Dangerous liaisons

by Anne McClintock


“If you own a big chunk of the bloody Third World, the children just come with the scenery,” as the Chrissie Hynde song goes. And from the evidence of Cynthia Enloe’s marvelously original and witty book, in the boys’ own adventure of international politics women too are no more than scenic backdrops to the big-brass business of male maneuvers, mergers and massacres.

But Bananas, Beaches and Bases shows how mightily the day-to-day brokering of global power depends on constructions of gender. Women around the world share invisibility, but without women’s work “in the back rows of politics,” as Adrienne Rich puts it, the world’s bases and banks, airlines and hotels would shut down in an instant, and the global assembly line would shudder to a halt.

Written in a scintillating and lucid prose, this is that rare combination, an eminently readable and eminently erudite book. Enloe takes on topics usually flicked aside as too trivial for foreign policy debate—the sex tourism industry; fashions for colonial nostalgia; the lives of base women and diplomatic wives; the politics of food and clothing; the international traffic in housework; nationalism and masculinity: brothels and bananas. She shows thereby how the male-order world of international politics could not survive a day without its structures of gender.

The politics of the banana, for one, she argues, is a politics of gender. When in the 1940s the climate for gunboat diplomacy became chilly, United States’ relations with Latin America were warmed by a new policy euphemistically dubbed “Good Neighborliness.” The new imperialism depended on powerful constructions of race and gender. Carmen Miranda, the Brazilian singer, be-

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NATURE RACE IN AMERICA
From the Algonquins Indians to the New Age
Catherine L. Altschuler
A Fermtor with Martin E. Marty. In this ground-breaking work, African-American author that nature has provided a catalytic force for understanding throughout American history. Her study ranges. From the 1700s to the present, this book reveals the many preservation and nineteenth century had great impact on the role of women in Algonkian society. The book considers the roles of the Goddess and deities of nature such as: the Sun, Warface, and Anser Dillard.

GONE PRIMITIVE
Savage Intellects, Modern Lives
Marianna Torgovnick
This is the work of cultural critics reveals the abstruse, illogical, and monstrous that have produced Western views of the primitive. It reveals the crucial role of sexual politics in primitive thought, and of courses of significance to the book, for example, the parallel perspective of the Western world and the roles of women in various cultures. It is a book about the role of women in Western societies and the roles of women in Western societies.

CRAFTING SELVES
Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Mid-19th Century Place
Dorinne Kondo
A vivid account of work at a small Quaker factory during the 19th century and supports a new theory of Japanese workers with identity.

"Kondo’s subtle analysis in part of the differential treatment of paradigms of subjectivity and agency, where the intersecting threads of gender, ethnicity, race, language, nationality, generation, and class only begin to suggest the complex textures of sameness and difference in late-19th century Japan. Kondo’s book is a tour de force, a rich, sophisticated, and detailed analysis," - Carroll Smith-Rosenberg

Four in Paper.
UNDER THE VIRTUE
The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition
Barbara Met Holz
With a new Preface.
"A crucial importance for understanding how and why we regulate prostitution, this book is as much about the history of the state and how our practice and attitudes toward prostitution have evolved. It is a rich, sophisticated, and detailed analysis," - Carroll Smith-Rosenberg

Five in Paper.

LETTIERS
To the Editor:
Thanks for printing Louise Armstrong's thought-provoking review [March 1990] of Elaine Aron's Un windowHeight into the nature of alcohol. Her book has been critically acclaimed by many people of all ages and has been a major best-seller in the past several years I have been active both in the fight against sexual abuse of children and in advocating for survivors of such abuse. Everything in my own experience leads me to agree wholeheartedly with Armstrong that the issue of incest, on one hand, has shown the potential to elude the minds of the courts, and, on the other, has revealed both the need and the potential to do more to help adult survivors find a way to function and get on with our lives. Unlike Armstrong, I believe that this goal is a noble one and in itself, and that the authors of such books as well as the adult survivors who might benefit from them see to evaluate them on their own merits.

Armstrong might have focused her anger on many mainstream books and articles that are deliberately and noxiously undercutting our efforts to stop child abuse. Or, if her point was to engage in an internal debate among feminists, then she might have expanded her discussion to a finger at all the books that haven't been written, at all the feminist activists and the work that is not there rather than "say the things we don't talk about incest of". With a few notable exceptions—Linda Gordon, author of Women's Bodies, Women's lives, immediately come to mind—feminist scholars and activists have maintained an eerie silence on the subject, leaving incest to people who have lived with it and don't usually feel comfortable about it because we are being stalked by our pasts. I applaud, the "community of healing" that she says have the power to heal themselves and the books that serve that community should be infused with political awareness and should complement efforts to bring about the kind of fundamental social change that is necessary if we are to eliminate child abuse. Many of us within that community have watched survivors in that situation, but we are forced to do so in the absence of a broader political movement around abuse. I agree with Armstrong and the millions of women who work to make sure that we each get to the issues of incest and to the other way" when sexual abuse is discussed, large numbers of our "non-survivor" feminist sisters are abandoning a new generation of children whose own suffering is not included in our political understandings. The damage that we do to our own understanding is as damaging as the damage that we do to the real culprits: those who perpetrate abuse on children and the systems of oppression that support them in doing so.

Pam Mitchell
Cambridge, MA

Dear Women's Review of Books,
I would like to thank Louise Armstrong for her intelligent review of recent books about incest. I write anonymously, I am sorry if I have made a point or two that you may have construed to express anger at the man who systematically sexually abused our daughter (three years old) in the arms of our housekeeper, or to the child, or to ourselves, or to the family who have, will, I have been warned repeatedly by my lawyer, destroy my credibility in court (prosecution is a hilly and vindictive). In my experience and observation, it is too easy for readers to swarms around the mother to silence her. The church demands that the mother forgive the rapist, he protects him by swallowing him in the Sixth Amendments...

My belief is that all of the abuse is the result of the hárplous sublimations of the therapeutic priests and priestesses who see the mother as sick, her anger a dangerous illness that must be overcome (for her sake and her child's sake, of course). The unholy fable that lives in the heart must be released from its chains. It has been almost an addiction to the sufferer. Any evidence of this anger after the time prescribed (not more than a year after the event) is a form of evidence that is "invalid." Never mind that the mother must cope with the psychic un- Russelling of a sexually abused child for years and years as she tries to come to terms with all of the devastating results of incest and its after- effects—socially, economically, psychologically—her life has swung out of control. Testimony is important, I am convinced, because incest is not taboo. It is com- pletely taboo, however, when it is right in our faces and treating it like a per- sonal reality in our lives and the lives of our children. Women who commit the crime is taboo. Punishing them is taboo. Naming incest, telling about it and exposing the men can help create the condi- tions for change, but must not be construed as constituting change.

An hysterical mother

To the Editor:
Both as a feminist and as a feminist psychoanalyst, I want to thank you for including my review of a recent psychoanalytic volume in your regularly review of recent incest literatures, "the personal is political." When I began working for women's liberation in 1968, feminism was a word that was used by men to show the psychoanalytical, economic and ideological liberation for all women. Our vision was a society without sexual and social roles, without select positions of equality for some women within a system of inequality for the mass of women. Women's autonomy was to be our weapon not the liberation of the women's autonomy. Women's autonomy was and is not to be achieved. We were unaware of the forces within us that were buried and submerged our oppression. We were less sensitive to psychological issues than we are now. We need to realize now that the application of psychological complexity in our theory rather than exclude politics from that theory. The discussion is not to place the modern woman in a context bound up with the depoliticization of our vision and our movement. We have since the 1980s created many necessary and useful institions: rape crisis centers, abortion clinics, battered women's shelters, women's health services, etc. These are crucial social services that are responsible for helping women to maintain their own issues and must be maintained. They dress our wounds. However, a hospital is not a substitute for an army of social workers and clinics.

Both my personal experience and my fif- teen years of professional experience as a psychoanalyst to the feminist assertion that empowerment is as crucial to healing as it is any form of psychotherapy. Identifying as a victim is not particularly empowering. True, it is preferable to identifying as the criterion of cause of one's own oppression, but those are not the only choices. In order to heal one has to neither obey, nor merely rebel within an oppressive system. One has to reject the whole system of oppression and begin build- ing an alternative that is empowering. All abuse of women has powerful political, economic and ideological conditions of ex- istence. Understanding these conditions of existence. By reducing any form of oppression to its personal psychological com- ponents we are saying "it's all in your heads," not understanding the notion that an individual can escape by and for herself. Both are ideas destructive to women. [...] I, like Louise Armstrong, deeply ap- preciate some of the recent incest literature. Books like The Courage to Heal by Ellen Bass and Laura Hendrickson. The Father's House by Sylvia Fraser have so well articulated the confusion, betrayal and rage experienced by sexually abused women that I feel they are making a contribution to our understanding of the experiences of existence. There is a place for books that exclude the political and social dimensions of the abuse, but there is only one place, not the entire field.

I join Louise Armstrong's protest against seeing our collective outrage as disease. We do not need to forgive our abusers but to use...