problem seems to come from the fact that mental illness is diagnosed by the symptoms of the illness rather than the cause. This means that in the case of women who have been sexually abused (like me), one could be diagnosed with BPD, one with depression, one with post-traumatic stress disorder, one with an eating disorder, and one with anxiety, due to different reactions to that abuse.



In general, women are three times

more likely than men to be diagnosed with BPD. I often wondered why this was, and the main answer I can find is that BPD is the general diagnosis given to those who have been sexually abused or raped. I find this very sad. As anyone with experience in the mental health system will know, going into it adds more trauma for people who have been through so much already, especially having to explain what happened over and over and over again.

Some feminists suggest that BPD is just a normal reaction to a world which does not care for women². The criteria one must fulfil in order to have this disorder are traditionally unfeminine. These include reckless driving and promiscuous sex – criteria, which if displayed in men would just be put down to their masculinity, not the fact that there is anything wrong with their mind. BPD has become the hysteria of the 21st century, i.e. an illness to categorise women as those who can't control their own

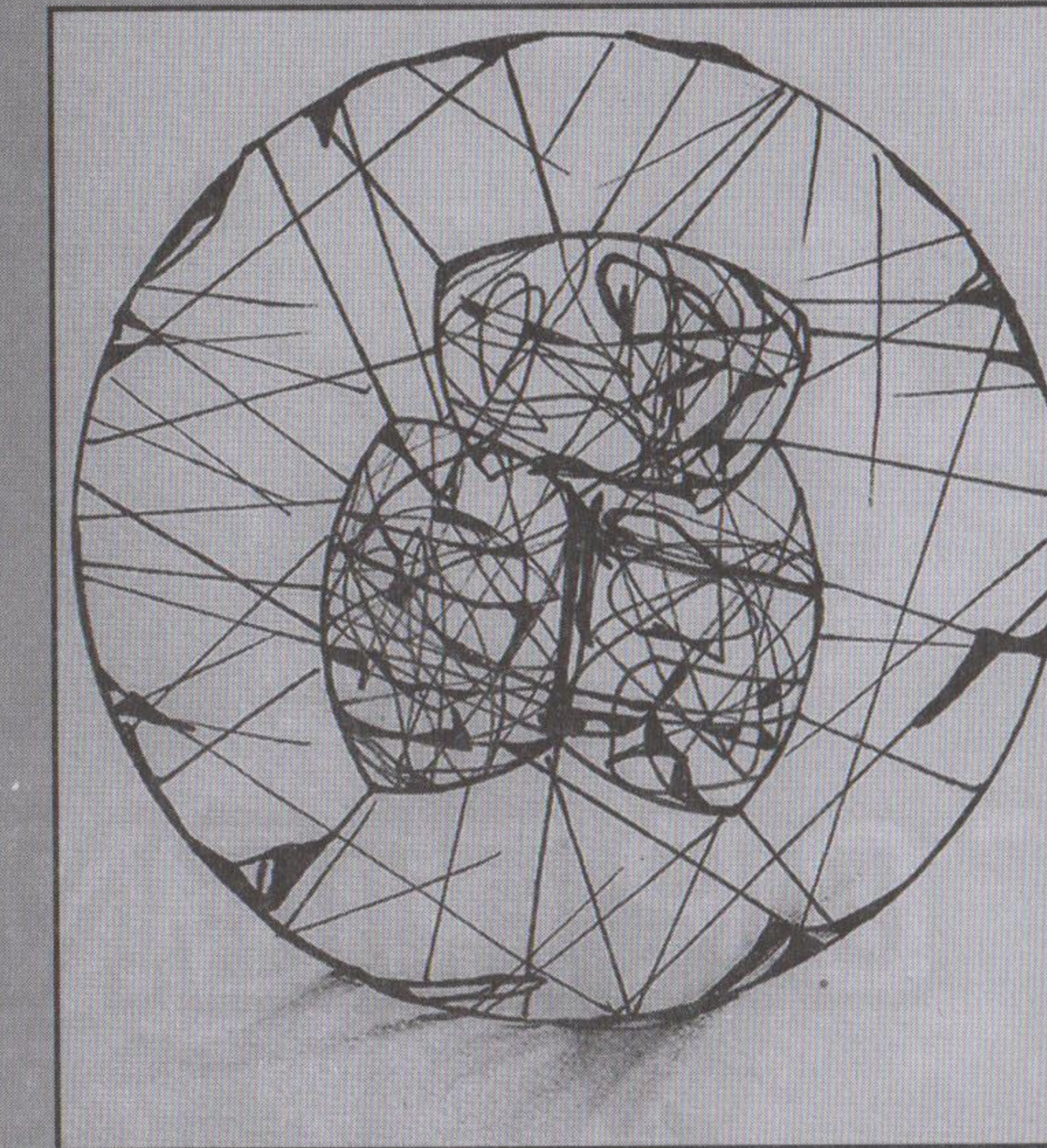
emotions.

The symptoms of BPD also seems a genuine way to deal with abuse. Who wouldn't be angry, irritable and afraid of being abandoned after being abused and/or raped? My life changed completely, I can't do the things I used to do, I am afraid of almost everything, I comfort eat, and I started to self-harm to make the mental pain go away and convince myself I was still alive. There is never a time when suicide is far from my mind. I don't believe this is because there is something inherently wrong with me. I believe this is my reaction to being raped, and whilst it is quite destructive, it does seem like a natural reaction to me. I live with this everyday.

Take today for example: I am annoyed with one of my friends. He didn't do something he said he would. Now, he has said he's sorry, and so in reality I should be able to move on. But no, my mind is telling me I should cut him off completely, refuse to speak to him. Though at the same time, I know this is a ridiculous reaction, but I can't seem to get past it. It is taking all my energy to even speak to him right now. This one instance might not seem so bad, but thousands and thousands of little things are big things for me, things I have to fight every day, these things that I know are irrational but still can't get past. Argh is the best way to sum all this up.

Now if all this has kind of scared you a bit, never fear, apparently it is treatable. There are courses of behavioural therapy out there. I personally attend dialectical behavioural therapy, which my psychologist assures me is very effective. At the minute though, I feel quite disillusioned. It's been 8 months – surely something should have changed by now, yet I feel no different. If anything, I feel I am getting worse. But hey, maybe I just give up too easily.

Critiques of BPD like mine wouldn't be necessary with a proper mental health system in place, one where the person is treated, not the condition. When I was intent on killing myself, I had to fight to be admitted into hospital, and faced months of them telling me I was fine. Then when I tried to leave, I was threatened with being sectioned. It doesn't make sense. Sounds scary? I'll expand. After Christmas, I was feeling pretty shit. I'd had nine different counsellors, a course of cognitive behavioural therapy and numerous consultations with GPs. I went to Germany and tried to have a great time, but in my mind I just kept thinking, wow my life is really fucked, I've achieved one of my dreams and yet I can't even enjoy



this. It was at that stage I made the decision that life was worthless to me and to get away from all of my problems the best solution was to end everything. I made what in hindsight I considered to be a mistake: I told someone.

Naturally, they were quite scared, but they researched what they could do and said the best course of action was to go to A&E and see what happens. In A&E I gave my life history, my plan of action, and that was that. Their plan of action: to put me on a waiting list for a psychologist. I accepted this, but when they hadn't let me know anything by the next evening, I went back and told them I was going to kill myself that night. After shouting this multiple times, finally I was admitted. Everyday the psychiatrist told me there was no reason for me being in hospital, that I shouldn't be there (despite numerous

occasions of self harm, hiding razor blades in my hair and smashing cups just to have something to hurt myself with). I decided to listen to what they were saying and said I wanted to leave. Then they seemed to move into action, telling me that if I even attempted to leave the ward, I would be made an involuntary patient. Eventually I did get out. I can remember the good bits of hospital, but I do have to admit that it was one of the freakiest experiences of my life.

The health system in Ireland seems to be based on profit, not on helping people to get better, and I wonder about the influence of pharmaceutical companies. I don't really know the solution. A free healthcare system would be nice, but is not a solution. I had free healthcare in Belfast, and that never helped me either. A system not based on which drugs are cheaper would be great too. The most general solution I can come up with though is very simple. I want a system where the patient is listened to, their concerns taken seriously. When someone makes

an informed decision not to do something, they shouldn't have to do it. I wish it was this easy, I wish people could get me, but right now that isn't happening, and all I can do is try, bit by bit, to change it. This article is my starting point.

Personally, I am surviving, not by much, but I'm still here. I don't take medication, but I am looking into herbal alternatives. The zine "This Frantic Silence" really helped me with advice and stories. If you want

to contact me for more information, I'd be happy to help. My email is gnarlypenguin@gmail.com.

¹<http://medical.yourdictionary.com/borderline-personality-disorder>

²<http://theword.org.uk>

BUT...

I'M A FOREIGNER!

BY ANGELA

At the end of 2008, I immigrated to Ireland. I have a fancy micro-chipped card from the Garda National Immigration Bureau as proof of my permanent residency. I live here with my Irish-born husband, neither of us are employed (thanks to Ireland's 13.7% unemployment rate), so we are on social welfare and therefore get dole money, rent allowance, and free health care from the medical card. Yes, I'm good for nothing, bleeding the system, and I'm not even *from* here.

I left all my friends and family, my two jobs, and everything I'd ever known. I sold my car, all my furniture, about 75% of all my earthly possessions. I spent an unreasonable amount of money to ship myself and my cat, Gypsy, across the ocean to be with a man and his wonderful family. I was not, like so many immigrants, searching for a better livelihood, or escaping a terrible situation. In fact, I was very happy and content in America. But I figured I would find a job in a month or two, and then we could relax into a nice, comfortable existence. Nineteen months later, I have to budget every penny so that I can pay my bills, eat, and go out once in a while. Unlike many of my friends here in Ireland, I cannot take off for vacations all over the world because we are paying college loans and child support back in the US. At this point, I can't afford the plane ticket, even if I wanted to move back. Heck, I can't even afford to go camping because I have no money for a tent or camping supplies. Nevertheless, I think I have it pretty good here. I am lucky. Under the American system of unemployment benefits, in which you are only eligible if you lose your job under certain circumstances, then receive only a fraction of your former salary for a maximum

of six to nine months, I would be homeless and destitute. The Irish social welfare system by comparison is extremely generous. And I have a feeling that many other immigrants feel similarly that it could be a whole lot worse.

On Sundays and Thursdays, my spouse and I go to the pub with my in-laws. Sometimes, news events and current political topics come up in our conversation. At such moments, I generally keep my mouth shut, and hope the subject will change quickly, especially when someone brings up those "foreigners" who "want everything and collect benefits from the country that we don't even get, and they aren't even from here!" In the past, I have piped in, "But I'm a foreigner!" to which they reply, "Oh, you don't count!" But in my mind, I do count. I realise that I'm not going to change the bigoted minds of everyone I come into contact with, but what I've really been wondering for a long time is how to react when someone you love, someone you are related to, sees people as "legal" and "illegal."

In April of this year, the US State of Arizona passed a law that would help rid the state of its illegal aliens, but in the process would give police carte blanche to harass anyone who remotely looks foreign. Most of my American friends and family were dismayed by the bill, but I noticed a few of my American cousins posting things on facebook.com like "The immigration issue in Arizona is out of control...because the great liberal engine wants everyone to just get along!!" Or "liking" the facebook group, "I shouldn't have to press one for English...We are in America, learn the language." Having done quite a bit of genealogical research on my family, I can say with confidence that all sides of my family are relatively new to America, and not all of the immigrants therein spoke English. My own father, whose parents immigrated from Italy to America in 1920, had rocks thrown at him as a child by a neighbour's mother when he tried to play with his friend in her backyard. She called him a "greasy guinea" and ordered him never to return. Discrimination

was especially bad during WWII when America declared war with Italy. Several hundred Italians were held in detention camps by the FBI during that time, and posters went up in government buildings declaring, "Don't speak the enemy's language! Speak American!" Yet these historical discriminations are lost on my Italian-American cousins, themselves only second generation. They don't understand that their attitudes are oppressive. I wonder why they don't see the similarities between Mexican immigrants, for example, and our own Italian immigrant grandparents.

But what I want to know is why otherwise lovely people – generous, caring, loving, and good – have the most xenophobic and scarily violent ideas about the poor. Because let's face it, it's not wealthy foreigners that they hate; no one complains about them, it's the ones who live in the worst conditions and therefore deserve the most compassion. And I think that's what lies at the heart of the issue. If you cannot imagine what it's like to have to leave the place where you were born, if you cannot imagine what it's like to face an unknown land, a foreign culture and/or language, not to mention the fear and sadness that must go along with such a move, then you cannot feel the necessary empathy to avoid a racist viewpoint. I face the dilemma of trying to instil this empathy in the hearts of my family, wondering, given the media machines that implore them to feel otherwise, if it's actually possible.

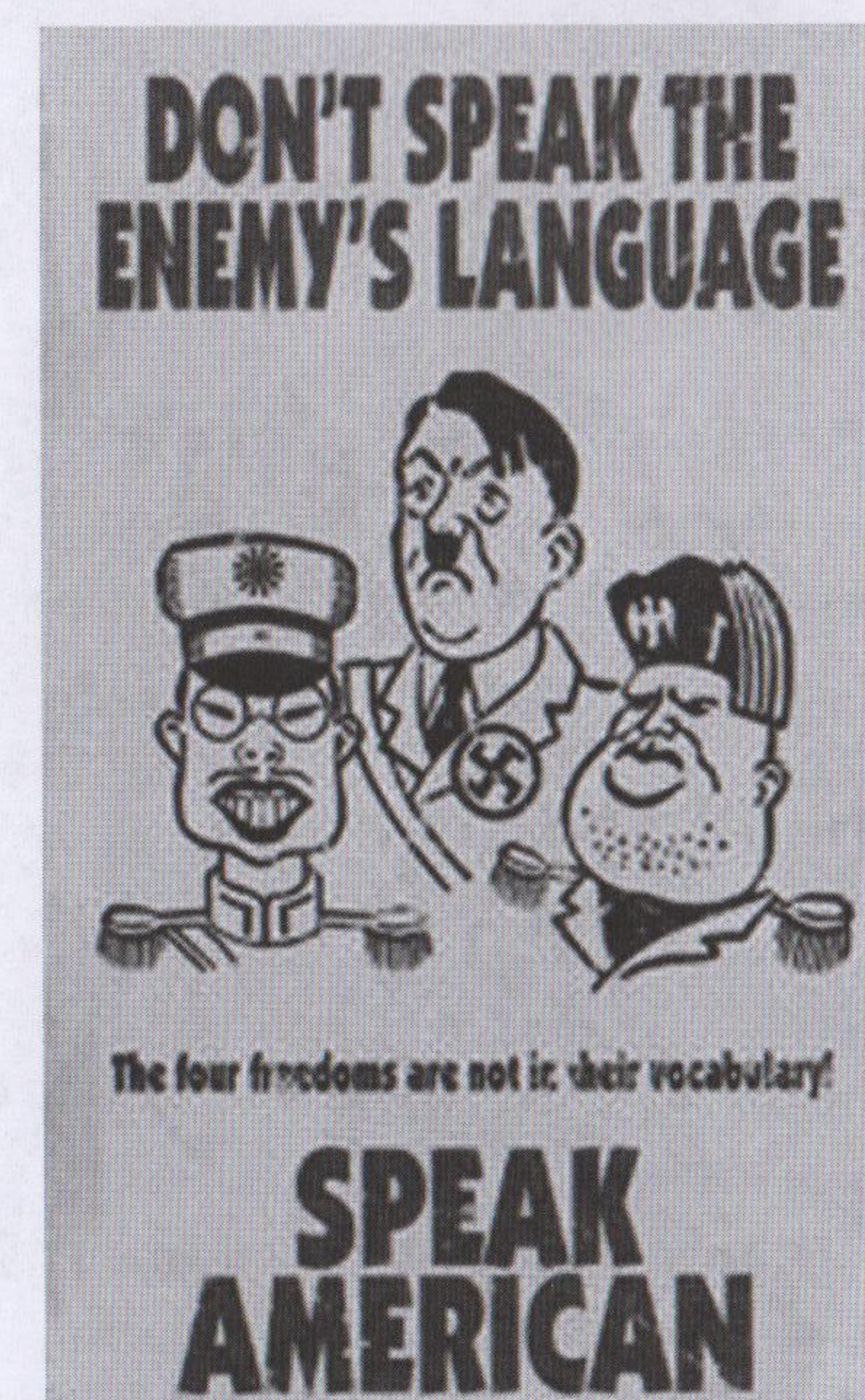
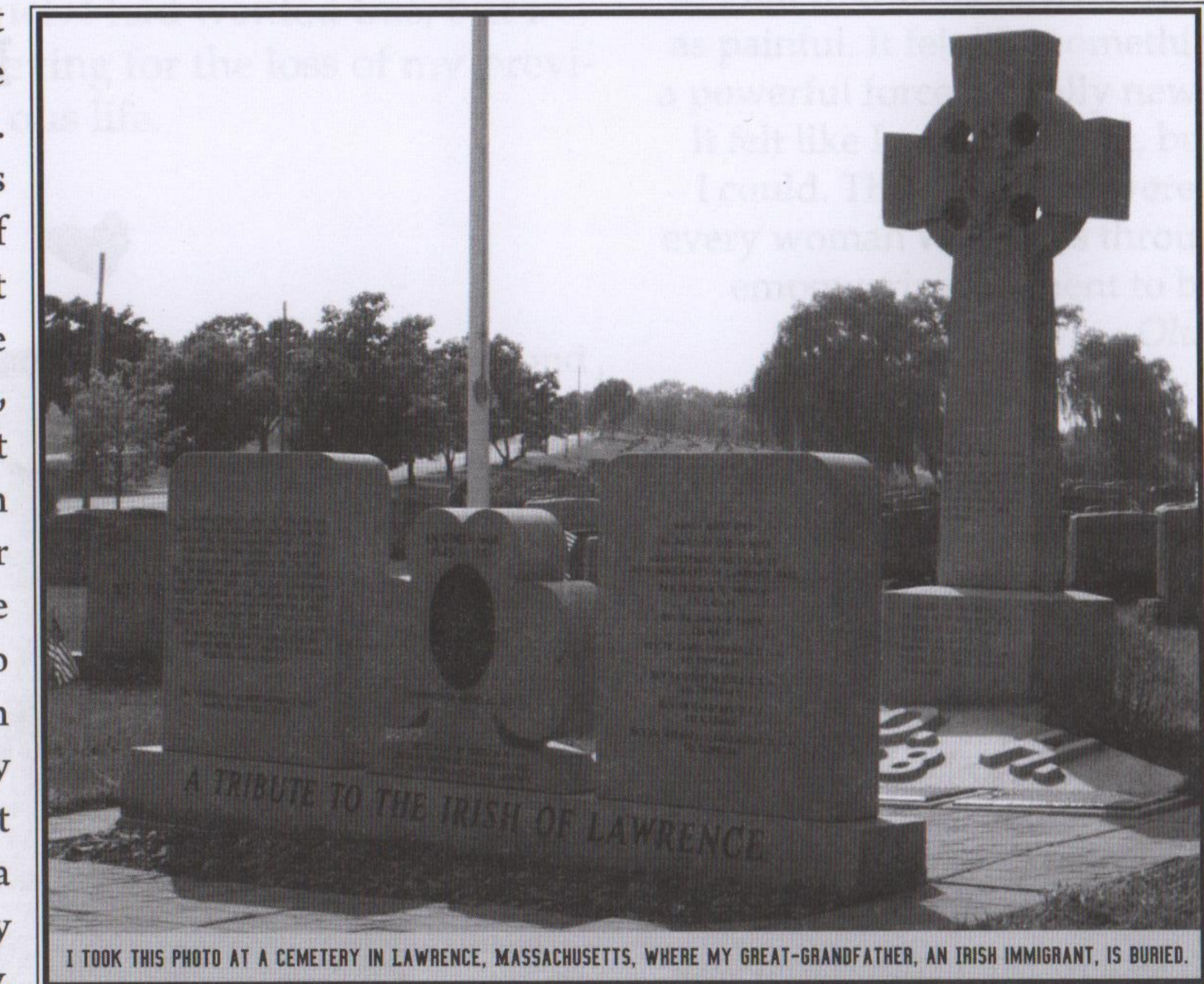
The Irish Times publishes stories with the titles "Poll shows hardening of attitude towards migrants," "Names hinder job search – survey," and "Foreign nationals at higher risk of injury." These kinds of articles have a pervasive subtext of intolerance and act as a warning to foreigners and people who might hire them. An article called, "Lack of jobs brings change in attitudes to

migration" seems to justify people's misguided fears, saying, "With mounting job losses and increased competition for scarce posts, it is little surprise to see enthusiasm for immigration has cooled significantly." The subtext says it's ok to discriminate against migrants. Sure, it's not surprising. But it's also frightening. With these attitudes come action. Violence against immigrants has risen by a third over the past two years. In Dublin, I have seen people with dark skin yelled at on the streets and on buses more times than I can count, so a recent article, "Immigrant children badly bullied" comes as no surprise.

Given that the Irish are literally sprinkled around the globe, and Irish migration is a well known fact, why this attitude? Maybe those who have chosen to stay and tough it out feel they have more rights than other people. I've heard people say that Irish-born have more of a right than non-nationals to get state financial aid. But what makes one human being more deserving of food, water, shelter, and health care than another one? It's an attitude I cannot get my head around. People who emigrate do so in search of something better for themselves, just as the Irish themselves have been doing for hundreds of years. We are all the world's citizens. I don't understand why we can't try to take care of each other.

Of course it's the same everywhere, not just in Ireland and America. The Scandinavian countries Denmark, Norway, and Sweden have successful anti-immigration political parties. In particular, so-called "illegal" immigrants the world over are looked upon as filthy animals. I've been asking myself why some people in my family, and scores of others for that matter, see people in terms of the borders of their countries of origin. When they talk about an immigrant/foreigner/illegal do they not simply see a person, a breathing, human person just as we all are? Do they expect everyone in the entire world to stay put in the countries where they were born, for their entire lives, forever? Should no one cross boundaries? I want to ask this of my in-laws, who are convinced, with absolutely no evidence, that their Latvian neighbours are getting handouts from the government that Irish nationals can't get. Where do these notions and conspiracy theories come from?

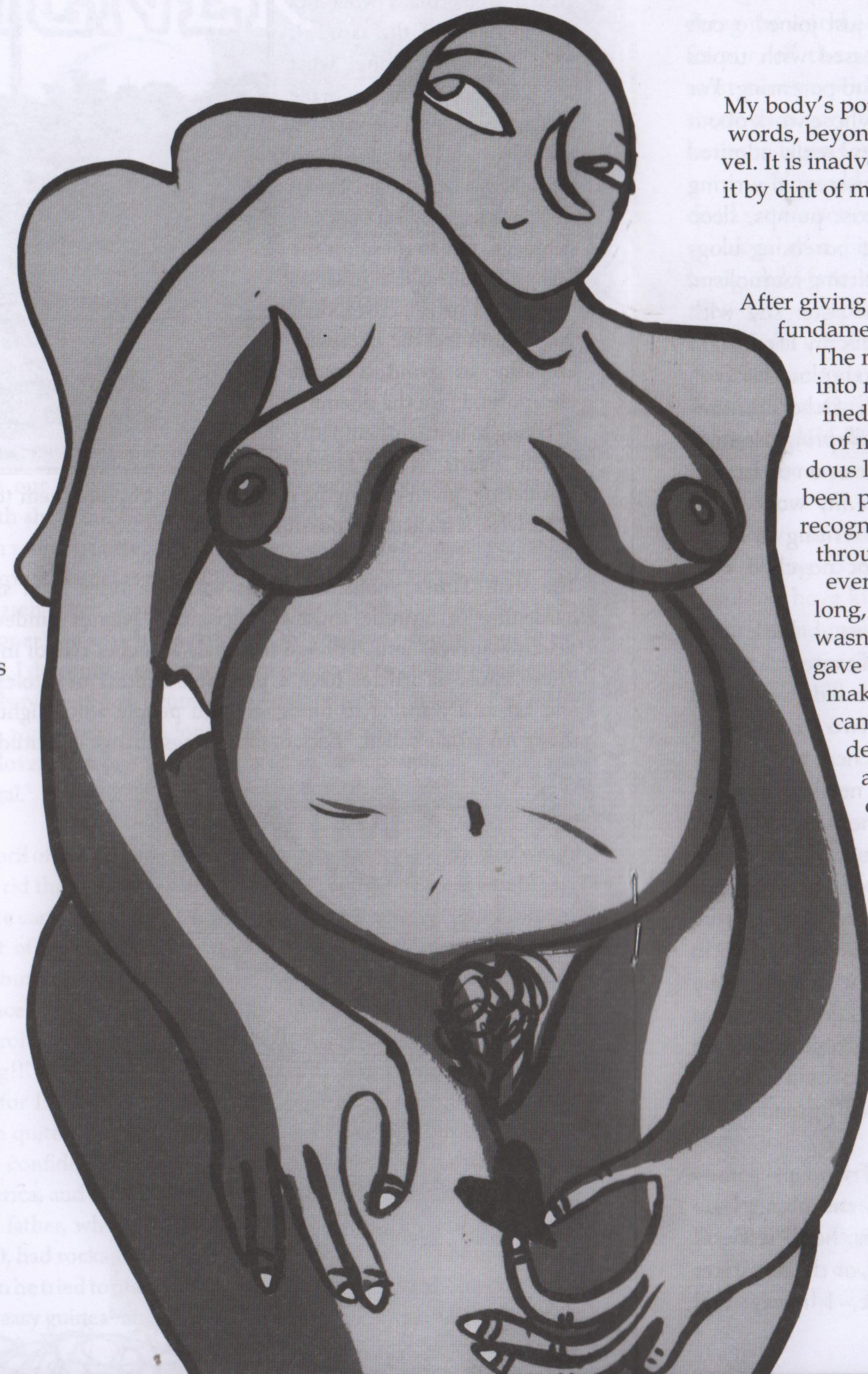
Can minds be revolutionised in simple conversation? The No Border, No One Is Illegal, and other networks have created websites, blogs, and solidarity camps to educate and demonstrate against deportation, detention, and discrimination against people trying to relocate. I've searched the literature for a straightforward, non-judgemental, easy-to-comprehend, compelling, forceful, and most importantly, concise argument that I can use on my elderly in-laws at the pub, or to my cousins in a facebook comment, that will magically and instantly eradicate racist attitudes from the people I love. But I suppose that's asking for a bit much. Maybe you either see the world with borders, or you don't.



Guess What I Found Out



Words by Deirdre
Image by Rachel Feury



When I found out, I said, "Oh Fuck."

When I found out, I was ecstatic. Happy beyond words.


When I found out, I have to say I felt like a warrior.

When I found out, I was so miserable, I went to eastern Europe, to escape.

When I found out, I was in total shock. I'd been told I was barren. Everything I knew turned upside down.

When I found out, I finally began to heal.

When I found out, I was on my own. I didn't tell anyone!

When I found out, I was thrilled. 

When I found out, I was walking on eggshells for months. I'd lost one before.

When I found out, I felt hollow.
It all felt like an empty ritual.

When I found out, I set impossible standards for myself.

When I found out, I felt completely exposed.

When I found out, I wasn't ready at all. I felt like a carrier, rather than a mother – an overseer, rather than a caretaker.

When I found out, I felt fulfilled, that this was the ultimate experience and expression of womanhood. Also ridiculous, that this was the element that fulfilled me, when the rest of my life was so rich.

When I found out, after the first shock, I was caught between joy and grief. I had wanted this, but I hadn't anticipated grieving for the loss of my previous life.



My body's potency astounds me. I am powerful beyond words, beyond image, beyond thought. I create. I marvel. It is inadvertent, this attribute of my being. I achieve it by dint of my gender, and I might revel or regret in its power.

After giving birth, I felt like I could do anything. I was fundamentally different, more capable, less afraid. The nature of the transformation from woman into mother was farther reaching than I'd imagined because it gave me enormous affirmation of my own abilities, and contained a tremendous lesson in heeding the need to surrender. I'd been prepared for pain, for intensity, but I hadn't recognised the need to lose control. The first time through labour, I fought against losing it with every fibre of my being, and the result was a long, drawn out event. I birthed at home and it wasn't until I was too tired to fight that I finally gave birth. The second labour, I understood that making my way through trying circumstances came not from management, but from surrender. It was freeing. What labour became was a chance to allow an intense event to wash over me, to surround me, without the situation altering my internal equilibrium. It's a deep lesson that I'm still learning – the skill is bringing learned contentment into a situation of struggle.

When I found out I was pregnant, it simply confirmed what I knew. I was awed. I'm still awed and my daughter is the size of a baby deer at age 6. I had a wonderful time being pregnant, even nauseated. I looked beautiful and felt it at the same time – how often is that true in your life? And birth was easy – the taxi trip to the hospital trapped with all my fear and my buoyant husband was the hardest part!
– Serena

I don't think I have ever felt as healthy or as fit as I did then. I was determined to make it a positive experience there seems to be so much negativity – people love to talk about the horror of both pregnancy and childbirth... I was determined to make it otherwise, and it was. I was blessed with a very healthy pregnancy and I have to say I felt like a warrior.

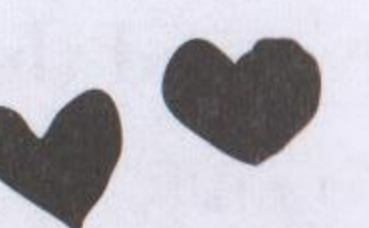
When I think back, I am so aware of the power of the mind, a woman's body, and the power of the breath. It was using the ability to control the breath that got me through every stage, keeping me calm and focussed. And the positive energy from women all over the world, as I felt it, was there with me too. I can't describe labour as painful. It felt like something else, something greater, a powerful force, literally new life coming into the world. It felt like I couldn't do it, but at the same time I knew I could. The midwives were awesome. I am in awe of every woman who goes through childbirth. It really is an empowering moment to bring life into the world.
– Olwyn

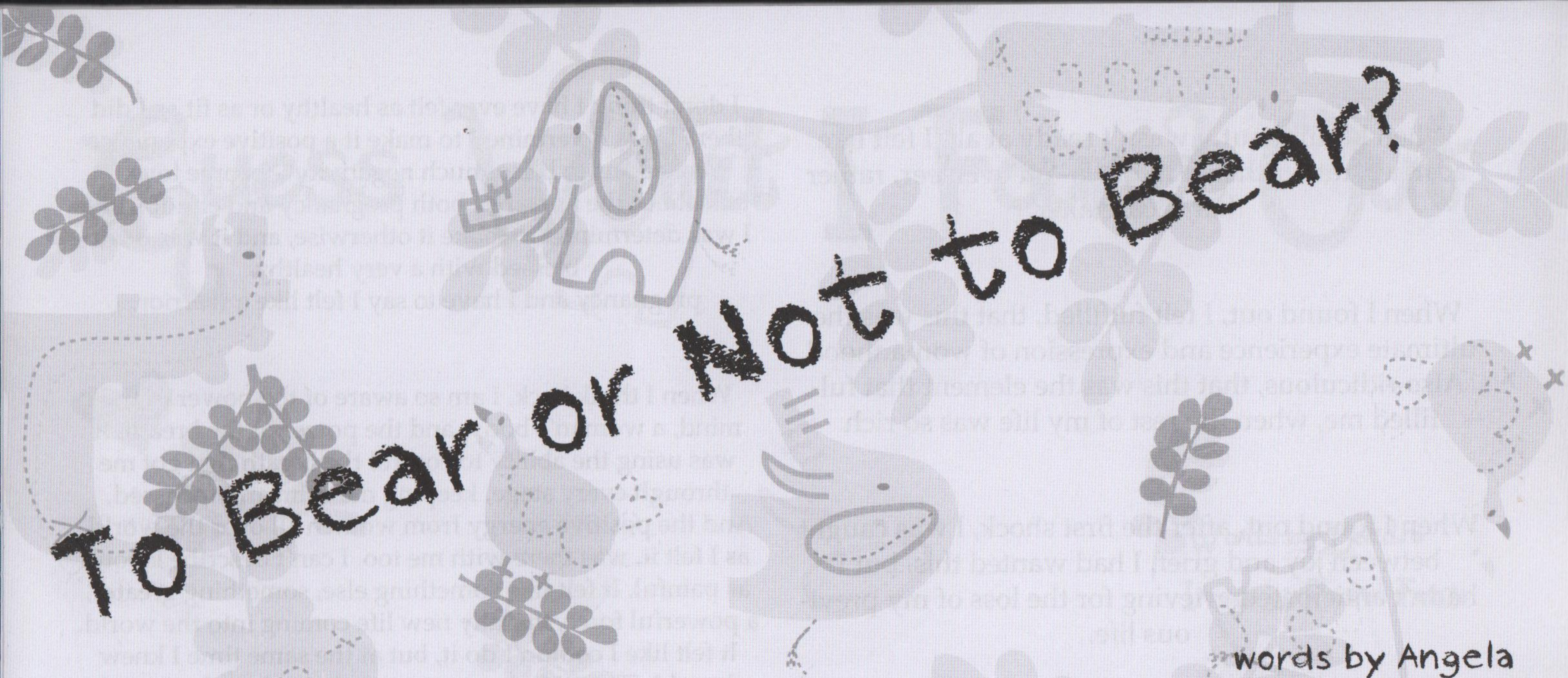
When I found out I was pregnant the first time, I cried. I cried and cried and cried more. But I also was okay. I challenged my then partner with the possibility of an abortion, and when he said that was okay, I knew I was ready to be a parent. I had a sleepy pregnancy and have the most wonderful child.

When I found out I was pregnant the second time, I cried worse. I spent days weeping and then I picked up my head and made logical charts and pros/cons lists. I talked to myself and I talked to many others. When I was encouraged to have an abortion this time, I knew that it was right. I was ready to be a parent, but not ready to do it all alone.
– Emily

Birth was tremendous. I was excited about the whole ordeal, and despite being treated in a patronising fashion by many medical staff because of my age, pregnancy gave me a huge amount of self belief.

The birth was quick, intense, hard, overwhelming but at all times I felt deeply rooted in the past, present and future of all women folk. This feeling continued right throughout breastfeeding. I felt as if my body was finally my own, no matter how much the medical establishment tried to intervene.
– Sheila





As a child I played with dolls constantly and with great dedication until an embarrassingly old age. If there was a baby in the neighbourhood, my best friend and I pestered its mother to let us play with it after school. We particularly loved to play with a set of nine-month-old twins, Patrick and Andrew, because it meant that we each got one to play with (according to our names, which also began with P and A). Aside from being avid doll and Barbie™ players, my older sister and I invented a game called "Ten Kids." As the name suggests, we wrote down the names and ages of ten children on a piece of paper, stood in the middle of a room, and pretended to order them around. So it was no surprise that I began babysitting at age 12, and happily welcomed each of my four nieces and three nephews into the world.

When I got married at age 25, I had a life plan. I didn't want to be one of those old, haggard moms, so we had to hurry up, get married, and I wanted two kids, but be finished having them definitely before I was thirty, so the pressure was on to save money, get careers in order, and essentially get our shit together ASAP. But then, a couple years later, something strange happened. I decided that my life plan was, for lack of a better word, stupid. Battling a 16-year bout of depression, I questioned everything, including my decision to get married. I started to wonder if I wanted kids, then or ever. I divorced the poor guy I'd bullied into marrying me. I moved back to the city. Life seemed full of possibilities, but

giving birth sure wasn't one of them.

And so it went. I hopped from one event to the next, never attaining much stability in my life or feeling like I was in a position to support offspring. Sometimes I'd think about my life and how I might have children one day. But it was never the right time and I never seemed to partner with men who wanted to be fathers. (And perpetually spending all my money on food, clothes, cocktails, and other frivolities didn't help.)

Sometimes, when I am really enjoying myself, whether it be at home or out on the town, I pause and think to myself, "Gee. If I had kids, none of this would probably be happening right now." At these moments I reflect on my relief at not having to think about babysitters, dirty diapers, feeding times, temper tantrums, and all the other unpleasant things that go along with parenting. With kids, spontaneity would be impossible. I'd be exhausted all the time. And the noise! How would I cope? How would I pay for the diapers, the food, the clothing, the toys? What if my kid turns out to be an asshole?

And never mind the kid, what if bearing a child turns me into an asshole? Friends and family with kids have treated me as if my decision to remain child-free signals a sort of immaturity and deficiency, and at those times I have thought that if having kids will give me that same superior, self-righteous attitude, I want no part of it. I've seen so many interesting, active people (men and women) seemingly lose their identities after they become

words by Angela

parents, as if they've just joined a cult that makes you obsessed with topics only relating to kids and parenting. For example, a journalist whose work about politics and social issues I really admired seems to have more interest in writing in her blog about breast pumps, sleep deprivation, and other parenting blogs than she does in hard hitting journalism. I have heard my own sister say with rapture, "My daughter is my life," and I wonder why she had to replace her own life with someone else's. Others remark on their legacy; their offspring are their mark on the world. But as an artist, my main goal in life is for my work to be my legacy. I want my writing to speak for me in a way that no child ever could.

Over the years I have also adopted a sort of politicised attitude: I believe that having a kid (a planned pregnancy among two consenting adults) is narcissistic. There are literally millions of kids who need love, care, and homes all over the world. I don't mean babies, but infants right up to teenagers. So if you want a child, your wanting a newborn that came from your own sperm/egg is an exercise in narcissism. I realise that not everyone is eligible to adopt – you don't just snap your fingers and adopt a child – but I wonder what the world would be like if adoption was the default instead of the consolation prize.

Whenever a friend or family member complains to me about how tiring being a parent is, how "selfless" they've had to become, or the sacrifices they've had to make, I rarely feel

sorry for them. I am sick to death of parents acting like their decision to have kids isn't selfish. You brought an additional child into the world when collectively we aren't taking care of the children we already have. In my mind, that's selfish in terms of the world's resources. I don't care how much extra work they are in your life. You made the decision to have children based on the fact that you weighed the sacrifice versus the payoff, and you went for it. It's like taking a hiking vacation and complaining that it's hard work going up the mountain.

So, I have felt for many years that my decision to not give birth is doing the world an infinitesimally small favour, all the while looking down at most parents with disdain, thinking of them as a sort of cult. But does that keep me from wanting them?

It would seem that I'm pretty dead set on not having kids. I subscribe to blogs that highlight articles about being child-free, and I try to internalise their (*very emphatic, very compelling*) arguments about how wonderful it is not to have kids and how people with kids are statistically more miserable than the child-free. I use this literature to reassure myself. But it doesn't work. Now I am 37, and recently had an epiphany that all these years I have been trying to convince myself that I shouldn't have kids, that in fact I don't want them, going so far as to say it's wrong to have them, but I've been only fooling myself. I envy my friends who know and have always known they don't want to be parents. If I didn't want kids, my life would be fairly uncomplicated, and I could feel content. But I'm not content. I want children.

My life philosophy and my personal beliefs conflict with my desires, which until recently I wouldn't even admit to.

Ever since I started sweeping my maternal longings under the rug, they have quietly crept out, only to be hidden again, like little voices being put into jars. These voices became much louder when my father died. One night, during his illness, I thought about how horrible this experience is of watching your parent deteriorate for years and years, and how I wished I'd never been

born so I wouldn't have to feel this pain that can only come from loving so deeply. And then I thought that maybe it would be a good thing if I never have another person through what I'm going through. But then I realized that I will never feel so close to another human being as I have to my father. Our relationship was uncomplicated and pure. Now that he's gone, I have a hole in my heart. And maybe it's illogical, maybe it's crazy, but I think that having a child will bring a little piece of my father back. His mannerisms and features are echoed in my nieces and nephews. These glimpses of my father are gifts. The treasure that our relationship was – to me, but also to him – I want that for myself. Perhaps children don't thrill me, and I realise that there are no guarantees in life, but a human being to nurture, spend time with, and love for the rest of my life, now that sounds lovely.

But it's not as easy as simply making a decision. Since I've been unemployed for over a year and a half, and have no idea when I will work again, I've had to give a lot of thought to what I'm going to do. Now, obviously, I don't expect to be poor forever, and both my husband and I are taking steps to be gainfully employed. Since we are both educated with work experience, I know that I can expect to have better financial days. But what it boils down to is this: I honestly can't really pay for a child at the moment without the help of social welfare, becoming the hated "welfare mom." But why should

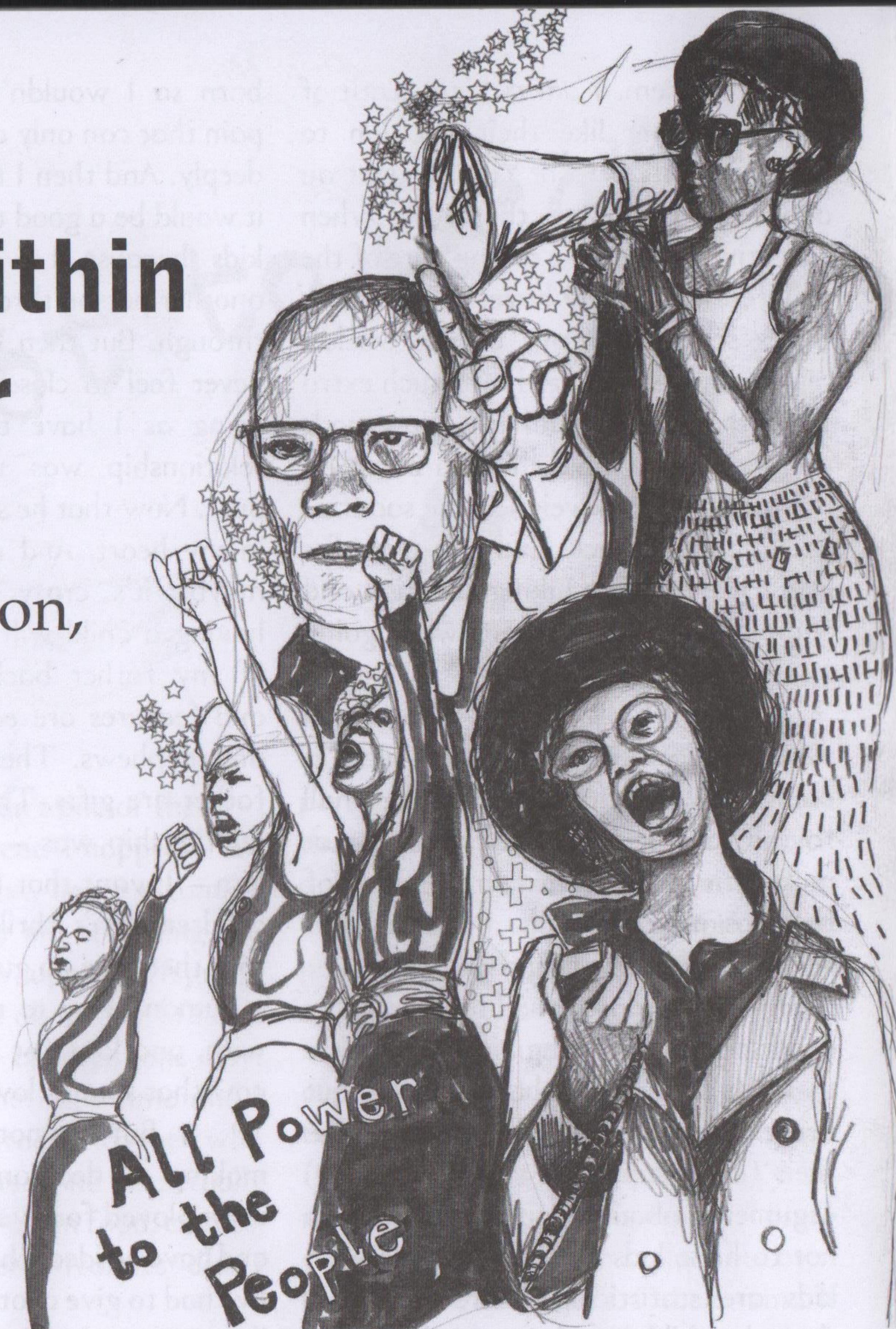
I be denied the experience of knowing a mother's love simply because I am poor? Why should only the rich and the middle class have the "ok" to give birth? That's not fair either. Four years ago I had an abortion because I was in school and not in an emotional position to have a child. Now I feel I'm ready, but I am poverty stricken. Does it make me a bad person if I rely on the state to help me care for a child?

Growing up in a place where birth control is readily available and abortion is legal, I used to (like many people in America) feel anger at people who had kids that obviously couldn't afford them. But now I see my anger for what it may have really been: jealousy. Can a person be jealous of that which they philosophically oppose? I have come to wonder if you can intellectualize something that is clearly a human need, even if it's not every human's need. Sometimes I wish I was made of stronger stuff, and I could simply make the decision to remain child-free as easily as I have made nearly every other choice in my life, with no regrets. I want to feel whole, just as I am, without offspring, if for no other reason than to shirk this idea women get fed that childless women are incomplete or abnormal. But at night, I dream of being pregnant, and feel contentment and joy seldom felt in my waking life. I wonder if anyone will care for me with the intensity and devotion I felt for my father, and if I might have a chance to be blessed with those comforts throughout my life and into the next.



Let's Get Free – fighting sexism within the Black Panther Party

Interview with Ashanti Alston,
Anarchist Panther



Words Hilary
Image Eve

Former Black Panther and Black Liberation soldier Ashanti Alston took time out from his Irish speaking tour in March 2009 for an interview [1] with RAG to reflect on the gender politics within the Black Panther Party (BPP). Emerging out of the Black Power movement in the United States, the Party was founded in 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale (Eldridge Cleaver joined later that year) and advocated the right to self-defence against police brutality rampant in black communities. The Party's focus evolved to incorporate socialist, communist and nationalist doctrines [2]. Having read bell hooks critique of the Black Power movement, as patriarchal, misogynistic and dependent on the oppression of black women, I was keen to learn how the BPP negotiated the intersection of race, class and gender. For black power politics, hooks argues, the labour of black women outside the home was emasculating, a threat to black masculine self-realization. Efforts to create gender equality within the Party challenged this patriarchal divide between men's and women's work.

Thanks for taking the time to meet with me, Ashanti. Could we begin by talking about masculinity within the Black Panther Party, in particular the influence of Malcolm X's teachings on the role of women within the Party?

The Nation of Islam's [3] impact on the black community was broad [...] when we heard somebody speaking about the white man and white man being the devil and the black man needing to have his own, that language was there. Our oppositional language was shaped in sexual terms. It was the black man's struggle for our dignity, for our rights and it was just supposed to include everybody and I mean we didn't challenge that. I know I didn't. I didn't have anything that would give me a way to challenge it until I joined the Black Panther Party.

By '69, '70 we began learning about the

Black Panther Party. When we started reading about the Black Panther Party we saw that this group called themselves "The angry children of Malcolm X" and what I understood of Huey Newton, Bobby Seale and Eldridge Cleaver is that they wanted to take Malcolm's teachings to the next level and some of that meant like, OK, he obviously was changing his opinion on certain things; his positions around nationalism, around violence/non violence, around coalitions, the possibility of coalitions with white people primarily. So, the Panther Party saw that even around women his position was changing. When he left the Nation of Islam, when he formed the Organisation of African-American Unity [4] there was women in leadership positions in that and he was also building relationships with political women activists from the South; Fannie Lou Hamer [5]. The Black Panther Party was trying to bring

that to this more revolutionary level. A revolutionary nationalist and socialist organisation basing itself eventually on a Marxist/Leninist interpretation, fighting sexism within the party and actually making policy that we must combat sexism within the party and actively building coalitions with other ethnic groups, even white activists. It was different from Malcolm from what I understood because I used to go to the Nation of Islam meetings, I just never became a member. I wasn't keen on white people myself, I hated white people but it was coming into the Panther Party where I began to learn that that's not cool; you just can't hate a person because of the colour of their skin and they're your oppressor, you know.

...the anti sexism, it was in place but it wasn't, I mean this in retrospect too. I mean Eldridge Cleaver himself who wrote Soul on Ice and in Soul on Ice

there's certain parts in there where he's actively raping women. He wanted to rape white women as an act of rebellion and a lot of people found that controversial. But in the Panther Party he was one of the main leaders who at least pushed for us to be anti sexist not necessarily meaning that he was anti sexist himself but I think that he knew that it was important.

In the Panther Party when I joined I'm just 17 years old. I felt like my own machismo was still forming. But I'm coming into the Panther Party and it's saying you can't treat women as objects; you've got to treat them equal. I come in and find out that women in New York and New Jersey are in positions of leadership, men in the chapters are supposed to do work that's traditionally for women from washing the dishes to sweeping the floor to helping to take care of any kids that's in there and I'm like, well shit! I'm inspired, you know and I know that that wasn't everybody's experience but I think I was one of those people that was like, wow! This was just so great because at the same time that we're being this way in the communities, we're standing up to the police and all of that.

But I knew that there was also a lot of sexism in the party. I can't say that I even had a consciousness of how deep mine still was and I didn't begin to see it until later when I went to prison. I thought we did pretty good and when I talk to former members years later, even when you talk to the sisters in the Black Panther Party, the stories are mixed [6]. Some of them are really harsh on the sexism within the Black Panther Party. Others... the stories are just as harsh but they felt that the Panther Party gave them a way to be different women because they were in a sense empowered to fight sexism and partly around the fact that everybody was armed. Sisters would tell you that because everybody had guns there were certain ways that they could tell a brother, "you're not going to fuck with me, I'm not going to be your sexual object because I got a gun". Others in the party would create a condition where women who had skills or who had abilities to be in leadership positions, they was there and brothers who didn't accept that, there was ways that they were disciplined.

That's 1970, '71, '72. By '74 I go to prison for a long time. I don't come out until the end of '85. So this is when I'm reading feminism, radical psychology, critical theory, the anti-authoritarian stuff, the anarchist stuff, sitting in this prison now with no choice but to reflect. First I've got to reflect on me because those things allowed me to see me as more than just Ashanti the Panther, Black Liberation soldier, I had to see me as even that kid in the nuclear family who had pops, moms, they was the authority. I come out of a Baptist church but I come out of a tough neighbourhood too and pops used to be a prizefighter. I used to think of all this stuff while I am reading, Wilhelm Reich and all this stuff was telling me that your family also prepares you for this very authoritarian sexist person you're going become so I'm like, if that's me I know that's a lot of my comrades in the Panther Party and then to be able to see how that's the leadership of the Black Panther Party too and the leadership's relations with those of us who were the field workers. Whatever is said up top, there was no real way that we could integrate our opinions into the decision making process so I'm like, well shit! There was a lot of sexism within the party that we didn't have either theoretical understandings of or better cultural practices within to help us really break it down. I just feel like we did the best we could.

bell hooks has written a lot about how Malcolm X was a figure or an icon of black masculinity. How much of a figure would Angela Davis have been not just for women but also for men within the Black Panther movement?

Angela was very important, maybe there was two things; one

she was a smart woman, you just got that from her, here's a smart, black woman and a good speaker. I think it was less important or maybe a little bit ignored that she had these connections to the Communist Party because I think a lot of people in the black community were still either phobic about the Communist Party or if you were in the movement you would ask yourself "why is she in the Communist Party?" But the image of her was of this beautiful black woman who was smart and willing to speak out in terms of the issues in society.

You had her and you had Kathleen Cleaver, same thing. But Kathleen Cleaver was one of the leaders in the Black Panther Party and her figure in the Black Panther Party was really important because she held a high position. So she was not just Eldridge Cleaver's wife but she held her own and she wasn't just a stand back person she was really active in her leadership. She brought a lot to the Black Panther Party and then on local levels you had other figures who became important like Afeni Shakur [7] at the New York Black Panther Party. Afeni was one of them figures who commanded a lot of respect in the local chapters in New York and then later on people like Safiya Bukhari [8] and in other places, women who were good speakers, or were good speakers and good organisers and they knew how to wield leadership. So their images from the national one to the international one like Kathleen and Angela to the more local one who may not have been known as well or as broadly but at local areas they was like, you look to them, you were inspired by them.

What were the organised efforts to create changes within the aims of the Party that would challenge patriarchy, addressing family structures, addressing masculine & feminine roles?

There were several things. One we had to read about other people struggles and when you read about these other liberation struggles you know you find that these anti-sexist struggles within those struggles is really powerful. So when we read about Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, struggles in South Africa, in Asia and Latin America that the more Marxist, Maoist-influenced liberation movements was actively fighting sexism. You would see women not only with the guns, women guerrillas next to the men guerrillas, but you would find out that some of them was even in positions of power. Those things was giving us one way of reinforcing that we got to also replicate that.

Other things was like, we had to do domestic stuff. The men did, you know. We were not to sit around and let women do stuff; cooking, cleaning and that was important too because that was not the role we was coming up with in our communities, especially that lumpen culture is like, "that ain't the role for men". We wanted more flashy shit, "that's what women do", but now it's like "no, we do that?" and it's enforced and things was in place where you were disciplined if you were falling in those areas.

I can remember one thing; to be late for a meeting, if you're late for a meeting you may be doing some runs around the block and if it's a New York meeting it means it's a very big block. But whoever came late, men or women, we all had to run and the first time I did that I was very surprised that, one sister in particular, Safiya Bukhari was kind of big, and like the rest of us she lead the way.

It was seeing things like that that was like, oh right on! I think my age had a lot to do with that. I think that impressionable 17, 18 and it's like they're saying, "This is what the new man is going to be like. This is what the new women is going to be like".

If a woman felt like she was being pressured for sex she had to let somebody know. And when she let somebody know there was a stop to it right then. Some things I didn't necessarily see but I heard about later on. There was one case in particular where one brother was being very abusive to his partner to the point where he beat her in public. I think there was a court date in Brooklyn and the police had vamped on the Panthers in Brooklyn and they went to court and one day in court he jumped on her and beat her for whatever reason and that Panther chapter banned him from New York State, they told him he couldn't come back any more. When that story was



told and it would get to us and it would tell us how serious this struggle is.

There were alliances between the Black Panthers and the White Panthers [9] and the SDS [10]. Were there any alliances between Black Panthers and factions within the feminist movement?

I think that there were some but it was more nominal, it wasn't really developed relationships and I think that one of the mistakes of the Panther Party was that it was limited to the white feminists. We didn't really make the same outreach to black feminists. Or if there was some kind of gathering like the Revolutionary Peoples Constitutional Convention [11] where there was all the different groups even the queer groups, it's like there's space for the white queer organisation but the Black Panthers organisation because of the homophobia wasn't outreaching or trying to find out who was the black feminists or black queer folks in the struggle. I think that the effort to really build relations with feminist groups of all nationalities and queer groups of all nationalities, I don't think we put real effort and probably because the phobias mean that you are a little scared of that which you don't know. What it might mean in terms of your image to your community or what it means for you, how it might make you look a bit insecure.

One area I'd like to move on to is the complicated combination of race, class, and gender. These different terms in some ways define political strategies so it's difficult to be politically active holding that triple framework. It's really hard to find politics that addresses these. Have you found a framework that does?

I think I have more of a grip now. The prison experience allowed me the time to think about our struggle and its complexities. Whereas on the streets we learnt so much quickly, broadly, deeply and directly. It's unbelievable how much we learnt from being local to our communities to joining the Panther party and the whole new world but now in prison you are beginning to look at that world in it's complexities. So reading

the feminism allows me to see how important antisexism is in the picture. Readings on authoritarianism allows me to see the same picture but differently, you know the role of anti-authoritarianism. All the cultural and social mechanisms in place that just kind of breathe authoritarianism like it's just second nature. And so if you're in this struggle you are not just in this struggle to overthrow or to stop some oppressive body over there but you begin to recognise like the anarchists say, there is a cop in your head, the internal oppression, and then to understand anti-colonial psychology that says those mechanism are still in you too. Franz Fanon becomes important again. So you've got understanding racism, understanding sexism, understanding anti authoritarianism.

At some point I began to understand more of homophobia and that was just from having a very close queer friend. I said something to her one day kind of innocently but it was really fucked up, so homophobic. So she said, Ashanti I've got something I want you to read. So the next day we're going to work and she gives me this book *Queer Theory* and it's like, queer theory! I have struggled to be a good ally but now she's asking me to read this book. So I am on the subway with this book... (Ashanti laughs)... I am so conscious that I have this highly charged title and so I don't hold the book like I do normally, I'm reading it like this (holds the book cover down), now I'm holding it down so people can't see the title and I'm conscious of myself doing that.

At the same time as I'm reading this I'm beginning to understand queer theory and what's the importance of it in terms of understanding people's identities and what that means in our struggles, understanding what all of this is around me, different sexualities and stuff like that just brings more lenses for me to see. Not only our struggle outside of me but how those struggles are inside of me as well. Those intersections that you are talking about now (race, class, gender). But for me too, I never put aside the anti colonial perspective because for me our struggle in the United States especially for people of African descent, we're still in an anti colonial struggle and for me that's going to be the struggle until we're free.

I began to understand more when I got out of prison; I began to work with other people and to interact with other folks. Then to watch how mainly the anarchist movement & the feminist movement would have practices that incorporate more of these things because they were more concerned that there was all kinds of oppressions that we have to deal with, how they are all still trapped off into us, how we manifest them and how they can really poison our relationships inside these movements while we're trying to destroy them on the outside and that shit wasn't working.

For example, first time I went to this anarchist meeting and before the meeting started it was like laying down some of the conditions for the meeting and one of them was directed towards the men and it was some simple shit like men have to take a step back and men have to shut up, not for the whole meeting. It was like men have to know when to shut up, like you've said your piece. Be careful of your man-tones and when you've said it shut up and let somebody else speak or say what you have to say and step back. And damn that's really it, that's really good; we didn't do that back then.

Or like when it was time to get into the strategy sessions and make the decisions, these groups seemed to be very concerned about who has been historically excluded, who's voices and how to make sure that we bring them in. I'm like oh, this is really great! Because these meetings were like mixed meetings and I know a lot of times black folk in a meeting with white folks, we would just automatically just be kind of quiet, and

then there's folks in there saying make sure that we hear from everybody or make sure that there's space for those that may be not feeling comfortable, say what you've got to say.

So even things like that gave me a way to see that we were looking for and experimenting with different inclusive practices. It reminded me of things I had read about the early civil rights movement which stood out, stuff around participatory democracy. Just to include everybody. And then to understand that that's the Zapatista way too, figuring out how to include differences, get out of the thinking that we have to be the same, the monolithic stuff, that's it's ok that there are differences, from differences of opinion but to differences of culture, spirituality, sexuality, analysis. So that made me hopeful because it's like we can do this, because all of these things have divided us for so long, we can take this thing down and turn it around.

You've described how women in the Black Panther Party could assume certain power because they were armed, they had authority behind the gun. It reminds me of an article called 'Gendered Revolution' in the second edition of the Irish anarcho-feminist magazine RAG in which the author compares the experiences of women in the Spanish civil war with the Sandinista revolution. She argues that despite achieving gender equality through participating fully in physical combat and political organising in the earlier stages of the movements, patriarchal relations soon returned segregating women to pursue what was deemed to be "women's issues". She explains that part of the political aims of revolutionary struggle must also include ending a gendered division of labour. De-gendering revolution would surely involve deconstructing the patriarchal, macho, warlike images that are so much a part of revolutionary iconography for men. Is there a tension here and how would you begin to resolve it?

I think we've still got to figure that out. I mean Angela, Kathleen, Afeni, Assata Shakur especially because she's like the most well known figure from that period of being this woman who was in the Black Liberation Army, the newspaper called her mother hen of the Black Liberation Army but people loved Assata Shakur. She's been in Cuba now for 30 years. She is such an important figure in our struggle because of that image of her. We need images of people who fight back but there are some pitfalls to it and I believe today you need women who had access to a gun if they got to defend themselves. From stories I heard, women having guns in the Black Panther Party made some men back up. But then you really got to see at some point that it still fits into these iconic roles that are really constructed by men, so how do we deal with that? I'm not sure we've quite figured that out.

Today it concerns me that a lot of young brothers who come into the movement, they're not critical of these images. They see those images of Malcolm, Huey Newton sitting in a wicker chair with a spear and a shot gun, I love all of them images but now you've got a culture of violence for real! You've got to really look at that. With the gun culture in the United States and this seeming love of guns and what guns can do, how much do you really want to uncritically promote them images and I don't want young revolutionary brothers coming into the movement thinking that the rigid macho image is what we're striving for. I think that my lesson from the prison is that we need to be soft. We need to be soft with the capacity (if we need to), to fight.

So you've groups like The New Black Panther Party [12] and everyone is real rigid, mean. They don't bust a smile, they look like they're gritting on you, you know they'll kill you in a minute. Parts of that I'm like, ok, I understand it and I appreciate the fact that they'll even fight the police. But that's

not where I'm at today in terms of what I would want them to really know. I want people to see how important our personal, family, social relationships are, because we didn't do that well back then and that played a part on weakening our power as a movement, as an organisation. You can't put that in the background, they need to be in the forefront, and I think that says a lot about how we're really seeing this movement and our ability to create a new world by how we even look at our relationships.

But I did confess in Belfast, some guy said, well what's my relationship to my children and I said, not good, not good because I'm a grandfather now. But do I take time out to spend quality time with my grans? Do I go see my children, spend time with them? (Shakes his head) I think a part of it is because for 14 years (in prison) I never had a chance to do it but then when I came out it was almost like, the man revolutionist addiction stops me from doing it because at some point I've got to stop and develop relations with my children and my grans, go see my mama and my brothers and sisters more, as part of being a revolutionary, just being a human being who develops a fuller life.

I guess it goes to the whole thing too of how we look at political struggle as the struggle and social struggle as subordinate to that and I think the thing I liked about anarchism when I began to really understand it was that anarchism talked a lot about social struggle. It didn't put all that priority on political struggle. It's like the social struggle and the social revolution and the more I understood that I'm like, yeah that makes sense! And it confirms a lot of stuff coming out now around cultural studies and these universities things that really focuses on how people live on that day to day or what's the cultural aspect of people's lives and how important that stuff is, I think compared with Marxism, anarchist thinking was always directed more to how people really live or how people really are, so I found myself thinking that's where I want to be.

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ENDNOTES:

[1] For a full transcription of this interview see *Interface: a journal for and about social movements*, May 2010. A video of the talk Ashanti gave at the Anarchist Bookfair in Dublin 7th March 2009 is available to view here <http://vimeo.com/3954733>.

[2] At its high point the Party had a 250,000-newspaper distribution while also running survival programmes, which included free breakfast for children programme, ambulance service, medical clinic, drug and alcohol rehabilitation and education programmes. Following a continued state crackdown against the Party the group dissolved in 1976.

[3] A Black Muslim religious nationalist organisation established in 1931 and based in the United States.

[4] A black nationalist organisation established in 1964 by Malcolm X to fight for the human rights of African Americans and promote alliances between Africans and African Americans.

[5] Fannie Lou Hamer was an African American civil rights leader and voting rights activist and later became the vice-chair of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

[7] See Elaine Brown *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (Pantheon Books, 1992)

[8] One of the Panther 21 trial defendants and held position in New York City Black Panther branch leadership. Best known today as the mother of Hip Hop artist Tupac Shakur. Safiya Bukhari aka Bernice Jones was Communications Secretary of the Harlem Black Panther office.

Ashanti Alston and Safiya Bukhari married in 1984. See *The War Before*, her autobiographical writings (just published, 2010).

[9] An anti racist, revolutionary, white American political collective founded in 1968 following an interview with Huey P Newton in which he was asked, what white people could do to support the Black Panthers. He replied "Form a white panther party".

[10] Students for a Democratic Society, a student activist organisation.

[11] Initiated and led by the Black Panther Party in 1970, it brought together a really broad array of activists from different "colonized nations," movements and issues whose objective was to write a new people's constitution envisioning a new America.

[12] A black nationalist organization in the US which takes the name of the Black Panther Party but works in a different ideology and style.

POLYAMOROUS PONDERINGS

words by Ariel
images by Hendrah

There's been a lot of buzz in the past few years regarding polyamory and open relationships, even outside the various anarchist, polyamorous, queer and feminist scenes. There are many different, sometimes conflicting, notions of what polyamory is, of course, but the core idea seems to be the same: monogamy is not the only shape that sexual or romantic relationships between people can take.

Having intimate relationships with multiple people isn't exactly news, as there is a history of allowing men to be with more than one woman, while the same standard was not applied to women. This double-standard was part of the oppression of women's sexuality under a system of marriage that saw women as 'goods' that could be 'possessed' by men.

Many people are exploring alternatives, thus polyamory has been gaining ground in the public imagination. There are many forms poly can take, as part of the point is that we create relationships the way we want them. We can choose to have one committed relationship and others that are secondary to it, or give the same commitment to many people. Just like different couples do monogamy differently, the same applies for polyamory.

Monogamy and its Discontents

Polyamory is not necessarily a new concept. Within queer and feminist circles, there has been a strong critique of compulsory monogamy ever since the 'sexual revolution' which took place in many parts of the western world during the 1960s and 1970s. The reasons were many: 'traditional' family structures were exposed as being inherently sexist, mandating a domestic role for women, and idealising a particular heterosexual, nuclear family dynamic. As a reaction to this, feminist and other progressive activists saw monogamy as another form in which the patriarchal-capitalist system taught us to treat each other as objects.

Some feminists of the second-wave took it even further. Danish feminist writer Suzanne Brogger, for example, considered monogamy and marriage to be outdated models of relating which only served to make us all prisoners of one another. This, in turn, distracted us from the fact that we were all prisoners of a larger system of oppression, which ruled our every waking moment. This, Brogger argued, was a successful attempt at subverting people's natural tendency to form relationships for themselves and their community, rather than for the interests of the powerful.

While the concept of 'free love' emerged in the popular consciousness in the 1960s, it was not without its problems, however. Many second-

wave feminists decried the fact that it didn't always carry with it a critique of gender roles, privilege and oppression, making it as problematic as its more mainstream alternative of repressive sexual mores. Today's polyamorous communities, mostly informed by queer and feminist politics, are the inheritors of the 'free love' movement.

The Ups and Downs of Polyamory

In my own experience, polyamory is neither superior nor inferior to monogamy. In essence, both are simply different ways in which we can relate to other human beings romantically and sexually. Both of these forms of relating have their pitfalls and, in the end, what it comes down to is what a particular person feels more comfortable with.

Polyamory, for example, does require work to avoid jealousy and feelings of possessiveness regarding our partners. We need to learn to communicate our needs and wants, learn to own our feelings rather than project them onto others due to insecurities. If you're monogamous and this sounds familiar, it's because it is: the challenges are not dissimilar to carrying out honest monogamous relationships. Rather, they happen in a different arena.

On the other hand, the polyamorous community

has a lot to offer. Many polyamorous activists, such as Dossie Easton, have become standard-bearers of the movement for sex positivity and good consent. These pioneers have challenged the demonisation of sexuality; the enforcing of binary gender roles; the existence of a 'rape culture' that seeks to dismiss abuse as unimportant and, finally, how all of these concepts are tied together.

Being 'Radical enough'

It is not uncommon in a lot of radical circles, to hear talk of polyamory and alternative relationship arrangements. Anarchist communities don't shy

away from criticising the oppressive role that gender norms play in relationships between people, or how the state and society work together to encourage particular kinds of relationships.

However, this has led to a different dogma, the idea that polyamory is somehow morally and ethically superior to monogamy: in other words, that polyamory is the 'true' anarchist way to organise one's romantic and/or sexual relationships. This approach owes less to actual polyamorous anarchist theorists than to an attitude many people in the radical left still possess, emphasising theory over the lived experience of human beings.

Not long ago, I was sitting in on a discussion about polyamory. It was an open, exciting discussion between many people who had different experiences and perspectives. At one point, a particularly theory-minded person put forward the position mentioned above. For him, monogamy was possession, a form of relating to people that had to do with our oppression under capitalism. In his view, polyamory was the only kind of relationship that was properly sustained by theory. I shook my head, and saw that many around me, polyamorous or not, were doing the same.

When it comes to intimate relationships, there are a myriad factors in our lives that influence how we deal with different people in our lives. Many of us have issues with trust, issues regarding our self-esteem, or simply our comfort levels regarding being around other people. It is true, we have all been influenced by a system of socioeconomic organisation that hurts us, traumatises us and, in many cases, attempts to make us disappear. Yet, as anarchists, we should be questioning dogmas rather than creating new ones. Prescribing how people love one another is exactly what oppressive institutions the world over are doing.

On Sleeping Around

In another recent conversation about poly, I was the only polyamorous person in the group. It was at a house party where most people were either queer, or queer-friendly. One person was having a hard time since their partner was just recently out in the queer scene, and kind of needed an open arrangement in which they could explore their identity and sexuality. The person talking was not comfortable with a poly arrangement in the long-term, and they were worried about the sustainability of this relationship.

This is my girlfriend AND my boyfriend.

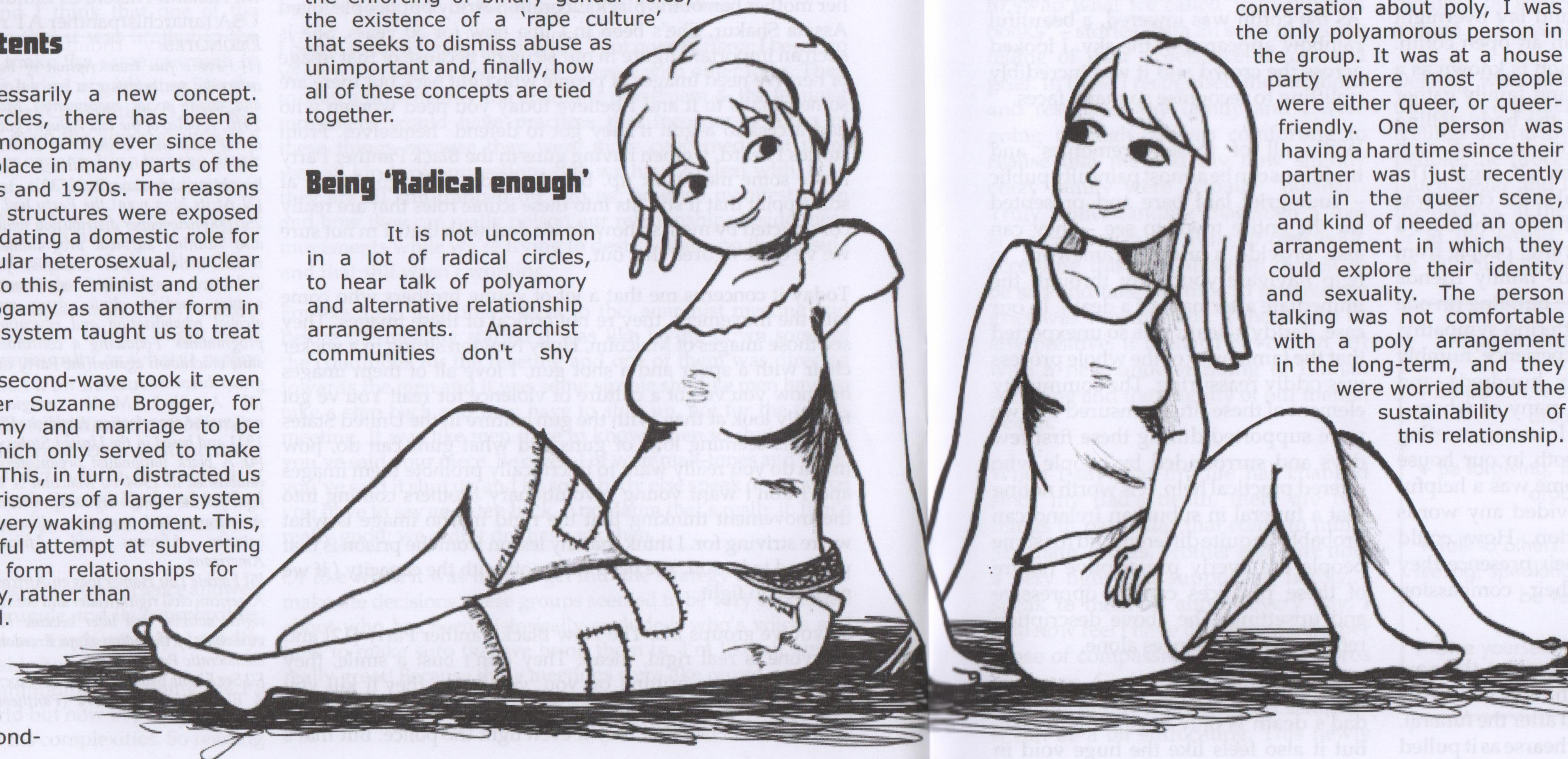


The problem, however, was that the conversation moved on to frame polyamory in terms of 'sleeping around', conflating it with immaturity. This is something that is heard often in gay and queer scenes. When you come out, everything is roses and you'd like to bed most of the intriguing, sexy free-lovin' queers you meet. Eventually, the theory goes, you'll settle down from those crazy days of your youth. You'll find your perfect partner, have a nice adult life and stop being such a selfish child.

But the thing is: there is nothing shameful about sleeping around. Nor is there anything immature about it as long as nobody is getting hurt, and good consent is practiced. On the other hand, it is not the same as polyamory, though it could be included as part of it. Some people may choose to have several committed relationships, and sleep around on the side. But this is not a sign of immaturity, or wanting unrealistic things. Seeing it in this way can only lead to shame regarding people's sexuality.

Towards a Fuller Future

There is a lot that we can learn from an open, frank discussion about relationship models. Many of us have experienced dysfunctional relationships, some of us have been survivors or perpetrators of abuse, physical and emotional. On the other hand, we have also suffered under systems which expect us to comply to certain ways of living, rather than trying to find fulfillment in our lives. I feel that there is little point in trying to work out which mode of relationship is 'the best'. It is quite evident to me that the 'best' model is one in which those involved find themselves fulfilled, in which good consent is worked on. There needs to be a keen awareness of abuse as well as each participant's personal history. Whether this happens in the context of a monogamous pairing, a polyamorous triad, and everything between and beyond, is irrelevant. For my future, at least, it's the only romantic ideal I aspire to.



Death and Bereavement

Words Clare
Image a-k



My dad died very suddenly in December 2006, he wasn't sick, there was no obvious warning. At 58 years old, he arrived home from indoor soccer training one evening feeling a little tired. He had a bath, went to bed and suffered some sort of heart attack and died. Since that very shocking 2am phone call from my mam, death and the impact of the loss of someone I loved so much has become achingly real and something I have been forced to think about quite a bit.

In Ireland death is not something that is hidden away. From my experiences, growing up in a small town in Mayo (in the west of Ireland), funerals were attended by large numbers of people and it was not uncommon for young children to view a corpse. The events and ceremonies which occurred following my dad's death were typical of rural Irish Catholic traditions. In the very early morning just after he died, neighbours called in to sympathise. They were in disbelief, wanting to know if it was actually true. I remember opening the front door to shocked and dazed faces.

As the day dragged on, friends, family and colleagues continued to stream in: each offering a kind word, a sturdy handshake or consoling hug. Many brought sandwiches, fruit-cakes, cold meats or apple tarts. Everyone consumed copious amounts of tea. The never-ending cups of tea and rounds of sandwiches reached almost comical proportions and yet were a vital part of the ritual. Our neighbours and extended family made certain we received

sufficient sustenance; sitting down allowed us to spend a little time with those who had visited to sympathise. I remember at one stage, being upstairs and stealing a moment for myself. I went to my dad's wardrobe and buried my head in a neatly folded pile of his woollen jumpers - they still smelt of him. Closing my eyes, I tried to believe that he was still alive and that this was all a horrible mistake. It didn't work.

After a post-mortem had been conducted in Castlebar hospital, my dad's body was brought home and lay overnight in the dining room in an open coffin. In Ireland, this tradition is known as a wake, when friends and family gather in the same room as the body, telling stories, drinking and keeping each other company, often all night. The day following the wake, the coffin was brought to a funeral home, where for a few hours in the evening, people from the town and various family friends processed through the building (in one door, out another) offering sympathy. This was a strange experience, numbly shaking hands with hundreds and hundreds of people, many of whom I had not met before. However, meeting all of these people both in our house and in the funeral home was a helpful process. No one provided any words of genuine consolation. How could they? But through their presence they expressed simply their compassion and support.

The funeral mass took place the next morning. It was bright and drizzly as we left the churchyard after the funeral. Two rows flanked the hearse as it pulled

off - a guard of honour provided by children from the GAA club (where my dad had trained the under-10s and under-8s for over 20 years), members of the Credit Union, the soccer club, groups my dad or mam had been involved in since they had moved to the town. As we walked the length of the town towards the graveyard, Gardaí stopped the traffic as we all trooped past; shops and businesses closed their doors and switched off their lights as a gesture of respect. Many who attended the funeral joined us for the burial. As the coffin was lowered, a beautiful rainbow appeared in the sky. I looked across the crowd and it was incredibly uplifting to recognise so many faces.

While all of these ceremonies and traditions can be almost painfully public - your grief laid bare and presented for the entire town to see - they can also provide a useful framework to help navigate your way through the immediate aftermath of a death. In our case, daddy's death was so unexpected that the familiarity of the whole process was oddly reassuring. The community element of these rituals ensured that we were supported during these first few days and surrounded by people who offered practical help. It is worth noting that a funeral in suburban Ireland can probably be quite different and for some people the overly prescriptive nature of these practices can be oppressive and upsetting. The above description reflects my experiences alone.

Four years later, the rawness of my dad's death is only beginning to heal. But it also feels like the huge void in

my life created by his absence will never leave me. At the time, I went through an array of emotions, some of it textbook: shock, sadness, acceptance, pain. I was also trying to balance studying for college exams and regularly visiting my mam. About 8 months after my dad's death, I ended a short relationship I had been in. This seemed to open my brain and body to the reality of the major loss I had suffered. I experienced despair and had difficulty coping with normal daily tasks. I was distracted, tired, disinterested, confused and very emotional; I stayed up all night and slept during the day. I was losing control of my life - a new and terrifying feeling.

In time, I sought help and slowly pulled myself back together. Speaking to a counsellor, someone outside of my everyday life was a huge relief. My head had felt ready to explode with the pressure - sorrow for myself, an immense feeling of responsibility towards my family and their various problems, loneliness, disappointment at my lack of ability to finish my dissertation. Every emotion was experienced in the extreme. Having an hour to talk to someone who would listen was truly a lifeline. Counselling is something I can't recommend highly enough.

Around this time, my mam and I began to swap what we called "bereavement books" - stories from all sorts of people telling of their experience of loss and grief. In these I recognised the emotions and responses my family and I were going through. It was comforting to realise that me and my now slightly crazy family were actually "normal". Truly understanding that such a loss is a very traumatic thing to deal with, accepting this and allowing myself to be sad and take the time to process my grief was very helpful. If there is to be any positive, it is that I have been left with a new understanding of human suffering and the fragility of our mental health.

When I say that my life has changed since my dad's death, there are two things in particular that come to mind. My mam, sisters, brother and I are now a very tight and supporting family. I speak to them all almost every day. I also now feel I have developed a deeper sense of compassion. Each has its pros and cons. Giving and gaining support from my family is great but occasionally it can be a bit suffocating. This newly

discovered strong empathy means I cry at the smallest thing - news reports, soppy films, even television adverts!

I had given up my job and had just returned to college to complete a Masters when my dad died. In some ways this was fortunate as I had much more freedom, I ended up taking a break from the course and signing on to the dole. My memory of this time is quite blurred and I can't imagine how I would have coped if I had been expected to turn up to work every single day. Holding down a job in these circumstances would be an extremely difficult, scary prospect. There is no entitlement to Force Majeure leave (paid leave that a worker is entitled to apply for as a result of a family crisis) in the event of a family bereavement. A worker can request compassionate leave, which is at the discretion of the employer. Most employers will grant leave to attend the funeral of a close family member but it is unlikely that their compassion will go much further than that. Even in the civil service the maximum paid leave allowed is three days.

For some this means having to return to work the day after the funeral. Perhaps some people find going back to work a welcome distraction but I imagine for the majority it is a struggle. Few bosses will afford the time or flexibility genuinely required by someone dealing with the trauma and loss of bereavement.

Dealing with grief is a very difficult thing; I experienced emotions and feelings alien to my former self. For many people, the process is accompanied by much anger and bitterness, directed at themselves, at the person who has died or at the world. People grieving can be difficult, unreasonable and at best

Tips for dealing with grief:

- + Be patient, with yourself and those around you.
- + Be forgiving, to yourself and those around you.
- + Talk to others. Share what you are feeling; speaking to a counsellor can be very useful.
- + Give yourself time to grieve. It tends to be a very slow process.

unpredictable. It is often those closest to the person who is grieving that will bare the brunt of this anger. Frequently, these same family members, spouses or friends are also grieving and are similarly fragile. When emotions run high, tempers are close to the surface and people can behave erratically. If a death occurs after a prolonged illness, those grieving can also be physically and emotionally exhausted after months, or even years, of caring work and visits.

It is sobering to realise how many people are suffering from the painful and lasting impact of a bereavement. A childhood classmate of mine died tragically in a traffic accident recently. Last week I bumped into that girl's mother and sister. As I sympathised, I recognised the vacant stare of the mother as she stood, silent and pale. I spoke with the sister who was chatting pleasantly. Surely painfully grieving herself, she found the strength to acknowledge my words so her mum would not need to. As she was leaving, she looked at me and added "Sure, you know yourself", implying that I probably understood some of their hurt, I nodded grimly in response. I occasionally have these experiences and it feels like I'm in this secret, but unfortunately not so exclusive, club of people who have survived a serious loss. Many people in my life have been in this club for a long time (it was always there, I just didn't know about it) and now too many others have recently joined.

If you have been bereaved it is important to try to be patient with those around you. Everyone will deal with grief differently, in a different timeframe. It is easy to be very hurt by another's behaviour, when it seems they are acting like nothing has happened and when you feel that your world is crashing. Before starting a (pointless) fight, it can be worth biting your tongue.

It is likely that further grief and heartache awaits us all. If the challenging sadness and emptiness I have felt is the price required in return for having had a loving, interesting, kind and compassionate father for 25 years, I am prepared to pay that. Perhaps, when we have the privilege of sharing our lives with people we care for deeply, grief is unavoidable.

WIDOWS' CURSES

An interview with Ian Lynch, a postgraduate in Irish folklore in UCD.

By Marianne
Image by Natalia

Curses and magic play a big part in Irish folklore, with trickster faeries, banshees and all kinds of characters and stories being passed down through generations. Widows played a very specific role. They were said to be able to put curses on people and I had heard that this rumour served to protect the widows themselves who were quite vulnerable in society, often living alone in rural areas. To find out more about widows and their curses I spoke to a friend of mine, Ian who is researching the subject.

M: When we think of curses we usually think of witches/spells/magic, why were widows in particular said to put curses on people?

Ian: Well, here in Ireland we don't really have a history of belief in witches, certainly nothing that would be comparable to the tradition in Britain and Europe (I think there have only ever been four witch trials here). It seems that the women who were taking part in those activities (healing, cursing, divination etc.) which would have had them charged with witchcraft in other parts of the western world, were a lot more accepted in Irish society. I think this goes back to the wider question of how the Christian religion was introduced to this country, in comparison with other countries, where its introduction was coupled with Roman civilisation and Latin learning. Because it came to this country in a much less official way, a lot more beliefs and practices which can be described as

pre-Christian, survived in different shapes and forms. The result was that a lot of the ground level religious practice (what is often termed 'folk religion') was at odds with the official teachings of the church. One thing that this led to was what the folklorist Caomhán Ó Danachair called "the neutral in Irish folk tradition", which referred to the belief in powers that are neither good nor evil. This goes against the teachings of the church which pretty much states that whatever is not from God must be from the Devil. This idea of neutrality can be seen in folk traditions regarding the fairies for example, who are just as likely to harm you as they are

to help you, but it also explains why the ideas which led to the famous witch hunts (i.e. the idea that women who took part in the activities mentioned above were in league with Satan) in other parts of the world never took a hold here. The Bean Feasa ('Wise Woman') and the Bean Chainte ('Keening Woman') might have been castigated by members of the clergy in post-reformation times, but they always had a respected place in the community. In the majority of the legends I have come across describing widows cursing, the sympathy always lies with the widow herself, with the one she is cursing being characterised as tyrannical or heartless, and well deserving of their punishment. These accounts of widows cursing were collected in the first half of the 20th century by the Irish Folklore Commission. While it is never stated exactly why widows have the power to curse, it is clear that they were widely believed to have this power, as there are accounts from all over the country. It seems that the belief in the widow's ability to curse stemmed from, amongst other things, her perceived powerless position in society. Folk narratives invariably side with the underdog, and in 19th and early 20th century Ireland there can have been few who were in a worse position than the elderly widow. Her most common enemy in these legends is the landlord, who would have been one of the most powerful in society at the time, so it is not hard to see why these narratives would have appealed to people. Undoubtedly, there must have been some cases in real life whereby the stories surrounding the widow and her alleged powers did indeed influence the actions of people when dealing with her. This scenario is also played out in a few of the folk legends which tell how a particular landlord changed his

mind about evicting a widow after being reminded of the widow's curse by someone else. So in this way it can be seen how folklore helped these women, with no standing or power in society, to empower themselves. Interestingly, the bible itself (see the book of Exodus for example) states that widows had the power to curse, once their curse was justified, which is what people believed here as well.

M: What kinds of curses have you come across?

Ian: There are a few main types of curses that I have come across. The most common one takes the form of a prayer to God that there will be justice served for what the transgressor (i.e. the landlord, his agent or a land-grabber) has done. This is interesting because far from being connected in peoples' minds with magic etc.; it seems that this type of curse was just another part of their religion. In these cases the one who is cursed usually dies soon after or they lose their mind. This type of curse can involve the descendants bearing the curse of the original transgressor, usually down to the seventh generation, which might have something to do with ideas about families' names being sullied and how this can carry on for generations. Other legends describe the widow either cursing the house that she is being evicted from, or cursing the landlord's house. As a result of these curses, the land does not prosper and the new inhabitants have no luck there. It seems that some of these legends may contain an echo of beliefs relating to the sovereignty goddess and sacral kingship in pre-Christian Ireland whereby the land was believed to become barren and inhospitable when the goddess of the land was without a suitable consort. Seeing as how Patricia Lysaght in her work on the Banshee, and Gearóid Ó Cruaíoch, in his work on the Cailleach Bhéarra ('the Hag of Beara'), have shown how modern folk legends can indeed encapsulate beliefs which are demonstrably pre-Christian, this idea is not as far-fetched as it might first seem. A third type of curse displays some serious influence from the poetic tradition. The poets were another class of people who were widely credited with the power to curse, usually through the composition of satirical poems. These for me are by far the most entertaining accounts just for the sheer viciousness of the lyrics, for example the following was composed by a widow for one of the three men who killed her son:

A Mhic Éamoinn Ruadh go mbuaile an t-éag tú;
Go marbhuighidh do chapall tú i gan fhios dod' ghaolta,
Is nár bheiridh an sagart i n'fhochair sin féin ort.

O, son of Eamonn Ruadh, may death strike you,
May your horse kill you unknownst to your relations,
May the priest not bring you into the solace of our company.

M: What other kinds of people were said to be able to curse people, was it only women or could men also curse?

Ian: While there were certain male characters who were seen as having the power to curse, it seems that the power could include women of low status in general, and there are a few legends which feature non-widowed women cursing. One common example involves the rich woman who refuses to help a beggar woman at her door and as a result bears a child with a pig's head. As I mentioned already, poets were also widely believed to be able to curse people. This idea must be very old as I have come across accounts from the 8th century of poets making clay effigies and sticking thorns in them in order to harm the person intended. Blacksmiths were also believed to have the ability to curse, and although I haven't really looked into this, I think, like the widow, this was in part attributable to their outsider status. Perhaps the most surprising one I came across was the priest. There are just as many, if not more, accounts of priests cursing people, and what is interesting is that they are often described as cursing the same people as the widow. Although the priest would have been very much at the centre of the community, rather than on the margins of it, like the widow, his power obviously came from that fact that he was seen as being in direct contact with God.



The following legends are all kept in the main manuscript collection of the Irish folklore collection, which is housed in UCD (University College Dublin), Dublin 4. The collection is open to the public Tuesday-Friday from 2:30pm until 5:30pm.

I heard poor Jamesie White tellin' 'Awnie' Coen this yarn wan night an' us above ramblin' in 'Awnie's, an' we had a terrible job ta hear it for it was jusht between themselves they was tellin' it, but anyhow heres all I brought taut me.

There was a family livin' near Ballyfarnon at wan time, an' they war rich people when every wan else round was poor. Some neighbourin' girl got married into the place, an' she was so proud o' her luck, is that she got very haughty an' proud. She had no family howsoever, an' she was very jealous o' other women, who had families.

Wan day she was shtandin' outside her hall dure, talkin' to another woman, when she saw a poor ould beggar woman comin' up the avenue to her, an' she had four or five childre wit her. 'Who is the sow and the litter of Bonhams' sez she to the other woman.

The woman was so surprised as that she didn't answer her only walked away. The poor ould woman came up is far is her, an' asked her for an alms, but she refused her, an' turned her away, an' set the dog in her. The ould woman jusht when she was goin' out o' sight turned round an' she shook her fist back at her, an' she sez 'May God's curse fall upon ye, an' sure is heavens it did, an' heavy. The woman is I said before had no family, but after that a daughter was born to her, an' God bless the mark an' save the hearers, if the baby hadn't a pigs head on her. She had three childre in all, but the second an' third was not quite is bad is the first. However none o' them could ate like ordinary childre, so she had ta get a special trough made for them ta feed out o'. When they grew up to be women, it remained there still, the third daughter howsoever got married, an' her childre had the mark too, an' it remained to the third generation.¹

¹ Ms 463, Pp. 86 - 88. Seamus Ó Garmáin (75). Baile n Dúin, Sigeach, 25 aóif, la Éanáir '38.

They say that a widow's curse will fall. If the widow kneels down and lets her hair loose about her it is supposed to be the worst kind of curse and will always fall.¹

¹ Manuscript 42, P. 203. Collected by Áine Ní Chróinín, Charleville District, Co. Corkaighe, April, 1929.

In the time of the evictions there was a property of the Glen, below Taghmor, to be sold. The tenants appointed one man to go buy the property for them. What did he do but bought it for himself and raised the rent on them all.

All the tenants cursed him, only wan widow woman. All she said was: 'God reward him according to his works to me.'

He died shortly after. His son took over the property. But he got delicate and died in a couple of years.

My uncle was at the funeral and I often heard him say, that when his grave was opened, the coffin and himself were burned into a charred cinder. The priest said twas the widow woman's prayer did it. Her prayer was worse than all the others.¹

¹ Ms 34, Pp. 235 - 236. Jem. Maher (82). Knockbyme, Tullicanna, Co. Wexford, 20/03/35.

A boy was hanged long ago for breaking an ash TWIG in LISGAR (Bailieboro) demesne. He was a widow's son, and she prayed that no leaves would ever grow on the tree that he was hanged on; that no grass would grow around it; that the sun would never shine on the hall-door of the castle; that the lark would never sing about the demesne, and that there would never be an heir to the estate. Nobody ever heard a lark singing about the place, and the sun never shone on the hall-door, and there never was an heir to the estate. No leaves grew on the tree, and no grass grew within a perch or two of it.

¹ Ms 815, Pp. 254 - 255. Peter Clarife (74). Bailieboro, Clonree, Cavan, 19/11/94/2 (B. 1868).

What was the driving force behind the

EUROPEAN WITCH HUNTS?

text by Leah. Illustrations by Leah and Rachel Feury

"It should be noted that there was a defect in the formation of the first women, since she was formed from a bent rib, that is a rib of the breast, which is bent as it were in a contrary direction to a man. And since through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives."

-Malleus Maleficarum

Most people have heard of the European witch hunts. It was this strange period in history where superstition ran wild and eventually led to the burning of between 40,000 to 100,000 people, predominantly women, accused of practicing witchcraft. Is it really possible that superstition was the driving force behind all of this? When one puts the witch hunts into some sort of context it becomes clear that this is not the case.

The Black Death, the end of feudalism, population decline, the professionalisation of medical practice and the beginning of capitalism are all factors that need to be considered when thinking about the witch hunts. By studying the hunts in this way it becomes clear that it was a systematic attempt to take away women's agency and impose an incredibly rigid guideline for the role men and women were to play in the formation of a new society.

The state, in order to create a labour force, depended on dividing people to form the modern proletariat. In the case of gender the witch hunts attempted to rob women of their agency and social status. Witchcraft was not originally considered a crime unless practiced with malicious intent, but later any practice of magic, including herbalism, was considered a crime against God, nature and the State.

According to Marx, in order for capitalism to take root there first had to be a collection of wealth. This process, known as primitive accumulation, can be seen in the mid 16th century, especially in England. An essential part of primitive accumulation, labour now becomes a new form of wealth. The state issued a broad assault on the peasantry, who had become dispossessed and separated from the communal land, a source of sustenance and village communism.

At the same time there was another attack by the state, on women and their bodies. Witches were not only the outcast beggar women but also the woman accused of infanticide, prostitution, crude sexual practices and a wide range of other crimes.

The first witch hunts took place after the Black Death or the Plague. Europe had lost a third of its population. The wealth and power of a state depended on the amount of labour power it possessed. In order to increase these numbers after the Plague, women had to essentially become breeders for the State. This led to the state intervening in reproductive rights and responsibilities, in an attempt to create a larger labour pool while removing women's rights and bodily ownership. Severe penalties were

"Witches were not only the outcast beggar women but also women accused of infanticide, prostitution, crude sexual practices and a wide range of other crimes."

introduced to any woman guilty of reproductive crimes, such as pregnancy out of wedlock or concealed delivery. In France in 1556, women had to register each pregnancy. They were sentenced to death if the infant died before baptism after concealed delivery.

By the beginning of the 17th century male 'professional' doctors began to emerge, overriding many of the female midwives and healers whose knowledge had been passed down through generations. Midwives came under suspicion for fear of infanticide rather than inadequate medical skill or knowledge. With the professionalisation of medicine came priority being given to the foetus rather than the mother, due to the need to raise population numbers. In France and Germany midwives became "spies" for the authorities so they could be allowed to continue their practice. They had to report each birth, unwed mothers and concealed births. In under a century obstetrics was almost entirely under state control.

Many midwives were burnt at the stake seemingly for the practice of witchcraft not because occupations that they held directly rivalled the new male professional medical system. The *Malleus Maleficarum*, a book written by Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger in Germany in 1487, declared the definite existence of witches, proclaimed they were much more commonly found to be women than men and gave guidelines on how to find and persecute. In this book there is an entire chapter dedicated to midwives, arguing that they were worse than any other woman, since they had at times helped the mother destroy the fruit of her womb through abortion, a conspiracy made easier. They claimed, with the exclusion of men from the delivery room.

Contraception, usually a potion or suppository, was made illegal, removing women's autonomy over child birth. When the first contraceptives resurfaced they were designed for men. Contraceptives had been named a 'diabolical device' by the church. Imagine being exposed to your neighbour burned at the stake as a witch and informed that

contraception is satanical. It is easy to understand why many women stopped using it, thus removing this control women had over their bodies.

With economic instability looming in the community, youths left their villages in search of other opportunities, elders were left to fend for themselves, often becoming poverty stricken. Other accusations that led to the witch hunts came from stories such as women stealing from their neighbours with the use of magic, bewitching and feeding off their livestock in the night, with the help of the Devil. Jealousy towards their more economically stable neighbours was the supposed driving force. Resisting pauperisation was considered a social misconduct. Many women accused of evil magical practice were older women who would have had strong ties to the old ways of communal living and would have depended on their neighbours in difficult times but now found no refuge. Gradually the family, rather than the community, became the focus. Neighbourly support becoming something of the past.

More often than not a witch is portrayed as being motivated by envy and resentment, making a pact with the Devil for something that should not be available to her. The relationship between women and money is demonised by the witch hunt. The devil approaches a woman in need, generally for money, and offers them what they want, promising they will not have to suffer any more. If you scratch the surface you can see it is a description of a community who see women as aspiring to a power that they should not have. There are some very explicit descriptions of the type of women approached by the Devil are. Eg in the Basque country women were highly independent, their husbands were fishermen who every year would spend weeks at sea. These women became the soul of the community, they had a tremendous amount of communal solidarity and independence. A French inquisitor, Pierre De Lancre in 1609, initiated a witch hunt which led to 7,000 cases being tried in the region.

The commons was a social space for local people, especially women, who came together to share news and get advice independent from their male counterparts. The most intense periods of the witch hunts coincided with periods of agrarian crisis. The new method of 'enclosure' was introduced. Enclosure ended traditional methods of land cultivation such as mowing meadows for hay or grazing livestock. The land was fenced and deeded to one or more owners. Enclosure has

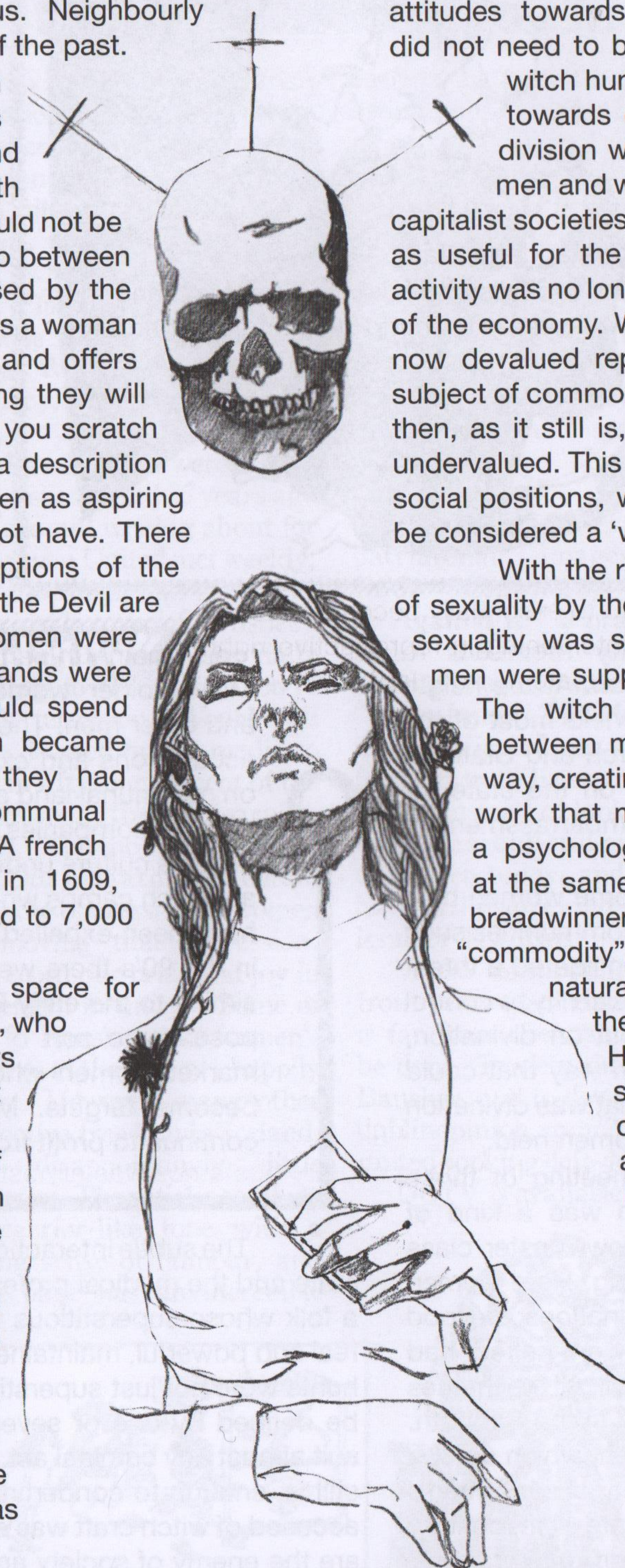
sometimes been accompanied by force, resistance, and bloodshed, and remains among the most controversial areas of agricultural and economic history in England. Rich landowners used the public land for their private benefit. This created a landless working class that provided the labour required in the new industries developing in the north of England. Women played a very important role in the peasant revolts against enclosure in the 17th century. They were often in the forefront of revolts, taking actions such as pulling down enclosure fences.

Some of the enclosed land plots prospered more than others, creating economic differences and manifesting resentment in members of the community. This internal division created an environment for local people to accuse other locals of practicing witchcraft.

With the steady rise in population the state's attitudes towards reproduction changed. Women did not need to breed for the state any more. The witch hunts were part of a transition period towards capitalism in which a new social division was created, dividing the labour of men and women more dominantly than in pre-capitalist societies. Commodity production was seen as useful for the economy. Whereas reproductive activity was no longer an effort to further the progress of the economy. Women became the subject of the now devalued reproduction and men became the subject of commodity production. Reproduction was then, as it still is, a labour that was unwaged and undervalued. This devaluation undermined women's social positions, which is why the witch hunts may be considered a 'war on women's bodies'.

With the rise of capitalism came a discipline of sexuality by the Church and the State. Women's sexuality was seen as a threat to the role that men were supposed to play in this new society. The witch hunts reshaped the relationship between men and women in a very divisive way, creating a physical division between the work that men and women did and creating a psychological division between the sexes at the same time. Men had now become the breadwinners. Women were presented as a "commodity", that can be exploited freely like a natural resource. Through the witch hunts the entire proletariat became divided. Hierarchies developed between the sexes. However the "witch" was a different type of woman, more like a rogue than a woman that could be exploited. Men became aware of the huge amounts of power witches supposedly held, so much they could challenge the Church and the authorities.

"There is no wrath above the wrath of a woman" *Malleus Maleficarum*



In the 16th century paid labour, for women, became almost non-existent and unpaid labour was not acknowledged. There was a rise in sex work, which women were condemned for. Sex workers were beaten, flogged, caged and submerged in water. In France raping a sex worker was not a crime. Women who were in the public eye and held a certain amount of autonomy were often described as 'whores' or 'witches'.

The witch hunts developed rapidly in areas where the persecution of heretics had been most intense, southern France and northern Italy. Heretics were burned at the stake as traitors to the 'true religion' and were accused of the same crimes as those accused of witchcraft: sodomy, infanticide and animal worship. These were charges that the Church used as an offence against all rival religions. The most important difference between heresy and witchcraft was that witchcraft was considered a predominantly female crime. More than 80% of those tried and persecuted as witches during the 16th and 17th centuries were women. In Malleus Maleficarum women were apparently prone to witchcraft above men due to their 'insatiable lust', however humanist writers, such as Martin Luther, felt it was due to a woman's moral and mental weakness. Either way it singled women out as "evil beings".

Catholic and Protestant churches were involved with the prosecution and execution of witches. Boxes were placed in the church for community members to anonymously name someone as a witch. At the height of the witch hunts, the secular courts held most of the trials, outlining the alliance of the Church and State on this issue. The Catholic church relied on the state for the executions to be relieved of the embarrassment of shedding blood.

Before the witch hunt craze, some women held power and respected roles within their communities such as the power of divination. This was considered a threat to the new forming state and capitalism's ability to control aspects of everyday life. A ban was put on divination, as the future could be read in a certain way that could instigate rebellion. It is unclear if the threat was divination itself or the power and respect these women held.

The witches Sabbath is the meeting of those who practice witchcraft. The Sabbath was a kind of representation of all the fears of the new master class and was shaped as a demonic gathering. Here women supposedly performed all kinds of abominations: ate food that was not meant for the proletariat, were naked, had homosexual sex and worshipped the Devil. All the themes that were central to witches were found in the Sabbath. Witches became seen as an organisation, which can be noted throughout the trials, creating a fear of all women's organisations and collectivities. By the late 17th century the work of witches changed to be an individual practice, showing how social relations were changing, a woman

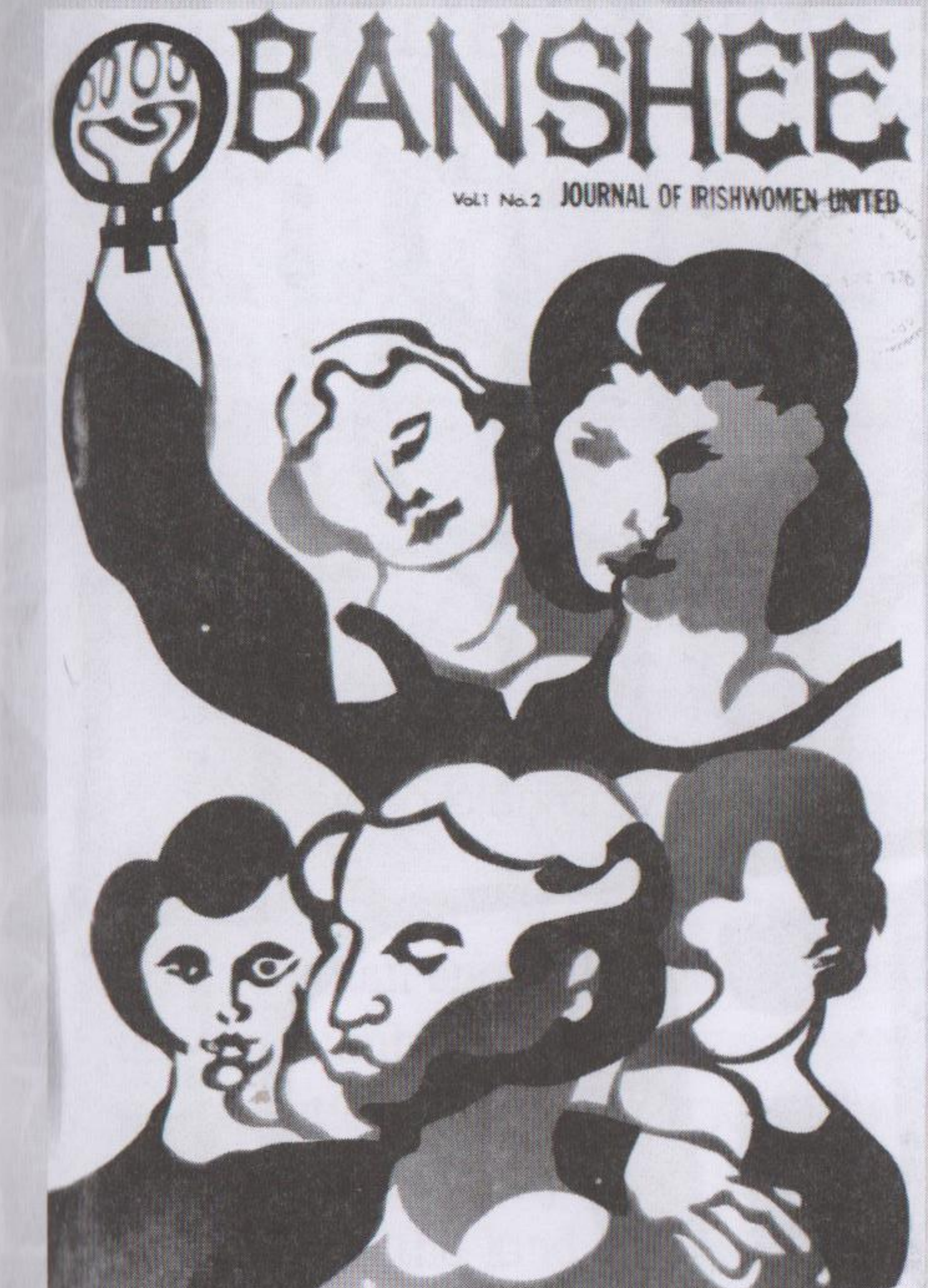
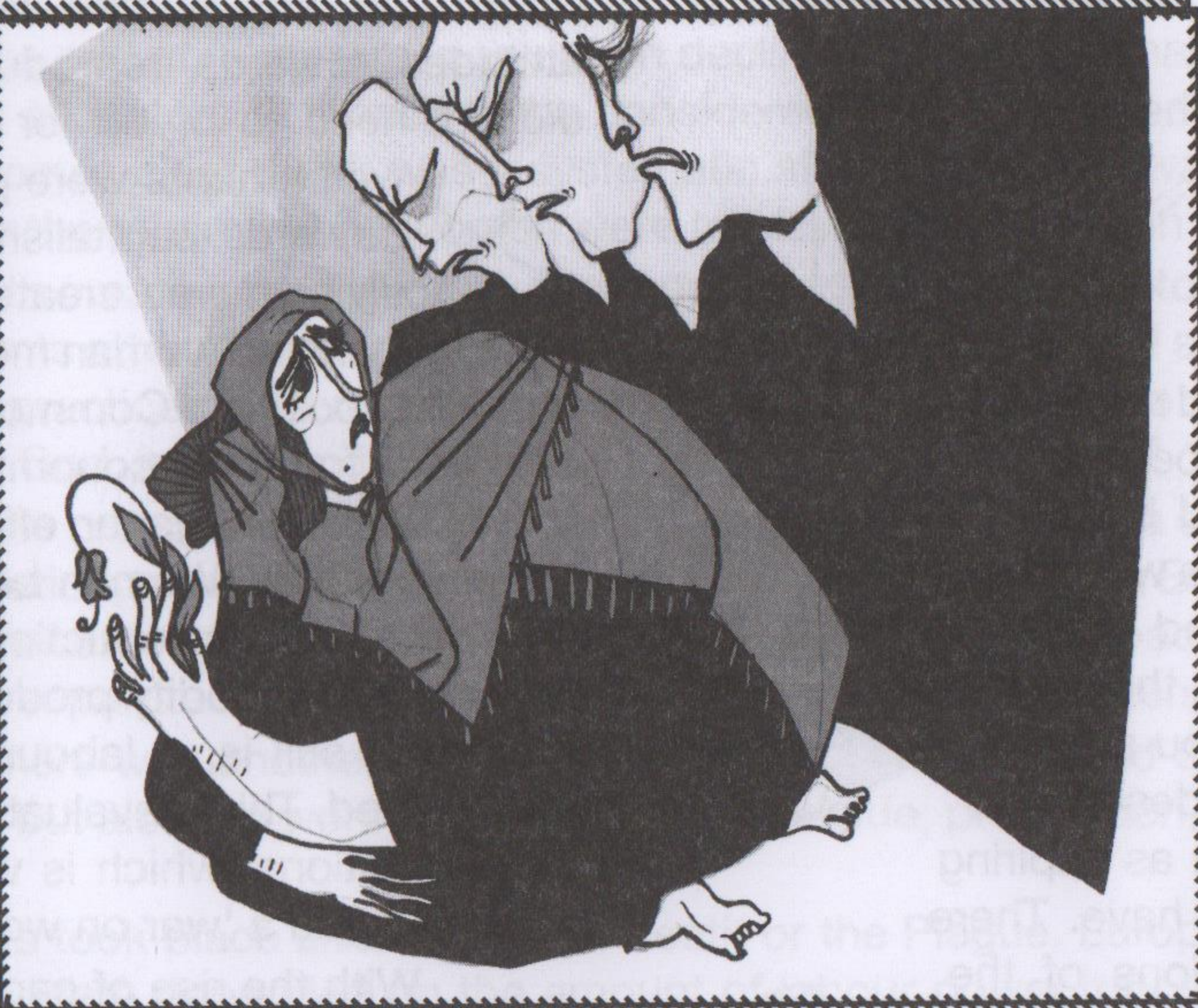
on her own was more suspect than a group of women.

According to Luciano Parinetto, the fact that the Sabbath happened at night went against capitalist structure of 'work time'. The proletariat, who were meant to accept waged work and scarcity as their fate, could escape and be active outside of labour hours, working against the productivity of the new society. Parinetto also argues that the 'flight' of witches was an attack on the freedom to roam for immigrant and itinerant workers. There was a fear among the authorities that these vagabonds, who had become homeless due to poverty as a consequence of the development of capitalism, would stage an uprising and overthrow those who held power.

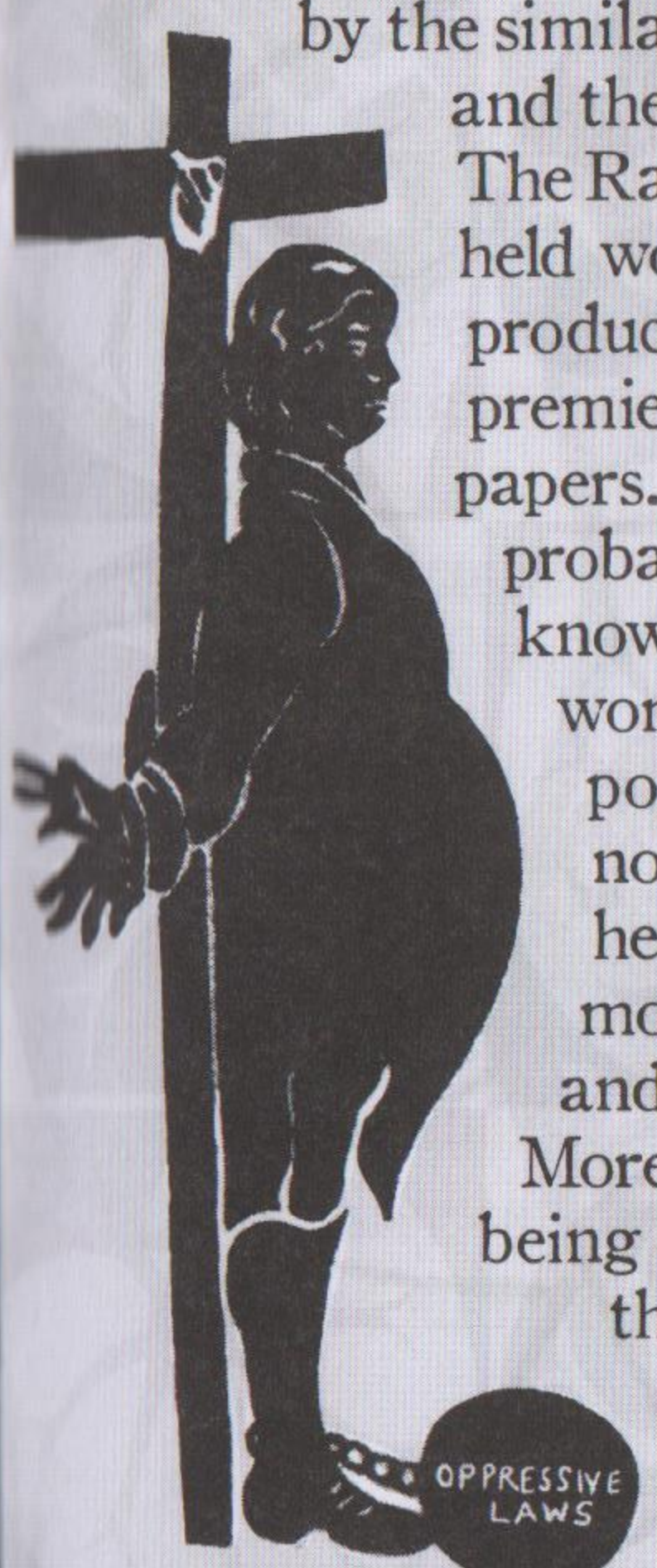
'Witch hunters' emerged and would travel from village to village assessing who was and was not a witch. Sexual sadism was common practice in the tortures of the accused. According to the standard procedure, the accused were stripped naked and completely shaved, then pricked with long needles all over their bodies, including their genitals, in search for the Devil's mark. Often the accused were raped to 'investigate' whether or not they were virgins, which would be a sign of their innocence. If there was no confession the accused were submitted to an even higher level of torture: their limbs were torn, they were seated on iron chairs with fires lit underneath, their bones were crushed. Then they were hung or burnt at the stake. The execution was an event that the public had to attend, almost like a parade of the authority's power or a campaign of terror. The children of the witches also had to attend, especially the daughters, who in some cases were whipped in front of their 'guilty' mothers.

Witch hunts are still active today, mainly in parts of Africa, Latin America and India. Mainly older women are accused but also children and older men. There is mounting evidence that these accusations and executions are linked with the attack on communal land and minerals, where it is being given away to companies. Witchcraft is a useful instrument to divide a culture under siege. In the north of Ghana there are witch camps where there are dozens of women who have been expelled from their communities. In Zambia in the 90's there were witch hunts that were incredibly similar to the early European witch hunts. Women who pose some sort of threat are generally a target, e.g market women who were seen as competition have become targets. Male witch hunters still exist and continue to profit from this phenomena.

The subtle interaction between the authorities in church, state and the medical profession manipulated the uneducated, a folk whose superstitious fears and anxieties were incredibly real and powerful, maintained the belief in witchcraft. The witch hunts were not just superstition left to run wild. A witch cannot be defined by one or several crimes but can be moulded to suit almost any criminal act. Suspicion was, and in some cases still is, enough to condemn someone of being a witch. To be accused of witchcraft was extremely intense and negative, you are the enemy of society and hence everything must be taken away from you.



Earlier this year, RAG were asked to appear on the Dublin Community Television (DCTV) show, Looking Left, a show devoted to "Irish alternative media and left-wing publications from the late 60s to the 1980s". The episode featured Banshee, a feminist magazine produced in the mid-1970s by Irishwomen United. Anne Speed, one of the founders of Irishwomen United and a contributor to Banshee, spoke about the magazine, which produced eight issues. Louise O'Reilly moderated, while historian Conor McCabe offered a historical context. Clare and Angela from RAG were asked to make comparisons between the process and content of Banshee and The Rag. We filmed in DCTV's studios on a freezing night in February, but thankfully our shivering is not visible!



As we read through copies of Banshee, we were struck by the similarities between those issues raised 35 years ago and the kinds of things we are still writing about for The Rag. Like RAG, Irishwomen United met weekly, held workshops and public meetings, and of course, produced a magazine. The inside cover of Banshee's premier issue reads, "You've just read the daily papers. You've been listening to the radio. You're probably about to watch television. Would you know, from the attention devoted by the media to women, that females form fifty-one percent of the population... You've just spent the day learning nothing about women. And no-one wants to hear what you think... Our magazine will detail, monthly and minutely, the oppression of women and the means of removing that oppression. More positively, we will record our pride and joy in being women and our strength in unity". Some of the struggle featured in Banshee, like women's fight to be served pints at the pub, are happily a thing of the past. However, many other issues, like reproductive freedom in Ireland, have made disappointingly little progress. The articles combine a warrior-like tone with a biting sense of humour, and each page has an incredible



RAG Looks Left at Banshee Magazine with Dublin Community Television



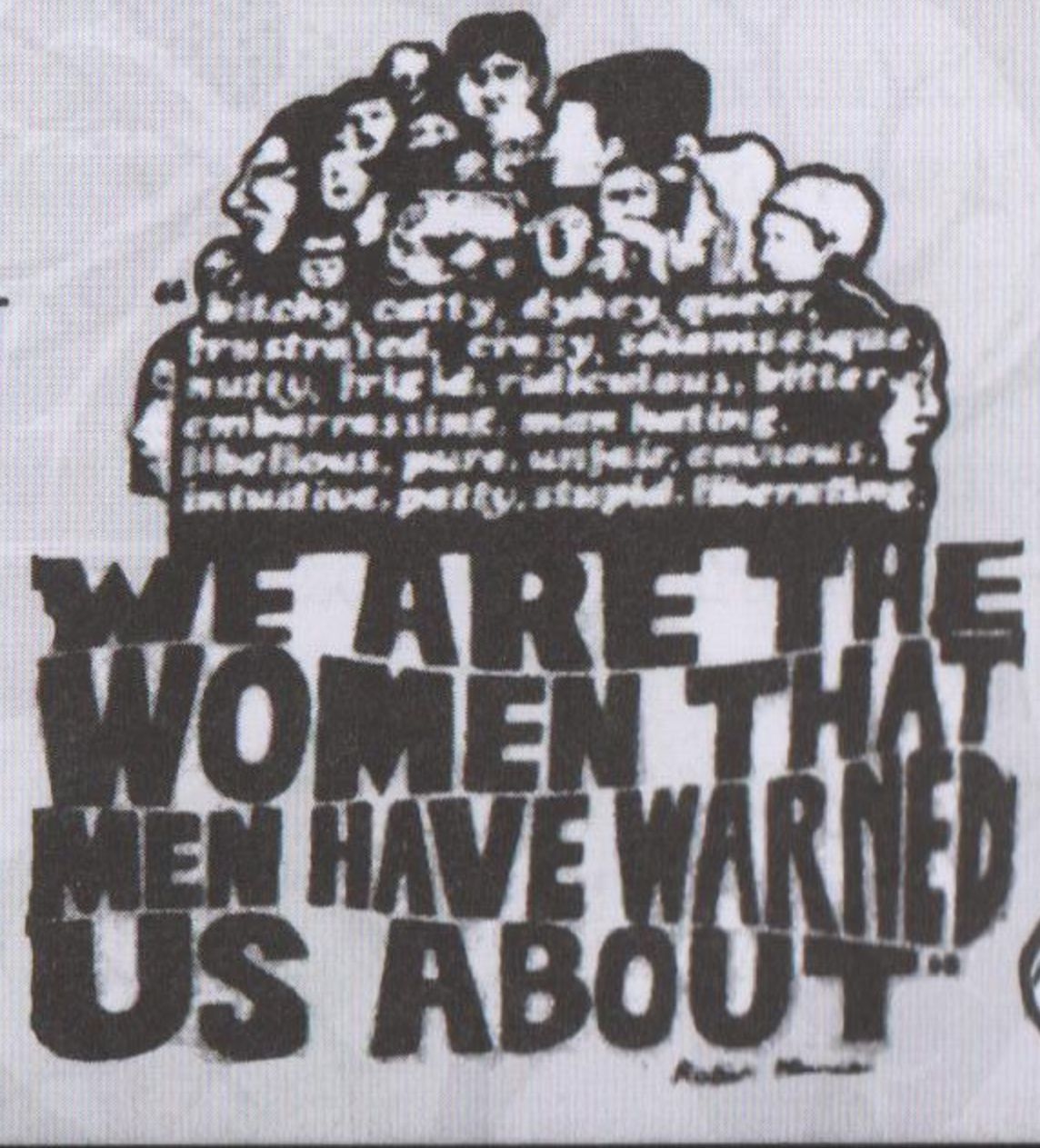
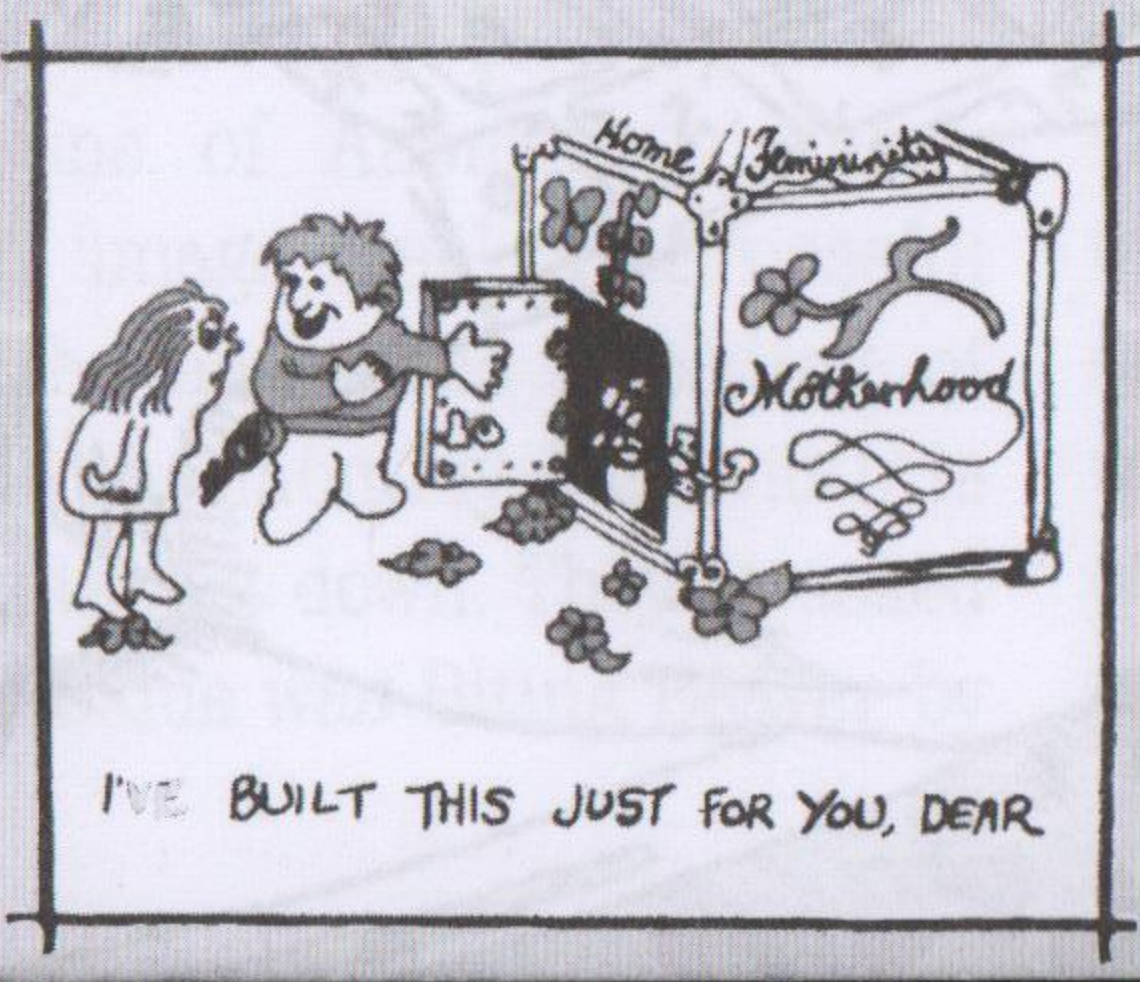
energy. In fact, the magazine was a tool for organisation, listing pubs to boycott, naming politicians to rally against, and reporting on direct action against unions, employers, tennis clubs, and pubs across the country and worldwide. They also printed calls to action being taken on behalf of women such as Noreen Winchester, jailed for killing her father, who had been raping her repeatedly for four years.

Banshee feature articles such as "Women and the Constitution", a look at discrimination against women in Ireland's Constitution; "Father Church", which explores patriarchal images of God; "Censorship - For or Against It?" a practical look at how feminist messages are thwarted; or "Body Image: The Monster in the Mirror", an appeal for women to listen to their bodies instead of looking at the scale are all still relevant to women today, and could have easily appeared in any issue of The Rag.



While comforting to read about feminist campaigns from years ago, Banshee serves as a reminder that our fight is far from over, and much work and organising remains to be done. To view the Looking Left episode, read more about Banshee, and to download issues of the magazine, go to <http://dublinopinion.com/2010/09/banshee-journal-of-irish-women-united-looking-left-dctv>

DCTV is available on UPC channel 802.



In June 2010, RAG hosted a discussion on the many positive and negative uses of 'new media'. We explored a variety of topics including the possibilities for positive change and 'radical democracy' via the internet, the dilemma of 'internet neurosis' where feelings of vulnerability and fears of exploitation need to be negotiated in order to utilize the internet as activists, artists and self-publishers, and the potential of the internet as a force for oppression and control. Angela Nagle was one of five speakers who came to contribute her research knowledge in the area of New Media specifically regarding the often oppressive and sexist dynamics on popular sites such as youtube.com. Angela's findings however distasteful, disgusting and depressing, were also very familiar to the Rag women; Internet sexism is nothing new, but it is something we feel needs to be addressed as a serious issue. The deceptively stupid comments are effective tools of oppression, which understandably make some women feel unable and unentitled to engage with the medium to the same extent as her male peers. We asked Angela to write about her findings and her concerns regarding the impact of internet sexism on women.

In a Paranoid Style: In 73rn37 4\$\$\$h0£3\$

Words by **Angela Nagle**
with an introduction from **Emily**
illustration by **Emma Wilson**

posting her home address and threatening to kidnap her son. This came only months after tech writer Kathy Sierra was forced to withdraw from public speaking and shut down her blog after her home address and phone number were posted along with sexually threatening comments on different tech blogs.

If a curious young woman types 'feminism' into youtube today, among the first clips she sees will be 'FEMINIST FAIL: Pwnage' 'FEMINIST BULL\$*%!!!' 'Feminism Sucks' 'How feminism screwed my generation' 'The problems with feminism' 'Anti-feminism =/= misogyny' 'The Myth of Women's oppression' and 'Vicious Feminism in schools'. From these clips she will learn that 'there are more than enough statistics showing that women are at least an equal number of domestic violence perpetrators' and that 'there are statistics showing beyond a shadow of a doubt that women are the vast majority of child murderers and child abusers'. To come across the kind of ideas that would loosely represent the majority of feminists, she would have to wade through quite a lot of misinformation and anti-feminist stereotyping. So, in an era of mass communication and democratised visual media, when having your say has never been so easy, where are all the feminist youtubers?

If our curious young woman were to take an interest in left wing politics and type 'Naomi Klein' into youtube she would find that below the first five clips that appear are comment threads which repeatedly and often immediately descend into commentary like: 'She's pretty hot so I survived the 8 minutes of this nonsense' or 'I want to fuck her' or 'She's not even cute. She's a bimbo' or 'This woman is a stupid cunt'.

If she were to take an interest in conservative politics she may well look up the provocative right wing pundit Ann Coulter. One doesn't have to look very hard to find ammunition to debunk Coulter's often knowingly sensationalist and outlandish arguments, designed to provoke the liberal left. And yet, the criticisms that appear in the comment threads of the first five clips on youtube immediately descend into: 'cunt' 'retarded bitch' 'Republican hooker' 'I thought about it carefully. I think I'd bang her' and 'I'm a little curious why a 50+ anorexic looking woman is dressed like a goth oversexed 16 year old'.

The on line presence and organisation of fascist and racist groups has been taken very seriously by the far left, and rightly so, but you are unlikely to hear a discussion of the very significant and very vocal presence of openly and aggressively misogynistic groups and websites. On menarebetterthanwomen.com thousands of visitors participate in forums such as 'Every woman is a cheating whore', 'Why women hate sex' and 'Cheating army wives deserve the death penalty', where they say things like 'millions of men are rotting in jail because some cunt decided to cook up a story' and 'Track the cunts who come on this site to their homes let them think twice about hm much their cunts can bleed'(sic) (original quote in capital letters).

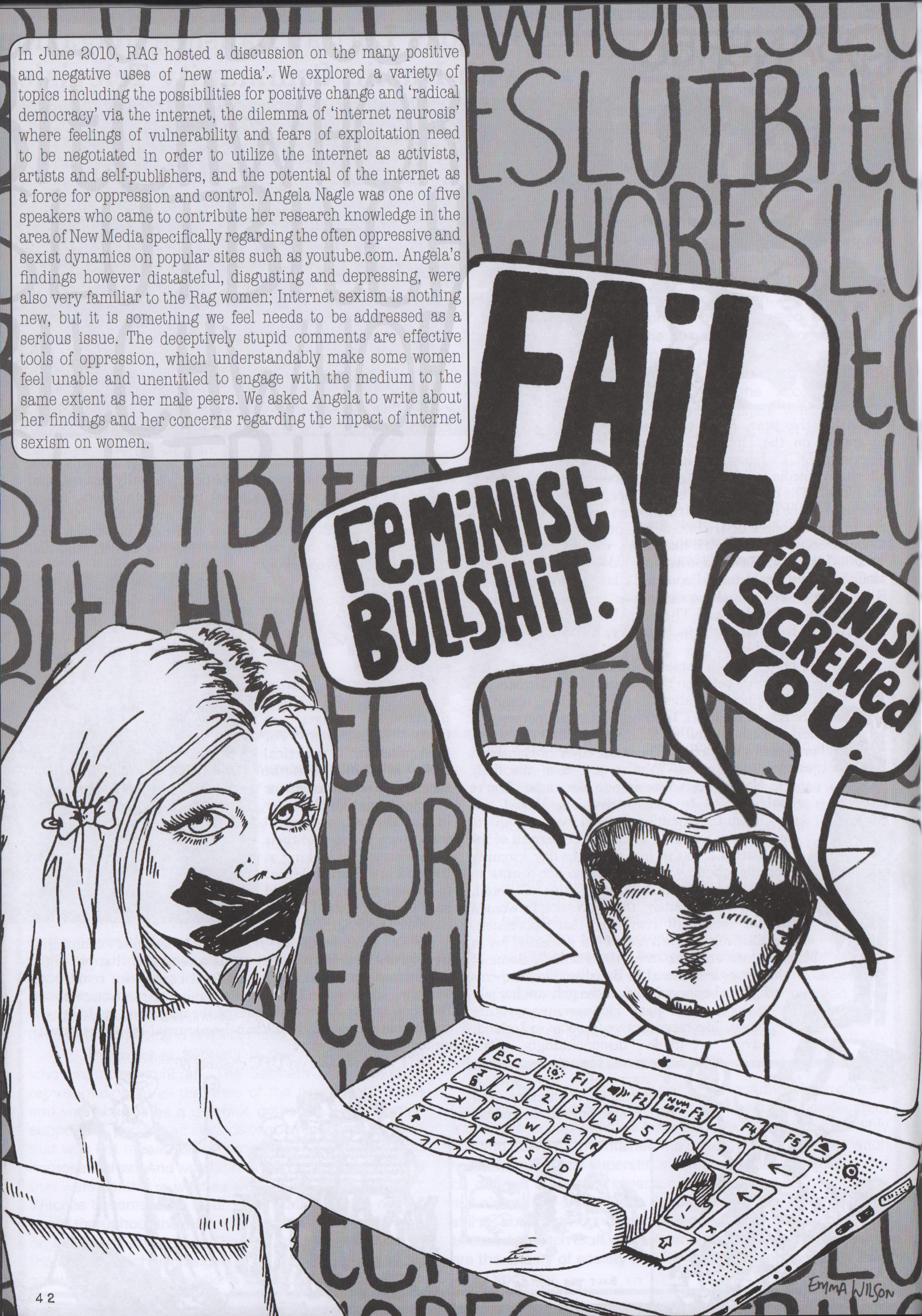
It would become clear to this young woman using youtube, whether she is fat or skinny, left wing or right wing, feminist or not, that any expression, visibility or (heaven forbid) critical thought are enough to insight a tirade of the most blithely issued dissections of her physical appearance in a culture in which sexual attractiveness is still considered the pinnacle of female worth.

Menarebetterthanwomen.com also raises money for billboard campaigns. Websites such as falserape.net and falserape.society.blogspot.com tell us that 'half of all rape cases may be false.' The people who go to great effort to create all this on line content may not be very articulate or bright and perhaps as a result seem somewhat non-threatening, but they are successfully colonising this dimension of the public sphere, adopting what Richard Hofstadter terms a 'paranoid style': a discourse which suggests they are all lone mavericks, battling against the status quo.

The men criticising these articulate and confident women spanning the political spectrum may well be highly unattractive themselves. They may be scratching themselves and breathing through their open mouths with microwave meals rising and falling on their distended bellies as they type, but they appear to feel so profoundly sexually entitled and have probably become so accustomed to seeing women enacting any sexual fantasy they can think of at the click of a button that they seem to be constitutionally incapable of the humility it would require to turn their gaze inward. If she hadn't already picked this up on TV, in magazines, at home or in school, the curious young woman in the age of the internet will quickly become aware that life will be made extremely difficult for her if she dares to challenge sexism or to become engaged in political debate or in fact any kind of public discourse. Not unreasonably, she may choose to opt out.

As the notorious website 4chan.org has often demonstrated, acquiring personal information and obsessive group cyber bullying is entirely within the grasp of willful hackers. Before focussing their energies primarily on Scientology, cyber mob Anonymous were involved in a sustained attempt to crash feminist sites including Feministe and Girl-Wonder.org, threatening feminist bloggers with rape and violence and flooding their comment threads with misogynistic rants. One of Anonymous' many methods of disabling a site is called 'image raep' (a purposeful misspelling) which involves using the automatic reloading of images on a site over and over until the monthly bandwidth is used up and the site host is forced to take it down. They attacked one particular blogger whose on line name was Biting Beaver by

In a world where women do two thirds of the work but earn only 10% of the income and own only 1% of the means of production and in a country where the rape conviction rate is 7% and female parliamentary representation 13% we have an easy argument to make but we are not making it as often, as visibly or as aggressively on line as anti-feminists are making theirs. Youtube and other free visual media have given us opportunities that first and second wave feminists could not have dreamt of. If those opportunities are not seized with courage, anger and creativity, the backlash will have found one of its strongest lobbies yet; not in the corridors of power but in a democratic, free and non-hierarchical hugely influential medium.



CONSUMING THE MEDIA, DIGESTING IT BACK

text and images
by arjel

I grew up in Buenos Aires, an avid consumer of science fiction, comic books and cartoons. When I began to be politically active in my teenage years, I found that many people of a progressive mindset were strongly against television and popular culture. These were regarded as, at best, mere entertainment, and at worst a dumb waste of time. In post-dictatorship Argentina, people were rightfully suspicious of a media that had been, in part, complicit with state terrorism. It was confusing to me, however, that these activists could speak about class war and, in the next sentence, look down on working class people based on the music they listened to.

This began to make sense to me, years later, when I studied the relationship between the left and the mass media. Historically, critiques appeared as soon as mass media emerged as a global force for the dissemination of information. These early analyses came from the left, mainly from social scientists and artists who escaped totalitarian regimes in early 20th century Europe, and came to be known informally as the 'Frankfurt School'. Many of these thinkers, most prominently Theodor Adorno, saw mass media as a tool for direct social control, which dumbed culture down and made people into unthinking tools of power. That is to say, mass media was simply used by the powerful to control the masses. The emerging forms of popular culture, such as news reels, cinema and new genres of music were seen as a way to make people forget about the supposedly more intelligent or refined 'high' culture, such as literature, classical music, theatre, etcetera.

I also learned that, in the 1980s, a new form of Cultural Theory emerged in academia. The progressive analysis of the Frankfurt school was continued in Britain by new intellectuals, who came from diverse backgrounds and had palpable experiences with subcultures such as Punk and New Wave. While retaining a keen critique of popular culture, these theorists found that there were many 'sites of resistance'. These were manifestations of resistance to dominant, capitalist-patriarchal society, embedded within popular culture. Cultural Theory variously analysed these as both valid expressions against oppression, as well as a 'pressure valve', where grievances could be aired, maintaining the status quo.

The Critical Theory approach, questioning the validity of popular culture, became very widespread among post-war, intellectual middle classes. In the present, it still informs much of the way we approach the media from the left, regardless of our particular political tendency.

Fast forward to about three years ago, when I

started moving within DIY/feminist circles. I was elated to find a niche which actively railed against so-called 'common sense', where you were encouraged to engage with reality through creativity and discussion, rather than just feeding on what the mainstream media provided the public. As time passed, I came to understand that even within anarchist subculture, people view different forms of media quite differently. In my experience, I would say it is rare to find the old kind of class elitism that says there is little of value in watching the latest episode of Eastenders, or catching up with Battlestar Galactica. We have moved on from the Adorno days, informed by the advances of Critical Theory. A lot of anarchist and feminist analysis of the media was influenced by this school of thought. Does this mean we're free of the problematic relationship of past progressive movements to 'mass culture'?

I don't think so. There are other divisions, other snobberies at work within our subcultures. I've met people who watch certain shows because they're popular, that is to say, because they're 'down with the working class', as they would never put it. To begin with, this kind of consumption strikes me as saying 'this is the CORRECT thing to enjoy, because it's what the Great Unwashed enjoy'. The inherent classism of the movement is, then, still present, except now it attempts to mask itself in contrived consumption. This, in turn, can become yet another unflinching dogma, within a subculture that aims to do away with dogmas.

I can understand that, when we first start down the path of being more critical of what's around us, we have to reject a few things. In my early days of feminism, I put away a lot of stuff, be it comics, books, tv, film and videogames, much of which has influenced me. I was not able to reconcile the fact that many of these creations were the product of a patriarchal culture of domination, and so I chose to eradicate them from my life.

Soon after, this was incorporated into my initial exploration of gender, and coming out as a trans person. I felt that I needed to be able to abolish everything oppressive about maleness and masculinity from my life, if I was to assert myself as female. This was, of course, very subjective and in many aspects, I can now see it was deeply problematic. I could not help but associate maleness and masculinity with patriarchy, in fact I was unable to separate them. Bands had to be queer-friendly and, preferably, female fronted. Books, comics and TV shows had to have strong, non-stereotyped women or queers as protagonists, or had to show a feminist understanding, or both. Near the end of this period of my life, ironically, I found myself wandering the streets of Frankfurt.

What changed in me? The first thing was the acknowledgment that many of these 'lesser' works, these comic books or science fiction shows, had been strong formative experiences for me. When I thought about it, I realised that I

had not consumed these things passively. Instead, I could take the parts that represented me, and critique the rest, hopefully with a sense of humour.

A couple of examples of this experience were two animeshows I encountered as a teenager: Sailor Moon and Saint Seiya. They were both huge hits in the '90s in Argentina, and had similar stories: reincarnated warriors of legend appear in the modern world, and fight a resurrected ancient evil. The twist in both stories is that the reincarnated warriors are modern day Japanese teenagers. Each show has a markedly different approach: Saint Seiya is aimed at boys, features an epic storyline focusing on martial self-improvement, with great

inspiration from knighthood and samurai stories. It's also quite a bit more violent, and lacking in much visibility for women. Sailor Moon is aimed at girls, and its plot focuses more in how the main characters juggle their everyday lives (school, family, etcetera) with fighting evil. Sailor Moon is also much more interested in the inner lives of the characters, particularly romance.

These shows were successful because, back then, they were unique for an animated series. Both of them managed to be quite sexist in many ways, yet they told complex, often mature stories. In retrospect, there were a few things I took from these, seemingly innocuous shows.

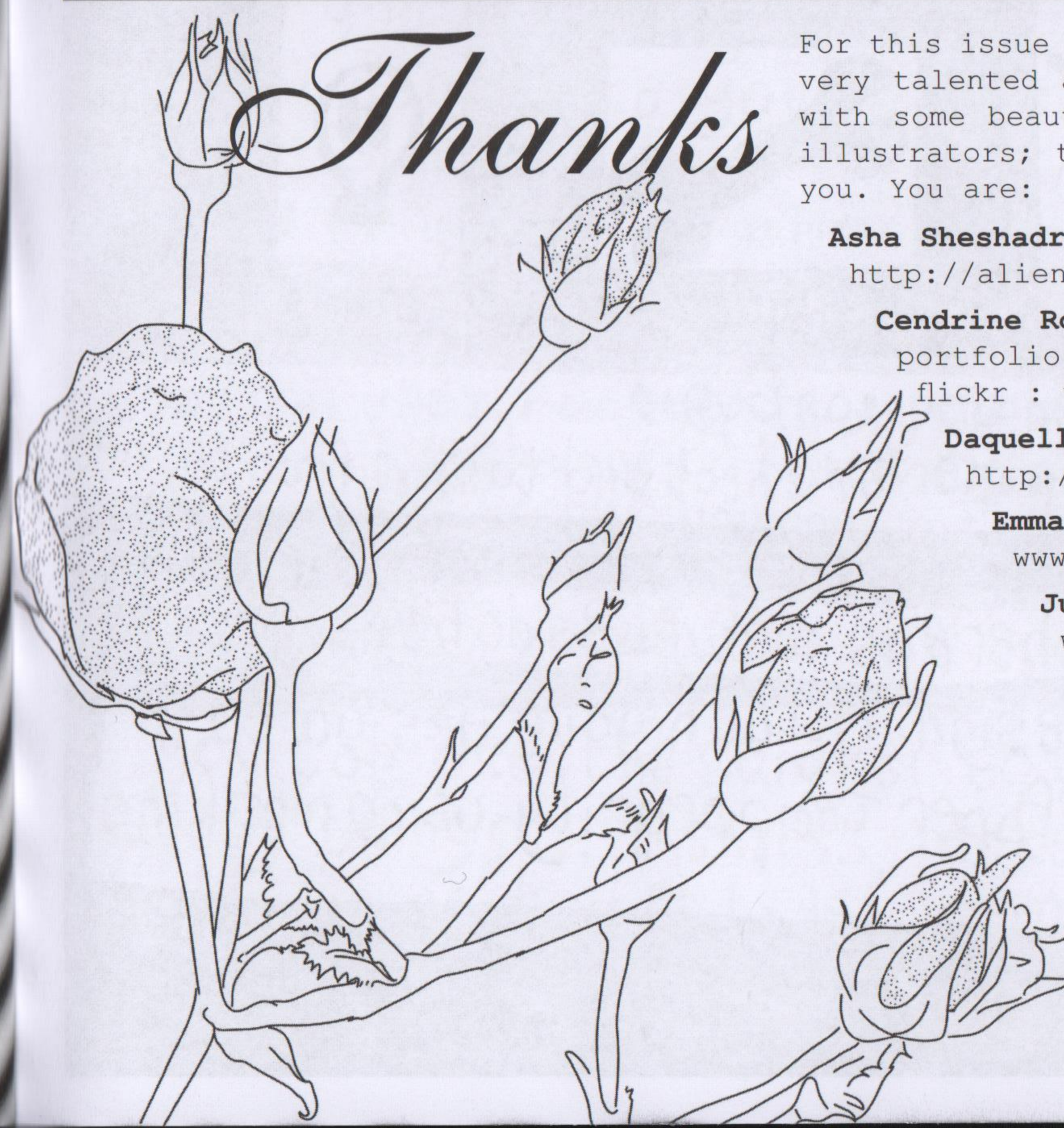
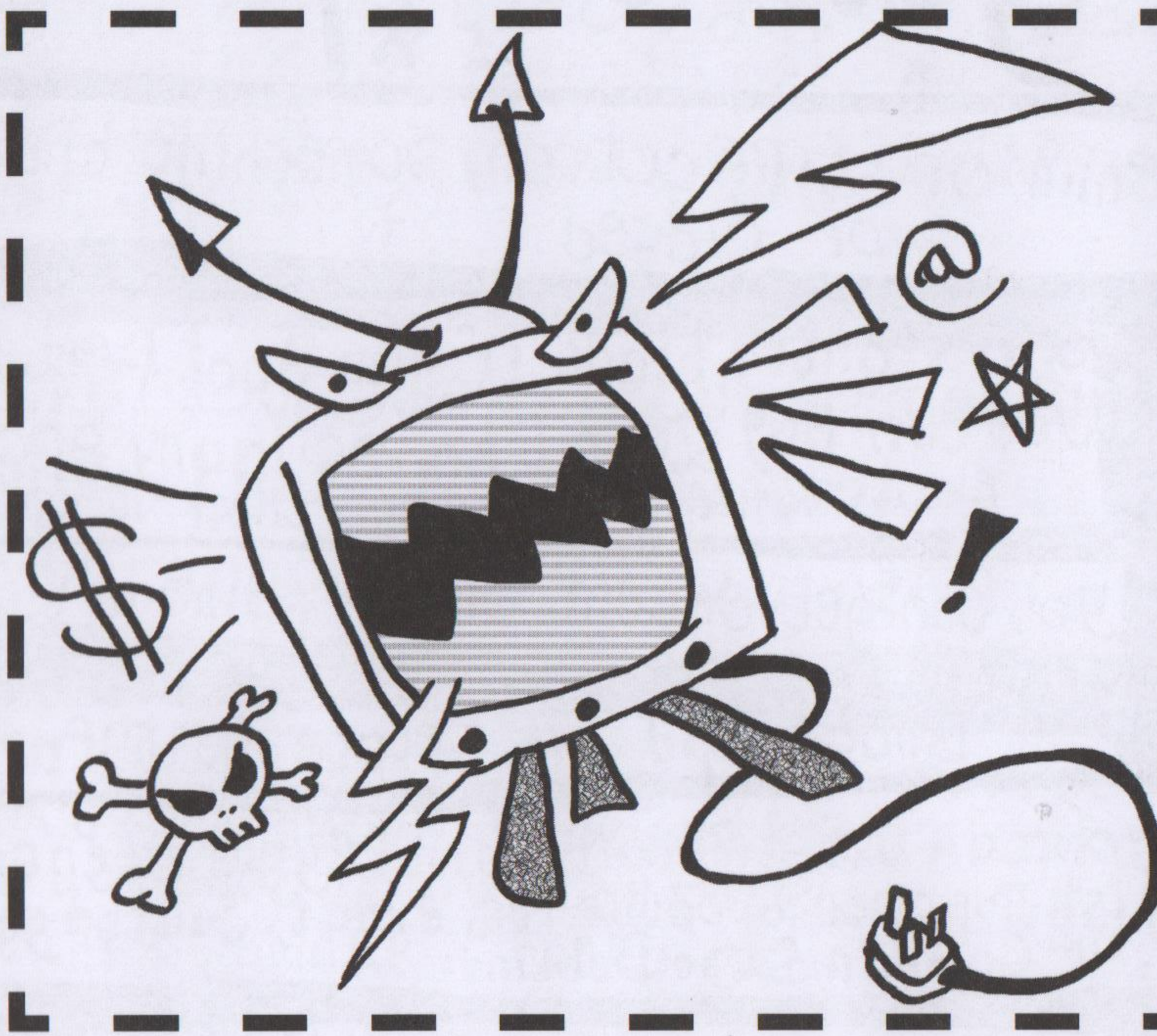
Saint Seiya featured, among its main cast, a very feminine boy. He was considered 'weak' by the rest, but turns out to be, secretly, the most powerful character: he simply hates violence and tries to avoid it as much as possible. On the Sailor Moon side, I could identify

strongly with the daily struggles of characters who were my age while, also, seeing a show with a gay couple in it who were part of the regular cast of characters.*

As I reconcile myself more and more with my nerdiness and its relevance in my life, it has become a part of my renewed engagement with the geek community, which I had abandoned in frustration due to its sexism, racism, classism, and overwhelming amount of sheer conservative bullcrap. Recently, I discovered that there were many queers and feminists who were just like me, enjoying the geek subculture while, at the same time, throwing back our own take on it, a closer reflection of our experience.

I have also met many artists, writers and critics who, unbeknownst to me, were a part of a new queer undercurrent, which is erupting in literature, television, even video games. I do not believe this is some sort of utopian subculture, which has all the answers. Far from it, as there is still a lot to address in terms of accessibility, racism, sexism and classism within geek subcultures, even those informed by radical politics. But at least, it's a start.

*See my two columns dissecting these shows' influence on my formative years at [Girl-Wonder.org](http://www.girl-wonder.org):
"Sailor Moon: Queerness in the Queerless '90s": <http://bit.ly/dfeEzE>
"Authorial Intent: That Elusive Foe": <http://bit.ly/bbhusx>



For this issue of the Rag we were lucky enough to have a group of very talented artistic ladies on board who kindly furnished us with some beautiful illustrations. A huge thank you to all the illustrators; the magazine would not have been the same without you. You are:

Asha Sheshadri

<http://alienstandardtime.tumblr.com/>

Cendrine Rovini

portfolio : www.cendrine.rovini.over-blog.com
flickr : www.flickr.com/photos/cendrerruines

Daquella Manera

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/daquellamanera/>

Emma Wilson

www.emmawilsondesign.com

Julia Duff

www.brainforbrainfog.blogspot.com

Kendrah Smith

www.sugarbeebooks.flickr.com
www.kendrahwithanh.tumblr.com/

Laura McAuliffe

<http://lmnopxx.blogspot.com/>

Maria gil ulldemolins

www.cargocollective.com/mgu
www.etsy.com/shop/nosideup

Rachel Feury

www.johnradclyffehall.blogspot.com

* Make * your own * patches *

Good fabric* denim or stiff cotton, something thats not fluffy or ridged.

Stencil*Knives or a Stanley blade if you dont feel like investing you can buy stencil knives in any good Art shop exacto knife if you wanna check it on the net.

Acrylic*Point You can get decent cheap point in Evans Art Supply shop in Dub for around 3 quid a bottle. Black and white are best for starting

Sticker*Paper you can use stiff card to make your stencils but i like sticker paper because its exact. You can get it in O'Sullivan's on Camden St in Dublin.

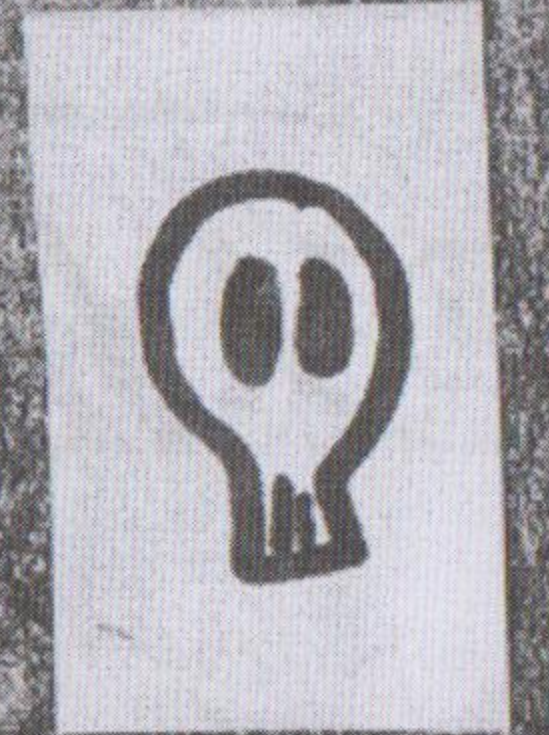
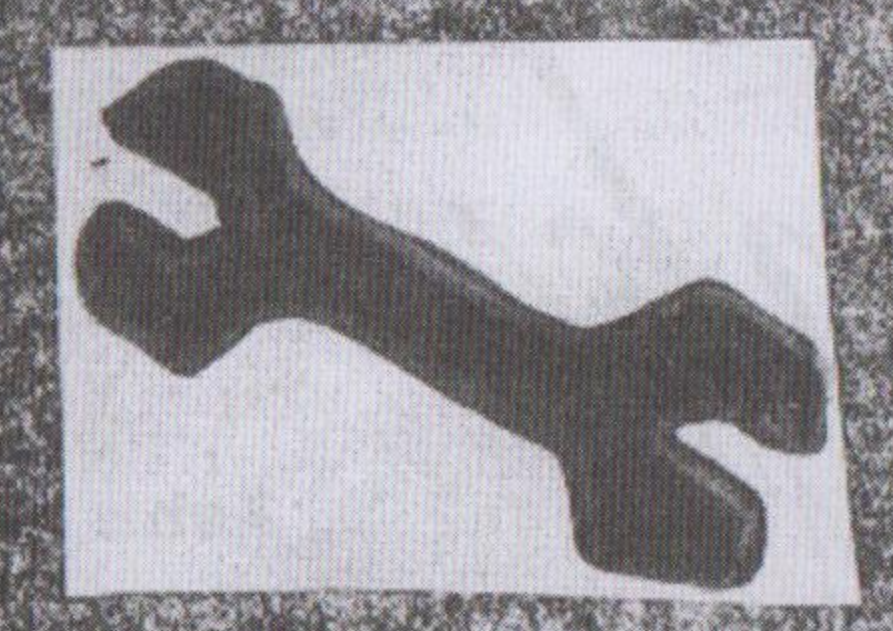
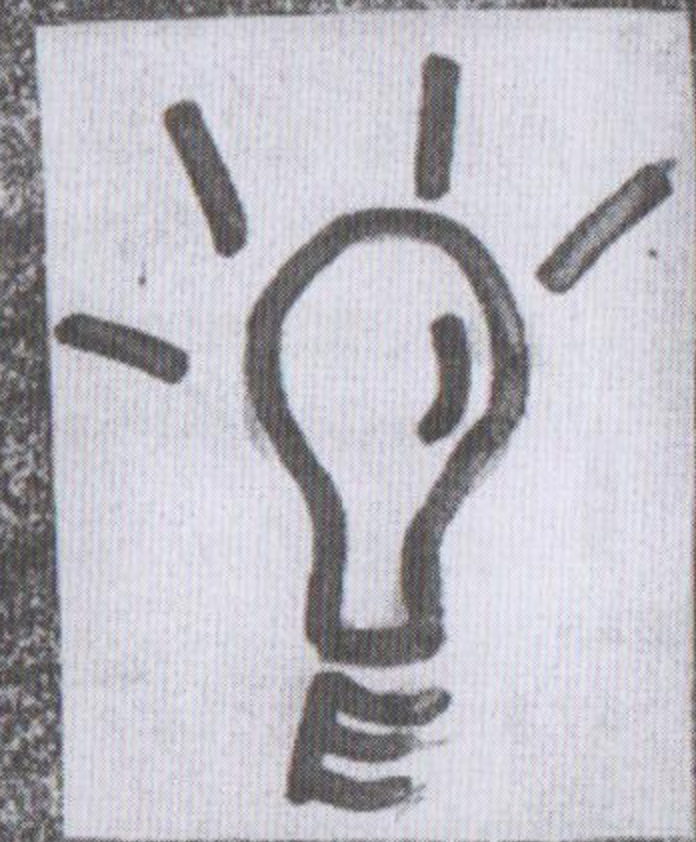
Masking Tape* will become obvious why later... keep going!

A Large Mirror* or piece of glass to cut the sticker on. I use the glass from a picture that used to hang on our wall.

A Design either drawn yourself or something you like, must be simple

A*Small*Paint Roller is the best and cost around €5, but a kitchen sponge works too.

examples of easy designs



So now you have what you need you can begin...
* Draw your design on a piece of paper, or cheat and take it from the net

* Cut the sticker paper so there is about 3 inches of extra space around the design. Attach your design to the back of the sticker paper temporarily using masking tape around the edges.

* to cut the design you either need a piece of glass with a lamp underneath to make the design visible, or more difficult, against a window pane to trace the design with a pen to cut after on a mirror (Trickiest bit!) when you cut, take your time and lean gently on the paper moving it around as you cut not yourself!

* Now you have your sticker cut, remove the design and masking tape. Hold your sticker against the sun so you can see the shape and if you need to change something

* Now grab your fabric and masking tape.. You need to cover your sticker with tape before you remove it from its backing so it stays intact. Before you do you need to put the tape against your jumper, a blanket, something fluffy to make it tacky. Otherwise the design may stick to the tape and not your fabric.

Next get your point and roller or sponge ready. Remove the sticker from the backing paper and carefully place it on the fabric. Make sure its well stuck before you slowly remove the masking tape. After this tape around the edges of the sticker a few inches so you dont get paint outside the design.

* When you are ready, begin to roll your paint on very slowly. if you dont take your time the paint can bleed outside the design and your efforts will be for nothing. (if you're printing a shirt put a piece of card in between the front + back of fabric)

* You can use a hairdryer to dry the ink and paint over a second time to make sure there are no holes. **Do not** remove the sticker before the ink is dry. Its best if you can wait and leave it overnight...

Eh Voila! Your very own homemade stencil!

you can use the sticker to print on LOTS of lovely things... t-shirts, jackets, bags, lampshades, walls, jeans, toilet lids, your mo... your do... etc...

Rag Recommends

Clare Recommends:

- **Living Memories - Kenya's untold stories by Al Kags*: an extremely interesting collection of personal memories as told by elderly Kenyans, recalling their experiences of the colonial period and the struggle for independence. Published by Story Moja - www.storymojafrica.co.ke
- **Dublin Community TV*: This is a really great project, making and screening programmes for and by the people of Dublin. NTL channel 802. See DCTV.ie
- **Katie Taylor*: amazing 23-year Dubliner who has just won her third boxing world championship. Go on Katie!
- **Mrs Fixit Everyday DIY, by Paula Lamb*: despite the dodgy name, this is a very useful instructive book about house DIY. It's a few years old so I bought it on-line

Sheila Recommends:

- **Sunshine!!* I have spent a lot of time travelling this year throughout Spain and Morocco, little man in tow. I delved into some fantastic books on the way that further inspired my galavanting
- **Dervla Murphy* - an amazing Irish woman from Waterford with determination, articulation and more often than not her kid on a donkey trekking with her
- **The Illustrated Virago Book of Women Travellers* - stories stretching from the 18th century til present day. Amazing ladies from all walks of life, traipsing throughout the world. Each story with its own purpose, its own baggage and insight to whatever culture they land upon
- **Women truckers* - can't get much hotter than a fem in a hub x
- **Poetry Chicks* - northern Irish crew, whose voice echoes the woes of our present, the hurt of our past and the hopes of our future
- **The Food of Love by cartoonist Kate Evans* - awesome woman, fantastic cartoonist and a breath of fresh air into the realm of stuffy breastfeeding books, "they aren't stretch marks they are flames of creation", rock on woman you're bringing sexy back to where it needs to be at

Eve Recommends:

- **Rolling down hills*: It took hanging out with a five year old to remind me how much i love rolling down hills - seriously fun
- **Picking berries*: seasonal autumnal treats for free
- **Irish History Podcast*: A new up and coming podcast delving into Ireland's rich history. The podcast works chronologically forward from the coming of Christianity (and writing) to Ireland in the 5th century A.D. As well as the entertaining and informative podcasts the site also features a series of accessible short history articles. <http://irishhistorypodcast.ie/>

Marianne Recommends:

- **Barbara Kingsolver*: I love her novel 'The Poisonwood Bible', and have lent and given copies to loads of people over the years. Seen through the eyes of the women of a missionary family in the Congo in the 1960s, it gives insight into religion, the patriarchal family and the nature of the idea of racial superiority and colonisation. She manages to set her story in a historical context but make it still relevant today, which is exactly what she has done with her new novel, *The Lacuna*. In 2001, she objected to the US invasion of Afghanistan in response to September 11th and wrote about it accordingly in various articles. What in Europe seemed like a fairly standard response to 9/11 and the US invasion, caused a massive backlash against her by the media in the US. She became a hated figure and received threats against herself and her family as well as torrents of media abuse which caused her to stop writing. *The Lacuna* is a response, almost 10 years later, to this backlash. Again she uses the past to comment on the present, her novel taking place from the 1930s to the 1950s in Mexico and the US. Through the eyes of a child becoming a young author she explores McCarthyism in the US, the fear of the foreign, and the paranoia and culture of fear that can take over in times of crisis.

Hilary Recommends:

- **Meditation*: don't let yourself burnout!! During these strange days of hypercapitalism the average employed person must work harder, for longer, for fewer rewards and suffer the consequence of stress related diseases. For a lot of women the workday doesn't end here and the double shift begins once they return home. Whether you're seeking to strengthen your mind against daily stresses at work or at home, cravings, the marketing psychology of advertising, addictive behaviour, bullshit propaganda in the media, negative thought patterns about yourself or others or whether you want to generate inner calm and happiness, developing a daily meditation practice could provide you with the skills to shield yourself from constant attacks on your mind and well-being. There is a range of secular and Buddhist meditation approaches out there; 'mindfulness of breathing' is a good introductory technique. Have a look around for a style that suits you. Keep that fire burning!!

Sinead Recommends:

- *Going to donation yoga in the Openminds project on 95 Lower Erne St Dublin
- *Making your own stencils :)
- *Being nicer to each other.

Angela Recommends:

- **Project Gutenberg*: <http://www.gutenberg.org/> Founded in 1971 by a guy named Michael Hart, Project Gutenberg is the first and largest single collection of free electronic books, or eBooks, and audiobooks. There are loads of fascinating and rare books on the site as well as some great classics. Check out Emma Goldman's "Anarchism and Other Essays," issues of Mother Earth, and my personal favourite, "The Suffrage Cookbook." In fact, there are a slew of suffrage-related books, from "The History of Women Suffrage" to "Are Women People? A Book of Rhymes for Suffrage Times."

Emily Recommends:

- My favourite independent women musicians:
- **Laura Sheeran*: www.myspace.com/laurasheeranmusic
- **Catscars (Robyn Bromfield)*: www.myspace.com/catscars
- **Meljoann*: www.myspace.com/meljoann

Leah Recommends:

- Cold and flu home made tea - Knocks the snot right out of you! Seeing as it's getting colder right now and I literally just got over a cold I thought this was worth sharing with our lovely RAG readers. It will make your nose run like crazy so be prepared and have tissues on hand! If you have a flask you can bring it into work/college/where ever you may be going and your cold will clear up before you know it. Add as much of the spicy ingredients as you think you could take. No promises it will taste nice though. what you will need:

chopped ginger; 1 teaspoon of chilli powder (or as hot as you can handle); 1 teaspoon lemon juice; some cloves; 1-2 cloves of garlic (if you're crazy, 3)

chop ingredients and add them to a small pot of water (about 2-3 cups worth). Let the water heat up and remove just before it boils. Drink it while it's hottt!

Ariel Recommends:

- **Reconnect* - Is there a part of you that you try to ignore, or you feel ashamed by? As a trans person, as an immigrant, I've twice had the experience of needing to push the past aside. But the healthiest thing I've done this year, is to reconnect with those parts of my identity, and try to see different perspectives, different ways in which I can stop self-censoring so much.
- **Oblique Strategies* - This is a set of cards created by Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt, which has been republished in limited quantities in the last four decades. Each one has a short sentence that can help with creative or writing blocks, as well as being good thought exercises. You can check them out online, for free! This website gives you a random one every time you click: <http://www.joshharrison.net/oblique-strategies/>

Aoife Recommends:

- **Greed is the knife and the scars run deep* - Damien Dempsey and Maser

Damien Dempsey's songs combine social commentary, realism and working class pride with some rocking tunes. That his persona is really laddish: stocky build, thick Dublin accent and dodgy shirts (no offence dear), means that he can pull off feel good lyrics that would come across as sickly sweet and sentimental in other people's mouths.

Maser's graffiti has adorned walls and corners around Dublin for the last few years. Large, bubbly graphics with optimistic slogans which lambast you from otherwise innocuous concrete grey-scapes.

Both their skills are combined together on a new project, "They are Us." Corners of the city have been embellished with Dempsey's lyrics in Maser's instantly recognisable style, deliberately reminiscent of signage from Dublin city centre in the 1950s and 60s. Inmates in Saint Patrick's Institution (for young offenders) and Mountjoy Jail will be collaborating with the artists on further work in the future. Theyareus.ie

- **Campaign on Emergency Contraception* - Choice Ireland

Choice Ireland have successfully drawn attention to the unethical practices of rogue crisis pregnancy agencies which use fear and confusion to manipulate women and distort the realities of abortion.

Now, they have launched a further campaign to highlight the issue of access to emergency contraception. The aim is that the morning-after pill will be available over the counter. This is necessary for women to have more control over the pill's effectiveness and to make it affordable, available without a visit to a doctor. With the Irish Pharmacy Union calling for greater availability, Choice Ireland are highlighting the unsubstantial medical reasons for its restrictions. choiceireland.org