

# UNITE!

## The Trinity College Women's Center Newsletter Spring, 2003

### Letter From the Director

Did you know the Women's Center maintains a library with over 800 volumes? Did you know the Women's Center's library will soon be on-line, and easily accessed from the Women's Center web page? You just need to go to the Women's Center webpage(see pg. 8 for address), and click on Library. This means the library is now accessible to the general public.

The library has volumes not contained in the Trinity College Library. Some are rare and old, and some are autographed. A few of the subjects covered in our non-fiction collection are: theater, health, race, spirituality, sexuality, sports, women's studies, poetry, law and music!

Some recent titles include: "Ela Bhatt: Uniting Women in India," "Erotic Faculties," "The Politics of Motherhood," "Queer Studies: an Interdisciplinary Reader," "African-American Women and

the Vote," "Eating our Hearts Out: Personal Accounts of Women's Relationship to Food," "Beauty Queens on the Global Stage," "Aung San Suu Kyi: Standing up for Democracy in Burma," "Marina Silva: Defending Rainforest Communities in Brazil," "Selected Poems of Nikki Giovanni," "The Politics of Women's Bodies," and "Wild Witches Don't Get the Blues." In addition, we have many wonderful novels you can come borrow, or curl up with on our comfy Lounge couches.

Be sure to also check out our periodical archival library, which includes new and old issues (some going back 30 years) of magazines like *Essence*, *Sojourner*, *Ms.*, *Working Women*, *Off Our Backs*, *Signs: Journal Of Women and Culture and Society*, and more. New 'zine additions *Bust*, *Bitch*, and *Lilith*, join our old stand-bys: *Ms.*, *Latina*, *Essence*, *Off Our Backs*, *Out*, the *Advocate*, and *Resist*. Plus for research purposes, we have a file cabinet full of information on a wide range of gender related issues.

The Women's Center Lounge and Library is located next to Terrace Room C, on the 2nd floor of Mather. To borrow a book, browse the library, study or just hang out, please call x2408.

**Have a great summer!**

### "Sluts Unite!"

Nicole Riendeau and Jillian Rutman

This statement along with others like "U.S Out of My Underwear," and "Decriminalize Prostitution" were posted on stickers and handed out by ex-sex worker Carol Leigh Szego at her talk on February 7, 2003. Carol Leigh Szego, an avid feminist and advocate of sex-workers rights, began her career in prostitution after receiving a master's degree in poetry. Naturally the question arises as to why an educated woman would choose prostitution as a career. Ms. Szego addressed this in two ways. First, she accepted the stigma of the label "sex-worker" as a feminist challenge and second, she viewed it as an opportunity that would support her financially.

Ms. Szego became a prostitute at the age of 28, both out of curiosity and necessity. Although initially rejecting prostitution as an anti-feminist institution, after dancing at the Golden Banana on amateur night she realized that the choice to be a prostitute was actually empowering. It was during her first job at a "massage parlor" that she became aware of the sisterhood that existed between the women and became interested in how they dealt with their work and with the stigma of being prostitutes. Although she

- "Sluts Unite!"
- Baring It All
- Feminist Spirituality
- Baby In/Baby Out
- "Hallow Victories"
- WILPF!
- Nikki Giovanni Poem

acknowledges that her work was not representative of all prostitutes, she claims with confidence that thread of identity connecting sex-workers that extends across the lines of race, class and sexual orientation.

After her introduction, which worked to establish prostitution as a feminist challenge, the remainder of her talk focused on what prostitution should be as a business. To challenge anti-prostitution activists, she argued that “decriminalizing” prostitution (meaning there would be no criminal laws controlling it) would actually allow the government more control, and the workers a safer, more regulated system under the civil codes of business. These codes would allow for regular health check-ups for the women, HIV education and training, protection from police abuse, and the strict prohibition of child labor.

While from this standpoint, decriminalization sounds like a way to provide prostitutes with an identity and a safe work environment, it also implies that prostitution would have to be treated as and considered an ordinary business. Although Ms. Szego argued strongly for prostitution to be viewed in this manner, her “Philosophical Overview” actually discredited her own argument. One of the demands set forth in this philosophy by the International Union of Sex Workers was the “Absolute right to say no.” Because of the nature of their work, there are certain hazards that are more prominent in prostitution than in other professions. Rape, murder, physical and sexual abuse, and

health hazards are among the concerns. However, from a business perspective, it is important to consider the question asked by one Trinity audience member: “If you were working at a deli, you wouldn’t be permitted to refuse anyone service based on appearances or heresay. So if you do want to be seen as a business, then what are your grounds for rejecting service to anyone?” Ms. Szego, thrown off by the question, quickly glazed over it and moved on to less controversial grounds. However, the question remains: how can prostitution call itself a business if it wishes to legally practice discrimination?

This is not to say that prostitutes as citizens should be excluded from governmental services and protection. However, those wishing prostitution to be decriminalized will have to reconcile the contradictions that exist between their philosophical standpoints and their organized business objectives..

business objectives.

### **Baring it All**

Nicole Riendeau and Jillian Rutman

It’s a stifling, hot July afternoon, with no ventilation in their tiny dress factory. Five women, bent over their sewing machines, are unable to stand the oppressive steam from the irons. So they decide to take off their clothes. What’s interesting about this scene (besides the partial nudity)? Not only were these women cooling off, but they were rejoicing in the beauty of their bodies in an unconventional and non-sensationalized way. Their celebration was unconventional because societal standards would give them nothing to celebrate. They were accepting and enjoying their large thighs, round hips, bulging stomachs, full buttocks,

and ample breasts. In effect, they were finding the beauty in the curves of their bodies.

This scene from the movie Real Women Have Curves (co-sponsored at Trinity College by RIBS and the Latin American and Iberian Film Festival), is just one of many that addressed the issues surrounding beauty standards and realistic feminine figures. The story itself covered a number of themes as it followed the transition of a young Mexican-American woman in her preparation for college and the real world. Some of the other themes woven into the film dealt with issues of cultural differences, generational discordance, sexual awakening, and coming of age.

After this film was shown at Trinity College on Wednesday, February 19, students gathered in the basement of Cinestudio to eat flan (a cultural dessert addressed in the film), and join in a discussion with Psychology Professor Claire Wiseman. While the post-movie talk aimed to center on weight issues, discussion quickly strayed into the various sub-themes of the movie. Body image was an important factor, but Ana, the main character, maintained a positive body image even in the face of criticism. It was refreshing for the audience to see Ana’s acceptance of her body. However, because of her strength, controversy on the weight issue was minimized. People were more interested in talking about themes that were left less encouragingly resolved, such as the generational gap that stood in the way of a healthy relationship between Ana and her mother.

Although the discussion did not maintain a focus on weight issues as it had intended, the implications of this are actually positive. It was

encouraging to see members of the Trinity community come together and be able to accept Ana's acceptance of her body so readily. This was a good indication that body image may not have to be a negative obsession, and that our Trinity community is ready and willing to deal with other controversies.

Real Women Have Curves has been widely acclaimed. It won the Dramatic Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival (2002), and actresses America Ferrera (Ana) and Lupe Ontiveros (Ana's mother), won the Special Jury Prize for Acting. The movie has been screened at a number of Film Festivals, and waits patiently for you to rent it.

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"Feminist Spirituality permeates the personal and political; it is deeply incarnational; it seeks to animate our actions, thoughts and imagination, so that it can work for the transformation of ourselves and our world. It seeks to replace dualism with mutuality, and to give value to difference and diversity, and is acutely sensitive to the negative effects of dualistic thinking in any form. It seeks to reclaim female power, beginning with the likeness of women in the divine, the rehabilitation of the bodily as the locus of the divine and the right which women have to participate in their culture and religion. It is a spirituality that seeks to transform and respond to the hopes, loves, aspirations and agonies of our divided world."  
~ Jean Waldron, *An A to Z of Feminist Spirituality*

## Creating a New Religion: Feminist Spirituality and the Goddess

Beth Miller

Feminist activism during the 1960s and 1970s fostered social inquiry dedicated to uncovering lost women, their experiences, and contributions to society. Through this activism some women worked to recreate and reconstruct cultural and social institutions dominated by men and male images. In short, some women created their own religion because they felt oppressed by traditional religions, namely Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Thus, some feminists recast God in *their* image and adopted the Goddess and Feminist Spirituality as their religion.

Women who re-gendered God found a spiritual legacy when Marija Gimbutas published her theories about the many small feminine figurines she had unearthed in Europe during the 1950s and 1960s. Gimbutas was a Lithuanian archaeologist, linguist, and feminist who translated ancient European text, gathered and researched Lithuanian folktales, and excavated Neolithic sites in Yugoslavia, Macedonia, and Greece. This work first culminated in *Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe*, in which Gimbutas focuses on the millions of Paleolithic and Neolithic artifacts she uncovered at these archaeological sites. Many were stylized human and animal images, but most were sculptures of women.

According to Gimbutas, nomadic Paleolithic communities evolved into more settled Neolithic farming communities whose stability fostered art and

ritual. When people settled into farming communities dependant upon the land, they began to symbolically represent the land through voluptuous female figurines. Gimbutas theorized that ancient people sculpted and carved what they believed to be the Divine: the Goddess.

Gimbutas further hypothesized that warlike invaders from the Russian Steppes, whom she referred to as the "Indo-Europeans," destroyed these idyllic matrilineal cultures during the Bronze Age. Review of her past reveals

possible personal motivation for this theory. When Russians invaded Gimbutas' home country in 1940, they executed, arrested, and deported many Lithuanians, including members of her family. At one point, Gimbutas was forced to hide in the woods near Pazaislis to avoid capture, and her Mother carried poison with her in case she was captured. Gimbutas continued writing her dissertation about burial rites during this time, though the Russians had closed the Great University in Kaunas. In all, 25 members of Gimbutas' family disappeared.

Her later hypothesis that "Indo-Europeans" from the Russian Steppes destroyed matrilineal communities in Old Europe clearly echoes her personal experiences with Russian invaders. Indeed, famed violent, nomadic horsemen, the Scythians, did control the Russian steppes from roughly 700-300 B.C., so her theory is plausible if unproven. Indeed, this theory about the destruction of Goddess worshipping cultures in Europe resonated with feminists who recognized this theory of invasion and usurpation by patriarchal power as akin

their struggle against sexism in contemporary society.

Ultimately, Gimbutas' work resulted in a revised sense of history, culture, and religious identity for some women. Evidence offered by Gimbutas suggesting an ancient, peaceful culture with people who worshipped a female divinity resonated with anti-war, pro-woman feminists in America during the 1960s and 1970s. So they adopted this new her-story and created feminist spirituality and gathered in Circles to worship the Goddess.

Goddess circles and feminist spirituality still exist today. Circles scattered across the U.S. follow loosely structured rituals within which women pray, sing, and worship as politically conscious feminists. A ritual can either celebrate the new moon, or provide the opportunity to plan for a protest against war.

Feminist spirituality provides space for women to speak, heal, and claim power through the image of the Goddess, the ideally complex female divinity. Embracing complexity counters patriarchal insistence on dualistic structures (good/evil) and creates a broader base of spiritual support for women. In general, feminists who worship the Goddess rebel against traditional religions that forbid women to preach and fixate on male images of God.

The credo of most circles is borrowed from the Wiccan tradition: "If it harms none, do what you will." Another similarity between Wiccan and Goddess traditions is use of the word "witch" to refer to group members. Wiccan witches spend

much time working spells and using magic, which fits a more traditional image of witches. Contrary to popular ideas about witches, however, Wiccans follow the credo and never practice the Craft in ways that will harm others. Witches who worship the Goddess reclaim the name "witch" in a political sense, particularly to honor those women, children, and men murdered during the "Burning Times" in Europe. The main difference between these two religions is that Goddess circles reject rigid structures, rituals, and hierarchies they considered to be patriarchal structures, while Wiccans perform elaborate rituals, precisely controlled by a priest and/or priestess.

The feminist social movements of the 1960s and 1970s in combination with Marija Gimbutas' archaeological work provided a framework of support and channeled women's anger into political action, historical review, and spiritual creation. Thus, through a combination of social consciousness, feminist archeology, and spiritual hunger, women with a need to heal their fractured lives and the multitude of injuries committed by society resurrected the Goddess and created a religion.

Many women take the initiative to start their own circles with close friends they know they can trust. If you are interested in starting a circle you may want to refer to *Spiral Dance* by Starhawk. This book provides rituals and spells and general information about Goddess worship. One group I worked with was facilitated by Nora Jamieson. Her website is located at: <http://www.norajamieson.com/>. Another great source is The Wise Woman Center in New York: [www.wise-woman-center.com](http://www.wise-woman-center.com).

## "What Gets the Baby in, Gets the Baby Out"

Nicole Riendeau and  
Jillian Rutman

The water is warm, and her husband's arms are a great comfort. Their two children join them in the bathtub, eagerly awaiting the arrival of their new baby sister. Midwife Susanna Arms had the option of a hospital birth, but to her the greatest power of womanhood was letting her body deliver her baby in its natural course. Her movie, *Birthday*, made a powerful opening for Arlene Shannon's lecture, "Women and Power in the Birthplace." The event was cosponsored by the Women's Center and the Department of Women, Gender, and Sexuality.

Ms. Shannon, an aspiring midwife, delivered an interactive lecture that focused on the reasons why hospital birth is not the only or even the best option for expecting mothers. Ms. Shannon acknowledged that for some women, hospital birth was imperative, but according to her statistics, only 10% of women fall into this category. Among the 10% are women with Type 1 diabetes, and women who smoke or have other birth-affecting addictions. Surprisingly, the age of the mother is not one of the factors considered. However, Ms. Shannon did suggest that a woman's maturity and readiness to accept the responsibility for her own labor is a more relative determinant for whether or not a woman should consider a home birth.

To better inform the 90% of women who can (and according to Ms. Shannon,



“should”) consider a home birth, Ms. Shannon gave some alarming statistics about the operations and practices of hospital births. Many of these procedures not only threaten the health of the mother and child, but also disempower the woman. An example of this is the fact that one in four hospital births is a cesarean. There has been a significant increase in the practice of this operation, and while sometimes necessary, the cesarean is usually undertaken at the discretion of the doctor, and not the mother. Cesarean sections along with the injection of the hormone pitocin, and such practices as artificially rupturing the membranes surrounding the fetus (breaking the water), are examples of how hospital births aim to increase the speed of labor. This results in disrupting a woman’s natural birth cycle and often causes complications and unnecessary stress on the mother and child. There is an interesting correlation between a high rate of unnatural births in a country and that country’s infant mortality rate. The U.S., having a high rate of unnatural births, lands in the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile for infant mortality. The Netherlands, which has the lowest infant mortality rate worldwide, generally uses midwifery as the only medical support in childbirth.

Besides the medical reasons for considering home birth, Ms. Shannon also discussed the emotional and ideological reasons behind

this practice. She suggested that hospitals tend to make the birthing process a medical event. Doctors treat the birthing process as a debilitating condition, and the mother as a weak, diseased patient. This contrasts strongly to the home birth policy of viewing the process as a celebration of life in which all members of the family play a part. Birth should be treated as a rite of passage, and the mother as the strong subject, active in the process, not a weak vessel under the supervision of her doctor and husband.

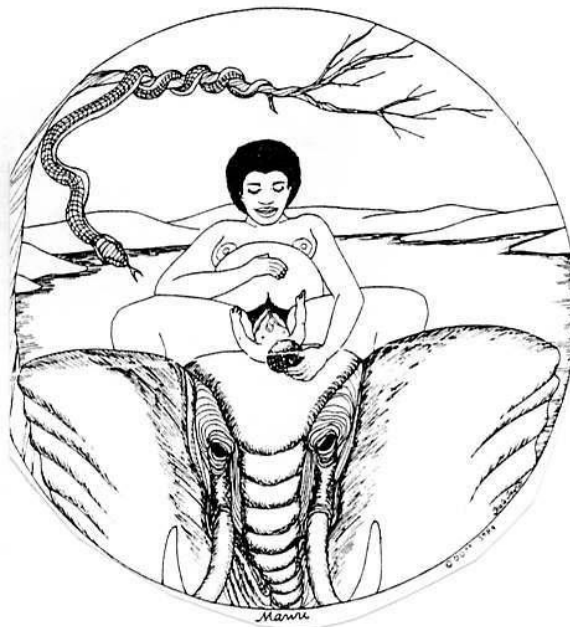
An interesting anecdote Ms. Shannon shared was a story about a friend of hers who recalled her hospital birth as a distant and detached experience. “Joan” remembers the doctor telling her, “Don’t worry, I’ll have this baby *for* you.” If that was not enough to cut her out of the action of the birthing process, after the labor was complete, the doctor asked her husband whether or not the mother should see her baby. The child was perfectly healthy, and the mother fully recovered from her memory-elapsing medication, but still the decision was given to the father. While some practices have changed since Joan’s experience, the fact remains that during hospital births, women are still infantilized. Today when doctors and fathers make decisions in the operating room, they do so under the assumption that the mother is too “out of it” to make informed decisions about her own body.

Throughout her presentation, Ms. Shannon supplied the audience with the surprising results of some recent studies. One study showed that women who give a natural birth (i.e. no drugs or even minor operations) and breast feed are far more likely to have healthy, connected relationships with their babies. Another study showed that for a normal, healthy woman, a home birth is actually safer to the mother and child than a hospital birth. Finally, and perhaps most surprisingly, women encounter considerably less risk and fewer complications in childbirth with just having another woman in the room, even if that woman is not actively participating in the birthing process.

This woman, who is present just to help if necessary, fulfills exactly the description of a midwife’s role. While a midwife serves to support the mother through all the stages of her pregnancy and child birth, she maintains enough distance to allow the mother the control and room for intuitive decision making. When describing the role of the midwife, Ms. Shannon said, “If you are a midwife and they can’t remember you being there, then you’re a good midwife.” This distance is only one of the philosophical differences between home and hospital births. Other philosophical differences include: the hospital sees the mother and baby as separate entities, while the midwife believes “what is best for the mother is best for the baby”; the hospital views birth as a sterile, asexual process, while the midwife believes that “what gets the baby in, gets

the baby out," and that the sexual connection between the father and mother is an important factor for a healthy natural birth.

While Ms. Shannon presented some excellent and enlightening information about home birth and midwifery, it is important to acknowledge that what is right for one mother is not necessarily right for another. Ultimately, the most important factor in deciding between home and hospital is where the woman feels the most safe and comfortable. Either way, Ms. Shannon's argument for the empowerment of women in the birthplace remains the same. Regardless of where the birth takes place, the process should be a cooperative effort that keeps the mother informed, connected, and active.



## Hollow Victories

Bailey Triggs, '05

We sit on couches  
drinking chais and talking  
about women, gender roles,  
the centimeters of vacant air  
between the cover girl's  
thighs.

The war is won, we're equal  
now.  
Didn't you get the memo?  
Forget that old fire,  
step from behind the cloud  
of feminist smoke. See the  
sun.

We argue more, agree  
to disagree. Finish our tea,  
tuck  
into bed. It's freezing out  
in negative degrees.

We wake: risen sharp  
perpendicular to the sheets.  
Hearts pounding, door  
pounding  
pounding down, dying  
down. Then louder. With the  
knuckles now,  
the empty palm not enough.  
We hear it bang wide, door  
handle punching  
the wall. Voice, no,  
not a voice  
at 4:30 am on a Friday  
night.

Something happened to  
me...

A frozen girl without a coat  
white ice to the touch,  
a friend recognized on  
warmer nights  
not tonight, not her tonight.

Her eyes working  
to purge themselves

of the things they've seen.  
Her body trembling itself  
free  
of the memory of grip.

*Something happened to  
me...*

*I don't remember what  
happened to me...*

We sit on couches  
drinking this in and running  
through scenarios, last  
seen with,  
and the number of blue-  
black  
bruises between her thighs.

*Something happened to  
me...*

*Someone...*

*I was so cold... So cold...*

We cradle and murmur,  
cradle  
and murmur cradle  
and stroke the tangled hair.  
*You're warm now. You're  
safe now. I've got you.  
It's over.  
Didn't you get the memo?  
The war is over, we're equal  
now.*

Hollow hands stroke hollow  
back  
hollow words whispering  
hollow victories into empty  
ears.

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Trinity College takes the  
crime of sexual assault very  
seriously. If you are a victim  
call Campus Safety (or have  
a friend/RA do so) at x2222.  
They will notify the Admin-  
istrator on Call (AOC) and  
the Health Center. For  
numbers of SART (Sexual  
Assault Repsonse Team)  
please see our website.

## FYI.....

**Eating disorders plague too many women & men on this campus. To help you learn more about eating disorders and how to help a friend, the Women's Center distributes the booklet "The Real Hunger: A Guide to Eating Disorders and How to Get Help." Just stop by the Women's Center to pick one up, or call x2408 and we'll mail you a copy.**

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**Want to work for women's rights and world peace?**  
Join WILPF - Women's International League for Peace and Freedom!

WILPF women stand for:  
\* The equality of all people in a world free of sexism, racism, classism and homophobia  
\* An end to all forms of violence: rape, battering, poverty, exploitation, intervention and war  
\* The transfer of world resources from military to human needs  
\* World disarmament and the peaceful resolution of international conflicts through the United Nations.

Dues are on a sliding scale.  
email: wilpfnatl@igs.apc.org  
Website: wilpf.org

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Ego Tripping (*there may be a reason why*)

*"The Selected Poems of Nikki Giovanni"*

Nikki Giovanni

*I was born in the congo  
I walked to the fertile  
crescent and built  
the sphinx  
I designed a pyramid so  
tough that a star that only  
glows every one hundred  
years falls into the center  
giving divine perfect light  
I am bad*

*I sat on the throne  
drinking nectar with  
allah  
I got hot and sent an ice age  
to Europe to cool my thirst  
My oldest daughter is  
nefertiti*

*the tears from my  
birth pains created the Nile  
I am a beautiful woman  
I gazed on the forest and  
burned  
out the sahara desert  
with a packet of  
goat's meat  
and a change of clothes  
I crossed it in two hours  
I am a gazelle so swift  
so swift you can't  
catch me*

*For a birthday  
present when he was three  
I gave my son Hannibal an  
elephant  
He gave me rome for  
mother's day*

*My strength flows ever on*

*My son noah built new/ark  
and  
I stood proudly at the helm  
as we sailed on a  
soft summer day  
I turned myself into myself  
and was  
jesus  
men intone my  
loving name  
All praises All  
praises  
I am the one who would  
save*

*I sowed diamonds in my  
back yard  
My bowels deliver uranium  
the filings from my  
fingernails are  
semi-precious jewels  
On a trip north  
I caught a cold and blew  
My nose giving oil to the  
arab world  
I am so hip even my errors  
are correct  
I sailed west to reach east  
and had to round off  
the earth as I went  
The hair from my  
head thinned and gold was  
laid across three continents*

*I am so perfect so divine so  
ethereal so surreal  
I cannot comprehend  
except by my  
permission*

*I mean...I...can fly  
like a bird in the  
sky...*

\* \* \*