GLOBAL UPRISING: CONFRONTING THE TRYANNIES OF THE 21ST CENTURY, STORIES FROM A NEW GENERATION OF ACTIVISTS


BY LEIGH S. BROWNHILL

Struggling for social and ecological justice, suggests Direct Action Network’s Shannon Service, makes us human. Judging by all the “Battles of Seattle” that have erupted globally, and by the contents of Welton and Wolf’s edited collection, Global Uprising, a whole generation has been born into the toil and festivity of building a new world out of the smoke and ashes of the old.

Still, as contributor J. L. Chestnut wrote in his chapter on the 1960s Civil Rights movement, “I don’t think this generation fully understands how we got where we are. They don’t know the extent of the blood, the suffering, the deaths.” Chestnut raises the critical issue of the ahistorical perspectives of many activists. As this collection shows, it is not that people are naturally blind to the past. On the contrary, much has been shielded from the public view by those in the state and corporate seats of power. Why? Perhaps because learning history can push a person to want to change the course of history.

Welton and Wolf contribute to the process of unveiling historical and international aspects of social movements against capitalist exploitation. Their book contains histories, testimonies, analyses, and personal and organizational biographies. Together, these present a picture of the diversity and unity emerging in tandem in the anti-corporate globalization movement worldwide. Authors do not spare us any of the most devastating impacts of corporate globalization. The contributors to this volume demonstrate personal courage and compassion and, in some instances, an unfolding understanding of the complexities of both corporate rule and the struggle for a new society. The time-tested analyses of Vandana Shiva, Kevin Danaher, Noam Chomsky, and Leonard Peltyir, among others, combine with the fresh perspectives of very young activists to make this a diverse collection.

Owens Wiwa presents his testimony on the Nigerian popular resistance against Shell and other oil companies. He argues that in that struggle, the women in Ogoni are the most powerful. They are very well organized, and they empowered us to speak out, because they were behind us. The women are on the front lines of the environmental movement. They are the farmers, and they see the effects of these oil spills and gas flares on their crops and their yields. They are the people who usually come to my clinic with the children whose lungs have been poisoned by gas fumes. They are also the people who, when their children are arrested, carry most of the pain.

I draw inspiration from statements such as that made by Betty Krawczyk, when she was on trial in 2000 for blockading logging roads in Elaho Valley, British Columbia. She told the judge that,

“In my opinion, my attempt to try to help stop Interfor’s rapid destruction of the Elaho Valley by standing in front of the logging trucks was not an evil, criminal, crazy thing to do. In my scheme of things, it was the eminently sane thing to do. I believe it to be crazy and insane to stand by mutely while our collective life support systems are being destroyed.”

Through activism, contributing author Neta Golan unlearned the racism she had been taught as a Jewish Israeli girl. In her article “Human Shield: An Israeli Activist in Palestine,” she concludes that I believe that a conflict can only really be solved when both sides in the conflict are happy and safe. That is real victory. My father shares a view with many Israelis that supporting Palestinians means betraying my people. I do not think that that is the case. I believe that for Jews to be safe and free, Palestinians need to have safety and freedom. Otherwise we are preparing our children for a legacy of war. So I am working on our joint interest—peace and justice—which is a requirement for all of us and for all of our children.

Global Uprising is essential reading, especially for the new activist. Its short, hard-hitting and easy-to-read articles build understanding of the issues and critical analytical skills. This book should be studied for its refreshing perspectives on what Wolf and Welton call the “fluid cohesion” characterizing this multifaceted movement which challenges corporate globalization from above by constructing a popular globalization from below.

LA PROSTITUTION, UN MÉTIER COMME UN AUTRE?

Yolande Geada
Montréal: vlé. éditeur, 2003

PAR JEANNE MARANDA

La prostitution, un métier comme un autre? La question est posée dans
un climat de mondialisation du proxénétisme et du trafic sexuel des femmes. Yolande Geadah, engagée depuis une trentaine d'années dans l'éducation interculturelle et le développement international a pris le parti d'éclairer le débat qui divise les féministes ainsi que des groupes défenseurs des droits humains et travailleurs sociaux. Elle nous donne à réfléchir sur les enjeux liés à la prostitution. La situation est critique et selon madame Aurora Javate de la Fondation Scelles de Paris: « le corps humain est inaliénable, le corps humain n'est pas une marchandise, il faut refuser sa mise en marché de la même façon qu'on refuse aujourd'hui le commerce du sang ou des organes ainsi que le commerce des esclaves ».

Un coup d'œil sur la situation au Québec nous retourne au temps du «Red-Light District », des spectacles de stripteaseuses qui ont cédé la place aux danses-contacts légalisées, aux salons de massage, aux clubs d'escortes. La Fédération des femmes du Québec, le Conseil des femmes du Québec et les CALACS (Centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel) ont pris position mais « on ne peut pas parler de consensus à l'égard de la prostitution, et le débat est appelé à se poursuivre ». La Société Elizabeth Fry et l'Association des travailleuses et travailleurs du sexe sous l'égide de Stella, (porte-parole des travailleuses du sexe à Montréal) se sont prononcées en faveur d'une législation qui protégerait ces personnes. Quant au trafic sexuel au Canada, il est lié aux émigrantes, «l'importation croissante de femmes étrangères pour répondre aux exigences sans limites du marché du sexe désormais banalisées et légitimées à travers la légalisation de la danse-contact » n'est pas une perspective encourageante.

Alors, quoi répondre à la question de Yolande Geadah? A quelle orientation doit-on adhérer? Il est évident qu'on ne pourra jamais en finir avec la prostitution, on sait bien qu'elle est là pour rester. Faut-il humaniser? la décriminaliser? en faire un droit? un choix? Et puis après? L'auteure offre plusieurs pistes dont le modèle suédois qui semble le plus proche d'une solution au problème avec sa politique qui vise l'égalité entre les sexes. Il aura fallu quand même 20 ans au Parlement de la Suède (43% sont des femmes) pour en arriver à
PASSION LOST:  
PUBLIC SEX,  
PRIVATE DESIRE IN 
THE TWENTIETH  
CENTURY

Patricia Anderson.  
Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers, 2001

BY STEPHANIE HART

Passion Lost: Public Sex, Private Desire in the Twentieth Century is Patricia Anderson's attempt to explicate what she deems as a widening chasm between the public representations of sexuality and what actually occurs in the bedrooms of North America. Anderson argues that the main implication of this chasm is a sexual self that longs for something deeper and more fulfilling — and that something is, of course, passion. The text opens with a scene from the 1997 film Titanic, where she offers a flowery description of Jack Dawson's imminent death and his young lover Rose's steadfast refusal to abandon him. This scene effectively sets the tone for the entire text, as Anderson describes this moment as one that typifies "our highest ideal of love and devotion." While Anderson does state that this scene is an idealized myth, she validates it by the suggestion that this is something "we" strive for. Through the course of the text, it also becomes apparent that the same collective "we" secretly longs for a transcendent notion of love and passion, while erroneously seeking its fulfillment through a sexuality that is commercialized and expressed publicly.

Anderson's consistent application of "we" to a complex and discursively constructed topic is problematic, as it is readily evident that her demarcation of healthy and unhealthy sexuality is mitigated by a singular and decidedly essentialist stance. Moreover, it is also apparent that her target reader is explicitly heterosexual, middle to upper class, and North American. Class, ethnicity, and certainly orienation are given scant attention in this text, suggesting that Anderson does not explore the many factors which construct and maintain the public and the private as binaries.

This tendency is not limited to her vanilla descriptions of heterosexuality, as her historical information is at times superficial and carries little specificity beyond popular culture. While she offers a fairly broad overview of the last century's public performances of sexuality (starting with the Victorians and working up to a Huxleyesque chapter entitled "Brave New Love: 2000 and Beyond"), each period seems to begin with a wonderful sense of sexual freedom, but ends with the people retreating to their bungalows to lament the lack of passion in their lives. Empowerment is followed by degradation and misery, and autonomy is reflected through rising hem lines. This refrain is consistent throughout the text, yet Anderson does not offer a deeper explication of her thesis, suggesting that this text is more a rhetorical device than academic study.

As with the mostly uncritical use of "we" (Anderson does in fairness refer to an age of sexual "plurality" in a sense that "it is here, so we have to learn to live together"), it seems to me that a text claiming to examine the gap between sexuality in the public and private sphere should examine how women's sexual identities are created and contained within these spaces. Anderson pays more attention to the décor of the urban home in the 1950s than she does to the implications of the pill, while similarly in her synopsis of the 1980s, she devotes a full page to the lycra outfits favoured by Jane Fonda while giving the devastation of the rising AIDS crisis a meager half page. Moreover, alternative sexualities are almost nonexistent in this text, suggesting that Anderson has a strict definition of identities and actions which injure the sexual self, and similarly, that there is a straight path to salvation.

The final chapter effectively illustrates this synopsis, as it reads more like a self-help book than a historical study of sexuality. In the closing paragraphs, Anderson states that "courage" and "imagination" will heal the sexual self, and offers us a "simple but essential truth...In the human will to love, and in the courage to enact it with integrity, is where passion can be found." Anderson's text falls short of its promise because of her emphasis on a transcendent notion of love and passion, as the factors that mitigate sex and desire cannot be encapsulated into a singular discourse, much less in one sentence.