

treatise serves as an exercise in the analysis of discursive relations. It is a recursive look at our history which could be extended to the present.

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Ceremonies of the Heart: Celebrating Lesbian Unions. Becky Butler (ed.). Seal Press, 1990, Pp. 308.

This 1990 publication breaks a long silence in gay and lesbian literature on the commitment ceremonies of lesbian couples. I read *Ceremonies of the Heart* with some anticipation, hoping that there would be considerable analysis of lesbian living. However, the focus is narrow and restricted to description rather than analysis of union/ceremonial activities. Nonetheless, Butler has provided a rich account of the diversity of women's choices around ceremonies between lesbian couples.

Butler intended *Ceremonies of the Heart* as a resource book for lesbians and, in particular, for lesbian couples looking for ideas to celebrate their relationships. The book is not an academic work. There is no account of the method used to select the stories, no theoretical framework of same-sex relationships or of the need for and implications of union ceremonies. Further, neither the relationship between the politics of feminism and of lesbian union ceremonies nor the common threads amongst the stories are discussed.

The book consists of three parts: an introduction, an historical section and a section of accounts of actual union ceremonies. The introduction is refreshingly reflective. Most importantly, we find that Butler has herself experienced a union ceremony and has a passionate commitment to preparing a book that will help other lesbians construct their own ceremonies.

The second part is a well-written and researched history of lesbian partnerships with an extensive bibliography. It is written to appeal to a "popular" audience and there is an abundance of

American references. This part details the struggle of lesbians for recognition and acceptance of lesbian partnerships. The topics addressed cover, in chronological order, sapphic spirit (Antiquity), intolerance (Roman times), cross dressing (Middle Ages), romantic friendships (18th and 19th century), deviance and pathology (beginning of the 20th century) and three sections on the increasing liberation of the 20th century. Butler's conscious effort to have diversity at the forefront is an important plus for this book.

The third part consists of 27 chapters, each an account of a ceremony provided by one or both of the women involved. Through these, the reader gets a bird's-eye view of culture being created by lesbians and their families. These are first-person accounts but, occasionally, the words of parents and friends are used. The reader is left with a feeling of richness — a feeling of having vicariously experienced the intensity and delight of others as they recount the process of agreeing to, organizing and living through a ceremony of the heart.

Each chapter contains a photo of the "partners," the story of how the idea of a ceremony surfaced between the women, how the ceremony was devised and presented and, finally, a small biographical note on each woman.

Despite the heavy emphasis on American couples (fully 89% come from the U.S.A., 44% from California alone), a great diversity of heritages (e.g., African, Aboriginal, Irish, Mexican, Chicano, etc.) and of spiritual backgrounds (e.g., Mennonite, Catholic, Jewish, Wicca, Quaker, atheist) is represented. In some ceremonies, women were able to combine unlike heritages and spiritual backgrounds to create unique, tailor-made experiences.

The selected couples introduce a number of issues. Some write about who to invite and who was involved: their children, colleagues, parents and siblings. For example, two New Zealand women decided to invite 13 women, "which is the size of a coven." Others write mainly about what was to be said during the ceremony. For some, "coming out" as a lesbian was a natural though risky part of

the decision to have a ceremony. For others, the ceremony was seen as the culmination of the lesbian relationship, where one "popped the question" or "proposed" to the other. Lesbians had to sort through the questions of who "proposed," of rings, of whether one was to be "given away," of permission of parents to "marry," of whether or not to have children, of roles during the ceremony and of monogamy as a part of the on-going lesbian relationship.

Ceremonies of the Heart provides a starting point for further research on the liberation of lesbians from patriarchal prohibitions, including the prohibition of same-sex "marriages." Essential questions for further research include: Are "pro-union" attitudes common amongst lesbians? Why are there few role models or models of ceremonies for lesbians seeking a union or commitment experience? How and why do some lesbian ceremonies parallel those available in the straight (heterosexual) world? What do words like *union*, *commitment*, *family*, and *bonding* really mean to lesbians? What is the meaning of unions and long-term "couplesdom" to lesbians in a social world that is antagonistic to them?

While Butler's work does not answer all the questions that need to be asked about union ceremonies, it serves as an excellent resource for the "pro-union" parts of both the lesbian and gay communities.

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Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth Century New York. Nancy Grey Osterud. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991, Pp. 303.

This book is a carefully crafted historical study challenging the notion of women's culture and the ideology of separate spheres as organizing principles for understanding women's work. Instead of continuing to use these concepts, which for many feminists have been instrumental in reclaiming

women's visibility in history and developing women's history, Nancy Grey Osterud draws on Linda Kerber's recent work on the history of the use of separate spheres as an ideology¹ and, in turn, frames her own writing with ideas about mutuality and shared spheres.

In Osterud's description and interpretation of life in New York's Nanticoke Valley in the 1800s, she argues that mutuality based on kinship and community labour sharing in a rural household economy was consequential to women's participation in the household, in rural organizations (both formal and informal) and in social and economic life. This mutuality, she further argues, was consequential to rural social and economic development and supported a rural understanding of women's equality.

Osterud highlights the positive aspects of bonding or the drawing together of people instead of focusing on the aspects of bondage (referred to in the title of the book²) which made life difficult for women (such as lack of access to property ownership, differential formal rights, decreased wages, and occupational restrictions). This bonding of the community through mutuality was, Osterud argues, based on an organization of family and household and women's importance in that organization.

As Rayna Rapp³ has demonstrated earlier, households were not based on universal rules but rather on normative rules governing household formations in specific cultural contexts. In the context of the nineteenth-century Nanticoke Valley of New York, flexible, shared labouring and responsibilities between women and men and between households contributed to a rich and textured social life rather than a life of drudgery for women.

Like most contemporary feminists, Osterud redefines work to include all activities of both women and men — not just those valued by a capitalist economic system. She also provides an explanation based on the specific case of the transition from a household production economy to capitalist market economy, upon which different systems of evalua-