

Poor-Bashing: The Politics of Exclusion. Jean Swanson. Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 2001; viii +207 pages; ISBN 1-896357-44-X; \$24.95 (paper).

Poor-Bashing, as the title suggests, is a no-nonsense examination of anti-poor ideologies and practices in Canada. Swanson's book offers an accessible and highly readable introduction to the bases of anti-poor social policies, the prejudices and practices that perpetuate poor-bashing, along with strategies for understanding and challenging social exclusion. Peppered with the experiences of individuals she has interviewed, this book brings a fresh approach to understanding the structural and systemic sources of poverty in Canada today.

There are two resounding strengths to *Poor Bashing*. First, the historical overview of the origins and perpetuation of anti-poor policies and practices is both rich and easily understood. Swanson traces the emergence of the poor laws to the United Kingdom and their subsequent transplantation in Canada, and adeptly illustrates the ways in which the protestant ideologies assisted in supporting a particularly capitalism-friendly view of wealth and inequality. In a chatty but serious fashion, Swanson winds through the various social policy developments associated with the rise of the welfare state in Canada drawing us to the current period, in which the media and neo-liberal ideology conspire to resurrect the spirit of the poor-laws. Second, Swanson pushes the reader to draw strong links between racism, sexism and indeed discrimination in general in relation to anti-poor behaviour. More than merely tying forms of oppression together, she forces an examination of personal prejudices and biases about poverty. She asks the reader to consider how she might "bash herself," thus exposing the insidiousness of anti-poor beliefs in Canadian society.

Swanson's examination of internalised poor-bashing pulls together the historical and social policy emphases of the book, culminating in strategies for countering poor-bashing in everyday life, in public discourse, in the media and in legislation.

Poor-Bashing will find a wide audience: it is written in clear and jargon-free language. While not specifically targeted to feminist scholars,

Swanson's ability to link poor-bashing with other forms of oppression makes her book extremely relevant for women's studies. Swanson is careful to note that poverty in Canada is gender (along with race and ability) specific. Social activists, university and college students, and indeed anyone interested in the issues of poverty and social justice will use this book as an accessible source of information about social exclusion in Canada.

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The Radical Women Manifesto: Socialist Feminist Theory, Program and Organizational Structure. Introduction by Megan Cornish. Seattle: Red Letter Press, 2001; 94 pages; ISBN 0-932323-11-1; \$10.00US (paper).

Turbo Chicks: Talking Young Feminisms. Allyson Mitchell, Lisa Bryn Rundle, and Laura Karaian, eds. Toronto: Sumach Press, 2001; 364 pages; ISBN 1-894549-06-6; \$24.95 (paper).

On a recent visit from Toronto, my aunt glimpsed these books upon my kitchen table and asked, "What *is* feminism these days?" A lively discussion ensued, with my side of the conversation drawing upon the diverse ideas presented in these texts. Both books address rebellious politicized individuals striving to change the *status quo*, but they present markedly different approaches to engaging feminism for social change. *The Radical Women Manifesto* is, well, a manifesto for socialist feminism, while *Turbo Chicks* is a collection of individuals' writings on how feminisms operate in the lives of the authors.

Introducing *The Radical Women Manifesto*, Megan Cornish addresses the book to a "new wave of rebels and revolutionaries" providing "a cutting-edge guide...to build and sustain a movement for redesigning society" (5). "Radical Women" emerged in 1967 in Seattle from a "Free University" class on Women and Society which brought together New Left student activists and feminist radicals from the "Old Left" socialist tradition. This international organization advances

a multi-issue stance linking multiple social struggles and works to change society by being "audacious, multiracial, queer and straight, socialist feminist advocates for the overthrow of capitalism" (5).

The manifesto is presented in four sections: Preamble, Theory, Platform, and Organizational Structure and Principles. The Preamble grounds Radical Women's analysis in standpoint theory whereby some women are "doubly - and triply exploited" and "develop a keener awareness and consciousness of the triple nature of oppression - class, race, and sex" (19). *The Radical Women Manifesto* also recognizes additional oppressions based on sexuality, age, ability, and so on. However, while oppressions are often multiple, a standpoint approach can in effect layer or hierarchize oppressions, problematically implying that those most marginalized have the greatest consciousness.

Radical Women's methodology draws upon Engels' historical materialism, asserting that sexism arose in the shift from matrilineal society organized around communal ownership to a patriarchal private property system separating public and domestic labour spheres. I am skeptical of their universalizing and idealizing claims that societies were organized as "communal female kinship groups" where "complete democracy and egalitarian decision-making prevailed among members of the tribe...a sexual division of labour prevailed but equal prestige was accorded to each group [and] class difference did not exist" (23). Why would a matrilineal society necessarily be more egalitarian? I am troubled by the essentialism lurking here. I do agree with their analysis of the nuclear family as an economic unit on which capitalism depends and that the institution of the nuclear family "breeds anti-social individualism and nonintervention into public affairs" (28-29). *The Radical Women Manifesto* calls for nothing short of a revolution where "the bourgeois father of male supremacy must be overthrown and replaced by the matriarchal democracy of socialist economics and humane culture" (34) commencing in the United States where, because of supremacy in the world economy, "revolution in the U.S. is the key to lasting fundamental change anywhere else in the world" (35). But call me cynical: I doubt the

"primal unity" of socialism and feminism (43).

The Platform section presents Radical Women's demands across a wide spectrum of issues, including legal rights, economic equality, biological self-determination, healthcare, education, childcare, disabled people, and women in prison. While I support their vision for a more equal society - particularly implementing free childcare, free post-secondary education with multi-lingual access, free and accessible healthcare, equal education for the disabled, fully funded women's shelters, guaranteed incomes at union wages for the disabled and elderly, and so on - Radical Women's demands remain ideal as their manifesto entirely fails to address *how* in any concrete way these reforms will be realized and where the money would come from. Also problematic is the homogenizing assumption that women "as women" will support "their sex" and socialist or anti-capitalist politics, as this fails to recognize that some women are presently privileged by capitalism and don't see it in their interest to align themselves with "the oppressed."

The final section of the book outlines Radical Women's organizational structure based in "democratic centralism" whereby unity in action is realized without the violation of individual rights (77). A summary of the bylaws defines membership, the structuring of the National Executive Committee, terms of office, finances, publications and so forth, and contact information invites inspired readers to join the movement.

Turbo Chicks: Talking Young Feminisms approaches revolution on a more individual level. Allyson Mitchell instigated the *Turbo Chicks* project to counter a perception that the current generation of young women is apathetic, and to extend a lifeline to feminism for those who need it. The editors resist defining "young" but rather employed the term "to point to the generational differences between feminist women while avoiding the characterization of young women as inexperienced and older women as experts" (17). Despite the editors' attempts to draw from communities across Canada, the overall response was primarily urban and university-centred and they were disappointed not to receive any submissions from Native women.

Arranged thematically around first experiences with feminism, identities, education,

and activism, *Turbo Chicks* comprises more than forty contributions and demonstrates that "young women today are entering multiple movements" (16). Julie Devaney writes of picketing to support a women's shelter and abortion clinics; Cara Banks tells of her work with the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, particularly the Prairie School for Union Women; Cat Pyne asks "is feminism dynamic enough to respond to the tranny movement?" (111); Jennifer O'Connor suggests that "third wave feminism is about embracing a separate subculture, reclaiming language and images" (333); and Maren Hancunt changed her name from Hancock to Hancunt "upon learning that the word 'cunt' is etymologically related to knowledge, sexuality and creation"(151). Each contribution includes the author's personal definition of feminism, a top-ten list of feminist influences, and a short biography. The volume also includes a glossary and suggested reading and websites.

As for my aunt's question, "What *is* feminism today?" she would find wide-ranging and sometimes contradictory responses when reading *Turbo Chicks*. This book offers engaging reading for those fresh to feminism *and* those who are more experienced: most selections are accessible while a few *may* prove a bit alienating in the references to particular theories/theorists. I particularly like the intimacy of the first-person voices and how the reader can sample throughout the volume, skipping to whatever suits her curiosity. Diverse feminisms emerge in truly inspiring ways through this collection of essays, prose, poetry, photos, and zine excerpts, making *Turbo Chicks* great revolutionary reading.

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