

WOMEN IN A VIOLENT WORLD

Feminist Analyses and Resistance Across 'Europe'

Edited by
Chris Corrin

1996

EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY PRESS

resulted in situations when women after being raped were driven out of their own families. It is dangerous for women to appear in the street after 5 p.m.: they are shot at, they are dragged into cars and taken to military camps, where they are raped or made servants (according to the testimony of refugees from Grozny, September 1994).

OUR ACTIVITIES

Since we started our work in 1992 we have developed a number of programmes aimed at the following categories of people:

1 Teenage girls who participate in the school programme 'sexual safety' introduced in St. Petersburg and other Russian cities. We believe that such a special course for girls should be introduced in every school in order to prepare girls for dangerous situations. The boys also need a special course on non-violent communication with girls.

2 Students, psychologists, social workers and volunteers who take part in workshops on feminist counselling. In our opinion a special psychological service should be established to help women-victims of sexual violence.

Experience shows that psychologists are not always able to provide competent help without special training.

3 Single mothers, divorced women, lesbians who are members of training courses in assertiveness and self-defence. We are continuously developing ties with professionals in the community who might be able to help our clients.

We conducted as well a workshop for men — 'Men can help stop the rape' — with participation of teachers and managers working in the field of education.

The Centre's workers have taken part in political actions for women's rights, they are well-known in the circles concerned about violence against women. In October 1994, nine crisis centres from different Russian cities decided to set up an Association of Crisis Centres for Women. The Centre 'Sisters' (N. Gaidarenko), the Crisis Centre from Moscow (M. Pislakova) and the Crisis Psychological Centre for Women in St. Petersburg (N. Khodyreva) are planning to arrange a joint action 'Safety for Women'.

The problem of violence against women is probably one of the few able to unite women's social organizations in order to take part in making new laws and supervising their observance by working in the Social Chamber of St. Petersburg. This work began in November 1994.

Domestic Violence Against Women in Hungary

Kriszta Szalay

In the first part of this paper I intend to outline some of my observations and ideas concerning domestic violence against women in Hungary. Since no serious research has so far been done into this topic in Hungary I will rely on my personal experience and knowledge whilst being fully aware of the limitations of such an approach. The age-old methodological problem applies to me just as much as it would to anyone trying to write about something of which she is very much part. Indeed, who knows more about the porcupine: the porcupine herself or the zoologist who observes her? At this point I think it necessary to clarify my position as the author of this chapter. I am a woman of forty who has spent all her life in Hungary and has survived violent relationships both as a child and as an adult. Whether I like it or not I am, in many ways, the product of the so-called socialism that was the ruling ideology in this country till the late 1980s. In other words, this is the porcupine in me. I am also a university lecturer and a volunteer of NaNE (Women working with Women against Violence), the first-ever hotline for battered women and children in Hungary. In these latter capacities I would call myself the zoologist.

In the second part of my paper I take on the role of the record-keeper and familiarise the reader with the objectives, activities and achievements

of those twenty-odd brave women who have been operating the above mentioned hotline for over eighteen months now amidst all the inevitable ups and downs of such a venture. I know that most of them are simply too modest or practical to speak about NaNE at length. One of my objectives with this work is to honour and to thank them.

IDIOSYNCRASIES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN HUNGARY

The problem of domestic violence against women anywhere in the world is inseparable from the social climate in which it occurs. Assessing this social climate in Hungary now is particularly difficult since for five years the country has been in the process of transition from so-called socialism to a market economy with all the accompanying social, economic and psychological consequences. It seems that a great price has to be paid for political freedom and national sovereignty especially by those who are traditionally the farthest away from the springs of power: i.e. women, children and the elderly. Together with the poor, they constitute the most vulnerable strata of Hungarian society today.

In trying to assess the causes, patterns and modifications of domestic violence against women in Hungary one has to face other difficulties as well. The lack of statistics, surveys and scholarly interest in the topic combines into a vicious circle with the lack of realisation of how great the problem really is. But even if interest were higher — one suspects — latency would prevent women from coming forward with their miseries. The often hostile social attitude — blaming the victim — the humiliating police procedures, the lack of sympathy and expertise in many who meet the victims result in women becoming shy and ridden with guilt. They get isolated and so uncertain about themselves that they do not ask help even from their family members or friends. Assessment is further made difficult by the inadequacies of the Hungarian penal and civil law system. The Hungarian penal code does not recognise marital rape. So as far as official statistics are concerned, it does not happen in this country. Little wonder then that only one case of rape in ten gets reported to the police. It is telling that the only statistics so far (see Appendix 1) that focus on women crime victims in Hungary were not produced by the official Central Statistical Office but ordered by one of the parliamentary parties, the Free Democrats, from a market research agency. Another source that could supply data about domestic violence against women could be the divorce courts. Here again our vision is occluded by the fact that the complicated and long-lasting divorce procedure together with the housing problems (the batterer

often remains in the same flat after the divorce) keeps many women back from turning to court. Normally, the police with their records and experience could be of great help. However, the overburdened and in this respect untrained Hungarian police tend to banalise family problems, and even often will not take records. It is not completely a legend that they will not interfere until 'blood flows'. Traditionally, the church is looked upon as a reliable source of information concerning all sorts of social problems. But although the importance and influence of the church has been steadily growing in this country over the past five years, many victims of violence are still not in the habit of turning to clerics with their problems, or indeed, to anybody. Another factor that makes assessment difficult lies in violence being a culturally defined phenomenon. What counts as gross violence in one culture might go unmentioned in another. Indeed, it is hard to define where exactly violence begins: verbal aggression, light physical violence such as pushing, pinching or serious physical violence? In defining violence, it seems, there are a great number of varieties even within Hungarian culture itself. In this respect there are great differences between, say a Roma family and a Magyar one, between an urban family and one in the provinces, between a professional family and a working-class household. Generally, it can be stated that violence for most Hungarians begins at the physical level.

The difficulties of assessment however, should not keep one back from pondering upon the causes of the high incidence of domestic violence against women in this country.

The first such cause might lie in the fact that up until the 1880s Hungarian culture was a basically agrarian one. Endurance and patience have a great ethical value in such cultures, especially as far as women are concerned. Traits of this endurance can be seen in films that have been made about peasant cultures in Sweden, Russia or Hungary, for example. Folk-tales and folk-songs also corroborate the evidence that women were expected to be immensely patient, waiting many a year for 'Johnny' who has gone away to be a soldier. Peasant culture also means a highly hierarchical family structure, where the father, or, should he be missing, the eldest son is head of the family. Domestic violence was often seen as part of the woman's lot, as something inevitable and socially accepted. This seems to be true even if one knows what a crucial and influential role women did play in the economic management of the family.

Another cause of the high level of violence in a society has often been linked with that society's exposure to grand-scale aggression — war. It

has been observed that all sorts of violence show an incidence in those European countries that have experienced war not very long ago within a few generations. In that respect Hungary is most unfortunate: two world wars and a revolution (the 1956 Civil War and War of Independence) have left a lasting mark on the country. It seems such experiences teach people (how) to be aggressive and also banalise 'minor' forms of aggression, such as domestic violence.

Next, it should be kept in mind that forty years of a totalitarian regime in Hungary resulted in a general erosion of human rights. Human dignity had never been a serious issue except in slogans. The fact that in such circumstances people could not direct their aggression upwards, whatever it stemmed from, contributed to the general practice of what is known as the downward delegation of aggression. The lack of opportunities for social negotiation plus the undeveloped conflict-resolving skills all resulted in a generally high level of tolerance towards all sorts of violence. One should not forget that domestic violence against women in Hungary is part and parcel of a more general practice of violence that is still all too frequently visited on children in the family, pupils at school, young men in the army, mental patients in the hospitals, suspects at the police stations, or, considering not only the human world, animals as well. I would say that the despairingly high rate of suicide in this country can also be interpreted in this context as an extreme form of violence directed against oneself.

Partly as a result of socialist protocol and partly dictated by economic necessities old family patterns loosened and finally broke up in the course of women becoming independent breadwinners. In 1994 80 per cent of women were at work. This otherwise positive change has had its dark sides: women became overburdened and often frustrated in their many roles while men also reacted ambiguously. On the one hand, they enjoyed the benefits of the increasing family income, on the other, they had to deal with their growing anxiety over gender roles. Many of them were unable to cope with the new situation and canalised their anxiety into aggression. It is also of great significance here that on the average, women in Hungary are better trained than men (*see* Appendix 2). More girls finish the eight grades of elementary schools than boys, more women students choose secondary grammar schools rather than secondary vocational ones, and almost as many of them get a university degree as men. A 'white-collar' wife and a 'blue-collar' husband — although the latter may earn three times as much as his wife — is a set-up which is often a 'problem' in itself in Hungary.

After forty years of a somewhat artificial full employment, the deep running economic changes that began around 1990 brought with them the hitherto unknown experience of unemployment. Up till December 1994 a significantly higher percentage of men had been out of work than women. The reasons here are manifold. Since for decades women have been doing the same job for less money than men, it was 'logical' on the part of the employer to send men away first. Also, the first target of the economic transformation had been the highly unprofitable heavy industries and mining, these traditional catchment areas of unskilled and skilled male labour power. So even if we know that many women simply did not register as unemployed because they, unlike men, were able to compensate themselves by returning to the traditional family roles, it can safely be said that until quite recently unemployment had hit Hungarian men harder than women. Now that unemployment has reached the traditionally female professions, education and health care, the situation is changing. Nonetheless, no researcher of domestic violence fails to point out the correlation between the loss in social status and the growth of violence at home.

As one looks around in Hungary today one sees a deep eco-social crisis, a crisis in the system of values, in self esteem — for which, yet again, the most vulnerable will have to pay the price. After a couple of years of stagnation, or even decreasing, alcoholism, abortion, suicide and divorce rates are rising again. The same lack of conflict-resolving skills that drives Hungarian men mad and violent, drives them to the grave as well: the mortality of Hungarian men in the age bracket forty-five to fifty-five is the highest in the world. Also, their life expectancy is seven years less than that of Hungarian women. Among a thousand other things this means more widows and more single-parent families.*

I would like to dwell on this last point a little to make it as clear as possible that domestic violence against women in Hungary is inseparable from its social context. That is one reason why many generalisations about this problem will not work. That is why the *net* import of foreign ideas, procedures and ideologies should be avoided. That is why no-one should identify domestic violence as a problem for women and children only. Only a system-oriented approach seems productive which understands that the batterer is also a victim. Therefore, do not scapegoat men. Do not antagonise men and women. In the years of 'socialism' civil society was more or less united in their hatred/suspicion/reservations felt towards the regime: men in Hungary did not hate women and women did not hate men. Let not that be wasted: the war between the sexes only benefits the oppressor, whatever you conceive that to be.

What can be done then to put an end to domestic violence? To get our bearings, professional, unbiased research should be done into the problem. Everybody who is committed to fighting violence at home should know what exactly he or she is fighting against so that they could adapt their moves and policies accordingly.

In trying to prevent domestic violence happening education campaigns should be initiated targeting schoolchildren, men and women alike, plus teachers and educational authorities. Conflict resolution, negotiation of problems, consensus-making skills should be taught at schools. In parallel, the already existing school and family counselling units should be reinforced by adequate staffing and funding. Awareness raising campaigns should be organised to call public attention to the problem and also to make it easier for survivors of violence to tell their stories. This is often the first step towards the solution of the problem. Self-help groups should be set up for battered women and violent men. Efforts should be made to make people who meet survivors of violence more tolerant and sympathetic. Doctors, police officials, judges, priests, social workers and lay helpers should be trained in how to face the problem and how to handle it effectively and tactfully. More hotlines should be set up, also for the batterers themselves. Widespread experience has corroborated what one had suspected already, namely that many violent men are very unhappy about their own aggression and would like to find ways in which to get rid of it. At the same time, more shelters for battered women and their children are needed. Although a nationwide network of these is slowly developing they often fail in the present economic crisis. It is telling that in Budapest (two million inhabitants, high incidence of domestic violence) there are less than one hundred places in shelters for women and their children. Further civil organisations should be founded and funded that could combat violence in the homes. Also, some kind of national machinery should be implemented to help in diagnosing and fighting the problem.

This national machinery together with the civil organisations could exercise pressure on the government for more involvement and for adequate legislation. Reforms in law and legal procedures should be initiated. At present, it seems, both legal philosophy and practice are lagging behind the events. And last, but not least, communication between groups and individuals committed to work against domestic violence should be improved. It seems, we have not quite managed to avoid the pitfalls of mistrust, jealousy, rivalry and ideological fights. This is very sad and also a waste of time and energy.

In conclusion, domestic violence against women in Hungary has its

local shadings and variations. Any successful attempt at trying to stop it will have to bear that in mind. The problems are many, the resources scarce. Only by a cautious, clever and benign attitude do we have a chance to implement changes. Difficult as it may seem, even on perhaps the most horrendous territory of gender inequality — domestic violence — all our moves have to be based on the ethics of care and understanding.

FIGHTING GENDER INEQUALITY

The history of NaNE began sometime in 1993 in Bratislava where a couple of women from Hungary took part in a women studies seminar and met representatives of the Belgrade hotline set up for battered women and women war victims. Inspired by the congeniality and camaraderie of the event, they immediately decided to set up a similar hotline in Budapest as well, where, they believed, the situation (though by far not as bad as in Belgrade) was grave enough to call for action. On arrival home they started the tiresome work of gathering licences, writing applications and petitions, searching for suitable premises. In less than a year's time their efforts materialised in a precious document whereby the Municipal Court of Budapest registered NaNE as an independent, non-party, non-partisan civil organisation. Finally, suitable premises had also been found in a central, yet 'un-posh' location in Budapest. In January 1994 the fourteen founding members moved into Várház körút and soon transformed the somewhat drab and run-down place into a most cosy one by sticking up posters, nailing bulletins on the wall and furnishing the flat with second-hand, rickety pieces of furniture. And there was NaNE . . .

The acronym NaNE stands for *Nők Nőkért az Erőszak Ellen* — Women Working with Women Against Violence. It also has a pleasant slang overtone to it, meaning something like 'Come Off It!' in English. The name so inventively chosen has attracted much interest since then and has given information about the style and attitude of this organisation to whoever was interested. NaNE has four explicit aims:

- to operate a hotline for victims/survivors of violence,
- to reduce the present high level of violence against women and children,
- to press for change vis-a-vis relevant laws and policies concerning violence against women and children and the way those are applied,
- and to improve the provision of support services for survivors of physical or sexual violence.

Media interest in NaNE was considerable from the very beginning with

articles and interviews appearing in a wide variety of newspapers, as well as radio and television programmes, already in the first month of NaNE's existence. This coverage meant that NaNE started to get calls for help earlier than it was planned.

In order to respond to this need, volunteers were recruited and trained. Leaflets, newspaper advertisements and several public information meetings brought twenty-two volunteers to take part in two consecutive weekend training sessions in January. These were given by means of trainers from the former Yugoslavia, one from Zagreb and one from Belgrade, who had several years' experience of running helplines and shelters for battered women and children. These training sessions were extremely inspiring and successful; and they were also filmed for documentary and future training purposes.

As soon as the line was opened NaNE started getting calls, most of them from Budapest, but about 20 per cent from other cities or villages. By now the helpline has become well established. NaNE volunteers have advertised it in Budapest with leaflets, stickers and posters, and the phone number is regularly listed in national papers and magazines that publish hotline numbers. NaNE has received some 500 calls to date. Records are kept of every call for help along with details of what help NaNE was able to give the callers and the follow-up information if such is received. We do our utmost to protect callers' privacy and have resisted the siren songs of the media to supply their articles and TV appearances with, as it were, some 'interesting' details.

In the course of the past eighteen months, work on the hotline has crystallised around two major functions. One of them is what might be called dispatching information. It is astonishing and also very sad how little Hungarian women know about their rights and their chances. Their ignorance in legal matters is all too often turned against them by blackmailing or threatening partners or family members. Many women do not know that often there *is* help and that the awful situation they are presently in is unjust, illegal and should no way be tolerated any longer. So NaNE volunteers have frequently found women in need, shelters, free legal or psychological counselling; they have put them in contact with self-defence groups or have initiated police intervention.

Here a digression needs to be made into the social composition of our callers. Although domestic violence penetrates Hungarian society at all levels and in all spheres and knows no territorial boundaries either, most of our callers seem to belong to the under-privileged. One supposes that better-educated women of better means tend to find the way out of difficult situations more easily or they have the

circle of acquaintances and friends through whom they finally get to the right lawyer, psychologist or police person. Also, if the situation gets intolerable at home they simply can afford to move out, at least temporarily.

The other function NaNE seems to have been performing is listening, simply listening to women who, often after much hesitation, finally come forward with their stories. Often the only thing they want is a sympathetic, non-judgmental listener who is prepared to devote fifty minutes of her time to listening to accounts of ten or fifteen years of solid suffering. It has turned out in a number of cases that the NaNE volunteer was the first person ever to whom that women dared to reveal her story. If I consider what we normally do in fifty minutes — have a leisurely breakfast or bath, travel from home to work, scan through the papers — I am stunned and shaken by how little those women would have been asking had there been anybody to care about them.

Such experiences and revelations indeed are bound to put great stress on volunteers. Mindful of the importance of personal and professional support for the volunteers, several further training sessions have been held enabling them to acquire co-counselling and other techniques for dealing with emotional overload, as well as giving them opportunities to discuss and practise difficult situations they are confronted with when answering calls. Also, we hold regular meetings to discuss cases and methods under the supervision of a psychologist who works for NaNE on a voluntary basis. In order to put NaNE on the map and also to call public attention to the greatness of the problem of domestic violence, NaNE organised, in May 1994, a conference on 'Violence and Democracy'. Hungarian, Croatian, Serbian, German and American activists came together to discuss the state of affairs, to do networking, to exchange ideas and methods, to share experiences, good and bad alike. As regards establishing contacts and learning about various patterns of domestic violence, the conference was a great success. Also, it was followed by sound media coverage which NaNE could not have attracted otherwise. But there was also a lesson to learn: the perceived imbalance between Western and Eastern contributors prevented the conference from becoming as useful and effective as it perhaps could have been, had it been more about the specific problems of women in this region of the world. For however charming, witty and non-violent it might be to try and fight domestic violence, as some women do, by gathering around the house of the batterer, chanting mocking songs and thus making him flee and hide in the forest in his shame, this is something that surely will not work in an Eastern European village where there

is a batterer in almost every house. What if they join forces? One had better not think of that.

Our attempts at networking did not stop after the conference was over. NaNE activists have participated in international conferences in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Vienna, Ljubljana and Birmingham, not to mention the various conferences and training sessions that have been organised in Hungary. Longer lasting and more direct contacts are being built with shelters and hostels offering temporary accommodation to women and children in Budapest, with Family Assistance Centres and other providers of social services operating both in and outside the city. This both enables us to keep abreast of the developments in the field, so that the information we pass on to callers is up-to-date, and also means we can turn to experienced professionals for advice.

Relationships are forming on another level too. We have so far been contacted by two groups of women in the provinces who wish to set up helplines or provide assistance to battered women and children in their regions. Helping them benefits us as well, since this way we can get acquainted with specific problems, variations of infra-structure, finance, local habits of thought inside Hungary and yet still outside our experience.

LEARNING TOGETHER

Working on a hotline, among other things, is a great learning experience. Volunteers in NaNE have had a chance to look into the often grave state of affairs within the Hungarian legal, health care and education system. During training courses, and also whilst listening to unknown callers on the phone, we had a chance to see ourselves function in yet unprecedented ways. We had the opportunity to get to know each other. Blissfully, NaNE volunteers have come from all walks of life and have colourfully different views on life, love and on less important things like politics and institutions. The common denominator is the realisation of how downtrodden Hungarian women often become, and the desire to change this situation. For well over a year now, some twenty women have been sticking together through thick and thin, despite arguments, moments of frustration or despair. Although rising social tension is affecting NaNE as well, and although no civil organisation can be completely different from the society that surrounds it, NaNE's aim has been to develop into a place where it is simply good to be.

We all know, how rare and precious this is and how vigilant we have to be to resist distracting and disintegrating tendencies. The closer we get to ourselves in this process of co-operation the closer we get to

each other and to those callers who might just now be searching in their pockets for a coin to dial 216-1670.

APPENDIX I

Women Crime Victims in Hungary

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
1.1 Crimes against (the person)						
Women crime victims over 14 years of age	2789	2905	3157	3370	3654	3688
Victims of domestic crimes	971	916	985	922	1075	1101
Percentage of Total	35%	32%	31%	27%	29%	30%
1.2 Homicide						
Women crime victims over 14 years of age	145	109	107	141	143	153
Victims of domestic crimes	101	76	59	81	80	91
Percentage of Total	70%	70%	55%	57%	56%	63%
2.1 Assault						
Women crime victims over 14 years of age	1733	1811	2003	1945	2143	2239
Victims of domestic crimes	795	763	833	731	881	903
Percentage of Total	45%	42%	41%	37%	41%	40%
2.2 Sexual Crimes						
Women crime victims over 14 years of age	369	390	390	388	376	346
Victims of domestic crimes	11	10	5	8	4	11
Percentage of Total	3%	3%	1%	2%	1%	3%
2.3 Hooliganism						
Women crime victims over 14 years of age	824	894	986	1207	1330	1482
Victims of domestic crimes	107	125	123	160	166	213
Percentage of Total	13%	14%	12%	13%	12%	14%
3.1 TOTAL						
Women crime victims over 14 years of age	3982	4189	4533	4965	5360	5516
Victims of domestic crimes	1089	1051	1113	1090	1245	1325
Percentage of Total	27%	28%	25%	22%	23%	24%
3.2 Crime clock (hour/crime) of domestic violence against women						
	8.0	8.3	7.9	8.0	7.0	6.6

Notes to Appendix 1:

1 The statistics include only the so-called 'major crimes' and only those where the offender became known to the police.

2 'Domestic crime' means that the victim is the wife (partner) or the ex-wife (ex-partner) of the offender.

Source: MEDIAN Market Research Agency, December 1993

Seven-Year-Old and Older Population as Divided by Highest School-Degree in Hungary in 1990

	Male	Female	Total
Elementary school, less than 8 grades	28.3	34.7	31.6
Elementary school, 8 grades	30.3	33.4	32.0
Secondary vocational school	17.8	7.0	12.1
Secondary grammar school	15.5	18.9	17.3
High school and university	8.1	6.1	7.0
TOTAL	100	100	100

Source: Hungarian 1990 Census

Note

This paper grew out of the talk I was asked to give at the 'ESCR Seminar on Women and Gender Relations in Russia, the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe'. The seminar was organised by Linda Edmondson and Hilary Pilkington at the Centre for Russian and East European Studies in the University of Birmingham in March 1995.

I wish to make a public thank you to all of the organisations and individuals that have funded and supported NaNE. In recording NaNE's early history, which I was not part of, I relied on various English-language material written by others at NaNE. Thank you Zsuzsa, thank you Antonia.

*Seeing Red: Men's Violence
Against Women in Ireland*

Ailbhe Smyth

Yes, my father was a butcher,
and kicked me down the stairs
before going to the slaughter-house
because he had no choice
and I must know that I could not choose.
But he had all the strength,
and I kept my tiny rage
intact behind silent tears
until soon I overcame that too,
and there were no tears, just silence,
and blood dripping passed my eyes,
I saw him through it
and I saw red.

(Rita Kelly, from 'The Patriarch')

I saw red long before I saw the full picture, long years ago when I was a young woman, fresh to feminism and quick to anger, both equally new, for rage had been forbidden us. I thought I knew so much. Now I see that what I saw then was only a first pale wash of colour, although enough, more than enough to see red. I still can't see the full picture

— who can? — but I know better now why it has been hidden and, perhaps, how to look through it. The rage is still intact.

But why, if I have been enraged for 20 years and more, have I never written before about men's violence against women in Ireland? Of course, violence is not my 'field' — I am not a sociologist or a psychologist or a counsellor — but so what? Lack of a 'field' hasn't been much of a deterrent for other things I've done. I don't altogether know why not, except that maybe the rage — the quality of that red rage — has something to do with it. There is fear in it, and shame and pain. And a failure of courage, I have no doubt. I am not apologising, rather trying to work out why rage is not always enough, and why it is (still) so difficult to write through.¹

3.1 SEEING AND NAMING MEN'S VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

I want to do two things in this paper: first of all, I want to try and review what we know about violence against women in the Republic of Ireland,² to see how much we can now see of the 'full picture', and to consider how we are prevented from seeing more; and not secondly, but throughout, I want to focus on how feminist activism has challenged and changed (Hanmer and Saunders 1984) the ways in which Irish society both sees and does not see men's violence against women, and what that means for women.³ For there is no doubt that feminists working to identify and stop men's violence against women have made a literally incalculable contribution to the on-going achievement of freedom and autonomy for women in Ireland.

It gets to a point where you think that death would be easier than living like this, I had a bottle of pills. I was ready to take them when I telephoned a refuge. (Marian, cit. in Shanahan 1992)

There is no way of knowing how many women's lives have been saved, physically or psychologically, because they have had a refuge to go to. Through their emergency assistance, legal and medical support and counselling, Rape Crisis Centres have helped thousands of women in Ireland to deal with the traumatic aftermath of their ordeal.⁴ We cannot even begin to calculate the vital difference made to children's lives, through the provision of support for children by Women's Aid and sister organisations: 'One simple and key principle which we can begin from is that woman protection is frequently the most effective form of child protection' (Regan 1994). How many children will be helped both to avoid and to reveal abuse and violence against them

through the introduction in schools of a new 'Stay Safe' programme, which would never have come into being without the analysis of patterns and strategies of male dominance identified and developed by feminists?⁵

I hid what was happening to me from everyone. I made excuses for my bruises and marks. I thought I should put up with it, [I] accepted my lot as being part of marriage. (Lily, cit. in Casey 1987)

The collective socio-cultural prohibitions against the naming of men's violence, experienced by individual women at an intensely personal and painful level, are a key factor in the enforcement of patriarchal rule. Hiding violence from others, from society as a whole, is also crucially about hiding it from ourselves. What is abundantly clear, for Ireland as for elsewhere, is that the silence enshrouding men's violence against women was broken by feminist anti-violence activists, groups and campaigns. Home-based violence, child sexual abuse, rape, prostitution, pornography, sexual harassment have been identified and named as systematic and institutionalised strategies for the sexualised oppression of women. (See for example, Steiner Scott 1985; Casey 1987; Corcoran 1989; O'Connor 1992; Shanahan 1992; Leonard 1993; O'Connor 1994.)

Rape is a terrible crime, yet in Ireland it is surrounded by a terrible silence. (Mary Crilly, Cork RCC, cit. in Shanahan 1992)

Feminist anti-violence activists have enabled women to speak by providing them with shelter and support, with a sense of legitimacy, and with a vocabulary and a framework through which to recount their experiences. The 'secret and unshareable' (Dobash and Dobash, 1993) has now a common and public language which has become increasingly explicit and insistent over the past twenty years.

Public statements of disapproval [of men's brutality] are now made by activists throughout the world, and their echoes can be heard in the media, in houses of government and in everyday conversation. (Dobash and Dobash 1993)

This has actually enabled us to *see* men's violence against women and to call it by its proper names. Men's brutalisation of women in body and mind is no longer minimised (by women at least) as just 'a few slaps' or 'knocking her about a bit'.⁶ That is why throughout this paper, as in 'real life', I use the phrase 'men's violence against

women' because the shorter and more usual 'violence against women' speaks/writes out men's agency. Implying by ellipsis that such violence has no perpetrators, the phrase 'violence against women' erases men's responsibility for violent criminal acts and contributes powerfully to the paradoxical construction of women as simultaneously 'victims' (but of whom?) and as responsible for their own fate. *She brought it on herself; she was asking for it; she should never have . . .*

Elsie Martin's husband beat her unconscious because she called him twice for his dinner while he was talking to his brother . . . Afterwards, his mother said that if Elsie had fed herself better, instead of wasting good money on them fags she'd have been able to take the few wallops and got over them the way any normal woman would. 'He didn't mean nothin', the elder Mrs Martin said. 'He got a bit ahead of himself'. (Maeve Kelly, from 'Orange Horses')

The existence of refuges and Rape Crisis Centres, the impact of 'Reclaim the Night' marches in the late 1970s and 1980s, of education programmes, of media campaigns — the multi-faceted forms of feminist activism highlight and define the issue of men's violence, its complex dimensions and its absolute unacceptability:

The new attitude to violence against women is that we have *zero* domestic violence in Ireland. That has to be our goal. (Joan Burton, TD, Minister of State, National Federation of Women's Refuges press conference, 15/5/95)⁷

Ministerial statements such as this clearly indicate that ending men's violence against women is, in the view of at least some members of government, a national project, and those who work towards achieving this objective are to be encouraged, supported and treated with respect.⁸ In Ireland, Women's Aid and Rape Crisis Centres are increasingly solicited by the media and by government for their views on matters related specifically to violence, but also more broadly on women's human rights issues.⁹ At moments of controversy and crisis — and in contemporary Ireland crisis is more of a constant than a moment (Smyth 1995a) — these organisations are appealed to for information, for advice, for ways of thinking our way collectively to a more just and egalitarian society. It doesn't mean they are always listened to, nor that their advice is followed, but in a relatively short space of time they have become an effective voice in Irish socio-political discourse. Recently for example, Women's Aid, the National Women's Council of Ireland and

other women's organisations had formal meetings with the Minister for Justice to discuss a range of issues including the implementation of the law relating to prostitution, proposals for a new women's prison, family courts, rape and sexual assault sentencing policy, Gardai (police) policy on violence against women, and other matters (*The Irish Times* 17 January 1995)

Men's violence against women has therefore been exposed as a massive social problem, despite the ferocious taboos against doing so. Services have been set up by feminist groups and, because of these groups' unremitting pressure, by State agencies. Oppressive and inadequate laws have been amended, new laws have been made. Education and training programmes have been initiated. Women violated and abused by men are discovering a measure of hope and some means of survival.

It is impossible to evaluate the precise impact of these initiatives or of this changed and constantly changing discourse, but that doesn't matter: what matters is that violence as an issue and a reality is being translated from the realm of the private and personal into the public arena where it is defined as a serious social problem.¹⁰

In the case of Ireland, a markedly traditional and Church-dominated society, it is particularly important to recognise the strength and persistence of feminist activism around violence. The continuing denial of rights to divorce and abortion, despite a quarter century of feminist struggle, is a sobering measure of men's power to define and control women's sexuality, reproduction and labour. In Ireland, the patriarchal subordination of women is blatantly achieved by coercion and force: women are forced by the Constitution to carry unwanted foetuses to term (Hoff 1994), just as they are forced by the Constitution to remain in unwanted marriages. These Constitutional prohibitions against women's freedom and autonomy are crucial foundations of the edifice of male ownership and regulation of women (Smyth 1992a).

Irish women are confined to marriage and motherhood through a complex weave of gender ideologies, institutional arrangements and social attitudes and practices, with Church and State functioning in powerful tandem to 'legitimate' men's dominant position.¹¹ In such a tenaciously patriarchal Roman Catholic culture, getting men's violence against women onto the political agenda, keeping it there and thus daily challenging men's private and public power over women, has been a difficult and brave thing to do. It is important for that achievement not to be obscured, nor attributed to others. If men's violence against women is now recognised as a social problem requiring a variety of

State responses, that is due to feminist politics and activism, and not to any other agency.

I see that, you see that, we all see that. Or do we? There was the man at the National Refuges Federation press conference who kept saying 'My God, I don't believe it'. He was shocked by the Federation's statistics, which the woman beside him said was only to be expected since men's violence against women was regarded as a 'women's issue' and given the 'invisible treatment' (*The Irish Times*, 16/1/94). I am far more worried by a conversation I had shortly afterwards with a woman who told me how 'stunned' she had been to discover the extent of men's violence against women in Ireland. This woman is much the same generation as myself, has been active in a major women's organisation for many years and has a real concern for women in this country. How can she not have known until now? If we only see what we want to see, why could she not see this before now? There are certain things we are not allowed to see at all.

And then he came home tight.

Such a simple definition!
How did I miss it?
Now I see
that all I needed
was a hand
to mould my mouth,
to scald my cheek,
was this concussion
by whose lights I find
my self-possession,
where I grow complete.
(*Eavan Boland*, from 'In His Own Image')

3.2 THE EXTENT OF MEN'S VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN IRELAND

Silence is never broken all at once and of a piece. It breaks now and then, here and there, voice by voice, gradually making sound and sense where before there was none.

In Ireland, the silence surrounding the issue of violence against women is clearly demonstrated by the serious lack of statistical data. (O'Connor 1992)

As researchers and activists everywhere have pointed out, it is exceptionally difficult to arrive at an accurate assessment of the extent and precise nature of men's violence against women. Women do not reveal or admit to men's brutality because they are afraid, because they think it is 'natural', or unimportant, because they think no one will believe them or care, because they do not or cannot identify with the role of victim, because they are ashamed, because they think they are to blame, because it is too painful to even admit it to themselves (see McWilliams and McKiernan 1993; Kelly and Radford 1991; Hanmer and Saunders 1984). The problem of seeing the extent of men's violence against women is compounded in Ireland where there is no funding for research, where services have not had resources to develop computerised data-bases;¹² where record-keeping by the Gardai (police) is inappropriate and/or sporadic, and altogether non-existent in Accident and Emergency hospital units; where GPs could not or would not diagnose women's injuries as the result of men's violence.

You cannot understand what is kept hidden from view.

Research and Documentation

It has taken twenty years for feminist groups and organisations to even begin to document men's violence against women in Ireland, and there is still no comprehensive, nation-wide numerical-statistical data available. Virtually every report or paper from service groups and organisations notes that funding for research is an urgent requirement. It is clear that a major national study of men's violence against women is long overdue, and vitally necessary for policy development and service provision. Such research as has been carried out, has had to be (under)funded in a piecemeal, hand-to-mouth way and rarely extends beyond short-term, once-off projects on necessarily limited aspects of the issue. Women's Aid, for example, carried out an *unfunded* pilot project on the identification and treatment of women admitted to an Accident and Emergency unit, which is now being extended to other hospitals in the Eastern Health Board area (Cronin and O'Connor 1994). They have recently obtained limited funding (50 per cent through private sponsorship and 50 per cent from the Department of Social Welfare), to research the prevalence of violence against women through a postal questionnaire and a community-based survey in the North Dublin area.¹³ And the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre initiated a research programme in 1990 which has so far focused on an evaluation of counselling and therapy programmes and the development (with the support of the Eastern Health Board) of a data collection system which will eventually

enable them to compile information on the sexual assault of adults and on child sexual abuse. They have also recently completed a survey of sexual harassment in the workplace.

The first-ever survey of women working in prostitution in Ireland was carried out in 1994, funded by the European Union on a very small budget (O'Connor 1994).¹⁴ I know of no data of any kind on the nature and availability of pornography in Ireland (but see the discussion in Corcoran 1989). A Garda 'Woman and Child' Unit was set up in 1993 where reported incidents in the Dublin Metropolitan area are being recorded (Morgan and Fitzgerald 1992).

Statistical and other information about the prevalence of violence, about professionals' responses and provision of services must therefore be culled from a variety of sources, including relatively small-scale or local surveys (e.g., Casey, 1987; Ruddle and O'Connor 1992); the annual reports of Women's Aid, refuges and Rape Crisis Centres; Gardai reports (see Morgan and Fitzgerald 1992); Law Reform Commission reports (1988; 1990); or extrapolated from studies on other issues (e.g., Kellegher *et al.* 1992).¹⁵

From this uneven mosaic, we can determine the following:

Service Provision

- 1 There are ten refuges in the country, catering for a maximum of 213 people.¹⁶ There are no community outreach services.
- 2 Rape Crisis Centres exist in six Irish cities or towns.
- 3 Advice and Information telephone 'Helplines' are provided by Women's Aid and by Rape Crisis Centres in Cork and Dublin.
- 4 The Women's Health Project runs a drop-in/health centre for women working in prostitution in the Dublin south city area. Major hospitals have STD (Sexually Transmitted Diseases) clinics, but no special services are provided for women working in prostitution with the exception of Baggot St Hospital where the Women's Health Project is based.
- 5 The Employment Equality Agency in Dublin deals with cases of sexual harassment in the workplace, as do the trades unions.

Rape and Sexual Assault: Statistics

The number of rapes reported to the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre (DRCC) has increased from 76 in 1979 (when the DRCC opened) to 408 in 1984, to 1479 in 1990 (DRCC Annual Reports, cit. in Shanahan, 1992). In 1993, DRCC received a total of 5129 calls on its twenty-four-hour

telephone crisis line, 84 per cent of which were from women: 64 per cent of these calls concerned child sexual abuse, while 36 per cent related to adult rape/sexual assault; 86 per cent of those counselled by DRCC in 1993 were women; 58 per cent of the total were counselled for child sexual abuse, 42 per cent for adult rape/sexual assault, and 17 per cent for both forms of abuse.

Rape Crisis Centres throughout the country maintain that rape and sexual assaults are seriously under-reported. They note that rape or assaults which occurred in the past are also now being reported, with a rapidly increasing number of contacts concerning child sexual abuse. The most common scene of the rape, abuse or assault was the victim's home. Limerick RCC has noted 'an increase in the number of women disclosing marital rape' (Shanahan 1992).

The DRCC estimates that fewer than 30 per cent of adult rapes/sexual assaults are reported to the Gardai (DRCC Annual Report 1993). In 1991, fewer than one per cent of cases recorded by Clonmel RCC had been reported. Limerick RCC estimated that an average of 10 per cent of cases were reported to the Gardai, while in Cork, the average reporting rate is estimated at about 25 per cent. Overall, about 10 per cent of reported rape cases go to court (Shanahan 1992).

Home-based Violence Against Women: Statistics

In 1994, Women's Aid received over 6000 calls to its National Helpline Service (Women's Aid 1995). In the twelve-month period between 1 November 1989 and 31 October 1990, Dublin Gardai responded to approximately 3500 cases of home-based violence (Shanahan 1992), while in a four-month period during 1991, they responded to 1568 calls (O'Connor 1992). More than 5000 cases were reported to the newly-established Garda Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Investigative Unit in Dublin in its first year of operation (1993-94).¹⁷

Refuges in Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Galway reported admitting 496 families in 1987 (CSW 1993). In one three-week period in 1991, 55 women with 112 children who sought refuge in Dublin could not be accommodated since all 20 spaces were occupied (Kellegher *et al.* 1992).

In 90 per cent of Dublin-based incidents and 82.4 per cent of incidents outside Dublin, no barring or protection order was in place (Morgan and Fitzgerald 1992).

Bradley *et al.* (1994) surveyed a sample of 335 women attending four separate general practices. They found that about 15 per cent of the eligible women who completed the written *questionnaire* had reported

suffering physical abuse from their male partners. No class difference was found in respect of the prevalence of violence. They note that 'one of the striking aspects of [the] study is the apparently low level of identification of the existence of violent relationships by GPs'.

In a pilot study of women admitted to a large Accident and Emergency unit in a Dublin hospital, Cronin and O'Connor (1994) found that of eighty-one women disclosing abuse on at least one admission, forty-six revealed a long history of abuse.¹⁸ In 78 per cent of these cases, the alleged offender was a husband or male partner; 71 per cent of the women listed 'blows' as being the main method of assault, with 'kicks', 'thrown', 'weapon used' and 'shaken' mentioned by the remainder. The descriptions of the consequent injuries show the severity of the assault of women in cases of domestic violence:

There were 21 incidents of lacerations, 26 fractures including a fractured skull. In 26 of the cases women suffered multiple bruising and in 40 cases the area of injury included blows to the head. In three cases, women were pregnant at the time of the assault'. (O'Connor 1995)

In all cases 'it was clear that women experienced verbal and psychological assault as part of the pattern of physical abuse'. Cronin and O'Connor finally observe that 'tables and figures cannot fully convey the appalling reality of abuse suffered by women' and present several specific examples, among which is the following:

Woman aged 41, 3 assaults in 1993. In the first assault a hammer was used resulting in fractured skull, multiple bruising and lacerations to the face. Second/third assaults resulted in multiple bruising. Fourth assaults resulted in a fractured cheekbone and nose, multiple bruising and attempted strangulation. With the support of the A & E staff, this woman took criminal charges against her partner. He was given a six months prison sentence. (Cronin and O'Connor 1994)

Physical/Sexual Violence Experienced by Lesbians

No research has yet been published on violence in lesbian relationships in Ireland. None of the existing services make special provision for lesbians who experience violence in intimate relationships although the services do deal with such cases. The 'Lesbian Line' telephone services operating in five locations in Ireland also deal with instances of violence.

Physical/Sexual Violence Experienced by Traveller Women

There are no published data available on the extent and type of violence experienced by Traveller women.¹⁹ At present, both Traveller and sedentary women and their children use the same refuge spaces. The submission of the National Traveller Women's Forum to the National Report for Ireland (UN Fourth World Conference on Women) (1994) observes:

Some Traveller women, as their sedentary sisters, experience male violence based on concerns to dominate, control and demean, and the abuse of power. Measures need to be taken to develop consciousness and address this violence.

Clearly, there are particular and very sensitive issues for socially marginalised groups such as lesbians and Traveller women in relation to violence. In each case, although for different reasons, women are likely to be especially reluctant to report violence on the basis that such reports will feed homophobia or racism. In the case of lesbians, there is a well-justified fear that reports of violence will be used by irresponsible media to sensationalise lesbians and lesbian sexuality and to further reinforce the construction of lesbians as 'unnatural' and 'deviant'. Traveller women fear that racist stereotyping of Traveller men as 'innately' violent will be reinforced by women's exposure of violence and that this will function to further 'demonise' the whole Traveller community.²⁰

Both groups of women, Travellers and lesbians, are reluctant to publicly name realities which they know from bitter experience will be used against them to maintain their communities in vulnerable, subordinate and marginalised positions. Out-groups have a particular need to assert identity and community and to maintain solidarity, all of which contributes powerfully to making the reporting of violence seem like an act of betrayal. Therefore, until the society as a whole confronts and eradicates its own racism and homophobia, the reticence of Traveller women and of lesbians around violence is likely to persist.

Prostitution

It is estimated that there are anywhere between 100 and 600 women working in prostitution in the Dublin area. No figures or estimates of any kind are available for other parts of the country. It has been suggested that the numbers vary seasonally, with women working at times when money is urgently needed (e.g., before and after Christmas). Women work in a range of settings, including the street, massage parlours, brothels, and

escort services. New legislation on prostitution is believed to have driven some women 'underground', making it virtually impossible to establish contact with them (O'Connor 1994).

In a survey of seventeen women working in prostitution in Dublin (O'Connor 1994), fifteen (83 per cent) were critical of Gardai attitudes towards them, and only three (17 per cent) would be willing to go to the Gardai if attacked by a client or pimp. In two of these three instances, the woman had been attacked and had reported the incident. Both women felt the Gardai had taken the matter seriously and treated them well.

The prevalence of rape/assault or other types of violence by the clients/pimps/partners of women working in prostitution is not known, although instances of violence were cited by the women in O'Connor's survey.²¹

Child Sexual Abuse

In Ireland, there are no national statistics on the prevalence of child sexual abuse. However, we know, for example, that in 1993, 64 per cent of all calls (i.e., 1497 calls) to the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre twenty-four hour Crisis Line related to child sexual abuse, and that 58 per cent of clients were counselled for child sexual abuse (DRCC 1993). In every Irish rape crisis centre 'the largest number of clients are adult survivors of child sexual abuse, ranging in age from seventeen to seventy' (Shanahan 1992).

In 1988, an Eastern Health Board report noted that of 990 cases of alleged abuse known to community care teams, 52 per cent were assessed as confirmed abuse, 40 per cent as unconfirmed, and 5 per cent as confirmed non-abuse. Three quarters of the children whose cases were confirmed had been abused more than once, with a quarter suffering abuse for one to three years, and a further quarter had suffered abuse for more than three years (Shanahan 1992).

The caseload of CARI (Children at Risk in Ireland) breaks down into roughly equal numbers of girls and boys, and equal numbers of intra-familial and extra-familial abuse. CARI believe that the incidence of child sexual abuse 'may be as high as 20-25 per cent' but point out that without comprehensive research and statistics, it is impossible to identify the true level of abuse (Geraldine McLaughlin, cit. in Shanahan 1992).

Increases in the Incidence/Reporting of Violence

We are seeing more violence. Everyone is seeing more violence. It is actively difficult to choose not to see it. On 17 January last, an ordinary

Tuesday, I decided to spend an ordinary evening watching TV.²² I like watching TV. I had a 'choice' of programmes in the 9 to 10 pm slot: a 'thriller' about the so-called aggravated rape and murder of a woman; a 'chiller' about a nurse who fears her husband is a serial killer; a 'drama' about a husband's psychological and physical abuse of his wife and children, and his subsequent murder by his wife; an episode of 'Law and Order' about a young black girl's 'controversial' claim to have been raped by a white policeman. I didn't want to 'choose' any of these, because watching programmes like these makes me more, not less, nervous. I don't want to see fictional representations of how men brutalise women, because they are for all the world (to see) indistinguishable from the 'real thing' I hear about and read about every day of my life. I don't find representations of women as bad or mad, or stupid or victimised at all entertaining. However 'puritanical' it makes me sound, however 'unscientific' my thinking, however unsophisticated and literal my analysis, I can't seem to stop worrying about the relationship between what we see, how we see it and what we do. My alternative 'choice' that evening was a documentary about the history of sport, entitled 'Blood, Sweat and Glory'. Don't tell me I'm paranoid.

Until very recently, there was neither a socio-cultural discourse conducive to recognising and speaking men's violence against women, nor mechanisms for recording its nature and extent. Therefore, in Ireland as elsewhere, it is difficult for organisations such as Women's Aid, the National Refuges Federation, Rape Crisis Centres and others to say definitively whether or not the violence is actually increasing, despite the growth in the numbers of reported instances. However, many women working in service provision believe that both the levels and kinds of violence against women are indeed increasing:

The level of violence is higher, there are more gang-rapes, the degree of violence used in assaults is higher. The level of violence in society has increased and that spills over into attacks on women'. (Olive Braiden, Director, DRRC, cit. in Shanahan 1992)

In fact, it is difficult to work out with any degree of accuracy the extent to which crime generally and violent crime in particular is increasing in Ireland. It has been suggested that the report of the Garda Commissioner on crime statistics does not reflect the true levels of crime, but only the levels of reported crime (*The Irish Times*, 11 August 1993). In the absence of an overall crime survey it is impossible to determine either

the prevalence or patterns of violent crime, nor what proportion of violent crime is perpetrated by men against women and children²³. In 1991, only seven of the 1,258 female convictions for an indictable offence reported and processed were for crimes of violence against the person. The equivalent figure for men for crimes of violence against the person, as reported and processed in 1991, was 273, almost 40 times greater (*The Irish Times*, 20 July 1993).

The paucity of official data has obvious and profound repercussions on the development of measures for the prevention of men's violent crimes against women. Service providers have repeatedly stressed the urgent need to develop and implement a coherent and comprehensive anti-violence policy (see, for example, O'Connor 1995). Piece-meal data mean that there can only ever be a fragmented understanding of the prevalence, nature and degrees of men's violence against women, which produces reactive, *ad hoc* and provisional policy-making. The absence of a comprehensive policy based on a clear and precise understanding of the problem impacts directly on service provision and funding, the development of education and training programmes, transformation of the legal, medical and social welfare systems, the nature and function of the policing of violence and, ironically, the development of research in all of these areas.

But of course the absence of a comprehensive overview is about nothing more or less than the denial of men's violence against women. A problem that does not officially exist requires no official solution.

'Denial' is a linchpin of the forces of conservatism in contemporary Ireland in respect of a range of social issues, all of which call patriarchal forms of social control into question. As we have already seen, there is no divorce law and no legal right to abortion.²⁴ Yet a conservatively estimated 70,000 married people are actually separated (Ward, 1993), while more than 4,500 Irish women go to Britain for an abortion every year (Smyth 1993). In demanding legal and other solutions to the problems which underscore the realities of their daily lives, women are posing a profound threat to the status quo of traditional gender relations. Issues of sexual and reproductive control are intensely divisive in the upheavals of a society moving itself slowly and painfully towards new values and practices (Smyth 1995a).

3.3 STATING THE CHALLENGE

For all its banality, the truism that change is a slow process, full of checks and balances, contradictions and uncertainties, is nonetheless

true, with a particular resonance where men's violence against women is concerned.

On the one (positive) hand, Irish feminists have been persistent and remarkably successful in challenging traditional patriarchal perceptions. At the level of the State, the law now acknowledges men's abuse of women as unacceptable and meriting severe sanction. It is recognised that women and children subjected to abuse require social, psychological, medical and legal support, and that current provision in all of these areas is inadequate.²⁵ While the State emphasises the joint role of 'statutory and voluntary bodies' in the provision of services, funding has improved, and noticeably so over the past few years. Underlying and propelling these changes is the shift in social attitudes towards men's abuse of women. It is no longer pervasively seen as a 'private, family matter', as 'natural' and 'inevitable', infrequent, or the consequence of pathological tendencies, illness or atypical deviance. Above all, women themselves are *decreasingly* prepared to 'put up and shut up' as the reporting rates to various services demonstrate.

On the other (negative) hand, while public articulation of the issue marks a crucial social transformation, it is far from being the full picture, as we (feminists) all well know. The very success of feminist activism over the past two decades has provoked a patriarchal counter-attack which is attempting to roll back, delay or dilute women's hard-won and still incomplete rights and freedoms (Smyth 1995b).

The conservative Catholic lobby is vehemently opposed to women's autonomy. Their specific targets are divorce and abortion, expressed in terms of a pro-family, anti-feminist discourse. These are the battle-grounds in their war to retain power: 'Their fundamental aim is control, the control of Irish society' (O'Reilly 1992). The denial of women's rights to independence and to physical integrity produces and maintains the social contexts and structures which 'legitimate' violence against women. Hoff (1994) observes that 'anti-choice arguments usually reflect civic or religious attitudes that implicitly condone or encourage violence against women . . .' The 'Masterminds of the Right' in Ireland have notably *not* spoken out against men's violence against women. Their main concern is the preservation of the sanctity of The Family, that private patriarchal *sanctum* which is such a high-risk space for women and children. Constitutionally, the family based in marriage enjoys 'inalienable rights'. The right of The Family not to be interfered with by the State is *de facto* the right of male family members not to have their rights of 'ownership' of 'their' women interfered with. The State — so reluctant to intervene when women and children are being beaten up

and worse — shows no hesitation at all in proscribing women's rights to control their fertility or to leave unhappy and/or abusive marriages. In conservative Catholic ideology and politics, The Family as an abstract ideal is of infinitely higher value than the rights, freedoms and survival of women and children.

The powerful Catholic conservative lobby produces and reinforces a patriarchal ideology which constructs femininity as 'naturally' domestic, dependent and acquiescent, and masculinity as public, dominant and aggressive. But as women increasingly question patriarchal constructions and constraints, and move outside and beyond the spheres of men's control, they threaten the stability and continuity of the patriarchal gender order premised on women's malleability in all domains of personal and collective life. Which means that the lash may be applied all the more ferociously to women's backs. For the 'backlash' is not just a metaphor: it has a concrete, physical reality in women's daily lives. McWilliams and McKiernan quote Yllo's study (1988) of domestic violence in the USA which found that improvements in women's socio-economic status did not necessarily signify a reduction in 'wife abuse', rather the contrary: 'Domestic violence . . . increased in those states in which women's status was highest relative to men's, [indicating] that rapid change towards equality could bring a violent backlash by husbands' (McWilliams and McKiernan 1994). While there is no evidence to indicate, one way or another, whether this is a pattern in Ireland, those working in women's organisations and services maintain that 'Irish society is becoming more violent' and that 'the degree of violence used in assaults is higher' (Shanahan 1992).

3.4 CONTRADICTION AND CHANGE

The judge stated
She drew it on herself,
In a red dress
Up to her ass.
In all fairness he fumed,
Any able-bodied man
Would be hormonally bound
To make a pass.

The unrepentant rapist
Served one hundred hours community service
As assistant caretaker
In the local school.

The girl withdrew,
A Valium-addicted
Wide-eyed
Frightened fool.

(Sarah Varian-Barry, 'Raped')

The heightened awareness in Irish society of men's violence against women has not *reduced* its prevalence, nor do the legal measures introduced or strengthened since the 1980s function as an effective or sufficient deterrent. How serious, then, are those in power about stopping the damage, pain and sometimes death of literally *uncounted* women and children in Ireland every year? What I want to do in conclusion is briefly outline some of the complexities and contradictions involved in trying to answer this, because:

Ireland is nothing if not contradictory and confusing. It is at once a developed industrial society, with increasingly secular tendencies, and a traditionalist 'anachronism' in the Western world. Both dimensions co-exist in a state of volatile tension, which creates particular problems for Irish women who refuse the narrow roles allowed them by tradition, law and practice. (Smyth 1995a)

The State's responses are based on strategies of *containment*. Where a problem is acknowledged, the State (or more correctly, its agents)²⁶ must now be seen to take action, while at the same time the resolution of the problem must be contained within a framework which ensures that existing power structures, and the interests of the powerful, are not seriously eroded. Thus, one of the most pressing issues for feminist anti-violence activists at the present time in Ireland and elsewhere, centres on the risks involved in negotiating with the State — Government, legislature, judiciary, the police, social welfare and health systems and so on — in order to obtain *necessary* legislative and judicial reforms, service provision, police protection — without being subsumed into and co-opted by the very system feminists set out to challenge and change in the first place (see Dobash and Dobash 1993).

Services

Although some institutions are more permeable, or less resistant to change than others, in every instance we can cite there is a built-in containment or 'braking' mechanism designed to ensure that change can go only thus far and no further. So for example,

where the operation of services (run almost entirely by women) is concerned, the State (incarnated mainly by the Departments of Health and Social Welfare) now provides the bulk of the funding, but only for a grossly inadequate number of refuge places, or rape crisis centres, or education and training programmes and so on. This ensures that while the principle of support for women and children who have been subjected to violence can be inscribed in State rhetoric, the reality is that large numbers of women and children who are being beaten or raped are *not* in fact being supported by the State. The State tolerates a certain level of violence by *limiting* the number of women it is prepared to support. Further, a considerable proportion of the funding for services is not guaranteed on an on-going basis and requests must be regularly renewed. Women are thus maintained in a subordinate relation to the State as supplicants, dependent on the grace and favour of the powers-that-be. There is a perception that funding is conditional on 'good' (ie, non-subversive, non-radical) behaviour, with consequently de-politicising effects. Persistent underprovision and underfunding mean that women who work in these vital services earn a bare pittance, which functions to maintain them in an economically subordinate position.²⁷ This in turn is one of the main mechanisms for (re)producing their relative powerlessness in society more generally.

Legislation

The now considerable number of new and amended laws may appear to provide an adequate framework for exposing and sanctioning men's violence against women. However, a number of these laws contain clauses which ensure that their effectiveness is directly controlled by the judiciary (*see* the critiques of Fennell 1993; O'Malley 1993; Leonard 1993). This is particularly marked with regard to rape law, where 'there is a high level of discretion [vested] in trial judges' (O'Malley 1993). For example, the previous sexual experience of a complainant may still be used in a rape trial with the express permission of the trial judge. The judge also retains discretion as to whether the jury should be warned of the dangers of convicting on the uncorroborated evidence of the complainant. The judge now decides if, and to what extent, a woman is to be believed in a rape trial. Further, what is written in the statute books (the 'rhetoric' of the law) is undermined by the procedures and practices of its implementation.

When new rape law was introduced five years ago, a barrister commented that the Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act 1990 'swept away the attitude to rape which partially blames the crime on the victim'. However, in practice attitudes have not changed in judicial pronouncements. (Bigley 1995)

Inconsistent and lenient sentencing has been a major area of controversy in rape cases (*see* Shanahan 1992; O'Malley, 1993), culminating in 1992 in public outrage at an especially blatant example of judicial disregard for women's right to justice. The complainant in the case in question was a young woman, Lavinia Kerwick, who made a public statement condemning the trial judge who adjourned sentence for a year on the young man who had pleaded guilty to raping her. The judge based his decision on the fact that, *inter alia*, the man had a clean record with good references from his employer. The young woman's pain, the violation of her person and of her right to bodily integrity, were apparently of no consequence to him.

Lavinia Kerwick appealed publicly to the Minister for Justice. She identified herself (the first time a raped woman had done so) as the victim of a violent crime perpetrated against her because [of her sex] . . . She identified herself as the victim of a 'justice' system which denies women value and status as human beings, entitled to have their rights upheld and respected by the State and its agents (Smyth 1994). Commenting shortly after the trial and its aftermath, feminist activist and academic Ursula Barry observed:

The broader issue in the Kerwick case is the situation of individual women dealing with the courts and having their response to a situation determined by the legal system. But also there is the fundamental status of women in this society being defined by its institutions. (Barry, cit. in Shanahan 1992)

The Criminal Justice Act (1993), introduced on foot of the Kerwick case and the public controversy it generated, now enables the Courts to take into account any effect of the offense on the victim when sentencing a convicted offender, and also provides for a review of unduly lenient sentences by the DPP (Director of Public Prosecutions). The Kerwick case provided a clear illustration of the contradictions inherent in a system which legislates for the punishment of rape as a crime, which polices infractions of the law, but which ultimately refrains from imposing the sanctions it has itself determined. It illustrates the State's simultaneous 'prohibition and promotion' of men's violence against

women: the perpetrator was tried, convicted, but not punished (Hyden and McCarthy 1994). However, the Kerwick case also demonstrated how feminist activism is beginning to affect the construction of gendered power relations: the authority of the State was challenged and at least partly eroded; a change in the law ensued following public outcry.

In 1994, the man accused of the statutory rape of the fourteen-year-old girl at the centre of the notorious 'X' abortion case came to trial (Smyth 1993). He was sentenced to fourteen years' imprisonment for unlawful carnal knowledge (the category of statutory rape does not exist in Irish law). On appeal, his sentence was reduced to four years in March 1995. The man was described by the appeal judge as being 'a hard-working, good family man who lost nearly everything; his reputation, the respect of his community, his livelihood, almost his family'. He had never committed any crime before, had suffered greatly and would never do it again. For these reasons, his sentence should be reduced.

Public outrage was intense following the appeal judgement. A coalition of women's groups, including the National Women's Council of Ireland, Women's Aid, Rape Crisis Centres, the Women's Education Research and Resource Centre and others sharply protested the judgement and demanded the immediate establishment by the Minister for Justice of a Judicial Review Group to report on sentencing in particular and on judicial treatment of cases of men's violence against women in general. Following negotiation with the Minister and considerable media attention, the Judicial Review Group was set up and will report in 1996. The newly-established Courts Commission also has as part of its brief a review of court procedures in respect of cases of violence against women and children. Review groups and commissions do not in and of themselves, of course, 'prove' that official discourse on men's violence against women has been radically transformed, but insofar as they provide mechanisms for furthering the process of change, they indicate the permeability of State institutions to social pressure for change.

3.5 STILL SEEING RED

The State is neither static nor monolithic and may be less coherent or more contradictory than our 'commonsense' way of talking about it indicates (*see* Connell 1987). In at least some of its institutional incarnations in Ireland, the State has begun to shift its practices around violence as a result of unrelenting feminist pressure. However, we need to remind ourselves that it invariably does so only reluctantly, partially and following years of work, persuasion and proofs of 'legitimacy' and

'authenticity' on the part of feminist activists and organisers. And at considerable personal price and pain borne by uncounted numbers of individual women. That makes me see red. And still prepared to stand on barricades.

Text of a speech made outside Dail Eireann (the parliament) following the 'X' Case 'Unlawful Carnal Knowledge' Appeal Judgement (Ailbhe Smyth 16 March 1995).

This judgement is an outrage and a scandal, and we must tell the courts and our legislators that we are outraged — and not to be silenced.

Saying you never did it before isn't enough for any other crime.

Why should it be so for child sexual abuse or rape?

Saying you didn't really mean it isn't enough for any other crime.

Saying you're sorry isn't enough for any other crime.

Saying you'll never do it again isn't enough for any other crime.

Why should it be so for child sexual abuse or rape?

The young girl whose life has been devastated by this criminally abusive man knows it's not enough. And so does her family. You know it's not enough and so do I.

We know it's not good enough, not fair enough, not just enough.

And we know that not because we are 'emotional' or 'irrational' or 'vengeful'. No. We know it because it's not JUST.

We know these are most serious acts of criminal violence. The LAW says they are most serious acts of criminal violence. But our COURTS don't seem to know this. The COURTS don't seem to know that one of the most powerful ways men assert their power over women and children is through acts of sexual violence.

And why don't the COURTS know this? Because the COURTS don't want to know. Because the COURTS are manned . . . by men. And they will not point the finger at other men. They don't care enough, because they think, at some level, it's OK.

The COURTS favour 'good family men', in the name of 'justice'. Not women and girls violated by men. No man who rapes is a 'good man' of any kind. Ever. So what do the COURTS mean by 'good'?

They make illogical and insulting distinctions between 'OUT AND OUT'

RAPE and . . . what? IN AND IN RAPE? They say that rape, which is a violent act, is really only a crime when accompanied by 'force' and 'duress'. What bodily evidence do the COURTS want to see? How many times does a girl or a woman have to be hit, punched, bruised, broken? What about the damage and pain the COURTS can't see because they don't want to know?

RAPE IS ALWAYS AN ACT OF FORCE. The COURTS, manned by men, don't know that because the COURTS never get raped, out and out or in and in, with force and duress and violence and devastation to their lives.

The courts don't know, so let's tell them again what we have made ourselves hoarse telling them, and the whole system, for years and years and years — MEN DO NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO RAPE OR ASSAULT OR SEXUALLY ABUSE WOMEN AND CHILDREN. THEY DO NOT OWN WOMEN AND CHILDREN SOCIALLY, SEXUALLY, LEGALLY, JUDICIALLY OR IN ANY WAY WHATSOEVER.

Women and children have rights. Human rights. Rights under our laws. Rights in this State.

So let's tell them again that we will go on telling them again and again and again, until they understand, that men's violence against women is a CRIME. That violent men are CRIMINALS. And that the duty of the JUSTICE system, of our laws, our courts, our judges, IS TO PUNISH CRIMINALS FOR THEIR CRIMES.

We will go on telling them until we have laws, sentencing procedures and JUDGES who understand that MEN WHO ABUSE WOMEN AND CHILDREN ARE CRIMINALS DESERVING OF PUNISHMENT FOR THEIR CRIMES.

And then, maybe, men's violence against women and girls will stop. Because as long as men's violence is condoned by lenient sentences, or none at all, the violence will go on. And will continue to devastate the lives of women and children.

Justice which is not applied equally to everyone is not justice. It is a parody, a farce, a travesty. The travesty must end.

Enough is more than enough.

Notes

1 An earlier version of this paper was delivered to the ROKS Annual Conference, Stockholm, Sweden, in January 1995. I would like to thank Olive Braiden of Dublin Rape Crisis Centre and Monica O'Connor of Women's Aid for taking the time to read and comment on a draft of the paper. And thanks to Denise Charlton and Niamh Wilson of Women's Aid for supplying me with information and documentation.

- 2 Given that the State is (still) two separate entities in the two parts of Ireland, there are difficulties involved in trying to consider the impact of feminist activism and organisation around violence against women on the island as a whole. This does not mean, of course, that common perspectives and co-operative strategies are not possible, and they are in fact being developed successfully in a number of different ways. For the North of Ireland, see particularly Monica McWilliams and Joan McKiernan's comprehensive study: *Bringing it out in the Open* (1993).
- 3 A detailed discussion of the role of force in Irish society — all Catholic though it be — in maintaining the subordination of women (*inter alia*), and the (asymmetrical) constructions of masculinity and femininity are beyond my scope for this paper, although I intend to explore them elsewhere in the near future.
- 4 As far as I am aware, there are no official data available on the total number of women who have contacted Rape Crisis Centres in Ireland since they were set up.
- 5 In 1995 the Minister for Education announced that a programme of sex education is to be introduced in primary and post-primary schools in September 1995. The 'Stay Safe' pilot programme, which includes material on sex abuse and bullying, will be extended to 2000 more schools. This programme has been virulently opposed by ultra-right Catholic organisations. On the day of the Minister's announcement, in an entirely uncoincidental counter-attack, the anti-abortion organisation 'Human Life International', announced its nationwide survey on 'family planning-type sex education in Catholic schools'. This survey asks parents such supposedly neutral questions as whether they believe safe sex education can lead to promiscuity and the weakening of 'a child's natural modesty' (*The Irish Times* 23 January 1995).
- 6 The equally common passive voice constructions 'she was raped/abused/battered', 'battered/abused woman' function to produce the same effect of erasure of agency. I rarely use the term 'domestic violence', since the connotations of domesticity function to preclude notions of criminality. However, alternatives such as 'home-based' or 'intimate violence' are not much more satisfactory, while 'battering' or 'battery' (as in North American usage) again invisibilises men's agency. For a brief discussion of the important and vexing problems of terminology, see Dobash and Dobash (1993).
- 7 In February 1995, Women's Aid ran a 'Zero Tolerance' national awareness campaign, the first of its kind in the Republic of Ireland, to 'try to halt the horror of violent crime against women and children' (Women's Aid Press Release, 27 February 1995).
- 8 The three ministers referred to specifically in this article are women.
- 9 As I write, the Republic of Ireland is preparing for a second referendum on divorce. The first referendum, in 1986, upheld the Constitutional prohibition against divorce. Women's Aid is playing an important role in the pro-divorce campaign by highlighting the detrimental effects on women and on children of abusive marital relationships (see Roisin McDermott, Chairwoman, Women's Aid, 'The Fate of Children in Abusive Marriages', *The Irish Times*, 18 September 1995).
- 10 For discussion of the impact of feminism on changing social value systems and social practices in Ireland, see for example, Smyth 1994 and 1995a; McWilliams 1995.
- 11 Discussing domestic violence in Northern Ireland, Monica McWilliams argues that there too, Church and State 'combine to ensure that women remain in the primary role of wife and mother' and that the dominance of 'traditional Catholic and Protestant ideology has affected every facet of women's lives' (McWilliams 1994, p.13).
- 12 This is the case, broadly speaking, across the entire spectrum of socio-economic, political and cultural issues of relevance to women and to gendered power relations. Research at the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) has been heavily weighted towards the economy, and the Institute has carried out, or published, extraordinarily little research on any aspects of women's social situations and needs. While the Combat Poverty Agency maintains a strong emphasis on gender, its research is primarily, in accordance with its brief, on the causes and effects of poverty. The Oireachtas Committee on Women's Rights has commissioned research on some specific topics over the years, but its budget is small. The Second Commission on the Status of Women, which completed its report in 1992, commissioned chiefly literature reviews and data compilation as it had no funding for in-depth research. Neither the Employment Equality Agency (EEA) nor the Council for Status of Women has regular (or any) funding specifically available for research. None

- of the Women's Studies Centres have received Irish funding for research, and there is no council or institute for research on women.
- 13 The study, which is currently being developed, is entitled *Violence Against Women in Intimate Relationships with Men*. It is being conducted by Kelleher and Associates and Monica O'Connor, Women's Aid (information supplied to the author by Women's Aid).
 - 14 This research was part of the EUROPAP project on health needs in the context of HIV and AIDS. It was carried out by Anne Marie O'Connor of WERRC, commissioned by the EUROPAP co-ordinators in Ireland, the Women's Health Project (Eastern Health Board).
 - 15 The *National Report of Ireland* to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (November, 1994), included *no statistics whatsoever* on the incidence of any form of men's violence against women. In other areas, such as politics, education, employment, housing and households, copious data are presented.
 - 16 The population of the Republic of Ireland is approximately 3.5 million.
 - 17 Information supplied to the author by Women's Aid.
 - 18 This compares with between 22 per cent and 35 per cent of women presenting to A & E units in the USA (cit. Bradley *et al.* 1994).
 - 19 The intense discrimination experienced by Travellers is detailed in the recent Government *Task Force on the Travelling Community* (1995).
 - 20 Anti-Traveller racism and discrimination are very strong in Ireland.
 - 21 Following publication of Anne Marie O'Connor's report (1994), a brief new item appeared in the *Irish Independent*. While the item itself was a neutral account focusing on the reasons why women working in prostitution are reluctant to approach hospitals and health services, the headline read: VICE GIRLS 'DON'T TELL HOSPITALS'.
 - 22 The programmes described are listed in *The Irish Times*, 17 January 1995.
 - 23 In 1988 women were just 2.2 per cent of the total daily average prison population (*The Irish Times*, 20 July 1993).
 - 24 The intricacies of Irish constitutional rulings on the legality of abortion are addressed in Smyth (1993).
 - 25 See proceedings of the Conference on Safety for Women, hosted by the Minister for Justice in 1992, with a follow-up seminar in 1993. See also Conference organised by the National Federation of Refuges for Abused Women and their Children, hosted by the Minister of State for Social Welfare in 1994.
 - 26 The State, that impersonal abstraction, is neither of these things in its daily and multi-faceted realities. It is incarnated, so to speak, in particular institutions, each with its own rites and rules, each with its own inscription and practice of patriarchy.
 - 27 Reading the financial sections of the annual reports of refuges and rape crisis centres, you wonder how so many workers can be paid out of such relatively tiny budgets.

Section Two