

LESBIAN STATE

CONCLUSION from LESBIAN NATION by JILL JOHNSTON

Within just two years the meaning of the word Lesbian has changed from private subversive activity to political revolutionary identity. Although sexual relations between people remain a private affair for the most part in the actual doing of it is now recognized that your choice of mate or mates is a political choice. It just isn't possible anymore to overlook the feminist analysis of the heterosexist institution by which women are oppressed. The new definition of the lesbian emerges from this analysis. The choice of mate can no longer be regarded as a purely personal one. Until now all women and men have been coerced by social conditioning of the established heterosexual institution to choose each other. Choice has been further limited by class and race. What choice there is left over is for a particular man within her class and race, and of course the man traditionally is less limited in his choice through his social prerogative as the aggressor. Although within this system exceptional women may receive special treatment from the exceptional men, we know now that women, defined as a class, suffer from their secondary status under the laws and customs and psychology of this institution. This choice then benefits the man and not the woman. The purpose of feminist analysis is to provide women with an awareness of their servitude as a class so that they can unite and rise up against it. The problem now for strictly heterosexual conditioned women is how to obtain the sexual gratification they think they need from the sex who remains their institutional oppressor. Many feminists are now stranded between their personal needs and their political persuasions. The lesbian is the woman who obviously unites the political and the personal in our struggle to free ourselves from the oppressive institution. I think it is generally acknowledged that the conditioning is so deep that there is practically no man in any case who transcends the supremacist psychology of his class. The lesbian argument is first and foremost withdrawal at every level from the man to develop woman supremacy, which does not necessarily mean the diminution of the man the way male supremacy has meant the diminution of women as though one can't be up without the other being down, but it does mean the (re) development of the moral physical spiritual intellectual strengths of women whatever the social consequences of that may be.

Proceeding from the premise that women are oppressed by the heterosexual institution, that women are an oppressed class, that from this point of view the man has become (if he was not always) the natural enemy of women, it follows that the continual collusion of any woman with any man is an event that retards the progress of woman supremacy. The continued economic dependence of women upon men, both individually and through the social institutions, is perhaps the central concrete factor holding back the liberation of women, the psychic aspects of women being held in check by the power of men to threaten survival. The self sufficiency of women in

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the end will have to mean much more than an apparent individual solution to the problem. We remain fugitives.

It is the banding together of fugitives which constitutes the phenomenon of revolutionary opposition. Ti-Grace Atkinson has said "It is the association by choice of individual members of any Oppressed group, the massing of power, which is essential to resistance. It is the commitment of individuals to common goals, and to death if necessary, that determines the strength of an army. In war, even political warfare, there is no distinction between the political and the personal. (Can you imagine a Frenchman serving in the French army from 9 to 5, then trotting "home" to Germany for supper and overnight? That's called game playing, or collaboration, not political commitment.) It is this commitment, by choice, full-time of one woman to others of her class that is called lesbianism. It is the full-time commitment, against any and all personal considerations if necessary, that constitutes the political significance of lesbianism." Atkinson correctly placed the lesbian as that tiny minority within the Oppressed who refuse to play out its proper political function in society. As such the lesbian or this "minority is labelled by those in power, the Oppressor as the 'criminal' element." When the criminal element is politicized it becomes a revolutionary force. Black men in jail have defined themselves as political prisoners. Lesbians are defining themselves as political outcasts and as such constitute a political group legitimate by its own creation and challenging by its very existence if not by any overt action the exclusive political dominion of the heterosexual institution by which women are maintained as the subservient caste. By this definition lesbians are in the vanguard of the resistance. If driven back from a position as a groups with political consciousness the lesbian would become again a private suffering fugitive, or criminal, or sick person by psychiatric terminology, and permitted to exist only under the old conspiracy of silence.

Historically the Lesbian has two choices: being criminal or going straight. The present revolutionary project is the creation of legitimate state defined by women. Only women can do this. Going straight is legitimizing your oppression. As was being criminal. A male society will not permit any choice for a woman. The women therefore can't expect anything from the men except token concessions and class privilege. The totally woman committed woman, or lesbian who shares this consciousness with other women, is the political nucleus of a woman's or lesbian state - a state within from exclusive woman strength building its own institutions of self support and identity.

The word lesbian has expanded so much through political definition that it should no longer refer exclusively to a woman simply in sexual relation to another woman. The word has in fact had pornographic implications, as though a lesbian was a woman who did nothing but enjoy sex, an implication employed as a tool of discrimination. The word is now a generic term signifying activism and resistance and the envisioned goal of a woman committed state. And in such a state a woman or lesbian will also be free to reproduce herself as she pleases, that is on her own terms in a woman supportive environment in which the child has a legal identity derived from its mother, still the only clear parent. The essence of the new political definition is peer grouping. Women and men are not peers and and many peoply seriously doubt whether we ever were or ever could be. The male remains

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the biological aggressor and as such especially predisposed to take cultural-political advantage of the woman. It is against this advantage that feminism deploys itself. The psychology of male supremacy emerged of course from the cultural institutions of oppression by which women more and more internalized the political reality of their status to believe in their own innate inferiority. It is extremely difficult for women to think back or ahead to a condition that pre- or postdates the artificial realities of social constructs. One thing we can be certain of however and that is that women en masse are peers and as such equals. Lesbians know this better than any other women. We also know how to achieve a certain illusory equality with the man by playing his game and being taken in as a special or token woman who performs various functions for the man, like assauging his guilt, or making woman as a class think that if one woman can do it all women can and thus reinforcing both the woman's sense of inferiority, insomuch as only a few make it through, and her notion of herself as a person, not politically classified. It is perhaps our mistrust of the man as the biological aggressor which keeps bringing us back to the political necessity of power by peer grouping. Although we are still virtually powerless it is only by constantly adhering to this difficult principle of the power inherent in natural peers (men after all have demonstrated the success of this principle very well) that women will eventually achieve an autonomous existence.
