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New Perspectives in
Gender Research

Working Paper Series
2022, Volume 1

Avrina Jos

Historicizing
Trouble and Strife
An Analysis of a Radical
Feminist Magazine

With a Commentary by
Anca-Raluca Radu



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2022, Volume 1

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Historicizing *Trouble and Strife*

An Analysis of a Radical Feminist Magazine

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Abstract

Trouble and Strife (TaS) was an independent British radical feminist magazine (1983–2002) that explored topics and debates connected to the British Women’s Liberation Movement. Though *TaS* has been archived online and reprinted as a short collection in 2009, it has not been studied for its critique of ideological structures within feminist politics. This paper historicizes *TaS* by looking at the ways in which it envisioned feminist history by examining and rewriting history. Viewing the BWLM from *TaS*’ perspective allows the historicization of a movement on the cusp of a shift to an intersectional radical feminist politics.

Keywords

Feminist history, *Trouble and Strife*, radical feminism, British feminism, feminist media history, feminist historiography, social movement media, feminist rhetoric, intersectional feminisms.

Zusammenfassung

Trouble and Strife (TaS) war eine unabhängige britische radikal-feministische Zeitschrift (1983–2002), die sich mit Themen und Debatten im Zusammenhang mit der britischen Frauenbewegung befasste. Obwohl *TaS* 2009 online archiviert und in Auszügen als Reader nachgedruckt wurde, wurde die Zeitschrift nicht auf ihre Kritik an ideologischen Strukturen innerhalb der feministischen Politik untersucht. Der vorliegende Artikel historisiert *TaS*, indem untersucht wird, welche Vorstellungen über feministische Geschichte sich in ihren Betrachtungs- und Umschreibungsweisen von Geschichte zeigen. Die Betrachtung der britischen Frauenbewegung aus der Sicht der *TaS* ermöglicht die Historisierung einer Bewegung an der Schwelle zu einer intersektionellen radikalen feministischen Politik.

Schlagworte

Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft, *Trouble and Strife*, radikaler Feminismus, britischen Frauenbewegung, feministische Mediengeschichte, feministische Geschichtsschreibung, intersektionale Feminismen.

Introduction

Of the innumerable contributors to the print culture of the British Women's Liberation Movement (BWLM), only a few have been extensively studied or mentioned in secondary literature. Names such as *Spare Rib*, *Everywoman*, *Shrew* and *Red Rag* for periodicals and *Virago*, *Sheba Feminist Press*, *The Onlywomen Press*, *The Women's Press* for publishers are considered representative of the reserves of writing produced during this period. The peak of the BWLM produced innumerable women's liberation groups or workshops¹ and often, each group or workshop published a newsletter or periodical to reach their immediate members and other groups, resulting in multiple voices and varying content. Difference, in terms of ideology and diversity amongst women, made these specifically oriented productions a requisite for the momentum of their women's movements. Practical differences such as financing and advertising policies also played a role in shaping each periodical.

One such periodical of the BWLM is *Trouble and Strife* (*TaS*), an independent radical feminist magazine that arose in 1983 and went on for two decades till 2002, publishing two to three issues a year. The collective intended the magazine to be a "new center" for radical feminist politics, engaging with issues that were of "direct and current relevance to the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain". This intention was fueled by a desire to create a print forum for radical feminism, a political strand of feminism that was "often silent in print" ("Issue 1 Editorial" 1983: 2).

TaS was not an academic journal, though it published articles that discussed theory, effectively connecting theoretical knowledge with activism of the time. The magazine was not a typical women's magazine, though it published short, readable articles in the style of one and

presented itself with a similar aesthetic². It was not a typical movement newsletter, though it carried developments related to the BWLM. Collective members came from different walks of life – some were academics, some public intellectuals and some students, amongst others – and included feminists such as Dianne Butterworth, Liz Kelly, Stevi Jackson, Sophie Laws and Diana Leonard. Collective members Deborah Cameron and Joan Scanlon, renowned feminists working today in academia and theatre respectively, were the Editors of *The Trouble & Strife Reader* (2009) published by Bloomsbury.

The magazine was intended as an "English language sister publication" to the French radical feminist journal *Nouvelles questions féministes*, one with which *TaS* continued a dialogical alliance. Similar alliances were made with other international feminists, fulfilling the collective's commitment to "open debate" and developing "links with radical feminist publications in other countries worldwide..." ("Issue 1 Editorial" 1983: 3). *TaS* also actively engaged with marginalized local feminisms apart from deconstructing ideological structures within feminist politics, effectively creating an examination of the ethnocentric, imperial and racist ideologies of then white middle-class feminism in Britain.

In the very first issue, *TaS* defined itself and radical feminism as distinctly different from lesbian and cultural separatism. In addition to opposing separatist forms of radical feminism, *TaS* also opposed essentialist ideas of maternal thinking, matriarchal power and other forms of spiritual feminism. The first Editorial in 1983 acknowledges the presence of socialist and Marxist feminisms but defines radical feminism as a political feminism that perceives gender as the primary oppression, whereas class and capital were only secondary or complementary. By the time of the second Editorial, published in 1993, the collective had opened itself to the idea of "multiple oppressions". They write, "... the idea

¹ According to Finn Mackay, the membership of just the London Women's Liberation Workshop rose from 16 to 66 groups in the months following the international women's day march in London in 1971 (2015: 48).

² *TaS* pages were illustrated by cartoonists Cath Jackson, Angela Martin, Janis Goodman etc.

that oppressions such as class, race and disability are somehow ‘added on’ to women’s oppression (making you working class and a woman, or Black and a woman, etc.) has been challenged. That approach implicitly assumed that these oppressions were somehow ungendered or gender neutral, and that gender is class and race neutral. But this is not the case” (“Editorial: Then and Now” 1993: 5). Continuing the “second wave” into the new millennium, *TaS*’ work can be seen to have developed an intersectional perception of oppression.

It is easy to assign the label of “second wave concern” to the topics that the magazine engaged with but several of these topics, such as sexual violence, power and oppression, religious fundamentalism, and sexuality are still relevant in the post #metoo age. Additionally, the ways in which *TaS* develops as a discursive and dialogical magazine – thereby (re)defining radical feminism in Britain – provide insights into the controversial and debate-fueled climate of the BWLM and the evolution of radical feminism. This paper aims to situate *TaS* as an important artefact of historicization of the BWLM. I do so by assessing the many ways in which *TaS* contributes to the examination and rewriting of feminist history, thereby rewriting radical feminism.

Readers can perceive *TaS*’ vision for a radical feminist politics from the very first issue of the magazine. One of the ways in which *TaS* exhibited this vision was by examining feminist and women’s history through its political lens. It interrogated both feminist – especially those appropriated by radical feminists – and other conventional tropes.

1. Deconstructing the Witch and Other Tropes

TaS’ examination of the witch is an example of how the collective viewed the need to not just interrogate socialist feminist tropes but also deconstruct radical feminist ones. As early as

Issue 2, Rachel Hasted questions the new distortions produced by feminist historians to replace male scholarly attitudes towards the idea of the witch and reclaim the trope as a feminist symbol. Even though the “witchcraze” was not part of 19th century feminist writing, Jules Michelet’s portrayal of “witches as political figures” in 1862 gave way to several feminist historical accounts on the topic. As Hasted points out, Michelet’s work, despite being based on archival material left by witch-hunters, was interpreted “personally”. He generated the idea of witches as “pagan priestesses leading a doomed peasants’ revolt against the oppression of a Christian ruling class” (1985: 18). This was followed by the 19th century idea of witches as scientists persecuted for questioning the authority and knowledge of the church³. These two ideas, as Hasted identifies, become the foundations for a feminist historicization of witches as spiritual or political heroes of the time.

Matilda Joslyn Gage, a radical leader of the US suffrage movement and a researcher of women’s history, who Hasted assumes was the first US feminist to suggest the presence of matriarchal and egalitarian cultures in prehistorical societies, connects these ideas to patriarchy. This framing of witches as women of “superior knowledge”, possessing supernatural powers either by way of the Pacinian corpuscles present in the sensory nerves in their hands and feet or by way of menstruation, played into the feminist agenda which constructed the church and the government as the “jealous” or threatened patriarchy. But Gage, according to Hasted, had not considered the presence of men amongst those burned at the stake or those hanged in public squares, or the validity of the primary sources she derived from. Hasted points out that Gage’s work assumed that “historical knowledge was advancing towards a complete world view” (1985: 19).

Feminists such as Mary Daly and Dale Spender tended to cite Gage as a source of feminist inspiration without questioning her belief in the occult and spiritual powers of

³ Proposed by American historian HC Lea.

women or her lack of evidence for these ideas. Attempting to recover the trope of the witch – as “lay healers, pagan Old Believers, proto-feminists, and peasant revolutionaries consciously fighting an underground war of resistance against the patriarchal state and Christian church” – some feminists were quick to undertake appropriations. Groups such as *WITCH: Women’s International Conspiracy from Hell*, *Women Inspired to Commit Herstory* and the like identified witches as “the original guerrillas and resistance fighters against ... the oppression of women”. A “mother coven” is said to have characterized witches as “groovy, courageous, aggressive, intelligent, non-conformist, explorative, curious, independent, sexually liberated, (and) revolutionary”. This New York based “mother coven” which builds vigorously on the image of the witch, furthers this idea in a pamphlet: “... the witch was chosen as a revolutionary image for women because they did fight hard and in their fight they refused to accept the level of struggle which society deemed acceptable of their sex... as women today must assume positions of leadership if radical politics are to relate to the real oppression of people, and mutually, if women are to gain true equality in a revolutionary movement”. Barbara Ehrenreich, Dierdre English and Daly often built on these unstable foundations⁴, portraying witches as a “spiritual/moral/knowing elite cross-section of the female population of Europe” and witchcraft as a “women’s health movement” (Hasted 1985: 20–21).

Though this conception of the witch as a radical revolutionary – which Lynnette Mitchell identifies as a “discredited set of ideas which have no historical validity” (1984: 18) – is ideal for the creation of a radical role model, Hasted points out that this comes with additional flaws, alongside its unsteady foundations. On refurbishing this historical precedent to suit their needs, they open feminist historicization and feminism itself to doubt and discredit. This new myth of the witch also disallows valuable insights

into the nature and history of women’s oppression. Hasted suggests that a feminist approach to history and historical evidence should be based on contextual factors of the time, such as “value placed”. This can enable feminists to identify not just oppression and its different forms, but also identify “women’s strategies of resistance” (Hasted 1985: 24–25).

In her review of Christina Larner’s book *Enemies of God: The Witch-Hunt in Scotland*, Mitchell takes a similar critical approach. Larner doubts the definite nature of witch-hunting as an equivalent to woman-hunting, suggesting that though it was related to the sex of the woman, it was not specific to sex. Mitchell disagrees partially with Larner’s view by constructing a more definite connection between histories of philosophy, Christianity and civilization using Aristotelian and Judeo-Christian views of women, men’s fear of menstruating women and the like. Mitchell emphasizes the lack of reliable figures regarding the number of women burned at the stake as witches and rejects the Murrayite theory that conceptualizes witches as “an organized pre-Christian fertility religion”. Mitchell also sympathizes with Larner’s view that men were executed as witches too. Raising several questions regarding the witch, Mitchell concludes by pointing out the intricate connection between patriarchy and the church, one that did not allow men to feel “threatened by the wrath of established Christianity *as a sex*” (1984: 19).

In contrast to its consideration of the witch, *TaS* engages positively with the trope of the female vampire. Albeit fictional, the female vampire is a significant radical feminist trope. In her article “Suburban Vampire”, Rosie Garland examines the adoption of the female vampire as a feminist heroine, connecting the character’s unconventional feminist energy to the hitherto shunned sexual energy of the lesbian. “There are connections: lesbians too are sexual subversives; lesbian-feminists are outlaws, rebels who aim to destroy patriarchal order...”. Garland examines

⁴ Those set by Jules Michelet, Thomas Szasz, Margaret Murray, etc.

the trope of lesbian vampires in works such as *Oh Captain, My Captain* and *Because the Dawn*, in which lesbian vampires are portrayed as those passing on seeds of revolution to other women. The woman – be it lesbian or not – like a female vampire, exists outside patriarchal society. As a result of this appropriation, Garland sets the stage for the development of a feminist literary character that can stand against centuries-old male literary tropes such as the werewolf, an appropriation that is different from the US radical feminist adoption of the witch as a feminist foremother. The defiance of the female vampire is used to create a “symbol for women’s positive, radical struggle against oppressive male society and the ‘justice’ that society metes out to women” (1991: 38–40).

TaS also reviewed and contextualized histories of misogyny in conventional society. Lyndal Roper’s analysis of Christine de Pizan’s *The Book of the City of Ladies* exemplified *TaS*’ interest in deconstructing historical conceptions of chastity and rape. Roper considers the French Renaissance writer’s deconstruction of myths, fables and legends as an attempt to “create a feminist culture” (1984: 48), and extracts methods to criticize misogyny in social tropes. For example, de Pizan retells the story of the Greek mythological character Medea without her filicide. De Pizan’s narrative highlights the misogyny of the myth which is often ignored in light of Medea’s murder of her children. De Pizan also highlights the injustice of double standards and debunks the following myths: women enjoy being raped, pregnancy from rape signifies consent or pleasure during the crime⁵.

TaS interrogated the portrayal of women in 18th century Britain in a similar vein. In her article “Women who Dressed as Men”, Lynne Friedli contemplates on cross-dressing women and the threat they posed to traditional ideas of domesticity and motherhood in society. She situates the phenomenon of passing women⁶ as a threat to the status quo of then British society,

given that they trespassed casually into otherwise strictly demarcated spheres of life. She writes, “this interest in passing women is mainly related to a general concern about the position of women, and the need to define the boundaries of male and female roles in a society that was in the process of radical change” (1985: 25). Like de Pizan, Friedli considers the double standard of the activity: though men cross-dressed in London as well, their form of cross-dressing was considered a social activity. Men’s cross-dressing was despised and subjected to homophobic attacks, but it was not considered a complete change of identity, as women’s was. Unlike men, passing women cross-dressed to enjoy a freedom of mobility disallowed to them in those days. This strategy gave them access to jobs exclusive to men and a better pay. Passing women also enjoyed the luxury of expressing love to other women without discrimination or fear. Friedli also exhibits an early intersectional analysis of class and gender. She points out that criticism of passing women varied according to the social class they belonged to. Women from lower classes were criticized for their abandonment of illegitimate children and for their role in spreading diseases as sex workers, whereas upper class women were criticized for their “vanity”, their refusal to breastfeed and indifference to domestic duties.

TaS’ interrogation of women’s and feminist history in Britain also enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the suffragette movement. In a review of Sheila Jeffreys’ book *The Spinster and her Enemies*, Margaret Jackson discusses the importance of the author’s analysis in examining the compulsory heterosexuality of 1880–1930. Apart from being the timeframe for the first wave British feminist movement, this period was also known for its sexual revolution. Jeffreys’ book points to the contrary by claiming that women lacked the “right to sexual self-determination” (1987: 40). The age was also characteristic of the rampant idea that forms of

⁵ The common belief during this period was that the “seeds” of both the male and the female had to be released for conception to take place.

⁶ The term given to women who cross-dressed as men.

women's abuse were a direct result of men's nature and men's natural urges, a natural phenomenon, thereby effectively dismissing the social context and reasons for women's oppression, especially physical violence and abuse. Jeffreys gives further insight into the role played by feminists during the "social purity" movement of this age, when restrictions were placed upon women as a measure to instill chastity in men.

The book exposes the suffragettes' role in women's struggle for sexual liberation, effectively connecting the work of BWLM feminists back to a historical and monumental past. First wave feminism has often been regarded synonymous to the achievement of suffrage, but suffrage was just one of the many demands made during the peak called the first wave. As Jeffreys shows, the feminist take on "social purity" also extended to militant feminists of the age, even to Emmeline Pankhurst, renowned for her role in British women's suffrage. Refutations of the above view of "male urge" often appeared in suffragette newspapers such as *The Vote*, *Votes for Women* and *The Suffragette* amongst other campaigns. This re-discovery was vital to the conception of an overarching, continuous feminist movement, especially one oriented to radical politics. Jeffreys' thesis came as a shock and a relief to BWLM feminists. "We were furious to think that such important historical evidence about the ideas and campaigns of our fore Sisters had been buried for so long under a heap of rubbish about prudish, man-hating spinsters. We wanted more evidence, and this is what this book provides" (1987: 40).

As a feminist scholar looking back at the past to study feminist media and opinions of the BWLM, it is important to note that Jeffreys' ideas were not limited to the praise and interpretation with which they were received by Jackson. Jeffreys' analysis of compulsory heterosexuality has been criticized for devoting a separatist brand of feminism, namely revolutionary feminism (Summers 1987: 101). By centering sexuality as the axis of women's oppression, Jeffreys' dismissal of heterosexuality disregards

women's sexual autonomy yet again. Jeffreys has also propounded several blatantly transphobic views in the new millennium (Kaveney 2012; see also Jeffreys 2012) that have been rejected by several radical feminists who have renegotiated stock ideas of "gender" and "sex". Cameron and Scanlon, in particular, have navigated this divide in radical feminist thought through the lens of more recent queer and gender theories. They make the distinction between "old" and "new" conceptions of gender, rejecting essentialist understandings of gender and sex as binaries ("Talking About Gender").

It is vital to note that *TaS'* first Editorial Statement states that their members are not just lesbians and as discussed in the introduction, several articles in *TaS* distinguish its brand of radical feminism from that of cultural or lesbian separatists. "While we criticise the institution of heterosexuality, we do not think that only lesbians can be feminist or that all feminists should be lesbians" (1983: 2–3). Additionally, discussions on sexuality have occupied a central role in *TaS*. For example, Stevi Jackson, a material radical feminist, undertakes a detailed analysis of the radical feminist critique of heterosexuality and calls for a theorization of desire and sexuality that does not favor one over the other. She writes, "We need some understanding of how the process of becoming sexual is related to discourses on sexuality circulating within our culture and how these in turn are related to structural inequalities, particular gender inequality. We need to weave these strands together in such a way as to recognize the force of cultural and ideological constructions of sexuality and the constraints of social structure, but without denying human agency and therefore the possibility of resistance and change" ("Straight Talking" 1995/96: 32). Such negotiations within a highly contested strand of feminism – which also paved the way for trans-exclusionary radical feminist politics – show that the development of radical feminism and its offshoots are an important area of study for feminist scholars, especially feminist historians.

Like Margaret Jackson's enthusiasm for

suffragette sexual freedom fighters, past feminist strikes and campaigns were recalled to build the morale of a feminist history of activism amongst the readers⁷. Further examples can be given to support the observation that *TaS* indulged in the destruction and recreation of certain tropes that existed within feminism and those that situated the feminist subject in society. The history of the institution of psychiatry and the control it exerted on women⁸, the contribution of ideas of hysteria and neurosis to rape culture, the contribution of Freudian ideas⁹ to the perception of women in society and the consequent restriction of their sexualities are other examinations that *TaS* undertook to break stereotypes of control over women's identities and lives.

2. Writing Lesbianism

In the aftermath of Clause 28¹⁰ that silenced homosexual rights, *TaS* invoked the difficult but queer history of censure and the lesbian in society. In "Lesbian Outlaws", Annabel Farraday wonders why the law, in the past, had never outrightly censured the lesbian. Presenting the reader with different punishments meted out to lesbians from medieval times – punishments involved being burned at the stake to being imprisoned – she identifies a change in the treatment of lesbians by law, post French revolution.

Farraday localizes this change in the distinction between sexual transvestism and social transvestism¹¹ that came about in the 19th century. Women who cross-dressed without permits were not punished for suspicions related to their sexuality but were punished for not possessing the permit and other allied crimes, such as fraud. However, this comes as no relief,

for Farraday identifies the motives behind this move: a silencing of the worst kind, which attempted to remove all "independent motivation". "This refusal even to acknowledge potential or actual lesbian existence has historically characterized legal definitions in England; if lesbians could be made invisible by definition, formal legal control would remain unnecessary" (1988: 11). Tracing the progress through the 1900s from the Criminal Law Amendment Bill of 1921 to Clause 28 of 1988, Farraday identifies a "terror of publicizing lesbian existence" (1988: 16). This historical framing of lesbian erasure and censure in society in relation to Clause 28 became a stronger impetus to fight against the new silencing of homosexuals, especially lesbians.

Farraday does not stop there. She fleshes out the paradox: the erasure that had failed to erase inevitably allowed the positioning of lesbianism as a threat to patriarchal law. Farraday observes that before the 19th century, women who used instruments in their sexual contact were punished more than those who didn't, for this usage of an instrument to "imitate a male penis" was seen as a way to "claim men's privileges" (1988: 10) and for this act, lesbians were punished as perpetrators of sodomy. Quoting Lilian Faderman, Farraday argues that "they were punished less for unorthodox sexual pleasures than for a usurpation of male prerogatives" (qtd. in Farraday 1988: 10) and connects this to the history of cross-dressing women. This weaves further into the history of women's liberation, especially rights pertaining to the conceptions of their identity and sexuality, for here, she synthesizes the consequence of the terror: not exactly a claim for male privilege but a toppling of male privilege.

⁷ "We all Stood up Together" by Linda Pickard follows the waistmakers' strike in New York in 1909 and examines the relevance of the strike to the BWLM.

⁸ "Still Crazy All These Years" by Dale Spender.

⁹ "The Desire for Freud: Psychoanalysis and Freedom" by Stevi Jackson.

¹⁰ In December 1987, the Tories introduced a clause to amend the Local Government Act 1988 called Clause 28. The amendment, enacted on 24 May 1988, stated

that "a local authority shall not a. intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material for the promotion of homosexuality" or "b. promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship" (Farraday 1988: 3).

¹¹ Required to possess a permit to cross-dress.

Apart from historicizing the censorship of lesbians in British society, *TaS* also criticized the rhetoric used for such an ostracization. In the article “A Straight Outing”, Julia Swindells comments on the reverse rhetoric undertaken by the editors of *Feminism and Psychology* to criticize heterosexual attitudes towards homosexuality. Imitating homophobic rhetoric, the editors questioned a group of heterosexuals about the nature, origins and possible explanations for the existence of homosexuality. Using statements such as “Heterosexuality is a condition in which people have a driving emotional and sexual interest in members of the opposite sex” or “...one theory advanced is that heterosexuals have an imbalance in their sex hormones” or “A bad experience with a member of the same sex while young may cause rejection of all members of the same sex through fear. The desire continues in the subconscious and emerges as a heterosexual neurosis”, the editors questioned the norm of heterosexuality, sometimes even prevalent amongst feminists.

Radical feminists possessed a general suspicion of heterosexuality’s establishment as a normal, given sexuality and considered it an institution that aids patriarchy in the disempowerment of women and queer cultures. Expanding on this subtle area of thought, Swindells clarifies that “like race or class, sexuality has its silent referents too” and that failing to take responsibility “for the political meanings attached to their sexuality” could disallow a comprehensive understanding of the self’s oppression in patriarchy (1993: 40). But this is not to be confused either with cultural separatism or cultural feminism or radical lesbianism.

When studying a magazine like *TaS*, it is important to understand it as a product of its time; a time when a range of feminists, from academics to activists to public intellectuals to students, discussed different topics in different ways. As discussed in the previous section, we see that Sheila Jeffreys’ critique of compulsory heterosexuality ran into a separatist strand of feminism, namely revolutionary feminism. However, *TaS* published a range of voices that

discussed sexuality from other perspectives, thereby serving as a forum which captured the debates of the time. By looking at the many ways in which *TaS* deconstructed ideas regarding homosexuality and compulsory heterosexuality – whether controversial or not – allows us to take stock of how radical feminism debated and evolved.

3. Writing White Feminism as Racism

One of the main features of the BWLM was the rise of Black feminist groups in London and other parts of Britain, as a response to the marginalization of Black women within the movement. US Black feminists such as bell hooks and Audrey Lorde situated Black feminism in opposition to white feminism, deeming the latter’s ignorance and divisiveness racism. The necessity to form coalitions between white and Black feminists and support Black women in their specific struggles was realized as an important mission (hooks 1989: 42), a conversation that was initiated by Black feminists in Britain and collectives such as *TaS*. A differentiation between white feminism and Black feminism, in effect, the difference of experience between white women and Black women, laid the foundations for intersectional feminism. Though there were no Black women in the *TaS*’ collective, they often conducted interviews with Black feminists and Black feminist organizations, apart from printing works by Black feminists. In historicizing Black feminism and understanding the legacy of white feminism, *TaS* understood the importance of experience-based narratives. *TaS* attempted to bring the Black feminist struggle closer to its readers by allowing constant dialogue regarding Black feminist conceptions of sexism and racism, the reluctance of Black women to join women’s movements, and the need for coalitions.

Responding to criticism regarding anti-Semitism and racism in the letters page of issue 4, the collective auto-critically addressed their privileges. They regarded radical feminist

ideology's inclination to universalize women's experiences as inevitably problematic. "As individual radical feminists we on the collective not only have to struggle against our personal histories as white women – the attitudes we have been taught and the material benefits we gain from imperialism – but also against aspects of our history as radical feminists. Within the wide range of ideas called 'radical feminist', there has been a strand which did indeed believe we could generalize from the experience of white genteel middle-class English women to 'cover' all women's situations. Apart from being arrogant and foolish, this assumption that women's situation is essentially the same the world over is also finally biologicistic..." ("Issue 4 Letters" 1983: 4).

TaS' acknowledgement of its privileges and the failings of radical feminist ideology allowed the magazine to reflect on complex issues related to Black women's oppression. For example, in "Black Women B Feminism", a reprint of an article by bell hooks, the readers were exposed to ideas regarding the slow acceptance of prevalent sexism in Black communities. hooks argues that Black women were silent regarding the sexism they experienced when expected to discuss it in white spaces. She considers this reluctance to identify "sexism in Black communities" a promoter of "abuse and subjugation of Black women by Black men", and a reluctance to acknowledge a problem that stood in addition to that of racism experienced by Black women. The difference being that this time, the problem came from within the community and not outside. The notion of redeeming Black people by redeeming Black manhood called for a stereotypical crowning of the man as the provider and the head of the house. This construction disallows the recognition "that Black male sexist domination has *not* enhanced or enriched Black family life" (1989: 43).

TaS also discusses the reasons for Black women's distance from the feminist movement. The extensive burden of history propagates an intrinsic suspicion of white women, even in cases

where white women develop dialogue that challenges racism, thereby disallowing collaborations. In addition, Black women who do collaborate are questioned time and again regarding this devious association by other Black women. Racism and silencing of Black women's voices, though, were more crucial to this distancing (hooks 1989: 42–46).

As advice to white collectives wanting to employ Black women, Linda Bellos, a *TaS* reader, asks white women to question their intentions behind wanting Black members. This would clarify white women's position to Black women and give Black women the choice to join or not join a collective based on the latter's intentions. However, such an integration would not mean an end of problems. In fact, collaboration attempts, she writes, will show collectives that "problems have just begun". However, only such ventures can set a "standard for what a non-racist feminist future might be" ("Issue 5 Letters" 1985: 3–4).

TaS' engagement with racism towards Black women is not limited to opening up to Black women's perspectives. White feminists writing for *TaS* also interrogated their own racism. Questions such as "Can white feminists disaffiliate from their race?" were asked as early as Issue 4. As the article by Marilyn Frye¹² notes, the awareness to ask such difficult questions did not come about spontaneously amongst white women. "Women of color have been at feminist conferences, meetings and festivals and speaking up, pointing out that their needs and interests are not being taken into account nor answered and that much that white feminists do and say is racist... the topic of racism has arrived not so much because some white feminists urged this but because women of color have demanded it". White feminists have responded in different ways to this accusation of white feminist racism – some sympathetically, some in defensiveness and the others in ignorance. Speaking about these multiple responses, Frye notes that it reveals another dynamic of race privilege – that white women have "a choice between the

¹² Also a reprint.

options of hearing and not hearing” Black women’s struggles (1984: 11).

Often, white women who did identify their own racism, were accused of yet again exercising their privilege. Being accused for both doing something and not doing something finally allowed white feminists to take a deeper look into historically established constructs of race and racism. In “White Racism: More than a Moral Issue”, Janet Martens and Ruth Frankenberg (both white women) identify the need to understand white women as “oppressors” in this ambit. This change in perspective, especially coming from a reflective white feminist will allow a re-evaluation of the different ways in which their feminism “closed the door to women of color and Black women” (1985: 17).

Through the above instances and many more, the reader comes to understand *TaS*’ framing of then white feminism as racism as an important step in a collaborative, intersectional feminism. This introspection did not stop with that of Black women but extended to women from other backgrounds. For example, “A Difficult, Dangerous Honesty”¹³ addressed the discrimination of northern Irish feminists in the UK, whereas “Different Roots, Different Routes”¹⁴ discusses the politics of racism and the insecurity of being an immigrant amongst Turkish women in England.

TaS’ approach to an inclusive feminist movement can be briefly summarized through Martens’ and Frankenberg’s comment: “The development of an anti-racist feminism will make it necessary for us to raise a vast number of questions and challenges to patriarchal power which might not have been relevant to the struggles of white middle class women, but which are nonetheless absolutely necessary to a comprehensive struggle against patriarchal oppression and in the interest of women’s liberation” (1985: 22).

4. “Writing Our Own History” – The Now

If the above sections dissect attempts undertaken by *TaS* to reflect on history making and to rewrite history in the process of doing so, the following section elaborates on a more immediate attempt of historicization undertaken by *TaS*: that of the historicization of the “now”. *TaS* ran a feature¹⁵ called “Writing our Own History”¹⁶ that recorded the origins and processes of several movements and ventured within and outside the BWLM.

The feature was a response to the danger of the “now”: a realization of the surge of attacks against radical feminism and a record of histories that either forgot or misrepresented it, and a radical feminist move to take the activity of representation directly into their own hands. “We hope that this project, by accumulating a published record of some of our own views, will go some way towards countering the attempt to write us out of existence”. The interview format was chosen for the series to ensure the representation of women unwilling or incapable of writing about their experiences. Introducing the first interview of the series with Sheila Shulman, the *TaS* collective defined their goals for the feature: “We are committed to telling the story from women’s own point of view – for this reason we are recording interviews with the participants themselves. We are aiming to put political experience in the context of our lives to get both a sense of what it meant to us and the ways in which our lives change. The interviews will focus on events which have been important to many of us, for although each woman has her own perspective, we have been doing collective political work and therefore have had common experiences” (“Introduction: Writing Our Own History” 1983: 51). The interviews highlight the foundations of the organization in focus, and in cases of individual feminists, contextualize their activism, using a personal history of the movement. For example, the very first interview

¹³ Written by Margaret Ward in Issue 12.

¹⁴ Written by Zebra in Issue 10.

¹⁵ Not a part of all issues.

¹⁶ For details regarding the contents of this feature, please see Table 1 in Appendix.

with Sheila Shulman¹⁷ recalls what it was like to be a lesbian feminist in 1974 and the importance of the First National Lesbian Conference. This allows a specific perspective that is unique to Shulman's interaction with a particular point of the movement. Black/women of color British feminist activists such as Shaila Shah, Hannana Siddiqui, Pragna Patel, Gail Lewis and others' perspectives to their movements were also reflected in "Writing our Own".

This feature fulfils feminist historian Antoinette Burton's criterion for a non-hegemonic historicization of feminism. Firstly, it features a wide range of feminist players from local, national and international scenes, representing an umbrella of concerns associated with the feminist movements at the time, through feminist art (*Feministo*), feminist music (*Jam Today*) feminist theatre (*Monstrous Regiment*), refuge centers (*Shanti Women's Counselling Service*, *London Lesbian Line*, etc.), journals (*WIRES*, *Outwrite*), etc. Secondly, it features a broad spectrum of organizations such as the *London Rape Crisis*, *National Women's Aid*, apart from featuring specific institutions such as the *Brixton Black Women's Group* and *SBS*, enabling the representation of multiple feminisms with multiple impacts.

Thirdly, *TaS'* interviewers focus on the origin, process and difficulties faced by organizations, approaching these institutions as "processes rather than events or stable forms", thereby rejecting the notion of an "original" feminism (Burton 1992: 25–39). For example, the interview with Romi Bowen and Bernadette Manning from the *London Rape Crisis* (LRC)¹⁸ begins by asking questions about the early history of the organization and the political climate of its origin, from influences to extensive groundwork done by founding members. In tracing the process, questions regarding the organization's funding, its vision and the execution of this vision were probed on. Given that the focus of their counseling work was rape, the interview

focused on the emotional difficulty surrounding it. The LRC received 150 calls in 1978 and 100 a week at the time of the interview (1987) from women seeking help post rape. The interviewees outline the type of emotional stability required in this work, but here again, the groundwork begins with an articulation of empathy and sisterhood: "agreeing with their experiences is strengthening for you and them".

The interview details the backlash faced by organizers in hosting a counseling service for rape survivors, as well as the resistance they built against this backlash. Apart from their office being vandalized, they also had major security concerns given the numerous false calls they received. This meant that they could not give out their addresses to women who called to meet them in person, for fear of harm to the women and to themselves. They also received an enormous backlash from the police who refused to cooperate, even believing that the LRC dissuaded women from reporting rape incidents (Alderson and Kelly 1987: 50–53).

The organization also involved itself in undoing "a huge mythology of rape which actually makes women feel much worse about what has happened", thereby adding to theory on sexual violence. For example, the interview delved into the rhetoric that women who were raped faced in society. A conscious shift was undertaken to identify women who called the LRC as "women who have been raped" instead of "raped women". Additionally, they also decided to no longer refer to women who approached them as "cases". Such conscious reflections were a result of conversations with other rape crisis groups¹⁹ (Alderson and Kelly 1987: 50–51).

Such nuanced conversations allow the reader to identify these organizations as ones with "waves" of their own – with varying periods and processes of sustained feminist activism. Positioned in the "now" and examining the past from the "now", this feature allowed a new writing of feminist history that was not merely a

¹⁷ Interview by Alderson, Lynn

¹⁸ Interviewed by Alderson, Lynn and Liz Kelly

¹⁹ In this case, the Newcastle Rape Crisis.

generalized, overarching movement history, but one that reflected the radical feminist tenet of “personal is political”. *TaS*, thereby, situated a history of the personal as a building block of feminist movements by representing and reflecting on feminist history from the perspective of the grassroots, the local and the individual.

Conclusion

It is fascinating for a feminist scholar to note that the section “Writing our Own” also represents socialist feminists such as Shaila Shah and Hannana Siddiqui, and Marxist feminists such as Gail Lewis, despite being keen on historicizing radical feminism. Several points of consensus and common concerns can be traced between *TaS* and these feminists, such as the need to represent Black feminists in Britain, to focus on issues such as domestic abuse, religious fundamentalism and the like. This disallows a rigid view of radical feminism as an insular, stock ideology and enables us to see it as a strand of feminism that was autocritical and dialogical.

Radical feminism’s impact on society is manifold. As Simone Murray points out, it was radical feminist writing that put queer writing

and theory on the shelves of prominent booksellers and the lists of commercial publishers. It was radical feminism that put forth the notion that our society needs a radical reordering for the erasure of women’s oppression. Through an immense contribution to questions regarding sexual violence, sexuality and fundamentalism, radical feminist thought spread like wildfire. However, history has chosen to absorb the scaffolding of its “content” and forget its “context”. “As a result, its influence appears, paradoxically, to be both everywhere and nowhere” (Murray 2004: 127).

This paper, “Historicizing *Trouble and Strife*”, situates *TaS* as an important artefact of historicization of the BWLM by looking at some of the ways in which the magazine examined and rewrote feminist history. In doing so, this paper historicizes *TaS*, a magazine relatively well archived but not studied enough by feminist media scholars, especially those engaging with print culture in Britain. By actively engaging with local, national and international feminisms, *TaS* deconstructs ideological strictures within British feminism, displaying a shift to intersectional feminisms. In historicizing *TaS*, the paper has also attempted to situate one of the many contexts in which radical feminism evolved.

Appendix

Table 1: “Writing our Own” Recurring Feature. The italicized titles are not explicitly titled “Writing our Own” but follow a similar pattern of interrogation and exposition.

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Interviewee(s)</i>	<i>Subject</i>
1	When Lesbians Came out in the Movement	Sheila Shulman	First National Lesbian Conference, and “what it was like to be a lesbian feminist in 1974”
2	Working for the Women’s Liberation Movement: Starting WIRES	Wendy Collins, Al Garthwaite, Maria Spellacy	WIRES, WLM and the changes experienced
3	Storming the Wimpy Bars	Lilian Mohin	Consciousness-raising groups and their involvement in “demonstrations in Wimpy Bars against their policy of refusing to serve “unaccompanied” women late at night.”
4	Early Days of Women’s Aid	Jo Sutton	“the opening of the first refuges for battered women, the split with Erin Pizzey and the setting up of the National Women’s Aid Federation.”
5	Feministo, Art and Parcel of the W.L.M.	Phil Goodall	The unique feminist art event Feministo, its execution and reactions.
6	A Rather Mean Cocktail Party	Georgina Ashworth	“about how the British Government gets away internationally with doing next to nothing on Women’s Issues.”
7	“Between Marx, the border and the womb” – Irishwomen United	Mary Jennings	Irishwomen United – the group for women’s liberation in the Republic.
8	<i>Spend, spend, spent?</i>	Frances Carter	Municipal feminism
9	Jam Everyday	Terry Hunt	Feminist band Jam Today, their feminism and music
10	Untitled	Romi Bowen, Bernadette Manning	London Rape Crisis
11	Organizing Against the Odds	(not an interview)	Extracts from ‘Women’s News’, a Northern Irish feminist journal.
12	<i>The Mancunian Way</i>	Angie Cooper	Women’s Liberation Movement in Manchester and Amazon Press
-	-	-	-
14	<i>States of Emergence</i>	Ailbhe Smyth, Pauline Jackson, Caroline McCamley, Ann Speed	15 years of WLM in Northern Ireland
15	Outwrite Women’s Newspaper	Shaila Shah, Teresa Hope, Frances Ellery, Nanda Sirker	“outwrite’s place in the 80s feminism and what the women’s movement needs to survive into the next generation.”
16	Feminist Theatricals	Gillian Hanna	Monstrous Regiment, development of political theatre by women

18	<i>Tyne and Tide</i>	Helen Lilly	Growing up in Newcastle, working class and development of feminist politics.
19	Talking Personal Talking Political	Gail Lewis, Melba Wilson, Olive Gallimore	Brixton Black women's Group, relationship of Black women to the movement
20	<i>Women on the Verge</i>	(not an interview but written after conversations with Debbie Clarke, Mo Ross, Avan Wadia)	Shanti Women's Counselling Service, Brixton
21	<i>Three Steps Forward</i>	NemaMdoe	Women's work, sexual harassment and violence in Tanzania
22	<i>Shocking Pink</i>	(not an interview)	Magazine Shocking Pink
23	<i>Still working against the grain</i>	Hannana Siddiqui, Pragna Patel. Excerpt from MandanaHendessi included	Southall Black Sisters, domestic violence, religious fundamentalism
24	<i>School for Scandal</i>	Diana Leonard, Liz Kelly, Joan Scanlon	Open University Women's Studies course
25	Dial-a-dyke	Helen Bishop, Rachel Beck, Shauna Brown, Janet Green, Sibyl Grundberg, Rachael Hamilton, Pam Isherwood	London Lesbian Line
26	A Press of One's Own	Lilian Mohin, Sheila Shulman, Brenda Whisker, Jackie Bishop	Onlywomen Press
29/30	<i>Banned for Blasphemy: The Rape of Sita</i>	Lindsey Collen	The book The Rape of Sita
35	<i>Secret Slavery</i>	Sister Margaret Healy	Kalayaan, women migrants who are employed domestic workers

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Commentary

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Avrina Jos's article, "Historicizing *Trouble and Strife*," fills a major, though not entirely unexplainable gap in the writing of the history of the British Women's Liberation Movement (BWLM). *Trouble and Strife (TaS)*, published independently from 1983 until 2002, was a self-declared radical feminist magazine which has so far garnered little to no attention in discussions of second-wave feminism despite its undeniable relevance for the third-wave, its international and multi-perspectivist outlook, its auto-critical self-reflexivity as well as its historical consciousness regarding the first wave of feminism and its own historical "now." At the same time, the complexity and radicalness of the magazine's goals and scope may contain the very reasons for its exclusion from the canon of feminist scholarship.

To begin with, the magazine is a striking example of an early self-interrogation of the feminist project of the second wave. As the author shows, *TaS* acknowledged the plurality of feminisms that were part of the second wave and openly challenged some of their assumptions both about the present and about the first wave of feminism. At the same time, *TaS* did not shrink from identifying uneasy ideological alliances where it recognized them, for instance by responding self-critically to Black feminists' allegations of racism targeted at the dominantly white, middle-class BWLM. *TaS*'s diverse

understanding of "women" as a group was also inclusive of other marginalized women, such as immigrants or Northern Irish feminists. The *TaS* collective thus brought an early contribution to consolidating the intersectional approach in feminism, identifying numerous factors combined in the oppression of women. Despite this recognition of diversity, *TaS* was opposed to forms of radical feminism that relied on either separatism or essentialism, adhering to a definition of feminism as a struggle against the oppression of women, primarily on the basis of the discriminating category of gender.

Additionally, as Avrina Jos notes, *TaS* undertook a critical interrogation of widely circulated and accepted narratives of feminist scholarship. For instance, the magazine dismantled the feminist iconography established round the image of the witch who was politicized as a symbol of female resistance to patriarchy. *TaS* writers found this appropriation objectionable both due to its exclusion of men who fell victims to witch hunts, and due to its mystification of witches either as scientists or as possessing superior powers that were perceived as a threat to men's domination. Through this and further examples, Avrina Jos illustrates the radical ways in which *TaS* undermined the formulation of a monolithic, homogenous metanarrative of feminism. At the same time, this makes *TaS* difficult to incorporate into the

history of feminism and might explain its absence from its canon. Moreover, the radicalness of its auto-criticism, its inclusiveness and ideological non-conformity were decisively on the avant-garde, anticipating present-day conversations of and about feminism.

Avrina Jos's article compensates for this lack in the scholarship of the BWLM and offers a brilliant and thoroughly informed account of *TaS*'s place in the history of feminism. For her contribution Avrina Jos was one of the students awarded the *Wissenschaftspreis Niedersachsen* 2019.