

Keynote Address

HETEROPATRIARCHY: GLOBALISATION, THE INSTITUTION OF HETEROSEXUALITY AND LESBIANS

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This feminist event is for all women who denounce the escalating violence and oppression that mark the 21st Century, who rage against the continued exclusion and silencing of women throughout the world, and who are convinced that a strong feminist response is essential for the creation of a fairer future.

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There have been many feminist analyses of globalisation in the last decade, including my own, but few have looked at the way in which heteropatriarchy and globalisation intersect. Lesbians are said to be without culture or because it's a middle-class Western fad lesbians are said to be free of the effects of globalisation. But each generation of lesbians is denied knowledge of their history, and no one cares or notices. In countries throughout the "so-called" developing world lesbians are chided for taking on Western fads. In other places, lesbians are arrested, raped and killed because as lesbians they are considered "less than human". Lesbians flee into exile, but what human rights campaign dare publicise their plight?

The core issue, is that no one campaigns for the human rights of lesbians, even though lesbians fall into every group of dispossessed and marginalised peoples around the world. The indifference to the suffering of lesbians as lesbians – on top of racism, sexism, religious and ethnic hatred, and poverty – means that there are simply no campaigns, and no supporters for such campaigns – except other lesbians. Fear, silence, hatred and ignorance are the norm. I want to point to the strengths of radical lesbian feminist analyses.

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Heteropatriarchy: Globalisation, the institution of heterosexuality and lesbians

There have been many analyses of globalisation in the last decade or so, some, like my earlier work has focused on women, and although that analysis included lesbians and critiques of heterosexuality as institutional power, I looked at it as one of several structural systems – including racism, classism, sexism, ableism, ageism, and marginalisation based on religion, ethnicity or culture. I did not single out heteropatriarchy. I also note that when I make such analyses and don't mention the institution of heterosexuality or don't mention lesbians, no one seems to notice the absence of sexuality from the debate. But when I speak of sexuality as central to my analysis, people do say, what about class, race, disability, age, culture, religion, ethnicity. I want to begin by saying that what follows does not exclude these factors, but it has to be possible to put sexuality and lesbians at the centre of our thinking if we really want to understand what is going on around us. That then has to be set alongside other analyses, discussed, synthesised and new theories developed.

Power

...how few are willing to give up the power relationship. Even the powerless cling to the ideology, in the hope that as long as the *idea* exists they have hope of escaping powerlessness by achieving *someway, somehow, powerfulness*. Of course, as long as the conceptual framework of “power” itself is valued (especially, if valued by the Oppressed!) none of us has any hope.

Ti-Grace Atkinson 1974 *Amazon Odyssey*, p. xxii.

One can't speak of globalisation without mentioning power. The superstructure of globalisation is built upon excessive imbalances in power, although the rhetoric is all about level playing fields, transparency, choice and free trade. The reality is about impossible gradients, shifting targets and confusion, consolidation that reduces the range of products and often annihilates local assets and goods, and trade that is structured to benefit the powerful and the monied.

How does heteropatriarchy come into this? If we want a feminist analysis, is it enough to speak of men, whiteness, wealth and mobility? I don't believe so, for inside this grid is a fifth element that comes into play in relation to all of these, and that is heterosexuality as an institution.

Let me take a moment to explain what I mean by an institution in relation to heterosexuality.

1. An institution formalises relations between the people inside it, in this case the relations between women and men. In doing so, it controls and limits those relations.
2. Particular tasks and roles are allocated to people in the institution. In the case of heterosexuality it allocates not only by sex, but also by gender.¹ Attempts to challenge these roles have only succeeded in embedding them more deeply. The roles preserve the respective subordinate / dominant

¹ For critiques of the misuse of the word “gender” see Hawthorne, 2004c; Eisenstein 2007.

positions of women and men – and continue to do so even when challenged.

3. Institutions have authority over people in them. This authority extends to limiting men's behaviour and women's, and furthermore it affects people not involved in heterosexual relations because it carries such authority.²

The institution affects not only personal and intimate behaviour, it affects global behaviour. Think of the images from Abu Ghraib. They exemplify the heteroreality of militarism. Iraqi men are feminised, dominated, treated just like all the women in all the porn you've ever seen. But when it is pornography, it is not viewed as torture because those subjects (the women) are pre-feminised by their sex. The horror only occurs when men feminise "enemy" men, and or military women (even if under duress) feminise "enemy" men (Clarke 2004; Hawthorne 2006).

Unfair, says the liberal, war is always bad. Let's look at something that is marketed globally as good: development. Development is an interesting area and it is one that has changed its form significantly due mainly to appropriative moves by the big money spenders: the IMF, the World Bank, the UN and the on-ground workers, the women working in NGOs. There is now a recognition that women make development projects more successful, more cheaply than comparable projects with men. But when you look at the language of development it is premised on a woman being part of a family, whereas development projects focused on men put the men at the centre. And when women want aid, they are first contracepted when clean water, poverty alleviation and reduction of violence would help more.

Further, the woman is structured as part of a group. Now this is no bad thing, because, as I've argued elsewhere, relationships are central to human activity. BUT the relationship always assumed is that there is a man in the family – he may be kind, brutal, dependent, absent – but his symbolic presence is key to development thinking. Imagine if the development institutions thought instead of, say, communities of women – sisters, lovers, friends, aunts, mothers, grandmothers and daughters, with men at the semantic and symbolic margin. What if development institutions imagined single women? What if development institutions considered lesbians? Simply considering these questions creates a challenge. How would development projects look, if the assumed heteronormativity, which determines how money and resources are used, were removed from the development process (Bergeron 2006)? How would the visibility of women's economic and social relationships change? Such shifts would change what we see – and it would affect heterosexual women and lesbians as well as those who don't want intimate relationships.

The Purple September Staff highlighted this in 1975 when they wrote about the normative status of heterosexuality and the very different effects of female and male conditioning. "In male conditioning, male heterosexuality is linked to male prerogative of a human identity; in female conditioning, female heterosexuality is linked to the denial of that same identity." (1975 p. 81). When I first read this in 1975, I thought that by 2007 it would no longer hold. But I look around and see girls wearing T-shirts with Porn Star, and heavy duty sexualization of girls at a younger and younger age (Caputi 2004); and I see boys running about with pretend AK 37s

² This is drawn from my essay, "In Defence of Separatism" (1976).

under their arms (and in some places, real ones) and I see videos made by boys glorifying violence against and rape of girls. You might argue that I'm seeing selectively. I'll happily admit there are happy and fulfilled heterosexual couples, but they are overwhelmingly unrepresentative of the cultural trend.

The Phallus and the Penis

The feminist aim is to render the phallus impotent, to sever its connection with the penis, and to ensure that the latter is reduced to *nothing but* anatomy.

Denise Thompson 1991 *Reading Between the Lines: A lesbian feminist critique of feminist accounts of sexuality*, p. 15.

Denise Thompson's distinction between the phallus and the penis is very important. Denise does go on to say that the "selective recognition towards women and away from men, does not have to be a permanent state of affairs" (p. 15). It's interesting to me that men of every generation can make statements over and over (i.e. permanently) that do direct attention away from women permanently and universally and it hardly raises an eyebrow. I believe that position of dominance that men hold – and that each person may hold in one or more parts of their lives – results in sloppy and uncritical thinking. And within the heterosexual world view, it is easy to slide from lesbian to lesbianism (a state of illness), while heterosexual is a given. And an assimilationist view is the prevailing one. Speaking of gay men recently, Jim Schembri wrote:

Most of them are secure and comfortable and blend into mainstream society so well they don't even worry about being referred to as "them", because they know that *we straights consider them to be part of us* (Schembri 2007: 7, my emphasis).

And when we are not assimilated – not part of them, we are afflicted with illness, criminality, abnormality. It's fine so long as we shut up or play the exotic and erotic role of lipstick or SM lesbian.

And this is what a lesbian feminist reading of globalisation can bring – another way of seeing the world. Indigenous women in many parts of the world are developing critiques of globalisation that reflect the ways in which they are being recolonised by bioprospectors and drug companies. Lesbians are being recolonised in different ways in different countries.

For example, same-sex marriage. I didn't join the women's liberation movement to fight for marriage, although I was furious when, in 2004, Liberal and Labor got together to create a new discriminatory law to prevent marriage.³ But it isn't

³ It's amazing what you can get away with saying in public about lesbians, and not be accused of discrimination or hate speech. In the lead-up to the federal elections in Australia in 2004, a Family First Party campaign worker made a joke about burning lesbians at the stake, and no media organisation objected. If such a bad joke were made about anyone from a marginalised ethnic group, voices would be raised in protest. All that happened was that the worker was later stood aside. To speak out on behalf of lesbians is somehow seen as passé, boring, not relevant to the real political fight. To that extent lesbians have become – and perhaps in the coming years will become even more – difficult to centre a campaign around. See Hawthorne (2004a; 2004b).

something I'm going to fight for because I see it as a new form of normative heterosexuality. If only we could quieten down those rabble raising lesbian feminists and pretend that they don't threaten the social structure. I believe that lesbian feminism is a threat, and should be, while simultaneously it is a positive and often joyous alternative. Nor will I go to the barricades to get lesbians into IVF. The discrimination is wrong, but the outcome is not worth having. If we fight these battles for the privileges of heterosexuality, what energy remains for us to fight for those issues which put women and lesbians and lesbian feminism at the centre? How will it be possible for us to turn our attention for long enough to create change?

As Giti Thadani writes of India and the difficulty of what words to use to speak about lesbians. She writes "...one can be, but only if one remains nameless" (Thadani 1996: 10). The same problem is raised by the use of overly inclusive language such as queer, LGBTI (QRS...!), same sex, alternative sexualities, diverse sexuality, minority sexualities. The symbolic meaning of these terms is to keep turning our attention towards the phallus which is a part of all these terms. I like the word lesbian. It has oomph. Many languages do have equivalents for the word lesbian, and those languages that don't are going to be the places where turning away from the phallus is particularly difficult.

In academia, any word except lesbian is preferable – because the lesbian, the feminist, the lesbian feminist is unsafe ground for too many people in every department. We need a shift in the culture that recognises the hatred at the root of this language. This is the result of globalised thinking that picks up the global and forgets the local, or to put it slightly differently, picks up the heterosexually acceptable language and ignores the intimate.

Origins and Violence

It is crucial to remember ... that [many] "creation" myths are not about the origins of the world at all, but about the origins of patriarchy which has, nonetheless claimed itself as the world.

Jane Caputi 1987 *The Age of Sex Crime*, p. 9.

What is it that makes us feel real? Makes us feel like citizens? Jane Caputi's observation brings us back to basics. Who, in the mythology or the religion or the storytelling, gets the credit for creating meaning in the world? Most of the world's cultures have old old stories that tell of times when women created the world, and went on to create social meaning. The vast majority of these stories have been steamrolled and steamcleaned, but they can be found in "mythologies" which are great repositories of women's knowledge. The Middle East, for example, is filled with ancient stories in which "goddesses" or as they were renamed "demons" populated the stories and were then torn to shreds, decapitated and violated. In Greece, the daughters of goddesses are raped, abducted and made hostage.⁴ When the stories are retold they are reframed as origin stories. This is comparable to the discovery stories

⁴ Graham, Rawlings and Rigsby (1994) argue that women's social relationship with men suggests a form of societal Stockholm Syndrome, that is that the institution of heterosexuality and the individuals who patrol it – men and apologists of men's power – act as though women are *hostages* to men. The captive perceives the behaviour of the captors as ranging from extreme violence to kindness. The kindness creates a belief in safety in the midst of violence and abuse.

of Europeans – the first [white] man to cross the mountain, the river, the desert, continent. They are stories of remaking reality in the framework of the group that won the latest battle.

In our contemporary global world, this is taking new forms. The area of conquest now is the immaterial, it is knowledge that is privatised and sold at great profit. One of those stories is the constant access to female bodies. So heterosexuality is ramped up to an ever greater pitch. Little girls are dressed in bras and panties before they've learned to run. They might not all wear pink, but the expectations of satisfying masculine sexual drive is happening at the age when girls have the developmental advantage over boys.

This is serious. How can a woman ever learn to move freely if she doesn't experience it in childhood? How can she sense the possibilities of her own power if adolescence gives no space for the girl within? If it becomes instead a lesson in self denial? The global advertising industry, the sex industry, the trafficking in girls and women industry are about the institutionalisation of heterosexuality as dollars for tourism and a way of providing for that group of highly mobile, cashed up men who take for granted easy access to women's bodies.

The alternative, which could encompass female friendship, lesbian love, or solitary solutions is simply not thinkable. They are not advertised on billboards or in movies or on TV soaps because within the heteropatriarchal world, they are a nonsense. The lesbian cannot have meaning. It is so far off the planet as to be out of this world.

we are captive of Venus Martian in our sexual style our origins are Uranian our desires Plutonic our mood Saturnian to the point of lunacy truly we are interplanetary (Hawthorne 2005a: 103).

The violence carried out against lesbians is both symbolic and real. Lesbians are killed and tortured for whom they love. Men use rape both to punish and to convert. All she needs is a good ... and that will do it. The symbolic violence can be seen in any porn magazine or website where "lesbian" eroticism becomes a turn on for voyeuristic viewers. The world rightly protests the destruction of the 2000-year-old Bamiyan Buddhist statues in Afghanistan. Giti Thadani (2004) in her research of ancient lesbian sites in India records the violence against 5000-year-old sacred stone sculptures. Why have we not heard about how the breasts of these statues have been cut off? Why is there no international protest? Is it because the statues are symbolic of lesbian existence, not just now, but back into ancient history? It is, as I have said before, impossible to get up a campaign that calls for an end to violence against lesbians. I have tried with Amnesty International and failed.

Nationalism and Exile

On the one hand the lesbian is reduced to the Western other and declared not to be a citizen of the country within any socio-cultural-historical-cosmological context. But on the other hand the heterosexual business executive is very much the result of an economic order arising out of a 'Western' context, yet his Indianness is never called into question.

Giti Thadani 1996 *Sakhiyani: Lesbian desire in ancient and modern India*, p. 87.

In the 1920s, a young woman named Grace McDonald travelled to England. She lived there for the rest of her life and the only photos of her are of her with another woman called Peg. Grace was my great aunt. We never met, but she sent gifts at Christmas. It is only in the last few years, after discovering the photographs of her and thinking about exile in relation to lesbians – and numerous discussions with Lara Fergus who is writing her PhD on this subject – that I have come to see that it is more than likely that my Auntie Grace was a lesbian in exile. I have been an activist and writer in this field for thirty years and it took years and an accident of photographic preservation for me to *see* this.

It is an indication of the great losses we have of lesbian history. While heteropatriarchy is rewriting our histories, while it distorts and dismembers whatever we have, while it severs those crucial lines of inheritance, we are left floating without that matrix of connection that most people take for granted. For those who don't have the connections, there is usually some recognition – even if it comes late – that it has occurred. Here I am thinking of the Holocaust, of refugee displacement, of the Stolen Generations and dispossession of Indigenous peoples. These are all horrific events. Could we try to be horrified about what has happened to lesbians (Hawthorne 2005b)?

... no training session prepared me for this intense pain ... my pain ... the one I did not choose ... all this alienation, this empty vacuum ..., my body, my mind, my pain ... this is not happening ... I am a little speck in the universe ... which universe? ... the world is not anymore ... I am ... disintegrating ... bit by bit ... yell by yell ... electrode by electrode ... The pain ... all this pain here and there, down there in my vagina ... the agony ... where am I? Where is my I? (Rivera-Fuentes and Birke 2001, 655; italics and ellipses in the original).

“Where is my I?” asks Consuelo Rivera-Fuentes after her experience of torture. She is also asking where is my lesbian I? Where is the centrality of the experiences of lesbians recorded and recognised? Where is the recognition that the violation of lesbians goes on day after day and no one speaks of it (Hawthorne 2006a)? She too, is writing in exile from England, not her native Chile.

Many a rural lesbian has made the move to the city, because it is simply too hard to live the way she wants in her own country town. Ask me. I grew up in the country in rural NSW. Do I live there? Do they know who I am? Hardly. So, like my great aunt, most of my life has been spent elsewhere. I'm sure this applies to others in this room. Lesbians are a diasporic population. The connections zigzag down the generations, through maiden aunts.

Lesbian existence resists nationalism. And what could it mean for a lesbian to be patriotic (Hawthorne 2006b)? I'm sure that oxymoron exists, but as challengers to the symbolic and actual power of patriarchy and heterosexuality, “Like oil and water / lesbianlife and patriotism don't mix” (Hawthorne 2005a: 221).

The lesbian, as Monique Wittig so astutely pointed out in 1978, is “not a woman” because her “relation to a man” falls outside the heterosexual obligation that occurs

inside the institution of heterosexuality. What does lesbian motherhood look like in this context? Is it possible to have the generational connection while remaining outside the “personal and ... economic obligation” (Wittig 1992: 20) of heterosexuality?

Just as lesbians are accused of disloyalty to family because we have left the places we come from, lesbians are also accused of disloyalty to their own culture. It is more than likely, that if we could find the connections, if we could find temples and statues and artworks as we can in India, we could begin to discover the ancient treasures that draw lesbians into focus. Would anyone support such a research project?

But, you know, when colonists first enter a country, they dispossess the people, not only of their land, but also of their culture. The colonists deny this possibility. They say “The natives have no culture.” What could we know of the colonists through many thousands of years ago who, upon “discovery” of lesbians, have killed, raped, maimed and denied their existence? So many families have their own colonists inside them (Machida 1996). How do we fight against this? And when our knowledge is digitised, who will use the word lesbian and in what context, and with what overtones?

Global Recolonisation

Making the nation-state safe for multinational corporations is commensurate with making it safe for heterosexuality, for both can be recodified as natural, even supernatural. Thus tourism and imperialism become as integral to the natural order as heterosexuality, and are indispensable in state strategies of recolonization.

M. Jacqui Alexander 2005 *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on feminism, sexual politics, memory and the sacred*, p. 26.

Jacqui Alexander points to an interesting concept here, that of recolonisation. It is particularly apt in the context of the Caribbean, where Western tourists flock, and where you can be imprisoned for being a lesbian. I think the important element here is that colonisation is not a one-off event. Rather, it is a series of actions played out against those who challenge the stock knowledge of the dominant culture. It is like the movement of tectonic plates, simultaneously sliding across one another in several layers.

The land is taken and the colonised are killed, enslaved, violated and disconnected from their language and culture. Then the products of the land and the people are stolen: the land is mined, it is farmed wastefully, forests, rivers and seas are plundered, the land and seas bombed and used as dumps, the material goods and arts are commodified, made safe for tourists and people in other countries (they are watered down). More recently, the knowledge and the cell-lines of people are being stolen, but this too has happened in different ways over many years. All of these things continue to happen simultaneously.

In the context of lesbians, these days most lesbians have no land to plunder, indeed in too many instances that connection has been sacrificed. Lesbian bodies are violated in

various ways: murder, torture, suicide, rape and most recently surgical violence. They are all justified as necessary. Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ),⁵ was the very first organization to be attacked for dissenting in 1995 (Tiripano 2000). Now anyone in Zimbabwe with a dissenting voice is under attack. Many are fleeing into exile. In Sierra Leone, on September 29, 2004, FannyAnn Eddy⁶ was found dead after being repeatedly raped. She had been working in the offices of the Sierra Leone Lesbian and Gay Association (*Human Rights Watch*, 4 October 2004, Morgan and Wieringa 2005, 20). And what of the lesbians who have died, for want of good medical treatment? Gloria Anzaldúa, dead at 61, because she couldn't afford the American health system. Lisa Belleair, who died far too young, at age 45, from a preventable illness. And what of the mostly young women who die in double suicides and whose deaths do not prompt families (like the Montagues and Capulets) to consider their part in their deaths (Gage 2007: 40; also see Thadani 1996)

Surgical violence against lesbians can now be counted alongside the violence meted out to lesbians in the "mental health" system. Gender disorientation is a "medical tag". Interestingly, disorientation is a method of torture. Who, but lesbians (see Jeffreys 2005, Gage 2005, Janice Raymond 1980) even sees this as violence?

If we speak of these things, we are accused of harming the efforts of those trying to do something about the poverty, AIDS, and levels of violence in Africa, among Hispanic Americans and Indigenous Australians. Who will speak about it? Who will publicly defend the lesbians who step forward and make themselves visible? Who will want to give aid to help save the lesbians of Africa, of the Caribbean, in Taiwan, and across the Middle East?⁷ Who will want to campaign for the lesbians who are the inmates of jails and mental institutions, who are over medicated on anti-depressant and anti-psychotic drugs in our own countries? Who will defend lesbians against the charge of transsexual bashing, when the lesbian is trying to make visible the violence against lesbians?⁸ The front has shifted. Lesbians are the invisible people whom no one wants to fight for. And when lesbians *do* become visible, new laws are brought into force, increasing the punishments (we saw it happen in Tasmania, although now happily reversed but only after an approach to the UN!). Lesbians in India, are fighting this battle (Thadani 1996; Sharma 2006; Hawthorne 2007), just as they are in

⁵ GALZ was established in 1990, and came to prominence in 1995 when it attempted to enter the Zimbabwe International Book Fair, which had as its theme, Human Rights and Justice. Permission was refused. For more information, see <http://www.galz.co.zw/cp_bookfair.html>

⁶ See her testimony, Eddy (2004) at the UN Commission on Human Rights just a few months before her death.

⁷ These are all countries where lesbians are punished harshly, ranging from jail to execution. See Hawthorne (2006a).

⁸ Frameline's San Francisco LGBT International Film Festival pulled a short science fiction film *The Gendercator* by lesbian filmmaker Catherine Crouch from its film festival program in June 2007 because of its purported "transphobic" content. In a petition to the organisers, Lenn Keller, Max Dashu, Joey Brite and Martha Shelley, write:

A lesbian voice is being silenced here. In the current climate of fear, we find it necessary to state that critiquing or asking questions about issues affecting our communities should not be confused with judgment or condemnation or, in this case, "transphobia."

Many have complained about the lack of lesbian content in the festival, and Frameline has chosen to silence one of the few voices. We think the LGBT community has been done a disservice. We, the undersigned stand for human dignity, rights, and freedom of expression for all.

many other places. Lesbians are either invisible and silent, or visible and illegal. The first represents an incapacity to imagine such a thing. The last a desire to punish for flouting patriarchal reality.

These are global realities. They are global issues and they are issues we should be taking back to our own communities. They are in fact the same issues that every group battling globalisation confronts. There is a great deal of fear around the word “lesbian” and it’s the reason I decided to speak about it today. As has been shown in Zimbabwe, if lesbians remain outside the scope of social justice reform, then everyone’s civil and political rights remain in jeopardy. If we cannot create campaigns for the safety of lesbians – and many of us have borne the brunt of attacks from both our enemies and those we thought were our allies – then what are we fighting for when we take up any social justice issue? Are we wanting just partial freedom? Freedom for some, and not others? If this is so, what are we changing? Are we serious?

I want to finish on a note that is both joyful and sad with a few lines from a poem by Lisa Belleair:

Three weeks have passed
and tomorrow
Three weeks and one
day will have passed
since we – you and I
held hands
sweet isn’t it
falling down across
backwards sideways
totally totally totally
in love (Belleair 1996: 23).

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