

LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

Editorial

Since its inception in 1978, WSIF has been very concerned about systemic male violence against women which knows neither class, race nor cultural boundaries and in that time we have published many articles on this topic. We therefore welcomed Diane Bell's and Topsy Napurrula Nelson's important article on intra-racial violence against women in Australia: "Speaking about rape is everyone's business" (*WSIF*12(4), 1989). Reactions to the article were many, mainly positive: grateful for the authors' courage to discuss a taboo subject. A group of Australian Aboriginal women, however, took issue with Bell's and Napurrula Nelson's article: *not* with the reality of rape—this fact, as with rape of women globally, remains uncontested—but with the question of authorship. They challenged Diane Bell (a white anthropologist) and Topsy Napurrula Nelson (an Australian Aboriginal woman from the Northern Territory) about the "right" to speak out about the distressing evidence of intra-racial rape. Specifically, they accused Diane Bell of "using" Topsy Napurrula Nelson, thereby misrepresenting the nature of the long-standing relationship between the two women and patronizing Napurrula Nelson as a "traditional" Aboriginal woman from their standpoint as "urban" Aboriginal women.

For those of us in Australia (Robyn Rowland and Renate Klein) it has been disheartening to see, since the publication of Bell and Napurrula Nelson's article, white feminists organizing panels at conferences, but not thinking it proper to share the ensuing "dialogue" with Diane Bell or Topsy Napurrula Nelson. Importantly, it was not the issue of steadily increasing intra-racial violence against Aboriginal women that was at issue, but a condemnation of Diane Bell as exploitative and Topsy Napurrula Nelson as incompetent to speak on this topic as she was "merely" a traditional woman and English

was her second language. This culminated in a paper given by Anna Yeatman at the National Women's Studies Conference in Melbourne, October 1990, which rendered Topsy Napurrula Nelson invisible and further impugned Diane Bell's work. Meanwhile, male violence against Aboriginal women continues.

What follows is the correspondence *WSIF* received by Jackie Huggins et al., Topsy Napurrula Nelson and Diane Bell. Contrary to rumours circulating in Australia, we never refused to publish the letter by the Aboriginal women. But we felt that the debate deserved more than an unsigned letter with typed names, and no return address(es). Robyn Rowland wrote twice asking for a more detailed response that debated the points in Bell's and Napurrula Nelson's article with which the urban Aboriginal women took issue. When this did not eventuate our Managing Editor wrote twice to Jackie Huggins asking her to sign and fill out a copyright form with all the signatures as is standard practice. Neither response nor signatures were forthcoming. Consequently, we had to ask our publisher to seek legal advice in order to protect the 12 writers as well as the journal in case of legal action.

We think that both the problem of intra-racial violence and the question of who is allowed to speak out about male violence against women are crucial topics. We still hope that we will receive (an) article(s) on these topics from Aboriginal women. We greatly appreciate that despite the way Diane Bell has been misrepresented—in her absence—in white feminists' fora in Australia, she has taken the time to further develop her analysis of these issues in "Intra-Racial Rape Revisited: On Forging a Feminist Future beyond Factions and Frightening Politics" which we are publishing in this issue of *WSIF*. We find it deplorable that speaking

out about rape still means paying a price—even in *feminist* circles.

We are deeply distressed about these happenings but more than ever determined to continue publishing radical analyses of the grim realities women continue to face globally. We urge our readers to send us papers on violence against women: we must continue to speak out in order to devise strategies to stop the abuse of women.

RENATE KLEIN (On behalf of the Editors)

[n.d.]

Dear Editors,

We wish to respond in order to make an objection to a recent article "Speaking About Rape Is Everyone's Business" appearing in *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 12 No. 4, 1989 by Dianne [sic] Bell.

Although some choose to call us "hostile black urban Aboriginal women" (p. 405) let us say we have the undisputable right to speak as Aboriginal women also. We have been aware for a long time that non-Aboriginal researchers and workers in Aboriginal communities have attempted to create "geographical and blood-line" divisions between traditional and urban Aboriginals. Being urban does not imply we are any less Aboriginal than our traditional counterparts.

As the majority of us have University degrees we are able to analyse the article more closely and we find it totally abhorrent and disagree with many of the assumptions Bell makes—the largest being the title of her article. We dispute the central proposition that rape is "everyone's business." What this reflects is white imperialism of others' cultures which are theirs to appropriate, criticise and castigate. One may well see rape as being everyone's business from a privileged white, middle-class perspective, however, when you are black and powerless it is a different story. Blacks have to face the individual, communal and societal consequences that whites don't have to endure.

We realise that our internal conflicts have been exacerbated by colonisation and white women have always been a part of that process. So just because you are women doesn't mean you are necessarily innocent. You were,

and still are, part of that colonising force. Our country was colonised on both a racially and sexually imperialistic base. In many cases our women considered white women worse than men in their treatment of Aboriginal women, particularly in the domestic service field.

Which brings us to the point of Topsy Napurrula Nelson as Bell's co-author. We find it amazing and unethical that her name has been placed as an author rather than that of chief informant. With all due respect, Topsy is an older traditional Aboriginal woman who speaks English as a second language and the analysis of the type in Bell's article is highly academic. Further, Topsy's quotations in the paper have little relevance to the chapter and nothing to do with rape at all.

Bell also states she met Topsy "during an eighteen month stint of participant observation" (p. 405) and like so many anthropologists this provides the nexus whereby they become the experts at documenting and transposing an alien culture into western patriarchal and feminist interpretations. This is not acceptable to us and is highly dangerous if cultural sensitivity to all Aboriginal Australians irrespective of where they come from does not prevail.

It is our business how we deal with rape and have done so for the last 202 years quite well. We don't need white anthropologists reporting business which can be abused and misinterpreted by racists in the wider community. They feed like parasites to this type of thing.

Another point we would like to address is that, yes, we find more cohesion with socialist feminists than radical feminists (p. 410) as our fight is against the state, the system, social injustices, and primarily racism, far in excess of patriarchy. We continually find we are being jockeyed into the position of fighting and separating from our men and we will not. We are women and men together who have suffered grave injustices by the white invaders. We have all suffered.

Some of us were present at the 1984 Women and Labour Conference in Brisbane (p. 415) where we were set up by radical feminists who opportuned an old traditional lady to give consent to a paper which we had agreed on earlier with the presenter not to be made public. At no stage did we agree that a

senior Aboriginal woman be present during the address. We do not forget these incidents, for we know the games whites play in setting blacks against blacks and we feel that this article creates those divisions even further.

Bell's paper makes us not want to work with white women, thus destroying some of the already good work that has gone before. We don't need any further intrusions which make life more difficult for us than it is now. You must listen to us also for we are Aboriginals who have felt the effects of colonisation far worse than our traditional sisters and brothers. Don't let white stereotypes continue to reign supreme about Aboriginals. Sexism does not and will never prevail over racial domination in this country.

JACKIE HUGGINS
JO WILLMOT
ISABEL TARRAGO
KATHY WILLETTS
LIZ BOND
LILLIAN HOLT
ELEANOR BOURKE
MARYANN BIN-SALIK
PAT FOWELL
JOANN SCHMIDER
VALERIE CRAIGIE
LINDA MCBRIDE-LEVI

Dear Editors,

I have been given a letter to you dated 14 February 1990 about an article Diane Bell and I wrote called "*Speaking About Rape is Everybody's Business*."

Since 1975 Diane and I have been working together. I didn't have anybody to write my stories, I asked Diane to. She really close to me.

A lot of Aboriginal girls I asked to write down our stories; young people they didn't listen to us.

I had no Aborigine to write this. Diane is like a sister; best friend. She wrote this all down for me. That's OK — women to women; it doesn't matter black or white.

I want these things written down, for people to hand down and read again later. I was telling Diane to write this story for me.

TOPSY NAPURRULA NELSON

Dear Editors,

How I might best deal with the controversy (at least as far as I understand it) currently swirling around publication of "*Speaking about Rape is Everyone's Business*" (Bell & Nelson, 1989) has consumed my time and energy for some time. Emotions have been running high and the mode of disputation since the letter of Jackie Huggins et al. (February, 1990) began circulating, has been largely counter-productive (see Larbalestier, 1990; Bell, 1990). Thus, after careful consideration of counsel offered by colleagues, lawyers and the persons most intimately affected by this matter — the women who continue to be abused, battered, and raped — I have chosen to write a letter and an article.

Here I deal with aspects of the letter of Huggins et al. and in the accompanying article "*Intra-racial Rape Revisited: On Forging a Future Beyond Factions and Frightening Politics*," I return to themes of our original article, discuss newly available material, and revisit one of our case studies (all references in the letter are included in reference list of article). My hope is that attention may again be focussed on the substantive issues; that the merit of collaborative cross-cultural endeavours be appreciated; and that the deep hurts expressed in and inflicted by the letter of Jackie Huggins et al. be given a context. The questions are complex, requiring a critique of theory and practice, and I ask that my letter and article be read jointly and that readers refer back to our original article.

Before the letter of Huggins et al. surfaced, I was engaged in active correspondence with researchers (Aboriginal and white) working on the issue of violence and women in Aboriginal communities. I had responded to some 60 requests for copies of our article. It had found its way onto reading lists in various courses. Work in progress (Atkinson, 1989; Bolger, 1990; O'Shane, 1988) indicated that our portrait of increased violence against women in the Northern Territory applied to other areas of Australia. Information on the dimensions of the crisis was coming from a number of sources: the Australian Institute of Criminology, work on

All citations in this letter can be found in the reference list of Bell's article in this issue.

the Inquiry into Violence, police reports, and Health Department records. I thought, at last, the extent of damage being done to women (and hence to families and communities) could no longer be denied. Establishing the high incidence of intra-racial rape was no longer the threshold issue, and it seemed that our speaking out had made available a discursive space in which productive debate could occur and where hitherto muted voices might be heard. On reading our article, one Aboriginal woman researcher had written that she was relieved that "people like yourself are speaking out." The issue of intra-racial rape has long had a profile with Aboriginal women I know, but it has been a private face, one of deep shame and anguish at the violation, of anger and despair at the inadequacies of remedies. I was beginning to think that the climate was conducive to work on collaborative strategies to empower Aboriginal women.

Then, in late February, the letter of Huggins et al. began circulating and the climate changed dramatically. A session at the Women and Australian Anthropology conference (Adelaide) was organised to discuss "the politics and propriety of work by women anthropologists amongst Aboriginal women" (April 19, 1990); the women's unit of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (A.B.C.) took up our article in a most hostile fashion ("Coming Out Show," May 19, 1990); there was an unseemly scramble on the part of certain academic women to position themselves as sympathetic to the Huggins et al. position. Demands that the letter be published gained momentum. Those who argued for the right and responsibility of feminists to speak on the issue of rape were quickly "white listed." The race card had been played and the actual abuse of women had been decentred. Persons who had been engaged in research in this fraught area, either withdrew from exchanges with me or wrote expressing great trepidation regarding their future work. A number of qualified, dedicated researchers and potential researchers, intimidated/apalled/tired by the tenor and raw emotions of exchanges such as these, are tempering their reporting and withholding information for fear of an attack on their personal and professional integrity.

This reluctance to engage with certain questions is becoming routine in the Aboriginal field and is having an adverse effect on the quality of research, the candour of reporting, and the range of researchers available to undertake work. This, as I demonstrate below, impacts on the quality of cross-cultural justice dispensed to women in a particularly dramatic fashion. I argue that a woman-centred analysis of gender inequalities at the level of inter-personal, community and state relations is indicated. I am not advocating that researchers have an unvetted right to expose the sexual politics and practices of the peoples with whom they work—I am only too aware of the delicate line feminists walk in being sensitive to cultural differences while not ignoring the exploitation of women (see Bell, n.d.). But brutal rape, gang rape, rape of young girls, rape so common it is a daily occurrence, so pervasive that when asked what he wanted to be when he grew up, a 10-year-old boy answered, "a rapist," is not an abstraction (see O'Shane, 1988, p. 99; Atkinson, 1989, p. 12). It maims real women, young and old, and existing procedures are proving to be grossly inadequate, and in some cases are contributory factors to situations in which women are routinely the victims of violence. In this context, silence kills women.

One of the main challenges from Huggins et al. and from the participants in scholarly fora which have taken up their letter appears to focus on a cluster of issues around co-authorship: I am accused of unethical practice in co-authoring; my relationship with Topsy Napurrula Nelson is characterised as exploitative; and her language and cognitive skills are disparaged. I had alluded to my relationship, professional and personal, with Topsy Napurrula in our article and, contrary to the assertion of Huggins et al., it is a friendship and scholarly collaboration of some standing (Bell, 1983; Bell & Nelson, 1985; Nelson, 1990). We met in 1975 and for the next 18 months I saw Topsy Nelson every day: sometimes it was when we went hunting; sometimes in ceremonial contexts or when visiting sacred sites; sometimes we travelled to another community to see relatives; other times we just sat at home or in a bush camp, enjoying a cup of tea and chatting, about our

children, families, work, tastes in music, film, art, our hopes, fears, and affairs. Over the next decade I saw Topsy Napurrula often: I returned to the Northern Territory for extended periods; she spent holidays with my children and me; we made a number of presentations at conferences; we spoke on the phone; and wrote letters. Topsy Napurrula Nelson is a friend and colleague.

In the accompanying article I trace the way in which a fieldwork relationship became one of scholarly collaboration and explore examples of cases of cross-cultural collaboration. Such occasions, I argue, empower Aboriginal women and the experiences impact positively on their families and communities. I am concerned that we (i.e., concerned persons: feminists, Aboriginal women, lawyers, bureaucrats, activists, etc.) move beyond the glib denunciation of "wicked whites" exploiting "defenceless indigenes" (this is demeaning of all parties) and the anti-feminist, anti-woman rhetoric which has come to characterise much discourse on questions of race and sex because it constitutes a deflection from the substantive issues. I am also concerned that we not have to reinvent the wheel with each inquiry. We do not need millions of dollars spent on a Royal Commission to establish that Aborigines were dying in custody at disproportionate rates. We do not need millions spent on inquiries into so called "domestic violence." What is needed is analysis grounded in these experiences which generates policy initiatives, social reflection, and a climate wherein "the statistics" are transformed; we need dialogue which will allow women to be partners in the process, not victims.

Although Topsy Nelson's narrative contributions, which are italicised in our article, do not constitute 50% of the total wordage, her imprint is firmly on the ideas and structure of the piece. The issues are ones we have spent long days discussing and are topics to which we return again and again. I owe her an enormous debt both intellectually and in terms of who I am now. To list her as an "informant," would demean that aspect of her contribution. Finding ways of presenting in a written text for a scholarly journal, the oral narratives of Topsy Napurrula and an explicitly feminist analysis was experimental.

I am concerned that the attack on this collaboration will deter others. Without the possibility of such collaboration, we have indeed reached a sorry pass.

Those who have heard Topsy Napurrula Nelson speak at various conferences are well acquainted with her intelligence, insight to cross-cultural communication and ability to find the narrative which illuminates the problem under consideration. To suggest that because English is her second language, she somehow can't comprehend complex ideas is at once matronising and false. Like many of her colleagues, Napurrula is multilingual. She speaks Warlpiri, Kaytej, and Warumungu with ease and I have heard her making herself understood in several other languages. She speaks a creole, but now, when speaking to non-Aborigines, prefers standard English. Her English is constantly being expanded and her meaning is always clear to audiences. At Deakin University (Victoria, Australia) in 1986, she delivered a half-hour address without notes or interpreters (see Nelson, 1990). The attack on her integrity, knowledge and capacity to be involved in any real partnership in the production of a scholarly article I take as deeply offensive and smacking of exactly the racism that many protagonists in this dispute would root out and expose. Her voice is not an afterthought and her reflections are central to understanding the current situation, one in which she lives on a day to day basis.

The title "Speaking about Rape is Everyone's Business," which Huggins et al. find so offensive, draws on a Central Australian idiomatic formulation. The following are examples:

Question: "Who speaks for that one [person or thing]?"

Answer: "I'm [or a specified individual/group] boss for that."

Question: "Who speaks for this one [place, ceremony, knowledge]?"

Answer: "That's man's business," or "That's woman's business."

Notions of what is whose business are precise, and to violate knowledge boundaries is to court sure disaster. In an oral culture to appropriate the word of another is tanta-

mount to theft: knowledge is wealth and ideas are owned. In negotiating publication of material over the years I have always consulted with the persons who were my teachers and asked about who may properly hear the stories. When Topsy Napurrula talked about the topic of rape and our article, she said, "It's important to show that story. Put it in one story, not only for Aboriginal woman but for everyone. It's O.K. to tell that story for Tennant Creek and old generation one too. Start from the old one and come to the trouble now" (work tape, 11/88).

In the code followed by Napurrula, one speaks only on those matters on which one has a right to speak and those rights are specified in a context-dependent fashion. In my code I state my credentials and I am accountable to the people upon whose stories I draw. These bases were spelled out in our article. I am not denying the right of Jackie Huggins et al. to speak—their anger and pain is legitimate—but I am suggesting that their letter does not constitute considered criticism. On the one hand, they assert their education assists their analysis, but on the other Jackie Huggins has made clear her disdain for "formal white rules" and stated the urgency of their struggles is such that "we act largely on instincts and emotions then face the consequences later" (Huggins, 4/4/1990). It seems to me Huggins et al. are conflicted regarding the basis and authority from which they speak. None of the letter writers makes mention of any specific field work in the area, nor do they appear to think that such experience may be a relevant consideration. They privilege understanding of the issues on the basis of their Aboriginality but then dismiss Topsy Napurrula's voice, claiming that she is being exploited. When she writes to them, quite independent of me, endorsing her contribution (April, 1990), she is dismissed as only one voice, whereas they are twelve. I have heard this repeated by members of the academy and media. In my view Social Science is not subject to popular referendum. Notwithstanding I doubt that even if there were a hundred signatures, it would have any effect on what is known to be so in Tennant Creek.

Huggins et al. introduce the divisiveness of what they term "geographic and blood

lines." There is a profound difference in the experience of women from the Tennant Creek community (discussed in our article) and that of educated urban women. To say this is not to demean one or the other, but simply to state a fact. It is Huggins et al. who wish to establish hierarchies of oppression and locate themselves as the most disadvantaged. Given the daily reality of Napurrula's life, this is hard to countenance. Topsy Napurrula Nelson and her families live without running water, electricity, sanitation, decent health care, education, or shelter, and endure high levels of infant mortality and unemployment. But Napurrula has authority in her community, continuity with her land, extensive ceremonial knowledge and standing in the wider community. Topsy Nelson is one of the few women members of the Central Land Council and is often cited in Aboriginal publications such as the *Land Rights News* (see February issue, 1990, p. 2). She has given critical expert evidence in land claim hearings and now speaks at international conferences.

Not so long ago, distinctions with decidedly pejorative overtones were routinely drawn between persons categorised as full-bloods, half-castes, mixed race, tribal, tribal remnants, assimilated, traditional, non-traditional, remote, settled, bush blacks, and civilised blacks. Government policies fostered, nay were founded on, such distinctions and divisions, and that language is still used by some Aborigines and non-Aborigines, although the impact of the words differs according to speaker and audience. With the emergence of articulate Aboriginal spokespersons at the national level, and lobbying in the international arena, the assertion of common identity based on Aboriginality has sought to expose the divisions as colonial artefacts and to develop inclusive categories. This political forging of Aboriginal solidarity is critical in pressuring the state to exercise its constitutional responsibility to legislate for the benefits of Aborigines, but it is a *political* identity, it does not entail sameness of situation or experience.

When the basis of claim to knowing is Aboriginality, a common reflex of non-Aborigines is to retreat to avoid being called racist. Too often different standards apply to the

work of Aboriginal writers: documentation or citation of sources is not asked for, and inconsistencies are not dwelt upon. I am holding Huggins et al. responsible for their words. To do otherwise is racist and to invite intellectual corruption. In our article we drew on the writings of many Aboriginal women: clearly there is no one position regarding violence, feminism, and strategy. Aboriginal women do not speak with one voice any more than do feminists, white men, or lawyers. To acknowledge this is not to create divisions, nor is it to deny the validity of different positions. It is simply to acknowledge reality; it is dogmatism and demands for "ideological purity" that are dangerous. Guilt may be a helpful lever on the liberal conscience: anger may generate action, but it is not to be confused with analysis. I accept that Huggins et al. are hurt and angry, but their anger should more properly be directed elsewhere. Their quarrel is with the academy, the politics of the nation state, not with Topsy Napurrula Nelson and myself. Of course, it is easier to be angry with us and attacks on anthropologists, especially feminist anthropologists, are music to the ears of those who prefer to ignore inequalities, especially where a case can be made that women are particularly disadvantaged.

Although not always acknowledged (an interesting erasure in itself), this is not the first time issues such as those raised by Huggins et al. have been aired. They have a history (albeit a contested one as their interpretation of the Brisbane 1984 incident as a radical feminist plot illustrates) and I offer a reclamation of one strand of that history in the article I have written for this issue. My various attempts to find ways of negotiating around the outbursts which have become part of the research landscape, have always been in the hope that we might move from name calling to co-operation. But that does not appear to be a shared goal. The pattern of the last decade of interventions at conferences by certain vocal Aboriginal activists has been as follows: there is a virulent attack on white academics either as anthropologists or feminists and demands that the speaker and sometimes his/her/their group be involved in future planning and then a dramatic exit, a boycott, or a closed session ensues.

Try to follow-up correspondence: no one answers, no one wants to work on planning committees, and papers do not materialise; one faces accusations of tokenism. All this can be understood; there is much to do; the fora are alienating; writing is seen as a waste of time. But, unless there is some continuing dialogue, not mere skirmishes, then attitudes harden and people begin to take evasive action.

In Adelaide, July 1989, Jo Willmot of the Aboriginal Women's Working Party was instrumental in organising an international conference of indigenous women. Non-indigenous women were excluded from certain discussions, there were walk-outs, but there was also some progress (see Huggins, 1990: 113-114). Perhaps from meetings such as these, where Aboriginal women may develop positions on gender and race with women from other countries, we will see a shift in the climate of cross-cultural exchanges within Australia. Maybe feminist concerns with issues of violence against indigenous women will have to be imported. In the context of the politics of the dialogues around feminism and Aboriginal women, it is interesting to note that it was the meetings in 1985 in Nairobi at the end of the Decade for Women, that had inspired Willmot (*ibid*; *Age*, July 14, 1989).

Having broken the taboo on speaking out about intra-racial rape, I now am going to continue on my iconoclastic ways and speak out also on the "racial cringe," a condition which afflicts anthropologists, feminists in particular. For those who care about their work, who want to make a difference, who believe we have a responsibility to act on our knowledge, it is often easier to bite one's tongue than to speak out. I am engaging now not because I need to build my curriculum vitae, and not because I need this pain, but because women I care about are being hurt. I am doing so because the violence continues and the two most obvious advocacy groups—feminists and Aboriginal legal aid services—have been reluctant, unable to, or conflicted in addressing the issue of intra-racial rape, and have been strangely absent from any strategising, policy formation, and public awareness campaigns. I am encouraged in my endeavour by a Malaysian

friend and colleague who, when I told her about the correspondence said I should, "Ask them: Is it wrong for a white woman to care? Is it wrong for a white woman to love?"

Initially I thought that Topsy Napurrula's letter adequately answered the grossest of the challenges of the letter of Huggins et al. However, the civil status accorded the latter by a select group of women in the academy and media in Australia, and the vehemence with which the letter writers have pursued their platform, have caused me to reflect on the nerves such a letter touches. It seems our article has been a catalyst for a series of simmering debates to surface, but we are saddened by the direction of the debates. It seems that the personal abuse and professional careers currently being generated by various protagonists have little to do with the substantive issues raised in our article. In all the furore following the publication of the article, our main points regarding rape, conflicted feminism and Aboriginal politics have been confirmed. The letter by its very existence confirms our contention that this a contested ground; that there are differences in how to characterise and deal with the issues.

In none of the responses do I see consideration of practical ways of ameliorating the situation of the women of whom we wrote, or of empowering women at the local level, or of building alliances at the national level. In fact quite the opposite is happening: Aboriginal voices are being stilled; divisions amongst women—black and white, urban and rural—are simultaneously being masked, mystified and manipulated; Aboriginal women's experiences are providing fodder for deconstructionists' mill; and a rather hasty and poorly argued attack on professional and personal integrity is being granted a civil status far beyond that which is warranted. Meanwhile, the abuse of Aboriginal women continues. We argued for woman-specific, woman-affirming strategies, ones like refuges, which we know work, and ones, we note that Aboriginal women working in this area are advocating (see Atkinson, 1989; O'Shane, 1988). Huggins et al. declare solidarity with socialist feminists; identify colonisation as the root of their troubles; and assert white women were worse oppressors than white men. I return to the matter of how best to frame the violence in my article.

Here I merely note that privileging race over sex is not providing relief, but refuges are, and more are desperately needed. O'Shane's (1989: 114–188, 122–124) account of the success of the Cawarra refuge in New South Wales and the stress on its services constitutes a serious plea for resources for women.

The Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody (Muirhead, 1988) has addressed what is primarily a male problem. Women experience the tragedy of custodial deaths as wives, mothers and daughters of the imprisoned males. That the number of custodial deaths is dwarfed by the statistics of women dying at the hands of their husbands, lovers, sons, is not yet on the agenda. Asking that violence against women be given a priority is not to diminish the abuse of men at the hands of law enforcement agencies, but rather to argue for sex-specific conceptualisations of violence; to ask that one scrutinises power between Aboriginal men and women as well as between black and white men. This reluctance to focus on gender is not peculiar to Australia. In the U.S.A., the pack rape of a woman jogger in Central Park, New York, and the murder of Carol Stuart in Boston by her husband generated analyses by feminists of the reduced visibility of gender as a category of analysis in violent crimes where race is concerned (see my article in this issue). The feminist attention to questions of power and the dynamics of culturally masked violence against women is receiving more reflective coverage in mainstream magazines (see Heinzerling, 1990).

Those who have been keen to discuss our work in scholarly fora have been less keen to share their deliberations with Topsy Nelson and me. This rather parochial "closed shop" approach may be therapeutic for those present, but it does little to generate a research politic, more particularly, a feminist, woman-affirming politic, in which we might all work for a safer society. I would welcome obtaining copies, or reports of the various addresses delivered and sessions conducted thus far, and as those who have shared their work with me know, I answer correspondence addressed to me. Had this attack on my professional integrity occurred when I was in Australia, I am sure the discussion would by now have assumed a quite different shape. I would have been able to respond

from the floor, engage in direct exchanges, and organise panels. But, at another level, I am glad I am overseas because, at this distance, the incursion on academic freedom represented by the letter of Huggins et al. appears less as a personal attack and more as misdirected political positioning fuelled by powerful emotions.

Aboriginal issues have been politicised, polarised and in the process, rather like negative campaigning, have been reduced to eight second sound bites and cryptic bumper stickers. This may be a successful tactic for gaining political office or leverage, but it can not be the way in which scholarly discourse proceeds. Academics have an important role to play in creating, sustaining, and nurturing the principles of a just society and that includes one in which women, black and white, may live as sexual beings without fear of sexual abuse. Feminists have a special voice in these debates: it was after all the feminist strategy of according women's experiences and narratives a centrality in social analysis that brought into the open the high level of

rape, sexual abuse and incest in our society; that named the phenomenon of marital rape; that offered a critique of the blaming the victim; and that argued for services for abused women.

I thank those who have remained in communication and offered their reflections on the issues. They know who they are and I shall not name them individually as there is some serious "white listing" occurring. I also thank the journal editors for their willingness to address issues as fraught as the ones raised here. Within Australia it is almost impossible to speak frankly on issues involving Aboriginal politics if one wishes to stay in work. In our article we asked: who speaks of the anguish, shame and risk for Aboriginal women? The question is still floating out there.

DIANE BELL
WORCESTER, MA. U.S.A.

[n.d.]