

# DAWIEN

Vol. 1, 2001

Involvement  
in Women's  
Power Projects

Feminist Project Seeks to Understand Men  
Men's Involvement in Gender Equality Movements in Japan  
Home is Where the Hurt Is  
Transforming Filipino Men Through Innovative Projects  
Why Women's Spaces are Critical to Feminist Autonomy

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## Men in Women's Spaces

**T**he question of exclusive women's spaces appears to have run dry in conversations within the women's movement. Particularly in the Asia Pacific, but also in Africa, women who identify with the women's movement, both feminists and gender advocates, have insisted that without bringing men into our dialogues and engage them in our discourses, we will not be able to advance the agenda of women's empowerment. This has been a particularly strong assertion with the rise of gender analyses and concepts of gender mainstreaming within both academic and development worlds.

Women's organisations, like Isis International-Manila, are often asked why we do not employ men as part of our regular staff, and why we describe our information and communications work as being in support of the women's movement. It appears that maintaining a women-centric focus is not any longer pursued by some sectors of the women's movement. While our agenda stand on the foundation of the feminist and human rights frameworks, we are very conscious of the fact that there are many women now engaged in different social movement who are also fighting for gender equality and fundamental social transformation. The women's movement itself, particularly that located in the South has begun to work on issues of globalisation, the impact of structural adjustment policies in the South, and the specific realities of nationalist and fundamentalist agendas in the South. We now see our role as also including the reaching out to other social actors, both women and men, and building bridges as it were, between the women's movement and other social movements.

We believe that the question of autonomous women's spaces is still very much a debate that we should have. While gender mainstreaming pushes for the inclusion of men as an effective strategy in pursuing the goal of empowerment, and there are indeed many more men now working on programmes and work, we cannot immediately conclude that maintaining physical and ideological spaces where only women engage is an outdated strategy. We do think that it is crucial that men become engaged in women's issues, and many more men need to do this, but, as Patricia McFadden, one of our contributors to this issue argues, not to reassert old heterosexist and nationalistic claims of women and men being located and engaged in the same spaces.

In this issue of *Women in Action*, there are several contributors who have shared the ways in which they have sought to engage men in their programmes on reproductive rights and domestic violence with varying degrees of success. There is also an interview with an exceptional man, Paul Sinnapan, who has himself been radically transformed by gender analyses and now actively seeks to educate other men in the cooperative movement in Malaysia to confront sexism within their movement.

Clearly, there is a desire amongst feminists and gender advocates to get men involved in our struggles, and there are many ways in which this can happen. And there are clearly exceptional men out there, feminist in their thinking and demeanour, who have taken on the challenge that their women comrades have posed to them. These men have overcome the pressures of the roles placed upon them as a result of societal

construction of men and women, while giving up some of the traditional privileges conferred to them through centuries of entrenched patriarchal dominance. However, we would argue that this is still the exception rather than the rule. In our conversations with women from the region, we hear about how women have to fight a very personal struggle for democracy and justice within their homes and within the most intimate relationships. There are still too many men who pay lip service to women's empowerment and notions of gender justice, who have yet to make any fundamental shifts in their own behaviour within their families and within their workplace. Women working in development agencies that promote gender frameworks within the work of their partners of the ground can attest to the ways in which gender hierarchies are reproduced and reaffirmed in internal structures of these very agencies. This is why the work needs to happen at all levels.

With this rich harvest of passionate women's and men's writings, we hope that we will stir up sufficient debate on this issue, and start the conversation from another entry point. The task of gender mainstreaming is not over, surely, but clearly there are visible gains in this area, and worthy of a reflection on how far we have gotten, where we are heading, and what we might be gaining and/or losing as a result of this project. We invite all of you to share your opinions by writing to us. We would love to publish more of your views on this issue in the editorial and letters to the editors pages of the next *Women in Action*!

# contents



15



21



38

12

## **On Men and Masculinity**

Locating the men and emphasising their importance within the gender and development framework

15

## **Feminist Project Seeks to Understand Men**

By Rashidah Abdullah

An international research is underway to clarify the extent to which "men's involvement" remains situated in the goal for gender equality and women's empowerment.

21

## **Men's Involvement in Gender Equality Movements in Japan**

By Hiroko Hashimoto

Outlining Japan's "gender" landscape in which the participation of Japanese men in social movements is needed

25

## **Home is Where the Hurt is**

By Ava Vivian Gonzales

A zero tolerance for domestic violence in Thailand is changing the way the country sees its women—and men.

29

## **Transforming Filipino Men Through Innovative Projects**

29 **Breaking Down the Old Macho Image: Recreating Men** By Bruce N. Ragas  
Men may be perpetrators of violence against women but they can also be advocates against it.

32 **Male Fertility Management** By Imelda Bacudo

Men reaching out to grassroots men to raise consciousness about sexual health and fertility management

35 **Men Can Breastfeed, Too** By Ines Avellana

Breastfeeding children is as much the responsibility of the man as the woman in the family

44

## **Express Yourself: "Exclusive Discos in Manila"** By Roselle Pineda

Doing away with men: lesbian discos as venues of resistance to hetero-patriarchal society and culture.

49

## **Why Women's Spaces are Critical to Feminist Autonomy**

By Patricia McFadden

The Women's Movement is a women-only movement and men's invasion is utterly unacceptable.



55

### For Raquel, Her Soul Sisters and Friends

By Rigoberto Tiglao

Remembering Raquel Tiglao, a leading women's rights activist in the Philippines and in Asia.

## Departments

- 1 Editorial
- 4 Letter to the Editor
- 5 Clips
- 60 Isis Resource
  - 60 ■ Books
  - 70 ■ Book Review
- 38 *One on One: Men Reconstructing Man* By tan beng hui  
Paul Sinnapan, a leading figure in the credit cooperative movement in Malaysia, is engaging in another movement towards the reconstruction of a "new man."
- 75 *Food Security Section: Women and Trade in Agriculture*  
Women are at the core of agricultural production in South and Southeast Asia.
- 79 *Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Section: Indonesian Women Find a Virtual Space of Their Own* By Nani Buntarian  
Sustaining activism through the E-mail
- 81 *Media Section: The Image of Women in Indian Television* By R. Chitrakala  
The television is no idiot box without a reason. Stereotypical images of women and traditional concepts about gender are affirmed and propagated especially in Indian television.
- 85 *Health Section: Putting it Up Front: The Politics of Breast Cancer* By Melody Kemp  
Breast cancer is more than a medical and drug issue. This research expands the issue of breast cancer towards prevention and environmental and chemical regulation.

Cover art by Aster Delgado. *To each his and her own space.* Men's involvement in the work for women's empowerment could be optimised in a shared space where both women and men are willing to negotiate, without losing sight of the goals for gender equality, social justice and genuine development.

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## 'Dry-Sex' Practice Harms Zambian Women

By Dorcas Chileshe

**H**ealth experts and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) in Zambia have expressed concern over the prevalence of dry-sex practice among women. This involves inserting herbs in the vagina to absorb the natural lubricants, making it dry and tight during intercourse. Some women add herbs to their porridge or tea to achieve the same effect. It is estimated that 60 percent of married women in Zambia practice dry sex but the figure could be higher, as many women keep it a secret.

"Women insert all sort of herbs, which are not even properly cleaned, and these cause serious infections in the vagina and uterus which in the majority of cases result in cancer."

Medical experts say the practice increases the risk of transmitting HIV/AIDS, because of the bruises or small cuts that occur in the vagina as a result of friction during intercourse without natural lubricants.

Jenny Nyirenda, a reproductive-health expert at the Central Board of Health in Lusaka, the Zambian capital, adds that the practice is also increasing the number of cervical cancer cases in the country. "Women insert all sort of herbs, which are not even properly cleaned, and these cause serious infections in the vagina and uterus which in the majority of cases result in cancer."

Community Youth Concern (CYC), an NGO that promotes youth and family welfare within communities, has set up a vigorous campaign to discourage dry-sex practice. Its executive director, Monica Shinkanga, comments, "We have a lot of educated women trekking to traditional doctors in shanty compounds to buy such herbs

alongside uneducated women, so where are we going to find role models?" She says some women are refusing to listen to the gender advocates who are touring the country, campaigning against dry sex, because they are suspected of having a double discourse. "How can you convince women to stop practising dry sex when they see you yourself buying the herbs?"

### Targeting the Tradition Makers

The CYC has now decided to target traditional counsellors, popularly known as *alangizi*, primarily because they give counselling during initiation and weddings ceremonies. "We have decided to target these people because they are the agents of behavioural change in the communities," says Shinkanga.

She says people getting married treat the counsellor's advice as sacred and feel compelled to do whatever they are instructed, because they believe that the *alangizi* inherit their wisdom from their ancestors. Tradition rules

that the woman should always give her husband sexual pleasure.

CYC held its first sensitisation workshop a few months ago. The traditional counsellors who attended have promised to stop teaching people who are getting married to practice dry sex and instead to inform them of its dangers. Despite these efforts, there has been considerable public resentment towards the campaign against dry sex.

... "there is nothing pleasant about dry sex because both the man and woman feel pain and they experience cuts, through which HIV infection can easily occur."

Vivian Mulenga, a 30-year-old housewife in Lusaka, says many Zambian men have been taught that sex is best when the woman's vagina is dry and tight like a virgin's. She believes that it is men who determine the sexual lives of most women. Some women who have attempted to abandon dry sex have been beaten and threatened with divorce. "In our culture, it is a cause for shame to be divorced because you cannot satisfy your husband sexually."

Erlinda Banda, a university student, says women should not embrace harmful traditional practices in the name of upholding the culture. "Of course it is important to preserve our culture, but should women risk getting cervical cancer just because tradition requires them to use herbs to please men sexually?"

"Some men demand dry sex simply because they have heard others talking about it highly in bars and sports clubs," says Rodwell Chalima,

a Lusaka resident. But, he adds, "there is nothing pleasant about dry sex because both the man and woman feel pain and they experience cuts, through which HIV infection can easily occur."

A lot of people who practice dry sex are failing to use condoms successfully because of the friction, which can lead to breaking of the condom. Organisations like CYC will only make a breakthrough in their campaign if they start educating men about the dangers of the practice.

Other people have suggested that CYC should start targeting young men, instead of those who have already been brainwashed in the belief that dry sex is best. "It is difficult to change people who have deeply rooted cultural beliefs, and the only hope lies in those who are not yet contaminated," says one young man.

CYC believes that dry sex may soon be a thing of the past, if the government, NGOs and churches take a positive approach towards eradicating the practice.

*Dorcas Ilunga Chileshe is a Zambian journalist. She is currently feature writer and editor of the Population Newsletter of Zambia, a newspaper which highlights issues such as gender, reproductive health, environment and HIV/AIDS.*

Source: *LOLA Press International Feminist Magazine*, November 2000-April 2001, No. 14.

## On Men and Masculinity

*Should men be involved in gender and development work? Is this an effective strategy in pursuing the goal of women's empowerment? The debate continues. Following are highlights of an Interview with Dr. Frances Cleaver, Senior Lecturer at the Development and Projects Planning Centre, University of Bradford (United Kingdom) on questions of men and masculinity in Gender and Development. The interview was conducted by Sonja Klinsky of the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) on 9 February 2001 and was sent via E-mail as part of AWID's Resource Net Issues 12.*

**Q: Why do you think a discussion of men and masculinity has been left out of discussions on Gender and Development?**

**A:** Many people are quite wary of discussing men in Gender and Development (GAD) because it has been such a long struggle to get gender issues taken seriously in development. In order to get organisations to really consider women's disadvantages and women's empowerment, those interested in GAD have had to use very strong messages about gender-derived disadvantages for women. There is a concern that if people stop emphasising women in gender and development, that the understanding that is now being achieved will be eroded. Introducing men and masculinity into GAD gives people who don't want to seriously address gender an easy excuse to revert back to focusing solely on men. This tension has meant that people have been very wary of tackling this issue.

However, it is an essential area for work within development as a whole. While there are now many documents and research studies that have pushed us to consider the complexities of women's situations globally, there have been fewer acknowledgements of men's diversities. Very often men are stereotyped in documents or projects in ways that we wouldn't accept as women. If we are serious about addressing gendered relationships and gender issues, then we need to develop a rounder picture that encompasses all gender roles.

An additional, but related difficulty is that practitioners faced with issues of men and masculinity are forced to seriously reflect and reevaluate their own identities and backgrounds in order to be able to incorporate these concerns. This requires a great deal of personal energy and it has been very difficult for many people actually doing the work to change their own perceptions. This is a major challenge for practitioners and it does slow down the incorporation of men and masculinity into GAD.

**Q.: What are some of the tensions that emerge among different groups when discussing men and masculinity within a GAD framework?**

**A:** This is a tricky area. The seminar series entitled Men, Masculinities and Gender Relations in Development that I coordinated brought together academics and practitioners who approached the topic from very different backgrounds, which sparked some very heated discussions. While there was the usual academic-practitioner debate in which academics wanted to explore the actual concepts of "gender" and "masculinity" and practitioners wanted to focus on "doing," this area also brought to light other tensions.

Discussions of men and masculinity can be approached from many different ideological underpinnings, and these different backgrounds can lead to very divergent understandings of power and of oppression. For example, while many of the participants of

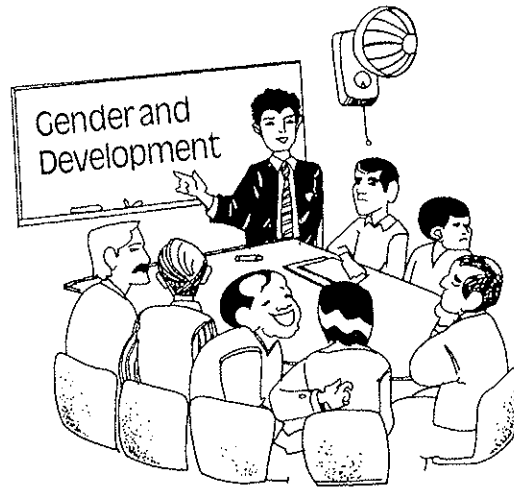


the seminars came from a feminist background, many other participants were coming to the issue with backgrounds in sexual diversity studies, or from postmodern frameworks and they brought different conceptions of power to the table. As there has been a long-standing debate in both the GAD and feminist communities around the question "can men be feminists and/or talk about women's roles in development?," there were also tensions around the question; "can women talk about men and masculinity?" These are the types of tensions that emerge from discussions of this nature and subject matter and negotiating around them can be quite tricky but it is an important and exciting issue.

**Q: Where is much of the work on men and masculinity in GAD being done on a practical level?**

**A:** There are two main sectors that have been experimenting with men and masculinity. The first is within sexual-health projects and the second has been in projects working with children and education. Many of the sexual-health projects have ended up working on issues such as HIV/AIDS or domestic violence. These are very intimate areas of people's lives that are strongly dependent on how each participant in a given relationship perceives his/her role in that relationship. Working solely with women then, in these areas is not enough as there needs to be scope for change for all participants in a given relationship. Thus, exploring how men think about and approach relationships is essential for work in sexual health and domestic violence and much of the practical experience in terms of men and masculinity has come from this sector.

Projects that focus on children and education are also major sources of much of the experience in men and masculinity. This work has often revolved around providing various role models that children can follow and much of it has included discussion of what it means to be "a boy" in a given context. For example, the Children's Fund recently did an international film project in four Asian countries focusing on boys and their perceptions of masculin-



Marilyn Barcelonafis International-Mentia

lity. Similarly, recent projects in Namibia and South Africa have been working to address high levels of violence in schools and high levels of pregnancies in young women in school. Projects working in these areas did not mean to start working from a discussion of masculinity and femininity; however, it soon became apparent that tackling gendered perspectives was essential for dealing with these problems.

Most of this experience has not come out of explicit "men in...." projects, but has come out of different sorts of projects. The diversity of approaches simply accentuates the cross-cutting and complex nature of the topic and presents both an enormous opportunity and a huge challenge as many different groups of people come together to discuss and to work on masculinity within GAD.

**Q: What are some of the strategies you can see for advancing a consideration of men and masculinity within GAD?**

**A:** There needs to be a practical effort to do more research. We need to explore what men are thinking about relationships or situations as compared to what women are thinking. As part of this we also need to continue work on monitoring gender roles and activities as they change over time. This is not a big change from traditional GAD work but it does require a greater sensitivity to the portrayal of and assumptions made about men while doing this research.

Training is another large area for change and growth. There needs to be a great increase in the number of male gender trainers. This is

an area dominated by women and that needs to be changed. More male gender trainers would help to encourage men to reflect on their own perceptions and behaviours and to change some of their own behaviours.

Some NGOs are working in schools on participatory theatre projects and with similar tactics to engage children in active consideration of their own gender perceptions. Similarly, there is some work being done with church groups and other small organisations. These small organisations often seem to be more comfortable dealing with more intimate aspects of people's lives and their strategies have promise for further work. Education at all levels is a major strategy.

There is also a policy aspect to future areas of work and strategy. There may be a role for organisations to encourage policy changes that would encourage the development of new role models for men and boys. Role models could be useful in reversing some of the stereotypical roles that have been assigned men and boys. Within this category, the use of the mass media to simply get ideas and images of alternative roles out there for the general public is a good step. Related to this is the development of a legal and political framework that is supportive of gender equity in all areas of life, including care and reproductive work. There need to be legal provisions that allow men to be "different kinds of men," although it is also recognised that the ability to do this in certain regions is questionable.

Overall, there are opportunities to advance this topic through research and data collection, training and advocacy and policy frameworks. These are all areas in which people can make huge contributions to the development of a GAD framework that includes a consideration of men and masculinity.

**Q: What are a few of the major areas that need more research?**

**A:** There are many possible areas that would greatly benefit from increased research. Two

of the main ones revolve around labour and health. While there has been a great deal of discussion of women's double and triple workloads around the world, there has been very little consideration of men's work. When discussing work and work intensity, men have often been left out of the picture. Some people have challenged the view that "men are lazy" and are instead proposing that new ways of measuring work need to be developed, that we need to start rethinking the way that research is done to allow for a better conceptualisation of "work."

A second large area for additional research is the area of men's health. Again, while there has been discussion of the implications of women's gendered identity on their health and access to health care, there has been little consideration of the gendered aspects of men's health. It must be noted that men take some health risks because of their gender identity. For example, men are usually the ones who handle dangerous chemicals, such as pesticides. They do this because it is part of their gender role and yet it increases their health vulnerabilities. There is however, little research done on these sorts of health issues from a gender perspective. Since this is such a new field, are there any good resources that you can recommend to people who are interested in exploring this further?

A webpage is one of the outcomes from the series of Men and Masculinity seminars that was conducted from September 1998 to June 2000. It contains all of the various papers presented throughout the seminar serves as well as contacts for people doing this kind of work, discussions of future research areas, and much more. The address of this site is <<http://www.brad.ac.uk/acad/dppc/gender/mandmweb/contents.html>>.

Note: For subscription to the Association for Women's Rights in Development's FREE listserv with jobs, announcements and analysis, send an E-mail to <[awid.resource@reply.net](mailto:awid.resource@reply.net)> with "subscribe" in the subject line.

## Feminist Project Seeks to Understand Men

By Rashidah Abdullah

**M**en are the focus of a new project of the International Reproductive Rights Research Action Group (IRRRAG).<sup>1</sup>

This may seem surprising as IRRRAG is a coalition of feminist researchers, and women, not men, are usually involved in feminist research. After all, it is commonly argued, there is so much that is not yet known about women's needs, perspectives and visions, that women themselves as a neglected and marginalised group must be asked and listened to first.

This was the position of IRRRAG when in 1992, it decided on its first research project on women's perception of their reproductive rights or their perceived entitlements in making decisions in the areas of childbearing, contraception, abortion and sexuality.

This necessitated asking women themselves what they thought, felt and experienced, particularly poor women who had fewer opportunities to express their views and to have these considered in the formulation of health and population policies. IRRRAG research teams in Brazil, Egypt, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, the Philippines and the U.S. focused on understanding women, although in several countries some men were also interviewed.

The research findings on women's reproductive rights however, also raised questions about women's relations with men. What did women actually want of men in the area of decisions on sexuality and reproduction?

Findings indicated that some women did not want men to take more responsibility for using contraception as they did not trust their



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partners to use it as effectively as women would. These women wanted to remain in control of their own fertility. The objective of family-planning agencies to "increase men's involvement" in reproductive-health decision-making would not be a priority for such women. Women justified this entitlement to make decisions on contraception or abortion on their own by explaining that they were the ones to bear, give birth and take care of the children.

In 1999, IRRRAG embarked on its second research project on "Men's Responsibility in Sexual and Reproductive-health Decision-Making," with five of the original groups involved (Brazil, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria and the Philippines).

The main concern was that increased attention to and interpretations of "men's involvement" in the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (1994) and the Beijing Conference on Women (1995) could inadvertently result retrogressively in lessening the control women had over their own fertility and reproductive decisions. There was a need to investigate the assumptions that women wanted men to play a bigger role in reproductive-health decision-making, that men also desired this, and that such a change would result in more equitable gender relations. It had been observed that often, new social policies and programme approaches were designed on the basis of assumptions that had not been tested. In addition, efforts to change men's behaviour had not been successful. For example, despite family planning programmes having a long-term objective since the mid-1970s of "increasing men's participation" in contraception by more men using condoms, condom rates remain low throughout the world.

There was thus a need to understand men better, why they behave as they do, and what they believe about their own entitlements and those of women in the area of sexuality and reproduction.

A number of stereotypes about men's attitudes and behaviour existed, which were thought to not necessarily reflect in reality the diversity of men's experience. For example, some men treasured fatherhood beginning with childbirth, but the gender stereotype is of men who do not love and care for their children as much as women. Perhaps this inadequate knowledge was related to the lack of in-depth research on men and was one of the reasons why programmes directed to men were not successful. Gender relations globally had also changed little over the last 30 years, despite the feminist movement.

An additional rationale for the research was that the concept of "men's involvement" needed to be clarified. The Cairo and Beijing conference documents did not clearly explain that the concept in these conferences was intended to be linked as a strategy to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. Men's beliefs, attitudes and behaviour about themselves and about women needed to change as did that of women, in order to have an outcome of an equal valuing of gender differences. The roots of the concept went back to population and family planning in the 1970s, when the reason for increasing men's participation was a demographic objective of improving contraceptive usage rates and not a gender equality goal. This was one of the reasons for the confusion. Historically, it had a different meaning but although it was a new concept, the words to describe it remained the same.

Thus, although IRRRAG decided to focus on understanding men, the intention was that the new insights and knowledge gained would be for the benefit of women, not to better meet the needs of men. This is a very important distinction, as the confusion about the term "men's involvement" after the Cairo Conference has sometimes led reproductive-health programmes to interpret the objective as being to better meet men's health needs. New services for men such as prostate and testicular screening and impotence treatment have been set up in some countries in order to "involve" men in reproductive-health services and meet their needs. Men's reproductive-health needs however are a separate concern from "men's involvement" and the two issues should not be interrelated.



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The gender approach is similarly misunderstood. Instead of beginning with the concept of gender inequality—the fact that men and women's relationships globally are characterised by unequal power, resulting in serious negative consequences for women's well-being—there is an assumption that a gender focus means that both women and men's different gender needs have to be identified and met. Addressed as a sociological construct, gender relations and gender sensitisation programmes thus become depoliticised, leaving out the element of power. Feminists who use gender relations in their theoretical frameworks need to be able to clearly explain gender relations, gender inequality and men's gender roles in decision-making as

Men need to challenge cultural expectations on the way, they should relate to women particularly on sexual and reproductive health concerns.

linked to women's empowerment, the goal of feminism.

With this background of conceptual confusion plus lack of clarity on what women want of men and what men actually think and feel about their role and women's entitlements, the following IRRRAG research objectives were formulated:

- To clarify the meaning of "reproductive rights" for women and for men in diverse cultural, national and social contexts, and to unravel the complex concept of "male involvement" and



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Targetting men in reproductive health programmes does not mean that men merely sit around to get their own reproductive health needs met.

its link to women's empowerment and gender equality.

- ▶ To translate those meanings and concepts into a locally relevant analysis able to inform larger quantitative demographic and population studies/surveys.
- ▶ To inform international policy, programmes and projects on male involvement in reproductive and sexual health, so that interventions geared towards male involvement and responsibility promote women's equality and freedom from inequitable burdens, and do not diminish their resources or control.

The central theme is to investigate the relations between women and men in negotiating reproductive and sexual decisions, so as to elicit answers to two interrelated sets of questions.

From the standpoint of women:

- ▶ In what ways do male behaviour and belief systems impact on women's choices?
- ▶ In particular, to what extent do male violence and abuse contribute to women's secrecy and fear in reproductive choices?
- ▶ When is increased participation of men in decision-making sought or indeed desirable from women's perspective? and
- ▶ Do women want more communication with men on these issues; why or why not?

From the standpoint of men:

- ▶ In what ways do women's beliefs and actions impact on male behaviour?
- ▶ Do men desire to share responsibility in negotiating contraception, child bearing, childcare, abortion and protection against sexually transmitted diseases?
- ▶ In which matters do they respect women's entitlement, or assume women's primary responsibility? and
- ▶ In which areas do they claim primary decision-making authority for themselves, or feel their position or identity threatened by women's independent actions?

### Research Methodology

As in IRRRAC's first research, this project is a qualitative action research using primarily in-depth interviews and focus group discussion. It is a predominantly ethnographic research, seeking to understand culture from people's own perspectives. An average of 180 men and women in each of the five countries have been included in the study. Of these, about one-third have involved individual interviews with men, the rest being both men and women in group interviews (or focus group discussions). Most have been low-income people, and ethnicity, age and rural-urban locations have been taken into consideration.

## MEN'S INVOLVEMENT

An innovative methodology used is the gender-interactive dialogue. Women first were interviewed to explore their perceptions of the roots of men's sense of entitlements, and find out what kind of involvement in their sexual and reproductive-health responsibilities they want from the men in their lives. Then men were interviewed, individually and in groups, to understand their own perceptions on the same concerns and also in response to the perceptions women articulated. The research team is comprised of both women and men.

Finally, as a feminist action research, the intent is to take back an analysis of the research findings to the communities interviewed and have a dialogue with individual groups of men and women and possibly mixed groups aimed to assist in the process of change in gender relations. Other advocacy actions will be planned locally and nationally to discuss, disseminate and utilise the findings to improve programmes and services for women.

Some of the specific research questions that emerged in the research planning meeting in 1999 and are being explored in the research are for example:

What are men's and women's differing expectations of parenthood? What do men invest in their children? What are the costs of fertility for men? What do men perceive as their own and women's sexual needs and pleasure? How do men and women perceive and construct masculinity and femininity? What are men's notions of self-control and control over others? What impels men to violence and what is their understanding of women's experience of violence?

What motivates men and what are the roots of self-esteem? How do men perceive and

articulate their sense of entitlement, i.e. their personal rights, privileges and responsibilities? How much of their feeling of power arises out of their construction of masculinity and femininity within this larger framework of entitlement and personhood? How do they view women's entitlements to autonomy, aspirations, rights, sexual pleasure and personhood? To what extent does men's sense of entitlement rest on a belief in a natural order, and how much is seen as, what is in fact, an unequal exercise of rights between men and women?

What are the conditions under which men feel compelled to conform, i.e., accommodate to the dominant structures of unequal power, and to the cultural norms that privilege them? And, what are those elements in these dominant structures that men feel the need to challenge or resist? And, when men question the traditional norms, how do they do this—in silence, or within the household, or in small groups, or in the public sphere?

A critical challenge for this research is to be able to elicit from men what they actually think and do—rather than a response based on what they think they should believe or do (the normative). In the first IRRRAG research on reproductive rights, it was possible to make this distinction in women's voices. For example, in relation to abortion, across countries and cultures women explained that they knew their respective religious stand on abortion and what was the predominant view. However, they were able to distinguish between community norms and their own views and values which they used in decision-making, which was explained as "a practical morality based on women's bodily suffering and social responsibility for women which usually takes precedence over religious belief and the teachings of the Catholic church or Islamic clerics when it comes to women's re-

productive decision making." (Petchesky and Judd, 1998).

We very much hope that the researchers will be able to encourage men participating in this research to speak openly and honestly about themselves and men in general, and not in stereotypical and normative terms so that an enlarged reality about men's identity and behaviour will be understood and can be discussed.

Research teams in the five countries have now completed their fieldwork and are in the process of analysis and report writing. This is planned to be followed by a researcher's meeting and publications output this year and some local, national, regional and international policy and programme advocacy.

Unfortunately, despite the importance of the research globally, the UNFPA financial crisis in 1999 meant a 40 percent cut in the project budget agreed on in principle. Funds are still being raised in order to complete the project. ☺

*Rashidah Abdullah is founder and Co-Director of Asia-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), a regional women's organisation based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia which focuses on women's health and rights. She's also a member of Sisters in Islam, a Malaysian women's NGO, and founding member of Women's Aid Organisation, Malaysia. Before coming to Malaysia, Rashidah was part of the women's movement in western Australia in the early 1970s.*

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**Footnote:**

<sup>1</sup> The IRRRAG research on men includes the following groups and coordinators: Brazil—Coletivo Feminista Sexualidade e Saude (Ana Paula Potella); Malaysia—IRRRAG Malaysia—a group of researchers/activists (Dr.Siti Norazah Zulkifli and Dr Wong Yut Lin); Mexico—Cinquenta y Uno Por ciento (Dr Adriana Ortiz-Ortega); Nigeria—IRRRAG Nigeria (Grace Osakue); Philippines: WomanHealth Philippines (Mercy Fabros).

The Project Advisor is Dr Rosalind Petchesky of Hunter's College, New York and the former International Coordinator of the first IRRRAG project. The Research Consultant is Dr Radhika Ramasubban, Director of the Centre for Social and Technological Change, Mumbai, India.

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# Men's Involvement in Gender Equality Movements in Japan

By Hiroko Hashimoto

**L**owest among the developed countries, Japan was ranked 41st by the United Nations Development Programme in terms of the Gender Empowerment Measure in the year 2000. There are three main factors behind such an unfavourable evaluation.

One, Japanese women have little participation in political activities. The ratio of females in Parliament is only 7.5 percent (104<sup>th</sup> in the world, according to a survey conducted by the Inter Parliamentary Union).

Two, female managers are few. The ratio of female managers in Japan is less than 10 percent, the lowest among the developed countries and lower than in many developing countries including the Philippines.

And three, women earn much less than men. On the average, their income is only around 52 percent of the income of Japanese men.

In 1999, the Japanese government promulgated a Basic Law for Gender Equal Society. Declaring it a policy to promote equal participation of women and men in family matters as well as in society, the law directs the government at all levels to take positive actions for the promotion of gender equality.

Some local governments have already enacted their own legislation. In fact, even before the Prime Minister announced his plan to formulate the Basic Law for Gender Equal Society at the Parliament, Saitama prefecture had

already organised a research group to draw up such an ordinance. The result is a more detailed ordinance that includes law enforcement and provides for the establishment of a grievance committee to assist victims of violence and other violations of women's human rights. In Tokyo, on the other hand, the local government can request private companies to report on the status of their implementation of gender equality.

Furthermore, an alliance of women parliamentarians from various parties plans to submit a draft law to the current Parliament for the prevention of domestic violence.

Gender equality in Japan is still far behind the situation in other Asian countries. One aspect is that most Japanese men have not been involved in this issue, and this is what the present paper focuses on.

## **Men's Involvement in Gender Equality as Public Work**

In January 2001, the national machinery for the advancement of women was upgraded to the status of Bureau, under the Cabinet Office, from being an Office under the Prime Minister. Officers of the Gender Equality Bureau consist of 22 women and 17 men. Among the managers, four are women and five are men. Although the top manager (the Director General) is a woman and 56 percent of all staff members are women, most of the managers are men. Even this ratio is special, since the percentage of female government officials at managerial level in Japan in 2000 is only 1.1 percent.

I conducted a study on the status of gender focal points and gender mainstreaming in all 47 prefectures and the 12 specially designated cities in Japan in 1997.

According to the results of the study, there were 55 female officers and 45 male officers at the gender focal points/women's office of the 47 prefectures. At managerial level, more women were found (58 versus 42 male managers). Since the percentage of women among all local government managers is only 3.4 percent as of 2000, this figure shows that mostly female officers are working to promote gender equality. On the other hand, quite a number of male officers are also employed in this job, although many women NGOs frequently complain that these men hardly show their passion for promoting gender equality.

Public servants in Japan usually transfer from one job to another every two or three years. For both female and male civil servants, gender focal points/women's offices are only one of these assignments. They acquire their expertise on gender issues through their work, regardless of their sex.

Many elective officials—mayors, governors and city councillors—have supported gender equality, partly to demonstrate their concern for female voters.

### **Attitudes Towards Feminism and/or Gender Equality**

There has been a gradual decrease in the stereotyped idea that "men work outside and women stay at home." According to a national opinion poll conducted in 1997 on attitudes towards gender equality, 65 percent of the male respondents and 52 percent of the females agreed with this idea. The attitude is more prevalent in rural rather than urban areas.

A similar opinion poll conducted in 2000 focused on male attitudes towards gender equality. More women (83 percent) and men (77 percent) agreed that men should take a leave from their jobs to take care of family members who are sick. But child-care leaves for men were supported by only 70 percent of the women and 67 percent of the men. All generations of both men and women agreed to men's taking leave in case of illness in the family. The older people, however, were less receptive to child-care leave for men than the younger women. Regarding domestic chores, 83 percent of female and 71 percent of male respondents believed that men should share in the housework. The older they were, the less women supported that idea, while among the men no such age pattern is distinct.

It may be concluded that most Japanese, whether women or men, accept stereotyped sex roles. However, younger women are the least likely to agree.

### **Sharing Domestic Chores**

Article 6 of the Basic Law for Gender Equal Society states that men and women should equally share domestic chores including child rearing and caring for sick family members.

However, husbands spend an average time of 20 minutes per day on housework, whether their wives are employed outside the home or not. Husbands in their 40s work the least, while husbands in their 20s perform chores a bit longer. It may be concluded that Japanese men are not undertaking domestic chores like their counterparts in other countries.

Therefore, many Japanese women have to quit their jobs when they marry or give birth to their first child. Japan is one of the very few countries where the labour activity rate of



Japanese men spend an average of 20 minutes a day on housework and childcare. Gender advocates believe they could and should do more than that.

women drops sharply in their late 30s to early 40s. Another developed country where this phenomenon has been observed is the Republic of Korea.

### **Persistence of Patriarchy in the Rural Areas**

Niigata prefecture (whose main product is expensive rice) is richer than other prefectures whose economies are also mostly agricultural. Yet 35 percent of women in Niigata's farming families have no bank account in their own names, nor do they possess their own properties.

The Japanese government has promoted the "family management agreement" scheme, to increase the economic independence of rural women. Once families make the agreement, its women members could obtain a minimum salary for their farming work. However, only 480 out of a total 123,160 farming families in Niigata prefecture have entered into such an agreement.

The truth is, many conservative politicians of the ruling party of Japan do not appreciate the "family management agreement" scheme. They strongly opposed its inclusion in the Basic Plan for Gender Equality which was discussed and approved by the Cabinet at a meeting in December 2000. Because of their opposition, the Ministry of Agriculture had to drop the agreement from the Basic Plan. The conservative politicians fear that such a scheme could destroy the traditional family system in Japan.

However, rural families today already find it extremely difficult to pass their occupation and properties on to the next generation, as their sons can hardly find Japanese women willing to marry them. It is no longer acceptable for most women to work long hours on the farm, without any economic independence and having to obey and take care of their parents-in-law.

I myself grew up in a rural area in Japan. My late father became a farmer as he had to leave the Imperial Navy after World War II. My mother repeatedly told me that I should get a good education so that I would not need to marry a farmer. At the age of 16, I left my family to study at a prestigious high school in the city. Since then, I have returned to the village only for short visits.

Inevitably, some of those rural men who remain unmarried until their 40s and 50s obtain brides in their 20s from other Asian countries such as China and the Philippines by paying 3-4 million yen (US\$25,000-33,000) to the women's families.

### **Re-emergence of Right-wing Fundamentalism**

Parliamentarians belonging to the ruling party of Japan supported the passage of the Basic Law for Gender Equal Society, convinced by the party leaders' argument that the law would ensure the necessary supply of qualified personnel in the labour force. It is estimated that Japan will face a serious labour shortage in the 21st century due to the long decline in the country's fertility rate, which has been decreasing in the last 50 years. (As of September 2000, the rate had gone down to 1.33.) In order to meet this problem, Japanese society must build support systems for working women, and men have to share domestic chores. These issues are provided for in the Basic Law for Gender Equality Society. Therefore, Parliament passed this law not to expand the enjoyment of women's human rights but to utilise the labour of women towards the revitalisation of the Japanese economy.

Meanwhile, several right-wing magazines and journals have attacked the Basic Law by warning that it could destroy the country's family system. They also oppose feminism which

they say is similar to Marxism, an ideology which was not able to survive. Those right-wing "experts" include many men and some women of various ages.

### **Towards a Gender Equal Society**

We can foresee a slightly bright future among the younger generation. Most young women and some young men are gender sensitive. (A Men's Liberation Group has already been organised.) Non-traditional men who want to live freely also find it difficult to survive in Japanese society. The total number of suicide victims in recent years has exceeded the total number of victims of traffic accidents in Japan. In particular, the suicide of men in their 40s has increased drastically. Some kill themselves in order to utilise the money from their life insurance for the family they left behind, and/or the company they owned. These tragic incidents are directly related to the oppressiveness of traditional sex roles in Japan.

It is important for Japanese women to change our society in close collaboration with gender sensitive men such as those in the Men's Liberation Group. We could also start to change our society from local areas. More and more women are entering the political arena in the various localities since the late 1980s, and this is a good sign. ☺

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## Home is Where the Hurt is

By Ava Vivian Gonzales

Aside from mastery over opposable thumbs, the exchange of women in marriage sets men apart from animals—as does their proclivity to inflict violence on female members of the household. What seems to be evident from historical accounts on marriage and the human family is that these institutions evolved from various property relationships. The word “family,” in fact, is derived from *fammulus*, which referred to the total number of slaves owned by a man. Today, even with women’s inevitable rise out of property/slave status, her transformation from property into person continues to challenge the foundations of intimate heterosexual relationships, especially within marriage.

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), which came out of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, identifies violence against women as one of the 12 critical areas of concern, declaring it “an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development, and peace” which “violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms” (Sec D.112).

The BPFA recognises that “in many cases, violence against women and girls occurs in the family or within the home, where violence is often tolerated. The neglect, physical and sexual abuse, and rape of girl-children and women by family members and other members of the household, as well as incidences of spousal and non-spousal abuse, often go unreported and are thus difficult to detect. Even when such violence is reported, there is often a failure to protect victims or punish perpetrators.” (Sec. D.117)

Further strategies for implementation adopted at the Beijing +5 Review in June 2000 underscore the involvement of men. A call is made to increase research and specialised studies being conducted on gender roles, in particular

on men’s and boys’ roles (Sec. D. 140), along with provision of avenues for redress, appropriate punishment for the aggressors, and actions that will break the cycle of violence (Sec. 130 e).

The anticipation of steps women and women’s groups will take to fulfil these strategies is enough to lift the spirit of Thai feminist activist and academician Virada Somswadi. “Despite the lack of official statistics on the rising horrible problem of domestic violence against women after the economic crash of 1997,” she explains, “the mass media [have been informing] the public of the extreme form of violence and the close relationship between perpetrators and victims.” Abusers include in-laws and true blood relatives, and they may be as young as the early teens. Some victims, on the other hand, could be little children two to three years old. One recent case was that of a paralytic grandmother in her late seventies who was raped by her great-grandson.

Virada is among the handful of individuals who maintain a “zero-tolerance” stance on violence against women versus her country’s longstanding “no-action policy” regarding domestic

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## MEN'S INVOLVEMENT

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violence. When the 1997 Thai Constitution was being drafted, women's and human-rights groups launched a vigorous public campaign and lobbied with the Drafting Committee, successfully pushing for a provision on equal rights, and a clause on state protection against domestic violence for children, juveniles and family members. "This gives Thai society ammunition to demand state intervention in domestic violence," Virada comments.

But while Thailand's constitution now guarantees security from domestic violence as a citizen's right, it is a protection that Thai women must learn to invoke, since most of them are still unwilling to press charges. "Thailand's criminal laws and judicial system are by design exclusive of women's specific interests and sociocultural conditions," according to Virada.

She pointed out that while the perpetrator may be found guilty and receive a prison sentence, it is his victim—whose rights and safety have been severely damaged by the act of violence—who has to endure the socio-economic consequences of that punishment. She is criticised for having reported the crime that led to her husband's arrest. She has to assume the role of lone breadwinner for the family; suffer the psychological trauma of seeing a loved one in prison; and risk the chance of another episode of violence after he returns home, because the husband's violent behaviour may not have been corrected during his time in jail.

Another factor to consider, Virada says, is Thailand's punitive approach to the problem of male hostility at home, which at best postpones the cycle of violence. "Perpetrators of domestic violence are subjected to jail terms but not to any programmatic activities that would put an end

to their violence-prone nature. In the medical and psychiatric professional fields, services for violent men are limited. Rather, available services concentrate on servicing victims of violence: they receive counselling on how to cope with the violent nature of their partners."

Such an approach to domestic violence cannot put a stop to the recurrence of violence in the home, she continues. "It is a Band-Aid approach, which emphasises the traditional view that women should take care of the wrongdoing of others."

Research findings and experience of agencies working on domestic violence indicate that the majority of Thai women would prefer not to press charges against their violent husbands or partners, and want to preserve the relationship while ending the violence.

It is against this backdrop that Virada suggests analysing "the entire culture creating the current male role and identity, or masculinity." It is her belief that doing so would make men more conscious of gender, because "it does affect their lives as well as those of women, and is a first step towards challenging gender inequalities and eliminating violence against women."

With a network of GOs, NGOs, and the academe, Virada hopes to help set up a Centre to End Domestic Violence against Women (CEDVAW) in the Muang district of Chiangmai province in Thailand. CEDVAW is envisioned to be an alternative correctional facility for first-time domestic violence offenders. It will also serve as a venue for a domestic violence intervention programme that will, among other things, propagate positive values to combat wrong societal attitudes on domestic violence.

Virada sees CEDVAW as a response to key areas for improvement in Thailand's efforts to end domestic violence. "It will facilitate a women-centred reform in the legal and judicial system by taking into account the specific interests of victims of domestic violence and the availability of psychiatric/medical assistance to perpetrators. These are needed for change in societal attitudes as a means to uproot domestic violence," she says.

If given the chance, CEDVAW will be jointly supervised by a network composed of legal professionals from the Thailand Criminal Law Foundation, and the Thailand Criminal Law Institute under the Office of the Attorney General. It will also involve the academe, like the Women's Studies Centre and Faculty of Social Sciences of Chiangmai University. Teeranat Kanjana-uksorn and the Office of the National Commission on Women's Affairs will also be tapped, as well as the Domestic Violence Prevention and Intervention Task Force.

Representatives of these organisations have already met twice to design CEDVAW's Plan of Action. The network has proposed the Domestic Violence Correction Programme, which seeks to encourage victims to seek assistance from state personnel by creating an alternative to mandatory imprisonment for domestic aggressors. This would mean psychiatric treatment in the pre-trial process.

The Domestic Violence Correction Programme has the following step-by-step components:

### **A. Pre-trial Procedures:**

1. Identification of users of violence in intimate settings by police officers, hospital emergency-room personnel, and community authorities.



For Virada Somswadi, men who use violence should be charged in court and undergo a correction programme aimed at changing fallacious notions about men's masculinity.

2. Women victims will be encouraged to file charges. They will be informed of the Domestic Violence Correction Programme and receive legal counselling from legal aides trained by CEDVAW. However, in cases of severe violence, which need adjudication, victims will receive immediate legal assistance.

3. Victims and perpetrators of domestic violence will have to consent to participating in the Domestic Violence Correction Programme.

### **B. Procedures during trial:**

1. Review of a domestic aggressor's violent behaviour by a designated psychiatrist, and submission of a treatment plan to the office of public prosecutors for approval.

## MEN'S INVOLVEMENT

2. If desired by the victim, the public prosecutor and/or judge will prescribe a treatment plan.
3. If necessary, a treatment plan for the perpetrator will be prescribed by public prosecutors and/or the judges.
4. Offenders will receive probation sentence and undergo psychiatric treatment provided by member organisations of the Domestic Violence Network.
5. Social workers and probation officers make home visits and monitor the offender's behaviours for a period of time as recommended by psychiatrists and the judge.
6. Reevaluation by the psychiatrists and completion of probation term.

Self-identified potential users of violence may ask for help through the emergency telephone hotline service, and participate in the correction programme at little or no expense depending on their eligibility.

To prepare for the implementation of this pilot programme, CEDVAW will carry out the following plan of action, as suggested by the network:

1. Capacity building and skills development workshops for public health officials, law enforcement personnel, and public prosecutors.
2. Production of a step-by-step manual for use by partner organisations.
3. Emergency hotline devoted to providing phone counselling and referral services to users of violence.
4. Campaign to raise public awareness of violence against women and targeting users of violence in intimate settings.
5. Documentation and monitoring of the domestic violence correction programme.

CEDVAW will push for the programme's eventual nation-wide implementation once it yields satisfactory results—provided it is given the resources to continue an advocacy that began at Beijing almost six years ago. After all, the Beijing Platform for Action is more than a description and less than a prophecy—they are articles of faith towards the kind of future that women want all over the world.

With more women like Virada Somswadi, men's violent tendencies towards their female partners may be a thing of the past—perhaps even a little sooner than Thai women have hoped for. ☺

*Virada Somswadi is active in the democratic and women's movement in Thailand. She is currently an Associate Professor of Law at Chiangmai University. She is also the Director of the Women's Studies Center. In 2000, she launched the first M.A. programme in women's studies in Thailand. Among those who enrolled in the programme are women from the hilltribes, police women, Lao women, women in the legal profession, women researchers and also, men.*

*Virada is a founding member of the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) and was the Regional Coordinator from 1997 to 2000. She is currently the convenor of Women and Environment Task Force and member of the Program and Management Committee of APWLD and also, member of the Steering Committee of Asia Pacific Women's Watch (APWW).*

*Ava Vivian Gonzales is a freelance writer.*



## Transforming Filipino Men through Innovative Projects

*The Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development (PPGD, 1995-2025) is a model plan for other governments in Asia and the Pacific aiming for good governance through mainstreaming gender. This is not surprising as the PPGD is known for having gone through a highly participatory and consultative process involving several government agencies and NGOs operating at regional, national and community levels.*

*The PPGD is the single national gender and development (GAD) blueprint that is in force until the end of the first quarter of the century.*

*Beyond the laws and government policies influenced by the PPGD are initiatives and efforts at the local level in reaching out and in taking up gender and development issues of both men and women. The NGO sector is not wanting to be left behind in this effort. Some of them actually took on innovative programmes and projects targeting men in ensuring gender equality.*

*Three such projects are presented here. First is a new project by Kauswagan Community Social Center based in Southern Philippines which involves men in the fight against violence against women (VAW). Second is by the Manila-based Population Services Pilipinas Incorporated (PSPI) which is working with grassroots men in promoting reproductive health and rights. And third is Arugaan's counselling and documentation efforts in sharing with men the responsibility in breastfeeding children.*

### Breaking Down the Old Macho Image: Recreating Men **By Bruce N. Ragas**

**I**n southern Philippines, Kauswagan has been taking the lead as advocate on gender, sexuality and reproductive health issues, and particularly against Gender-Based Violence or Violence Against Women (VAW). Kauswagan Community Social Center is the community extension services of the Cebu Doctors' College. It is a community-based health and social centre in Cebu, a province in southern Philippines. Kauswagan is committed

to improving the quality of life of marginalised rural populations by providing affordable social and health services in a non-discriminatory, gender-sensitive and innovative manner. It provides training to rural health units, academic and medical institutions, and local government units to build their capacity in addressing reproductive health concerns, most especially focused on VAW.

## MEN'S INVOLVEMENT

The centre's director, Dr. Melanio Y. Sanchez, Jr., M.D., M.P.H. noticed, however, that from the start Kauswagan's work seemed to have been an exclusive concern of women. After a time he began to ask himself, "Where are the men in this serious discussion? Are they really the source of all these problems that have to do with gender, with sexuality and reproductive health? What if they are also victims, forced just like the women to behave in certain ways?"



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His first insight was that men tend to be violent mainly because that is the way society requires men to behave. This is how they are expected to enforce the idea that men are superior and women are inferior.

"Masculinity is not in our genes, it is in our imagination." That is how Michael Kaufman, organ-

iser of the famous men's group called White Ribbon Campaign, put it in his book *Cracking the Armour*. Society tells our boys: "To be a man you have to wear the armour of being tough, aggressive, uncompromising, strong, assertive, unyielding, rough, etc. Outside of that armour your masculinity would be questioned." A man who doesn't display these traits is despised and ostracised.

Therefore, women's liberation from gender oppression and exploitation must involve as well the liberation of men, imprisoned as they are in their own gender role. Both women and men have to free themselves, so that the benefits of their struggles may be mutually enjoyed and enhanced.

Dr. Sanchez started to introduce this idea at conferences, meetings and discussions on the issue of violence against women.

It is not enough to simply punish the perpetrators of violence against women, he argued. "Putting them behind bars will not prevent the same thing from happening again." The offender may have believed

that his actions were merely "part of being a man."

Don't you think, Dr. Sanchez asked, that these men also need help to change the way they look at themselves, the way they look at women, at society and their role in the world in general? "We have to make a better world where everyone, women and men alike, would regard each other as equal partners." Thus, he advocated counselling for offenders and orientation seminars that would reach out to men, let them see the issue as a whole; and solicit their suggestions on how to bring about the desired changes.

At first, his views were not too well received. Doubts and questions were raised, essentially asking why men had to be involved when they themselves are the perpetrators of violence.

In 1997, however, Dr. Sanchez decided to call a consultative meeting of men to discuss what they could do to help diminish the problem of violence against women. He invited well-known lawyers, academics, police and military officials, mass media practitioners, physicians and

religious, among others. The response was very positive. Despite the difficulty of finding a common time, a series of initial meetings was held and plans were made.

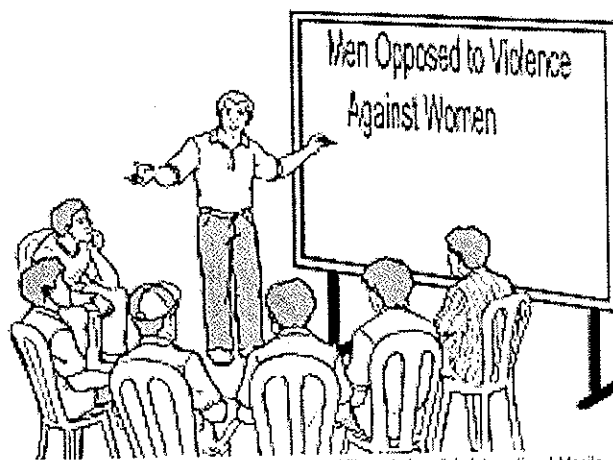
For a start, the group conducted an orientation seminar amongst its members on the issue of violence against women. We noted that most of those who attended had almost negligible knowledge of the issue. This has definitely changed after they attended the seminar *moreso*, after the media began to write articles on VAW and discussed it over the radio.

Though the group has not yet formally and legally organised, its viability has been demonstrated. Members get in touch with each other even in connection with issues other than reproductive health. Since Kauswagan has not yet accessed any funds to support the initiative, for the present it can only play a limited role. In the future, though, we are looking forward to the formal establishment of a group who will call themselves Men Opposed to Violence Against Women (MOVAW).

Kauswagan recently received a grant from the Southeast Asian Gender Equity Programme (SEAGEP) to conduct a Southeast Asian Conference on Men's Role in Violence Against Women. We hope to be able to announce the conference details as soon as we have finalised these so that all interested individuals and organisations may participate.

The major aim of the conference is to support the emerging movement of community groups involving men in advocacy and campaigns on violence against women. The conference would explore and document current initiatives in this area and suggest strategies for greater engagement and partnership between men and women to address and/or eliminate violence against women. The participants are expected to commit to guidelines or a framework of actions that they can pursue, and which would be helpful for the formation of new men's groups.

Furthermore, through this conference it is hoped that men's involvement in



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the cause of eliminating violence would increase and that their presence through organisations or associations would be felt not just in the Philippines but in the whole Southeast Asian region as well. We hope that in the near future we will see more and more men involving themselves in fighting violence against women. ☺

*Bruce N. Ragas works as a research assistant/documentor for Kauswagan Community Social Center. Kauswagan has several projects and programmes including a collaboration with the Reproductive Health project that was supported by the Ford Foundation. Kauswagan, with the assistance of MOVAW, organised the recently concluded "Southeast Asia Regional Workshop: Men and Gender Violence" that took place on 16-20 April 2001 in Lapu-Lapu City, the southern part of the Philippines.*

## Male Fertility Management By Imelda Bacudo

Although men often consider contraception as purely a woman's responsibility, the case is true only as long as the chosen method doesn't impinge on the male partner's satisfaction and convenience. The bedroom is yet another arena, amongst others in Philippine society, where men's decisions prevail.

It is perhaps because of this attitude that information and services related to reproductive health are almost always focused only on the women, severely limiting the chances of success for such projects. The Filipina woman's decisions about fertility management, after all, are expected to comply with the preferences of the man in her life.

Yet, in this society with a dominant Catholic church, who dares come up to the macho Filipino men and try to educate them about semen, sperm, condoms and birth control pills? The task is daunting especially in the face of the belief that a man's virility is measured by the number of his children. Who can change these men's minds, and turn them into partners of women in making informed decisions about fertility management?

As a group of health activists found out, it is the men themselves who can do this best.

In 1998, a nonprofit institution called Population Services Pilipinas (PSPPI) responded to this situation with a project dubbed "Male Call." With the objective of developing male participation in

reproductive-health concerns, PSPPI worked with NAGKAISA (United), a federation of tricycle drivers in a rapidly urbanising area just outside Manila.

In the spirit of the call made in 1994 at the International Conference on Population and Development to find more creative ways of improving the status of women world-wide, Male Call aims to help men make responsible reproductive choices, and to promote peace within the household. Thus, it is concerned not only with fertility management, but also with domestic violence and sexual health.

The project activities include structured learning workshops, led by peer educators and attended by the tricycle drivers and their partners. Here they discuss human fertility and its management, domestic violence, and the cultivation of healthy sexual practices.<sup>1</sup>

Klinika Medico (KM), on the other hand, renders direct medical services to



courtesy of Male Call

members and their families. These include such services as early detection of common male complaints, Pap-smear testing for women, vasectomies, and pediatric medicine. It has become so popular that even non-members come to the clinic, and other paying clinics in the area have begun to consider it a competitor. KM has clearly managed to establish itself as a community-supported health centre.

In uplifting the condition of women, PSPi points out, the indirect but generative way is to target the transformation of men. One indicator of success for NAGKAISA was when its members voluntarily adopted a policy of meting out disciplinary measures to members found guilty of beating their wives, or if they refused to support the latter's wishes to regulate their fertility.

That was a significant achievement. NAGKAISA members tend to be aggressively male. Most are in their early 20s, married, with children, earning just over US\$5 a day, with less than 10 years of formal schooling. They hold traditional Filipino values such as the importance of having children and the woman's role in child rearing

and managing the home. They perceive their principal role as being that of breadwinner for the family.

Imagine a health education worker approaching these hardy men on motorcycles and showing them realistic drawings of the male sex organs, or engaging them in discussions about their intimate relationships. The unique challenge is to work within this framework of not only male, but Asian, sensibility.

Ronnie Reganon, PSPi's most successful health educator, describes his technique that allows him to permeate through the thick and tricky façade of the male "loob." (A key concept in Filipino culture, *loob* pertains to one's inner state.) Instead of a direct and frank approach, Reganon first establishes rapport with the individual through words and actions that will earn the latter's trust and consent to "enter his inner being." After this, he introduces Male Call and explains its objectives, only later bringing in the visual aids that are usually greeted with snickers in the beginning. "I was surprised to learn," Reganon says, "that most males are not aware of the difference between sperm and semen, among many other things."

One could say that it's another indicator of success: the growing number of people who can differentiate between sperm and semen and their role in sexual health. But then there are plenty of other gauges: decrease in the cases of domestic violence, number of people who can tell you about condoms and other contraceptive methods, and name the parts of their sexual organs as well. The new knowledge contributes towards informed decisions on fertility management.

The tricycle drivers would disseminate Male Call's message through posters attached to their vehicles and at passenger terminals. These are messages they composed themselves: "Gastos ay Talamak Kung Marami ang Anak" (Expenditures Soar with Many Children), "Karahasan ay Tigilan sa Pamamahay At Pamayanan" (Stop Violence in the Home and in the Community).

However, initiatives such as Male Call are still dependent on external funding. To address the concern for sustainability, certain methods have been developed. The structure of the workshops ensures the transfer of knowledge from trainor to participants as

## MEN'S INVOLVEMENT



courtesy of Male Call

potential peer trainers themselves. Fathers and sons are invited to participate in learning about sexuality and human reproduction, and the fathers are tasked by NAGKAISA to do follow-up work.

Also being studied is the plan to transfer responsibility for *Klinica Medico* to the town's public health system or to a private service provider, whichever is acceptable to the members.

Even if the lack of external funding should cause the project to lose momentum, however, PSPI believes that important gains have already been made. Its partners, PSPI notes, have achieved "a heightened awareness (among members) about the relationship between societal production and human reproduction as these could lead to the universal longing for healthier, wealthier, and more peaceful lives." NAGKAISA members are now aware of

responsible sexual practices, and recognise their partner's own sexuality. They now seek medical advice. They see the interconnections between domestic abuse, fertility, contraception, and women's empowerment. And by making informed choices, the men become empowered themselves.

Already, NAGKAISA has gone beyond personal and domestic issues, to the arena of community politics. Its members, when given the opportunity to be trainers and health education activists, were empowered by the whole process where before, they used to feel inferior because of being poor and less educated. From co-governing their households with their partners, they have gone on to participate in community governance. NAGKAISA often issues position papers on relevant issues, and local politicians seek its support. The organisation

takes action as well. Recently, for example, the members stood firm on the position that they themselves, and not the town's police force, would ensure safety standards for their transport vehicles.

Thus, from being marginalised in the past, NAGKAISA's members have found a new role as a recognised force in the community. Hopefully, the assumption of responsibility in the public sphere will also be reflected in the domestic sphere. May the fathers continue to be educated and pass on knowledge to their sons and daughters. May their tricycles ply their different routes every day bearing the message of family planning and household peace. The Philippines deserves better men. ☺

*Imelda Bacudo is a freelance writer and works with communities in managing natural resources in the Philippines.*

## Men Can Breastfeed, Too **By Ines Avellana**

*If you think breastfeeding infants is solely a woman's responsibility, then think again. Arugaan, a non-government service organisation for women with young children, challenges this myth in breastfeeding through an innovative programme that involves men in the role of breastfeeding their children.*

*Promoting shared responsibility in child care, Arugaan, provides free training and counselling services for couples mainly from rural and urban communities in Metro Manila and Eastern Visayas who want to breastfeed their children. It also conducts training on indigenous healing, on therapeutic traditional massage, and herbal medicines.*

*The following is a documentation of the many ways by which men can take part in breastfeeding responsibilities. They are gleaned from actual cases, from a roster of Arugaan's clientele. Arugaan believes that although many factors have contributed to the success of each case, harnessing men's potentials for child care and involving them in breastfeeding children on an equal and shared basis with women stands out as an important element in its overall success.*

*The word arugaan is a Filipino word meaning to nurture fully and with commitment.*

Erwin was a university student when he first caught a glimpse of the deeper issues involved in breastfeeding. A resource person had come to his class in Community Development to speak on the topic of Breastfeeding and Food Security. Before that, he had thought of it as simply a women's concern, not realising that he was very much a part of it. Later, Erwin understood what breastfeeding implies for the empowerment of women, the nurturing of family life, conservation of the country's resources, and how it is affected by the globalisation of trade.

To his regret, Erwin found out that if he had been breastfed, he could have acquired multi-intelligences. Since he had been bottle-fed, he was 25 times at risk of getting sick often and hospitalised. And if his mum had chosen breastfeeding over a longer period of time, her risk of having breast and ovarian cancer would have been reduced by 50 percent. Importantly, she would not be still living in fear of getting pregnant if only she breastfed each of her babies exclusively for six months.

What struck Erwin even more was the cynical manipulation behind the marketing of artificial infant formula that targets vulnerable women and profits from their fears and labour. As mothers, women are most vulnerable during pregnancy and birthing—crucial moments of life-bearing and life-giving, powerful acts that sustain humanity and that society ought to celebrate, value and revere. Instead, men have turned this stage of the women's reproductive cycle into an opportunity to make enormous profits.

How? Available figures on the milk industry in the Philippines show that it sells US\$416 million worth of products annually. The infant formula market aims to capture the three babies born every minute in the country alone. Globally, four babies are born every second in the world—all potential consumers of industrial products manufactured by U.S. and European (male-dominated) corporations. Conservative estimates place milk industry profits at US\$6 billion annually. Contrast this with the 1.5 million babies that UNICEF says could die if not breastfed, and many more who suffer malnutrition.

What disgusted Erwin was the discovery that Nestle, the global milk monopolist,

## MEN'S INVOLVEMENT

employed and exploited the youth as sales agents, leading them to believe that the artificial milk products they were pushing were really breast milk substitutes. Hard-sell advertising campaigns mislead and confuse women, making them doubt their ability to nurture their own babies and depriving them of their innate resources. In the Philippines,  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a worker's daily wage is needed to purchase the daily milk consumption of her baby (about  $\frac{3}{4}$  litre).

The milk industry has institutionalised unethical marketing practices that include giving attractive gifts

to doctors, making donations to hospitals, sponsoring attendance at medical conferences, offering scholarships, as well as bribing government officials.

Acting on his newfound conviction, Erwin convinced his mother Paz to facilitate a breastfeeding seminar in her workplace. As a result, Malou and Beng became successful breastfeeding working employees of a big Philippine firm. Today, Erwin himself and his wife Jing are the happy parents of EJ and Joaquin, both breastfed.

In 1996, Erwin was invited to speak at a workshop on the topic Youth Involved in Children's Health at the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) conference on Children's Rights, Children's Health held in Bangkok, Thailand.

Despite the odds, many young couples are making a conscious choice to breastfeed their babies. The Manila press recently took notice of the efforts made by flight at-

tendants Joanna, Beth and Cris who are able to personally breastfeed only three days a week, being on the job on international flights the rest of the time. What they have been doing has been to express their milk and store them in special icebox containers, which are then flown back to Manila by Northwest Airlines. Their husbands then fetch the milk from the airport.

Then there's the story of Albert and Nancy and Wilson and Julie, two couples who attended classes in natural childbirth as well as breastfeeding in St. Luke's Hospital. Nancy and Julie both gave birth to twins, who are now one year old. They are successful breastfeeding working mothers to their one-year-old babies. Albert and Wilson helped in expressing breast milk manually from their wives. After two months, when Nancy had to go back to her work outside the home, she had so much milk that the couple donated 25 6-ounce bags of it to the Arugaan creche centre. The centre maintains a 10-hour day-care facility in Quezon City, in an area where many offices are located.

It was the milk from Nancy that Fe and Rommel used to feed their baby who





had been born prematurely weighing 1.5 kilos. While their infant was being cared for at the Manila Doctors Hospital, Rommel would accompany Fe to hospital nurseries nearby so that Fe could breastfeed other babies who had been orphaned. This enhanced Fe's milk supply while waiting for their own baby to be well enough.

Robert, on the other hand, is one father who's a familiar voice at the other end of Arugaan's counselling hotline for child care. Manager of a store in the commercial district of Binondo, he has convinced many mothers to breastfeed and referred them to Arugaan.

Another breastfeeding family is that of Mitzy and Al and their children DanDan, 6, and Nadine, 1. It was with Al's encouragement that Mitzy went into tandem nursing. He would massage her to assure a steady supply of milk, a technique he learnt massage from the more experienced mothers of Arugaan. Through their persistence, the couple convinced Al's parents, both medical doctors who trusted only the baby bottle for their grandchildren, that breastfeeding was a good option.

Another supportive husband is Jay, a mechanical engineer who helped his wife Gina to initiate breastfeeding even if the hospital did not encourage it and their baby's paediatrician had already prescribed infant formula. He would cook for her himself, whipping up healthy dishes that helped keep their baby free from colic and allergies. At Arugaan, Gina learned how to breastfeed and the young parents now feel that they are empowered as nurturers.

Trade-union leader Vic and his wife Sol are expecting their second child, and he hopes that this time she will be able to avail of a longer period of paid maternity leave than the eight weeks now prescribed by Philippine law. Last June 2001, the International Labour Organisation passed Convention 183 which provides for a minimum of 14 weeks paid maternity leave and paid breastfeeding breaks at the workplace. Vic is very much involved in the Maternity Protection Campaign that seeks implementation in the Philippines of the newly passed international standards on maternity protection. Aside from Convention 183, the World Health Organisation has in fact urged that working mothers be

given four months leave, saying that early resumption of their previous work load would result in long-term consequences on their health. These include uterine prolapse, urinary tract infections, anaemia and malnutrition.

Vic and Sol, who are breastfeeding advocates, want to mobilise all working people to support the campaign and push for the creation of a maternity protection fund.

These men—Erwin, Robert, Vic, Al, Jay, Albert, Wilson—have demonstrated that they value the significant roles of women as food producers and managers of family income, as healers and teachers, and as partners in life. They know that because of mothers, humanity lives on. We value the resolve of these men to take part in the struggle to recapture the power of nurturing, from the global milk industry that has taken it away from the world's parents. ☺

*Ines Avellana is the mother of Chum and Iggy Fernandez, breastfed children. Ines guided all the men above to be partners in breastfeeding, the first step in producing loving sons, boyfriends and husbands for the future.*

## Men Reconstructing Man

Interview by tan beng hui

*There is a mini-revolution happening in the credit cooperative movement in Malaysia. Over the last thirty years, a group of men and women has been quietly at work, addressing the unequal relations between the sexes. What is more striking, however, is the persistence of some of these male leaders in sharing, informing and educating other men in their communities about such matters. These efforts, which have gained momentum in recent times, represent a first in the country in showing that men too can and do have a role to play in challenging patriarchy. Women in Action managed to catch up with the affable Paul Sinappan, a prime mover and shaker in this field, to find out more about the quest to encourage a new "breed" of genders-sensitive men in society.*

**WIA:** Tell us first about the credit cooperative movement in Malaysia.

**PS:** We started in the early 1970s with the primary objective of helping to alleviate poverty. Several target groups were initially identified but tensions resulting from the 1969 racial riots forced us to focus our attentions solely on the Indian community. So we went to plantation and squatter areas, and using a series of education and training programmes, organised the men and women into groups that were able to collectively take charge of their own credit schemes. This meant being entrusted not only with collecting money from amongst themselves, but also with disbursing loans for emergency, provident or productive purposes. Through this, members have been able to pay off debts, purchase homes, start up businesses, send their children to school,



tan beng hui

buy computers and so on. Today, the movement has 420 credit unions involving around 40,000 households nation-wide. Its two main bodies are the Workers Credit Cooperative and the People's Credit Cooperative. While there are national and regional offices with paid staff to coordinate activities, the bulk of the work is done by trained volunteers.

**WIA:** You mentioned before about the gender programme. How did this develop?

**PS:** In the beginning we didn't actually have a gender programme. Our preoccupation was with the poor and any interest we had in women was in relation to them being part of this community. We wanted to address the "woman question," which some of us had been made aware of through our association with different schools of thought, within the framework of

development. Some of us came from Marxist-Leninist backgrounds, while others were influenced by the teachings of E.V.R. Perier and the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu, India. There were also those who were trained in the church. All had in common, an idea to "promote" women within the cooperative movement and show greater sensitivity to their needs. We concentrated on taking in more women members and a small number attained status as leaders. Our methods were simple because while we were concerned about including women, we really didn't know the issues. All we knew was that for women to be "promoted," they needed to be educated and become leaders. We were committed to this but didn't know the "specifics."

**WIA: When then did you become aware of the "specifics"?**

**PS:** This came to us only later on in the mid-1980s. Local women activists were among our earliest channels of information. Through them, male and female credit cooperative leaders gained knowledge on various issues such as violence against women, the status of women in society, and women's rights. We also participated in the anti-rape and domestic violence campaigns. In fact, till today we have maintained these networking ties. However, at the time, we still didn't know HOW to integrate what we had learnt into our programmes. Because we had a mixed audience, we couldn't follow the approach of women's NGOs, which promoted the idea of women-only activities. Moreover, some men felt threatened by certain very strong feminist positions. The fact that they were not always invited to [the women-only] discussions fuelled their fears further.

Nevertheless, following the World Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya,

and events around the UN Decade for Women, there were more institutions that took on the role of promoting gender issues and many of these had a mixed membership like ours. That meant we had more options to learn from. This was a time when there were many gender-sensitising training workshops and we benefited from several organised by the Canadian Cooperative Association, as well as the Asian Confederation of Credit Unions and the International Cooperative Alliance.

Actually, both the approaches of women's groups and mixed groups have their advantages. It's just that in our case, we needed a programme that could bring men and women together to look at gender issues. But even then, things were STILL not clear. It was like we knew the terminology, we knew the issues, we even knew what our gender-sensitising programme could look like. Yet we remained unable to incorporate such a component into our work.

**WIA: What was the turning point?**

**PS:** For me, I think things only became clearer after I attended a workshop organised by the Asian Women in Cooperative Development Forum (AWCF) in Cebu, the Philippines, in 1990. It was then when I was able to better understand the concepts; what was meant by all this talk about "mainstreaming gender." More importantly, I learnt about self-reflection and the importance of internalising gender issues. But first let me backtrack to explain the process behind the formation of the AWCF because that itself was a learning experience for me.

Having been exposed to gender issues over the years, there was a period between 1987 and 1989 where there was some conflict between male and female cooperative leaders.

Both found that we had difficulty in understanding each other when it came to gender concerns. The women decided to do something about this by organising a workshop in Thailand in 1989. First they met separately to discuss women's empowerment within the cooperative structure. Men were then invited to join the last two days of the meeting.

**"If I am unable to practice in my own home what I preach outside, then there is no point in becoming a gender trainer."**

When we met, the women informed us that they wanted to raise certain issues with us since we (men) were policy-makers in our respective cooperatives. So we had a situation where men and women were sitting in the same room, trying to enter into dialogue. Except that this never took place because we men were reacting and fighting every issue that was being raised. We felt like "Hey, what is this... here we are doing so much good for women and now they are criticising us." We didn't appreciate being told that this was not right, that was not good, etc. However, while it was very difficult for us men at the time, this meeting opened my eyes a little. I thought, ok, maybe there is a point that the women are raising here. And that is how I ended up in Cebu for the gender-sensitising training workshop.

**WIA: How exactly did that workshop influence you?**

**PS:** I acquired a lot of new knowledge but I think the most significant outcome was how it inspired me to implement what I had learnt in my own home. So, when I returned I started doing housework like sweeping the floor and

washing clothes. I still remember the first time I picked up the broom; I was in the middle of sweeping when I suddenly remembered something urgent I had to do at the office. But because I had promised my wife that I would clean the house, I didn't want her to come home to finish what I had started. So I took the short cut and swept all the dust and dirt under the cupboard or left them piled up in corners. When she discovered what I had done, she was not amused! Even using the washing machine was a learning experience. Having little idea how these things worked, I hadn't thought about the speed of the cycle and just threw everything into the wash. In the end, all the bras and underwear came out stretched in various shapes and sizes...

**WIA: Would you say that these early days of doing housework were a struggle?**

**PS:** Yes, it was quite difficult. I found that it wasn't an automatic thing for me to think about household matters, it wasn't in my consciousness like say it would be for women. It was much easier for me to think about my work outside. For example, if it started to rain in the middle of the day, I did not hesitate to call my office and remind them to shut the windows. But I didn't give the same thought to bringing in clothes that were hanging out on the line to dry.

One day, having seen me struggling, my wife said to me, "Paul, if you don't put your heart into this, don't do it... If you just want to please your gender advocates, don't do it." That was my wake-up call. I knew that as a man, I had many privileges in the home. Doing housework meant reverting from the traditional male role of being served—why would a man give up these benefits to work? But because that training in Cebu was still in my head, I said to myself, "If I am unable to prac-

tice in my own home what I preach outside, then there is no point in becoming a gender trainer." It's not good enough having all the right ideas in your head, you need to implement them in your everyday life.

Though it took about five years for me to feel very comfortable around housework, today it is no problem at all. Except when it comes to cooking. I can do things like cook rice and prepare basic dishes but I leave the main meals to my wife. That requires skills which I don't have and also, I have to be mindful that other people have to be able to eat the food that is put on the table!

**WIA: Today the credit cooperative training programme has a gender-sensitising component firmly in place. What does this involve?**

**PS:** Our gender-sensitising training seeks to build awareness on gender issues. Some sessions are run separately, i.e., men-only or women-only, and some are run for them together. In the men's training, we first give a theoretical overview on women and development issues. We also include exercises that aim at changing the male mindset, the ways in which they negatively view and treat women in society. For instance, one such activity demonstrates how men are stumbling blocks to women's liberation. Another makes them see how they use culture and religion to oppress women and why this needs to change. After introducing the idea that women must be treated as equals, we go on to the concepts e.g., sex and gender, sex-role stereotyping, portrayal of women, etc. In these sessions, the audience is mixed and the discussion moves into the sphere of justice and rights. We get them, for example, to think about wife-battering. Why is it that men who use the excuse of being stressed beat their wives but don't take it out on their male bosses? On the

whole, we want to educate the men at the same time empowering the women. This way we hope that eventually they can meet somewhere in the middle.

**WIA: What kinds of successes have you had in gender-sensitising the credit cooperative movement?**

**PS:** There has been progress on two accounts. One relates to institutional or structural changes, and the other at the level of the individual.

In the first instance, we now acknowledge the equal participation of women in the co-operatives. It is policy for all leaders to include a gender perspective in whatever input that they make, irrespective of whether this is for a small meeting, an annual general meeting or a written-report. All our data is sex-disaggregated so that they no longer invisibilise the presence and contributions of women. Likewise, the cooperative's rules and regulations have been rewritten in nonsexist language, and our notes on the history of the movement not only mention women but also contain photos of them. Other measures include ensuring that the organisation is gender-responsive, right from the level of our education and loan policies, down to application forms and member passbooks. Any man who is known as a wife-batterer is forbidden to sit on the Board of Directors. As well, each time decisions have to be made about trainers, budget allocations, or overseas trips, it is "automatic" for us to think of this in terms of both women and men. We have also instituted the provision of child-care and preschool facilities which are nontraditional cooperative activities.

At the individual level, I won't say that all the men who have undergone our training

**All the men who have started to do housework and make decisions collectively with their wives and children, are showing a new leadership style which is gender-responsive and transformative.**

have changed 100 percent because it is really hard for them to understand women. I see this instead as an important learning process for them. Nevertheless, on the whole, a lot more listening to women is taking place in the homes and cooperatives. There is greater respect shown for women. Also, more men are getting involved in housework and male-female relationships in the household are improving. There is greater joint decision-making taking place as well. For instance, families plan household budgets together and this has led to increased savings. Some will even organise for food to be served and cleaning up to be done at training sessions that women attend.

There are also men who have taken up the challenge of showing by example. In one incident, this man, after attending the gender-sensitising training, washed and hung out the clothes to dry. Several people who saw this ridiculed him and asked why he was doing women's work. Wasn't he afraid of society criticising him? He responded, "This is not women's work, this is housework. If society wants to criticise me, let them." In reality no one else criticised him. Instead six other men in his community subsequently followed his example. All the men who have started to

show more concern for their families, by doing housework and making decisions collectively with their wives and children, are showing a new leadership style in the cooperatives and their communities, a style which is gender-responsive and transformative.

**WIA: You have, besides the gender-sensitising training, "men's clubs." Tell us a bit more about this.**

**PS:** After a certain point, we realised that women were coming together as a group and meeting every month to empower themselves. Men, on the other hand, were not doing this. As leaders they already participated in the gender-sensitising training but we wanted their involvement to be more proactive. Instead of merely "plugging" them into a training workshop, we wanted the men to sit down and talk about themselves, to freely express what they think and feel about certain issues. We hoped that having male-only meetings would encourage them to open up. This is also why we emphasise confidentiality and see that all the groups comprise people who know and trust each other. These are our "men's clubs." They have been going on for two years and have been a tremendous help in gender-sensitising the men.

As a result, I have seen and heard a lot of things that men never share with anybody. Their love stories. Their feelings about their wives and families. Their understanding about sex, male impotence and menopause, and their fears around these. In our sessions we help men to see how they can behave differently. For example, we show that culture and religion have imposed certain beliefs on us which in turn leave men unnecessarily burdened. Traditionally, the male role is to "carry" everything and when he cannot cope he turns to drinking, womanising... But none of these

are solutions. Instead, we teach them how to talk with their wives, and discuss how their burdens can be shared.

We also teach how sex is not a right, that it must be on mutual grounds with their wives. Once we even showed a man how his helping in the housework could improve his sexual relationship with his wife. He had said that she had no sexual desire. Later we discovered that this was because she was always tired at the end of the day from doing too much work. After he started to help out with the household chores, she didn't

feel as tired and things became better for them. As well, in some sessions the men have really gone into tears. They have discovered how to show appreciation to their wives. They have learnt about holding, hugging and showing love to their children.

**WIA: What are your future challenges?**

**PS:** Multiplying our experiences. For this we need more trainers with the "right" mindset. We have a handful of them already but the difficult part is getting more. Unlike math or geography where you can just go to class to learn, this is a gender-sensitising training. This means the trainer has to have certain skills and ways of thinking. Apart from knowing the issues, they need to understand a bit of psychology and must be able to communicate well. Conflict will happen during these sessions so we need trainers who know how to handle this, how to avoid a sex war from erupt-

ing. We also want to put a support system in place because once you start dealing with family matters, there needs to be a mechanism



Paul Sinappan: addressing poverty and transforming gender relations in credit cooperatives need not be two separate struggles.

tan beng hui

for resolving issues that arise. To expand we need better resources to work with too. Because society has been so gender-biased, a lot of the materials we use are inappropriate and this makes our work more difficult. Money is also a consideration. We will need more of this to allow us to train more extensively. ♪

*Paul Sinappan is the general secretary of the Credit Union Promotion Club. He is also a consultant and trainer for the Canadian Cooperative Association. He works in Malaysia and other countries in the region, introducing gender into the cooperatives and micro-credit programmes, as well as offering gender-sensitising training to male policy makers. For more information write to: <paulcca@pc.jaring.my>.*

*tan beng hui is a freelance researcher and writer based in Malaysia. She has a keen interest in women and sexuality rights issues.*

## Express Yourself: "Exclusive Discos in Manila"

By Roselle Pineda

I had been hearing about the existence of exclusive places for lesbians almost all my lesbian life, but it was only in 1997 when I actually entered one. At the time, "The Sports Zone" was probably the only place in the country where women-only parties were being held, once a week. It was a small bar in Mandaluyong, in the eastern section of Manila.

After that experience, I started thinking seriously about lesbian spaces, and how these spaces empower lesbians amidst a heteropatriarchal society. Moreover, I experienced how visceral activities such as dancing play a role in expressing lesbian aesthetics within these spaces.

Dancing and other visceral activities have always been crucial to the expression of lesbian sexuality. This is evident not only in the popularity of exclusive discos that serve as venues for freedom and bonding for us, but also in the use of dance as a metaphor for lesbian sex, eroticism, love, union, communion and spirituality. Exclusive discos have long existed in the city—the first ones opening in the early 1980s, about a decade earlier than the formal establishment of lesbian activism in 1992.

This close relationship between lesbianism and visceral activities, particularly dance, is of course due to the body being a primary medium of communication both in these activities and in expressing sexuality.

This is a preliminary study. While conceptualising and writing this paper I realised the lack of published sources and related literature on this subject. Thus, I had to rely on surveys, subject interviews, and my ethnographic researches and experiences in the field.

Moreover, finding the subjects for my interviews proved to be even harder than identifying what methodology I would use for researching and writing. Very few people were willing to be interviewed for the record. Those who did agree—bar managers and event organisers—asked me not to mention their real names for the time being.

I was compelled to write about this journey because for so long, lesbians have been finding solace in exclusive discos, yet nobody has articulated their language of resistance. As a dancer/performer, an artist, and a lesbian advocate, I recognise this need to study and emphasise lesbian venues of resistance in a conservative culture and socioeconomically backward society like ours. And so, I write this.

### A Brief History

Even before lesbian activism formally introduced itself in the Philippines, exclusive discos had already existed in Manila.

Located on Roxas Boulevard along scenic Manila Bay, the Power Station was one such pioneer in the early 1980s. It provided a space for lesbians to connect and communicate with each other, and at the same time, to move along with the rise of transgenderism. This was the time of androgyny and cross-dressing: sexual





liberation manifested through clothing and fashion. Television screens and the streets were filled with cross-dressers following the fashion style of rock stars and other musicians like Boy George and Annie Lennox. Lesbian cross-dressing, especially as butches, became a legitimate fashion and a trend.

After Power Station was destroyed by a fire in 1990, the disco scene lost a central venue. Many groups began holding their own exclusives. Some masqueraded as "ladies' nights" in places like the Ozone Disco (Wednesdays), Maribeth Bichara's Danz Café (Wednesdays), Kudos Disco (Saturdays) and the Sports Zone (Saturdays).

It was only in the mid-1990s when reconcentration was revived and for a while, there was only Shescapes, where discos were organised every other Saturday. Today, aside from Shescapes and Third Dimension, a number of individual organisers and lesbian organisations still hold exclusive parties at various bars especially in the Quezon City area.

### Third Dimension

It was an E-mail that informed us of this place. It said: "Finally! A bar exclusively for women, all throughout the week." Finally, we did not have to wait for the weekend to be able to feel free in a space dominated by our kind. And so, one day, we decided to pay a visit to Third Dimension.

That first time, the feeling of seeing a sign saying "Exclusive Bar for Women" was both relieving and weird. Inside, it felt even weirder. It was dark and nearly empty, the menu still incomplete. The spinner at the bar was playing that irritating album by Mariah Carey. But we didn't mind these first impressions, for all we could think about was the potential of the place.

Third Dimension is relatively spacious,<sup>8</sup> with a dining, drinking and bar area on the first floor and a dance area, slightly darker, upstairs. Erotic sculptures and murals are installed on the second floor. The menu features such dishes as Garlic Nipples (garlic mushroom), Sticky Fingers (cheese sticks), Potato Peck (french fries) and Girlie Nuts (peanuts).

In a lengthy talk with Melissa, the bar manager, we finally got an inner look into the history and concept behind the bar.

Melissa is the bar manager of a gay-owned exclusive bar for women called Third Dimension. It claims to be the first exclusive bar in the Philippines. Ironically, however, it is owned by a gay man, although Melissa says that he leaves most of the decision making, managing and

## WOMEN'S SPACES

planning to her. Being old friends, they trust each other, and it has been agreed that the relationship would be strictly business as far as running the bar is concerned.

Aside from being a full-time bar manager, Melissa is also involved in cause-oriented foundations based in the entertainment industry. They produce concerts in other countries like Japan to promote campaigns on the awareness of sexuality and against the use of drugs, among

Recognising the need to reach out and bond with other women in this society where all women are marginalised, Third Dimension does not limit its clientele to lesbians only. Rather, they seek to welcome other women by providing a venue for the discussion of issues like battery, rape, and single motherhood.

The place, according to Melissa, offers women a sense of freedom. "Here, they can do whatever they want, and no-one will judge them," which is not usually the case elsewhere. Undeniably, however, most of those who come to the bar are lesbians. You only have to read the name of the place, or if that's not enough, take a look at the art works upstairs to know that the place caters to the so-called "third sex."

A big come-on for the clients of Third Dimension is the privacy it offers. When I asked



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others. It was on one such trip to Japan that Melissa and her friends first thought about putting up an exclusive club back home. They happened to be strolling along the busy streets of Shinjuku when they came across a club called "Mayonnaise." To their surprise the guys in the group weren't allowed to enter or even peek inside the club. "We realised that it was a lesbian club. Okay, from that time on, we thought, why not put up a club like this in the Philippines?" Months after that, Third Dimension was born.

Melissa what happens inside the bar, she quickly answered, "Whatever happens here, whatever may be seen here, is nobody else's business." One is reminded that society still considers lesbianism to be a delicate topic, and most people going to exclusives not only seek freedom and fun but also a sense of safety and privacy. Not all lesbians are out and not all the people around us are supportive when we do come out. The bar is sensitive to this and the management tries to keep the place as private as possible.

**In exclusive discos, ...we may create a relatively autonomous world with ample space for our lesbian sexual expression. It is here that we may reclaim our rights, our marginalised community, and our territory. It is here that our resistances as a marginalised sector are articulated.**

### **The Language of Exclusive Discos**

Exclusive discos exist mostly in urban centres like Manila. From my interviews and survey findings, I would say that this can be explained by the fact that urban dwellers have access to a relatively higher level of education and sexual liberation. More often than not, conservatism in the rural areas prevents people from enjoying such bodily exploration and sexual freedom as are afforded by the movements of dance as well as the opportunity to socialise.

However, I do not think that education and a liberal mindset are the sole factors that encourage people to frequent exclusive discos. It's rather a question of economics. Most of those who go to exclusive discos belong to the middle- and upper-bourgeoisie. Minimum-wage earners wouldn't blow their money on expensive food and drinks in one night of dancing, sweating and smoking. Thus, it is safe to say that exclusive discos are primarily a cultural practice among the urban bourgeoisie but not for most of the lesbian population in the Philippines, especially the poor.

However, it is undeniable that for lesbians who can afford to buy a sense of security, freedom and sanctuary for at least five hundred pesos a night, it is worth the money. Just to be able to feel that you are safe with your girl

friend and with your lesbian friends for even just one night, is definitely a big satisfaction.

Moreover, what happens in exclusive discos provides parallelisms between lesbian experiences and aesthetics. I will reiterate that these parallelisms are due to the direct connection between such activities as dancing, flirting, kissing, holding, etc., and the semiologies of the disco like its murals, sculptures and menu. This only shows that basically, the aesthetics of lesbianism is the expression of freedom through the body.

### **Conclusion**

It is very important for the lesbian movement and advocacy to recognise and utilise exclusive discos as legitimate lesbian spaces. We can empower ourselves by creating a space where we can be free from the discrimination of society, our families included. These venues allow us to connect with other sisters and strengthen our bond. In these safe places, setting ourselves apart from the lesbophobic community, we can act on and advocate our issues as lesbians. Here, while remaining in constant relationship with the rest of the society, we may create a relatively autonomous world with ample space for our lesbian sexual expression. It is here that we may reclaim our rights, our marginalised community, and our territory. It is here that our resistances as a marginalised sector are articulated.

In any movement and political advocacy, these resistances are crucial in strengthening the foundation of our unity. Our languages may be well hidden in the heterosexist society but they are definitely articulated in such underground venues as exclusive discos.

Lastly, allow me to end my point by telling another story.

Once, I went out with some cousins and girl friends to a techno bar called The Lobby, where one beer will cost you at least eighty pesos or US\$2 (this was in 1998). This was a place for rich young partygoers who are liberated enough to do what they want. Inside, I saw at once that it was a sexually liberated crowd—erotic dancing, women wearing expressions of jouissance, beer galore, the air thick with smoke. Then I saw a woman, cute and sexy enough for me to want to know her more. I approached her and told her how cute she was. Disconcerted, she turned away and hurried to tell her friends about me! I felt so small. It was a harsh reality check, yet another reminder that society is not as lesbian-friendly as I want it to be. I only wanted to say how nice she looked in her simple clothes, or what a pretty smile she had, and yet I was made to feel so small for expressing my appreciation, because I had expressed it to another woman...in a heterosexual crowd.

A week after that I went to an exclusive disco called Gills and Fins, and danced the night away from nine o' clock to 3 a.m. I went home, still alone, with a few calling cards from the people that I had met. Then I went to bed, my thighs and legs aching, the stench of smoke on my dress and in my hair, the sweat on my body now dried. But I went to sleep with a smile of fulfillment.

I never went back to The Lobby. ☺

Roselle Pineda is a performance artist, art educator, critic and lesbian activist. Over the past years, her scholarly works and performances were devoted to the expansion of lesbian theory in the Philippines, specifically in the culture and the arts. As a writer, her narratives were recently published in *Mirror Magazine* and *Likhaan on-line*, the web magazine of the UP Creative Writing Center. She is currently teaching humanities at the Department of Art Studies, University of the Philippines (UP) in Diliman,

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# Why Women's Spaces are Critical to Feminist Autonomy

By Patricia McFadden

**T**he issue of male presence, in physical and ideological terms, within what should be women-only spaces is not just a matter of ideological contestation and concern within the Women's Movement globally; it is also a serious expression of the backlash against women's attempts to become autonomous of men in their personal/political relationships and interactions. As human societies have become more public through the intensified struggles for inclusion by various groups of formerly excluded constituencies (the largest of which is made up of women of differing classes, ages, sexual orientations, abilities, ethnicities, nationalities, and locations), so the struggle for the occupancy and definition of space has also taken on a concomitant significance.

In this short article, I want to explore some of the reasons why this contestation over women's spaces has arisen. I also want to argue strenuously that women must not allow men into our spaces because strategically this would be a major political blunder for the future of the Women's Movement, wherever it is located and engaged with patriarchal hegemony and exclusion. To argue for men's inclusion into women's political and structural spaces is not only fundamentally heterosexist; it also serves an old nationalistic claim that women need to take care of men, no matter where they are located and or what they are engaged with. This claim is inherently premised on the assumption that women who are not attached to or associated with a man are dangerous, rampant women who must be stopped. That is why the statement that women need to "take men along"



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smacks not only of the deep-seated patriarchal assumption that women's mobility requires male approval. It also facilitates the transference of socio-cultural practices into the Women's Movement that nurture male privilege and pampering in spaces that women have fought for centuries to mark as their own.

In order to make my points, I want to refer briefly to the conceptual notion of space and try to show how space is gendered and highly politicised as a social resource in all societies. Throughout the known human narrative, certain spaces have been culturally, religiously and politically marked as either "male" or "female," and we know that in terms of the latter spaces, these were and still are largely linked to wom-

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en's breeding and feeding functions in all human societies, without exception. The spaces we refer to as *public* are assumed to be male, and for centuries men have excluded women from the public where all the key decisions relating to power are deliberated and implemented.

Additionally, across human time, those spaces that were feminised were also considered the least important; they were and still are places where women functioned through the benevolence of males, but which they never owned and still do not have entitlement to if they live in close intimate relationships with adult males. Notions of "the family" and "the household" remain fundamentally masculine in terms of all the key institutions of our societies, and women cannot create a "real" family; when they construct households these become immediately feminised and stigmatised as *Other* (female-headed/single-headed/women-headed, etc.).

Therefore, when we take a really close look at notions of space and its occupancy in gendered terms, we realise the shocking fact that it was only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that women have occupied limited space in patriarchal societies in their own right as women and or as persons. Space was and continues to be largely defined as a male construct in every way conceivable, and for most societies of the South, one can-

not even refer to the changes that have occurred in Northern societies around this issue to make any generalisations. The majority of women in the South exist outside space as a politically defined resource. In the main, and especially for poor women on a continent like that of Africa, space remains fundamentally tied to the archaic notions of patriarchal privilege and the ownership of women both privately and publicly. That is why the Women's Movement as a political, ideological, activist and structural space must remain just that: a women-only space.

Additionally, it is vital for any conversation about the presence or absence of males in women's spaces to locate the notion of space itself within a political narrative about what space means in patriarchal gendered societies. The fact of the matter is that space is not neutral territory; it is highly politicised in class and locational terms. The rich live in certain spaces and the poor are systematically excluded from those spaces by barbed wire and electric fences, vicious dogs and poor males in overalls carrying guns in their hands. Space is kept under close scrutiny by the military which declares particular areas of a national territory "no-go" areas to the public, and the ruling classes themselves construct all sorts of exclusionary practices and mechanisms that keep certain groups of people out of 'their' spaces. Colonial whites used the state to put in place systems of surveillance that excluded Africans from their spaces through the institutionalisation of "passes" and the extension of license to any white to be able to stop any black person and demand that they account for their presence in a particular place at any time of the day or night.

And in one of those rarely acknowledged moments of patriarchal collusion between black and white men within the colonial enterprise, black men were allowed to stop and interrogate any black woman who was not in the presence of an adult male outside the confines of the "Native Areas" of colonial Southern Af-

...women who like men so much that they cannot spend any time during the day or night without male presence can set up what are called "mixed" organisations, which have a right to exist as all other civil society structures do which enhance human desires and interests in the common good; but not as part of the Women's Movement.

rica. The same practice probably applied in other parts of the continent and of the world, for that matter, at varying points in time.

In the period immediately after independence in many societies of this continent, women who were unaccompanied by an adult male and dared to re-enter or remain within the public arena after the formal working day was over, were and still are susceptible to arrest and criminalisation as "whores," who should be locked away for their own protection because "good women" are at home feeding the children and catering to the sexual needs of their husbands after the sun goes down.

These and many of the discourses which define and mark space as male and gendered, exclusionary of women as persons and as individuals who are entitled to mobility and to the occupancy of space in their own right, must be brought into focus in considering the pressure that men and certain groups of "good women" are putting on the rest of us within the Women's Movement to allow men into our limited political spaces.

My retort is that those women who like men so much that they cannot spend any time

during the day or night without male presence can set up what are called "mixed" organisations, which have a right to exist as all other civil society structures do which enhance human desires and interests in the common good; but not as part of the Women's Movement. Therefore, to insist that our Movement, which we have struggled to establish, often giving our entire lives to its creation, should become a "gender-mixed space" is not acceptable at all and must be vigorously contested.

Suffice it to say then that space is always highly contested and it is a political issue, and women must understand and keep that in mind as we ask ourselves questions with regard to the presence of men in our Movement. Spaces are never given—like all resources in our societies, whether these be material, aesthetic or social—spaces are struggled for, occupied and crafted, marked as belonging to a particular group through struggles that are basically about establishing ownership and using that ownership to fulfil an agenda. And the Women's Movement has a very clearly stated agenda—that of the emancipation of all women from patriarchal bondage and exploitation. Patriarchy has effectively used exclusion as a central tenet of its ideological claims to hegemony in all our societies, whether one is looking at notions of identity, of rights and privilege, of access and inclusion into institutions and sites of power.

Exclusionary practices use space as a key element in the implementation of a specific agenda. The claim that women's place is in "his home" is an old strategy that mobilises notions of femininity; locates them in the private, and imposes an ideology of domesticity through which females are socialised to believe and accept that the narrow, male-privileging spaces called "home" are the most appropriate spaces for them to spend all their lives in, breeding and working for "him" and "his family." This claim is so powerful that millions of women continue to believe it, even when they have been

...it is through their intrusion into women's spaces that men have been able to redirect the politics of the Women's Movement in many countries—shifting its character from a radical political platform where women experience themselves as autonomous and entitled persons, into a welfarist movement that is focused on the old sexist notions of reproduction and cultural custodianship—on behalf of the very males who claim that they are being excluded.

able to leave the home and acquire an education and professional skills that they could use to become autonomous. Still, they return to that space where they become "real" women in backward patriarchal terms; terms which they sometimes choose to define themselves through but which do not have to become the markers of all women, especially in the public which is a common space that belongs to all women and all citizens.

I think that one cannot consider the issue of male intrusion into women's political spaces without also considering that this demand is always made with the conscious desire to undertake surveillance on what women are thinking, saying and doing. I know that some of my sisters will say I cannot generalise because there are "nice" men who name themselves "feminist" and who are interested in securing the rights of women against patriarchal dominance. At one level, that may be true. There are a few men

who are experiencing a new political consciousness through association with women's struggles for freedom and autonomy. But in my book, such men need to get themselves into a political movement which will mobilise more men to change themselves, especially in relation to masculinity and the hegemony that patriarchal ideology grants all men. In that way they will be better able to support women's demands and rights for freedoms. Because while "nice" men do support women and "allow" their wives and partners to do activist work, they also influence the politics of women when they enter women's spaces and interact with the ideas and activism of women within the same framework.

Women must be able to formulate and express their own ideas as individual women and as a constituency that is affected by patriarchal laws and practices in uniquely gendered ways—an experience which no man is open to and cannot experience for as long as patriarchy defines gendered relationships to power and privilege in their present form. And when men are in women's spaces, women tend to react to their presence in intellectual and sexual ways. Men tend to intimidate most women; even the wimpiest male has an impact on the confidence of some women, and that is a cost we should not have to incur in our own spaces.

Men also tend to take over discourses and to steer them in particular directions, often adopting a defensive attitude towards women's radical consciousness and consequently damping down women's sense of entitlement to their rights. The presence of men in any women's space has fundamental consequences for women's sense of themselves and their visions of the future. In my opinion, women cannot afford to be nice about such a threat. In fact, it is through their intrusion into women's spaces that men have been able to redirect the politics of the Women's Movement in many countries—shifting its character from a radical political platform where women experience themselves



as autonomous and entitled persons, into a welfarist movement that is focused on the old sexist notions of reproduction and cultural custodianship—in behalf of the very males who claim that they are being excluded.

Surveillance of women's political consciousness is a key objective of the patriarchal backlash, which manifests itself through male demands for inclusion into women's spaces. One need only look at all those organisations that have men within them to see how collusive and compromised such organisations become within a short space of time. Often these men take over the most critical elements within the organisation, often the control over finances and the publications section, imposing a male voice over the views and knowledge that women bring to the public. We know that voice and the visibilisation of women's experiences are foundation stones of the Women's Movement—saying what we know and want is so very central to our agenda and our freedom. Why therefore are some women's organisations handing over their newsletters and documentation sections to males who gladly 'speak on their behalf.' Have we not demanded the right to speak for ourselves and used this facility to debunk the myths and stereotypes that still characterise the male media. Yet some women see no political threat with having a male, one of those 'nice' ones, occupying the status of knowledge processor in their organisations.

Within the language of compromise, such organisations are conforming to 'gender mainstreaming' which basically re-inforces the welfarist tendencies within women's activism through the de-politicisation of women's agency in the public.

Gender becomes an empty notion, without any relationship to power and contestation, and women are told to consider the interests of boys and men in the same breath as they attempt to bridge the yawning gap between them-

selves and males across time and space. The de-politicisation of women's struggles lies at the heart of the demand to include males in women's political spaces, because it is clear to males (as well as to conservative females, most of whom predominate in the Women's Movement across the globe) that by occupying a political space in the public which women have crafted and marked as their own, women become radical and develop a consciousness of themselves and their rights. This is a threat to the privilege and interests of males in all patriarchal societies.

For me, this is the core of the matter. When women occupy public spaces as persons who understand that for millennia they have been denied their inalienable rights as human beings, they begin to demand the restitution of those rights through the creation of structures within which they situate financial, technical and intellectual resources.



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When women become articulate about who they are sexually and cast off the old patriarchal myths about what a woman can be and what she is not allowed to become, women become powerful and acquire the ability to say no to violence; no to unpaid labour; no to exploitation and discrimination in the name of cultural preservation. Women become persons who relate to the state in new and challenging ways, no longer waiting for men in the state to dole out a few "favours" in the name of benevolent dictatorship.

Such women become autonomous and their Movement becomes a force for the transformation of oppressive relations of power in both the public and the private spheres.

Such women are a danger to all males, regardless of how some men define themselves. Therefore, women's spaces as politicised spaces must be occupied under the guise of "inclusion" and those women who resist such surveillance are accused of being man-haters and of acting in "exclusionary" ways—the same old story we have heard for centuries. When women first demanded the right to be free, to have access to education (not even equal access, just access to the collective knowledge of their respective societies), they were accused of hating men. Those of us who have refused to be ritualised and owned by men through heterosexual marriage, and who have sometimes gone on to love other women, are marked as "heretics" and man-haters. The tarring of women with the brush of heterosexist vitriol is well-known and most women fear it because it is a harsh and ruthless brush that marks a woman for the rest of her life as Other and Dangerous.

But we have learnt along the long road of our struggle for freedom, that compromising only takes us back even further than where we started. So we must hold on to our spaces because they are the only living spaces that we have and can own as women in these deeply woman-

hating, patriarchal societies we continue to live in at the present time.

If men want to engage in gendered politics, let them set up their own structures and create a new political discourse on democracy and equality with those who live in their societies. As politically conscious women well know, men have a lot of work to do on themselves. While a helping hand is always useful, the old saying that charity begins at home applies moreso today to men than ever before. Men must clean out their patriarchal household as men, first, and get themselves a new identity—one that does not depend on owning women; on buying and selling women; on raping, forcibly occupying, and pillaging the bodies of women or on plundering women's minds so that they can prove to each other that they are real men. Men need to develop a political ideology that does not require that men exclude women from the institutions that we too have built and which belong to us as much as they belong to all who live in our societies.

That is where I stand as a radical African feminist on the sacred spaces we have carved out, often with our very lives, and I am not prepared to share them with any man, as long as males continue to be privileged by patriarchy. ♪

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