HILLARY CLINTON | JANIS JOPLIN | BURKINI BAN

Fall 2016   |   Vol. 30 No. 2

WOMEN'S NEWS & FEMINIST VIEWS

SERENA RYDER
The Making of Utopia

SEXUAL ASSAULT & JUSTICE
What do Women Want?

LAST RIGHTS
Medical Assistance in Dying

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Medical Assistance in Dying
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The purpose of HERIZONS is to empower women; to inspire hope and foster a state of wellness that enriches women’s lives; to build awareness of issues as they affect women; to promote the strength, wisdom and creativity of women; to broaden the boundaries of feminism to include building coalitions and support among other marginalized people; to foster peace and ecological awareness; and to expand the influence of feminist principles in the world. HERIZONS aims to reflect a feminist philosophy that is diverse, understandable and relevant to women’s daily lives.

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DAVE HAZZAN
Dave Hazzan lived in Korea for 14 years as a teacher and journalist. He became interested in the phenomenon of K-pop when he travelled to Japan, China and Southeast Asia, where people were eager to discuss their favourite K-pop stars. Dave’s article on K-pop, on page 44, is his first to be published in Herizons.

AYESHA MIAN AKRAM
Ayesha Mian Akram is a regular Herizons contributor. Her master’s thesis research explored the experiences of Canadian-born Muslim women who practice hijab. Ayesha worked as a consultant with the Edmonton Police Service to incorporate the hijab headscarf into the official police uniform. She is currently a PhD student in sociology at the University of Windsor.

KATE SLOAN
Kate Sloan’s writing on sex, kink and feminism has appeared in magazines and on websites such as The Establishment, Maisonette, Plaid Zebra and xoJane, and on her blog, girlyjuice.net. Kate has written about toxic sex toys and Drunk Feminist Films for Herizons. Check out her article about female ejaculate on page 21.

MAUREEN MEDVED
Maureen Medved’s screen adaptation of her novel The Tracey Fragments, starring Ellen Page and directed by Bruce McDonald, won the Manfred Salzgeber Prize. Maureen has just completed her second novel. In 2009, she received the Artistic Achievement Award from Women in Film and Television in Vancouver. She is an associate professor in the creative writing program at the University of British Columbia.

LIANNE LEDDY
Lianne Leddy (Anishinaabe) is an assistant professor of Indigenous studies at Wilfrid Laurier University. She is a citizen of the Serpent River First Nation, thanks to the efforts of Indigenous women like Mary Two-Axe Earley, who she wrote about in Herizons’ spring 2015 special history issue. Lianne writes about environmental and gender issues as they pertain to Indigenous communities.

JOCelyn DOWNIE
Jocelyn Downie teaches health law at Dalhousie University in Halifax. She was a special advisor to the Senate committee on euthanasia and assisted suicide in 1995. Jocelyn is the author of Dying Justice: A Case for the Decriminalization of Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia in Canada and was a member of the plaintiffs’ legal team in Carter vs. Canada, as well as the provincial-territorial advisory group on physician-assisted dying.

JANET NICOL
Janet Nicol is a freelance writer and history teacher in Vancouver. She volunteers and writes for the B.C. Labour Heritage Centre and was involved with the feminist union SORWUC. Janet blogs on feminism, social justice and local history at janetnicol.wordpress.com. Her article on the need for sexual assault legal reforms in the aftermath of Jian Ghomeshi’s March acquittal starts on page 11.
Hundreds of rape crisis centres, women’s shelters and other organizations that provide crisis support women and girls cannot afford a subscription to Herizons. They are waiting for a generous donor to sponsor their Herizons subscription.

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**BUY A SUBSCRIPTION FOR YOURSELF, TOO, AND HELP HERIZONS EVEN MORE!**
Let me see if I’ve got this right. When a judge performs a misdeed—as former Alberta Provincial Court Justice Robin Camp did in 2014, when he asked a sexual complainant why she “couldn’t just keep [her] knees together” to avoid sexual assault—he need only apologize and all may be forgiven.

But when a rape complainant veers from the prescribed victim script, the consequences are swift and unforgiving. In an incident currently before the Canadian Judicial Council, Camp had acquitted Alexander Wagar on charges of sexual assault involving a 19-year-old Indigenous woman at a party. Camp told the disciplinary hearing in September that he has studied up on rape and apologized. He wants to return to his post as a Federal Court judge, a promotion he got last year.

If it were only one slur—well, maybe. However, during the trial, Camp said to Crown prosecutor Hyatt Mograbee, who is Black, that he hoped that she did not live too long. Apparently, the words were not a veiled threat, or even a racist slur. Rather, the comment was, Camp explained, a type of “bantering” he was accustomed to using in South Africa, where he lived for 30 years.

Camp leaned on another stereotype when he said he took comfort in the fact that Mograbee is a strong woman who would not be affected by his remarks.

And when Mograbee tried to point out Camp’s lack of legal knowledge about sexual assault law during the trial, he said to her dismissively, “We’re grown-ups here.” That’s the dog whistle sound of victim-blaming, just like his comment that women drinking alcohol need to be “more careful.”

Fortunately, the acquittal of Wagar was thrown out. However, acts of sexual aggression, whether from a judge or someone in a bathroom at a party, are both culpable. Camp also said, “Sex and pain sometimes go together, that—that’s not necessarily a bad thing.”

Camp is not the only judge to confuse the legal notion of the presumed innocence of the accused with the social notion of presumed guilt on the part of rape victims. Yet such comments illuminate why victims of rape rarely bother to seek justice. The complainant, who was homeless at the time, bravely came to Camp’s court seeking impartial justice, but she said his remarks caused her to hate herself. Camp seems to have had no idea he’d done anything wrong until Alberta’s attorney general made a complaint to the council. If Camp were the only culprit, a reprimand and a sensitivity workshop might clear up the matter. But he is just the latest judge in a sexual assault case to enrage rape victims.

In the last high-profile rape case in Canada, that of former CBC radio host Jian Ghomeshi, Justice William Hoskins, in acquitting Ghomeshi, expressed contempt for the complainants. They had flirted with Ghomeshi and they weren’t perfect victims. And, like Camp, Hoskins seemed to have forgotten who was on trial. Camp, during the trial in question, and even during his own judicial review, repeatedly referred to the assault complainant as the “accused,” a blazing Freudian slip. Hoskins, likewise, ruled that the three complainants were dishonest, and Ghomeshi was never really held to account.

There is something unjust about a system in which sexual assault charges are tossed if a complainant gets the model of a car wrong or doesn’t just close her knees. And there is something wrong when judges’ biases can be used to blindside victims of a crime that takes place in Canada every once 17 minutes. And as long as courts reinforce such inequality, there can be no justice for sexual assault victims.

Fortunately, feminist lawyers and sexual assault experts are starting to map out what justice could look like if it were to give rape victims greater agency. In this issue of Herizons, we asked three experts—Vancouver Rape Relief’s Lee Lakeman, YWCA Vancouver’s Lisa Rupert and law professor Janine Benedet—for some ideas on how that could start to happen.

Under Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms, women are guaranteed the right to equal protection of the law and equal benefit of the law. But we’re not getting it when it comes to rape. And in a country where violence towards Indigenous women is an epidemic of more than 1,100 missing and murdered women, we can’t wait until the federal inquiry on murdered and missing Indigenous women is finished before we start to fix this problem. Let’s begin with the conversation that starts on page 11.
WOMEN UNITE ON ZIKA

Female senators in the U.S. have joined ranks to combat the Zika virus.

In early September, House of Representatives Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi held a press conference, alongside Republican and Democratic female senators, to demand that U.S. House Speaker Paul Ryan bring a pro-contraception Zika funding bill up for a vote.

The joint effort came after the Democrat-led Senate refused to pass a Zika response bill that had been passed by the Republican-dominated House but would have cut funding for Planned Parenthood. The Senate previously passed a $1.1-billion Zika package in July that did not restrict women’s reproductive freedoms. The speaker has refused to bring the pro-contraception bill to the House floor for a vote.

Public health experts have stated that family planning is the key tool for combating the Zika virus, which can be sexually transmitted and has led to neurological birth defects in infants born to Zika infected mothers. The defeated bill would have prevented Planned Parenthood in Puerto Rico, which has 14,000 cases of Zika—from receiving Zika-related funds.

U.S. health authorities have encouraged women who have travelled to, or lived in, Zika-infected areas to wait six months before getting pregnant. Funding restrictions for women’s contraception would therefore appear counter to the aim of avoiding transmission.

SENIOR TO HEAD FOUNDATION

The Canadian Women’s Foundation appointed Paulette Senior as its new president and CEO in August. Senior is a former CEO of YWCA Canada.

Iran Backpedals on Women’s Rights

According to a U.K. report issued in July by the country’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the human rights situation for women in Iran has worsened despite its president’s pledge to improve freedoms.

The report, Human Rights Priority Country Update Report: January to June 2016, cites legislation drafted by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khameni that aims to limit access to birth control and to restrict tubal ligations and vasectomies. One bill being debated proposes discrimination against unmarried female job applicants and would make divorce more difficult.

Farideh Karimi, an activist with the National Council of Resistance of Iran, criticized the restrictions on women’s freedoms under Iranian President Hassan Rouhani’s government.

“With each passing day, the mullahs’ regime is further infringing on the basic rights of women, which they had fought hard to obtain,” she said.

A group of bicycle-riding women in Iran were detained recently by police and were made to sign pledges not to ride bicycles again. The cyclists were taking part in an environmental event in the northwestern city of Marivan when police informed them of a government directive that barred women from riding bicycles in public. Several women who protested were taken into custody.

Female cyclists have long been a subject of controversy in Iran, where they risk being punished for flouting modesty laws that impose strict dress codes for women in public. Environmental activists in Marivan, near the border with the Kurdistan region, were participating in a “Car-less Tuesday” event to battle pollution. Numerous men and women were riding their bikes when Iranian police stopped the women.

There is no specific penalty in Iran’s legal code pertaining to female cyclists, so officers use dress laws and offences such as being in the company of unrelated men to intimidate the cyclists. It is illegal in Iran for women to go out in public without wearing a headscarf or “modest” clothing.

Marivan is known for its pro-female campaigns, environmental activities, street theatres and teachers’ movements, all of which emphasize gender equality. Afsaneh Beheshtizadeh, one campaign manager, said that about 30 percent of the cyclists were young women under the age of 18.

—BBC News & Kurdistan24 News

Women in Iran take part in an environmental demonstration.

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Franklin Took Bite out of Nuclear Weapons Testing

By PENNI MITCHELL

(TORONTO) The remarkable scientist, pacifist and feminist Ursula Franklin passed away this summer in Toronto at the age of 94.

Born in Germany and educated as a physicist in Berlin, Franklin came to the University of Toronto as a post-doctoral student in 1949 after surviving the Holocaust. When she arrived in Canada, she worked for 15 years as a senior scientist with the Ontario Research Foundation.

There, she conducted groundbreaking research on strontium-90, a radioactive substance present in fallout from nuclear weapons testing and which had been found in baby teeth. That research, and the activists who furthered it, were instrumental in achieving a moratorium on atmospheric nuclear testing. In recognition of her humanitarian work, Franklin received the United Nations Association’s Pearson Peace Medal in 2002. She was a Quaker and a supporter of the Voice of Women, which campaigned against nuclear testing in the 1970s and 1980s.

In 1967, Franklin began teaching at the University of Toronto, where she pioneered the field of archaeometry, in which modern materials science is applied to the dating of archaeological artefacts. She delivered the CBC Massey Lectures in 1989 and received more than 40 honorary doctorates.

Franklin believed that the technology developed since the Industrial Revolution has fostered a “culture of compliance.” To combat the gradual transfer of power and control into fewer and fewer hands, she encouraged people to trust their own senses and to become “citizen scientists.” According to a biography of Franklin on the Library and Archives Canada website, citizen scientists are those who gain scientific and technical information to take part in deciding how technology is used in society. Franklin urged people to protest, if necessary, until a change in the application of technology occurs.

Franklin’s footprint on the planet will be marked by her fundamental belief that all of technology and science should serve human needs. Resisting compliance to technology and its owners was her political driving force.

Franklin was described by Hugh Segal, the master of Massey College in Toronto, as “one of Canada’s and the world’s most important interdisciplinary scholars. With a background in the sciences, engineering and physics, a strong scholarly engagement and achievement in philosophy and remarkable lifelong advocacy for peace, humanism and the human priorities for technology, Dr. Franklin’s work will live on for centuries to come.”

RUTHLESS LIES

the oldest and largest multi-service women’s organization in the country.

“She has a deep knowledge of all areas of our work and will help to build on our legacy of helping women and girls across Canada,” said a statement by Crystal Laborero and Beth Summers, co-chairs of the Canadian Women’s Foundation’s board of directors.

Senior has led, managed and operated shelters, employment programs and housing programs at organizations such as Yellow Brick House, YWCA Toronto, Macaulay Child Development Centre, Lawrence Heights Community Health Centre and Central Neighbourhood House.

Senior is a graduate of York University and the recipient of several awards, including the African Canadian Achievement Award, the Black Women Civic Engagement Award, the MicroSkills Margot Franssen Leadership Award and the Woman of Influence citation.

The Countdown Public Art Project, a community initiative in Renfrew County, Ontario, will see the installation of four permanent public art monuments that recognize survivors of sexual violence. The “Sister” monuments are to be the first of their kind in Canada.

The initiative has been organized by the Women’s Sexual Assault Centre of Renfrew County. Toronto artist Anna Camilerri and Red Dress Productions produced and designed the multi-phase structure to be unveiled October 15.

Community members worked with lead artist Camilerri to develop the four linked monuments. They are being built with community members in the Ontario communities of Pembroke, Eganville, Pikwakanagan First Nation and Killaloe.

According to JoAnne Brooks, director of the Women’s Sexual Assault Centre of Renfrew County, “To create
Reviving the Art of Canning

By RENÉE BONDY

Even if you don’t, chances are your mother, grandmother or great-grandmother did. For many women in the past, peeling, chopping and cooking fruits and vegetables, then canning them—heating and sealing them in jars to prevent the growth of bacteria—was an essential domestic undertaking in summer and fall. From jams and jellies, to pickles and sauces, stocking the pantry ensured a supply of nutritious food for a long Canadian winter.

Canning food produced far more than stocked pantries, however. It also promoted community ties, enriched women’s education, drew attention to the importance of healthy, local food and contributed to a 21st-century revival of domestic crafts.

**HomA Hoodfar Released**

Twenty former United Nations special human rights investigators added their voices to a global campaign calling for Iran to release HomA Hoodfar, a Canadian-Iranian academic jailed in Iran since June for “dabbling in feminism.”

On October 1, Hoodfar, was released. She is a retired anthropologist who taught at Montreal’s Concordia University. Held in solitary confinement at Tehran’s notorious Evin prison for three months, she was denied medical care for a neurological condition, and denied access to her lawyer.

The former reporteurs who called for her release said Hoodfar’s academic work posed no threat to

**Abuse Victims Released from Leases**

A new provision in Ontario’s sexual violence and harassment action plan makes it easier for female tenants who fear for their safety and their children’s safety to get out of rental leases.

The change to Ontario’s Residential Tenancies Act took effect in September and allows tenants fleeing domestic or sexual violence to terminate a lease in 28 days, down from 60 days. The purpose is to allow “them to be able to leave an unsafe living environment quickly,” according to the action plan.

**HOMA HOODFAR RELEASED**

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Iranian security and that she should be released immediately.

“We stress that Iran is breaching its national constitutional principles by arbitrarily arresting and detaining people for simply expressing their opinion and conducting academic research, as is their professional right and duty,” they said in a statement. Hoodfar has written on the topic of sexuality and gender in Islam. Worldwide, 5,000 academics signed a petition in support of Hoodfar.

**SIERRA LEONE PRESSES FOR ABORTION LAW**

In Sierra Leone, an abortion law that passed with the required two-thirds majority needed to avoid a presidential veto has been stalled by the country's president. The country’s parliament has twice passed a law to replace an 1861 law that criminalized the procedure in the West African nation.

The new law would permit an abortion during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. After 12 weeks, abortion would be only allowed in cases of rape, incest or risk to the health of the mother. Girls under 18 would be allowed an abortion only with the permission of a parent or guardian.

Sierra Leone has the highest maternal mortality ratio in the world, in large part due to deaths from illegal and unsafe abortions. President Ernest Bai Koroma refuses to sign the bill into law.

According to a 2015 UN report, Sierra Leone's maternal mortality rate was 1,360 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2015. In a study conducted by Ipas, a non-profit group that works to increase women’s access to sexual and reproductive rights and reduce maternal mortality, the Sierra Leone government spends $230,000 a year on personnel and medical

Canada’s $53.86-million missing and murdered Indigenous women’s inquiry will submit an interim report in the fall of 2017 and a final report at the end of 2018.

The inquiry will examine the systemic causes of, and make recommendations to address, the high rates of violence Indigenous women and girls face. It will report on the underlying factors that contribute to the violence Indigenous women experience, including unsolved murders spanning at least four decades.

Minister for the Status of Women Patty Hajdu said, “We cannot move forward until we face and recognize and put a stop to this ongoing tragedy. Until that time, our entire country will live under its shadow and the consequences of our inaction.”

In 2004, Amnesty International released a report, Stolen Sisters, which contained nine case studies of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in three Western provinces over three decades. In 2010, the Native Women’s Association of Canada estimated there were 582 missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls across Canada. In 2014, the RCMP created a database of murdered and missing Indigenous women which contained the cases of over a thousand Indigenous women who were murdered or went missing from 1980 to 2012 and 169 missing Indigenous women dating back to 1952. The bulk of unsolved murders took place in Western Canada.

The chief commissioner of the inquiry is Marion Buller, a B.C. provincial court judge originally from the Mistawasis First Nation, in Saskatchewan. Buller became the first

**MMIW Inquiry Begins**

The missing and murdered Indigenous women’s inquiry, first called for by the Native Women’s Association 11 years ago, will be led by a panel that is made up of five Indigenous experts. (Photo: CP Archives)
female First Nations judge in B.C. in 1994. The other commissioners are Michèle Audette, former president of Femmes autochtones du Québec (Québec Native Women’s Association); Qajaq Robinson, a Nunavut lawyer and northern advocate; Marilyn Poitras, an assistant professor of law whose expertise is Aboriginal law with a life study of customary laws and the development of self-government; and Brian Eyolfson, acting deputy director, ministry of Aboriginal affairs, legal services in Ontario, from the Couchiching First Nation.

The underlying factors to be examined are historical, social, economic, gendered and institutional. However, the terms of reference for the inquiry do not compel the commissioners to examine the role of the police forces in the unsolved and unexamined deaths. Rather, it will focus its attention on systemic factors that make Indigenous women three times as likely to be killed as non-Aboriginal women.

曼尼托巴省基雅瓦陶尼奥基马卡纳克大酋长谢拉·诺思·威尔森说，术语的参考应该首先关注“特别是对不一致的或无效的警方处理方式的影响。”

唐·拉维尔-哈维德，原住民协会的主席，表示失望，表示没有机制可重新启动失踪和被谋杀的原住民女性案件。她还关注到，审查警方、验尸官和未结案的原住民女性的案件没有要求的调查。

与调查并行，联邦司法部将提供1.671亿加元用于新家庭信息联络单位的建设，这些单位将设立在省级和区域性的服务机构。他们的目标是帮助家庭重新发现有关他们所爱的妇女的失踪和被谋杀的信息。

New funding for new family information liaison units, which will be set up in provincial and territorial victims’ services offices. Their aim is to assist the families and loved ones of missing and murdered Indigenous women to find information that is available about their loved ones from the criminal justice system, social services and policing.

Sexual Assault and the Law: Where Do We Go from Here?

By JANET NICOL

Since the verdict in the Jian Ghomeshi trial last March, burning questions have arisen about the legal rights of women who experience sexual assault and violence.

The case touched off a renewed debate about how the courts treat sexual assault. Experts and activists are now calling for legal reforms, a shift in judicial and societal attitudes, and greater support for women’s crisis centres.

The former CBC radio host was acquitted on charges of assault and choking involving Lucy DeCoutere and two other women. In his ruling, Justice William Hoskins chastised the complainants for inconsistencies in their testimonies and for not including certain details. These factors led him to dispute their credibility as witnesses.

Lisa Rupert has worked in women’s shelters for more than 20 years and is the YWCA director of housing services and violence prevention in Vancouver. Rupert believes the legal systems in countries such as France and Denmark have the right approach because they provide women with their own legal counsel.

“Women are witnesses, so they don’t have a lot of power within the system,” Rupert says. “It would be important for them to have a lawyer who can bring their views forward from the beginning.”

While rape crisis centres offer emotional support, lawyers provide a different kind of support.

“This will encourage women to come forward if they have somebody there to defend their interests, and they’ll feel more comfortable.”

Rupert observes that Crown lawyers don’t always vigorously object to questions asked of complainants during cross-examination. Crown lawyers represent the state—not the complainant. She also believes the “perfect victim” myth must be dispelled.

“There is no perfect victim,” she says. “We have to take into consideration there is no one right way to respond. There is no right way to recover from...

GOVERNMENT LEADER POST A FIRST

Bardish Chagger has become the first woman in Canada to hold the post of government leader in the House of Commons.

Her appointment in August followed the shuffling out of two former house leaders, Dominic LeBlanc, who sharply clashed with opposition parties, and Hunter Tootoo, who resigned from the Liberal caucus in May.

Chagger, 36, represents the Ontario region of Waterloo and has pledged to build a new relationship with opposition parties. Before her election last fall to Parliament, Chagger was involved with the Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre.

WOMEN CALL ON TRUDEAU TO END POSTAL DISPUTE

A group of prominent Canadian women called on Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in early September to direct Canada Post to live up to its legal obligations on pay parity.

The issue of the wage gap in the paycheques of rural letter carriers—most of whom are women—and urban letter carriers—most of whom are men—has been at the forefront of protracted contract talks between Canada Post and its biggest union, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

A special mediator has been appointed by federal Labour Minister MaryAnn Mihychuk.

An open letter signed by a group including actor-director Sarah Polley, environmental activist Naomi Klein, Council of Canadians leader Maude Barlow and social activist Judy Rebick accuses Canada Post of trying to negotiate away the pay equity principles in the Canadian Human Rights Act.

Supplies to treat botched abortions.

"Unsafe abortion is a major issue in Sierra Leone—one that accounts for an estimated 10 percent of maternal deaths in public hospitals," said Janie Benson, the vice-president of research and evaluation at Ipas. Women continue protests to ensure the law passes.
Lee Lakeman, a founder and long-time staff member at Rape Relief transition house in Vancouver, says the courage displayed by the complainants in the Ghomeshi case helped garner public support for women who experience assault. “They had a kind of solidarity in the airwaves,” Lakeman says, “and that solidarity, I think, sent a message to other women that it was possible to talk about violence against women, and about what men have been getting away with, and about the lack of adequate response by the government—but, in particular, by the criminal justice system.”

Lakeman cites the federal inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women as part of a growing demand for greater justice in cases involving sexual violence.

“There is something quite wonderful about watching women’s insistence that they have a right to the rule of law,” she says, whether it’s “in the case of the Indigenous women or in the case of the women who were trying to hold Ghomeshi to account.”

Recalling that it has been a long, uphill battle to establish credibility for victims since the first rape crisis centre in Canada was established in 1973, Lakeman says that the enforcement of sexual assault laws still is not a high enough public priority.

“The state has a responsibility to prevent rape and has a responsibility to prosecute rape. They have a responsibility to see to it that violence against women is criminalized effectively.”

However, Lakeman says that in practice, most cases are dismissed at the outset by police who do not take sexual assault seriously.

“The first cop doesn’t take the incident seriously and does not collect the evidence, applies no imagination to how to get the evidence, often ruins the evidence, applies his own bigotry to the situation and is never corrected by his superiors—and his superiors are more callous than that,” she contends.

Canada is not unique in this respect, she adds. “It’s an issue in every industrialized country in the world. What we are up against is bigotry, the inequality of women and the refusal of the state to do anything about it.”

Ultimately, this belief system must change. “Men need to know: If you commit this act there is a greater likelihood that you are going to get caught,” she says.

“What we need is the rape crisis centres … to have enough independence to be able to make trouble within their own community when the police do not do adequate investigations, when the prosecutors do not pursue the cases and when the judges shoot off their mouths,” Lakeman says.

“Why is this not a super-national discussion right now? Why are we not having proper consultations?”

Janine Benedet is a professor of law and co-director of the Centre for Feminist Legal Studies at the University of British Columbia. In addition to teaching, researching and writing about the law and sexual assault, she does pro bono work for women’s organizations in cases involving sexual violence. She also conducts workshops for judges and prosecutors.

“I try to both teach them about the current state of the law, but also to get them to understand why the law developed the way it did,” Benedet says, “and what kinds of biases and stereotypes can influence legal decision-making.”

“I don’t think we will ever be at a stage where 100 percent of sexual assaults are reported to authorities,” Benedet says. However, “when you ask women why they don’t report, I would like to get to a point where one of the top reasons isn’t: I don’t have any confidence the system will treat this fairly or that the perpetrator will be punished accordingly.”

Benedet notes many of the legal reforms won due to feminist efforts. “Women are no longer presumed to be consenting until they object or resist,” she says. “If a man wants to argue that he believes the woman was consenting, he’s got to point to something affirmative to show consent.”

She adds that provisions restricting women’s sexual history from being discussed in court, as well as their personal counselling and medical records, have helped protect victims.

Ultimately, Benedet believes that changes to rape culture—more so than changes to the law—will have the greatest impact on the reporting of rape and conviction rates.

On this point, she sees a positive shift: “I do think we are seeing more and more women using a variety of platforms—whether it’s the legal system, social media or conventional media—coming forward and naming their accusers and saying: I won’t be silenced and I won’t be shamed and this is what happened to me. I think some find support and encouragement from those stories, whatever the outcome might be.”

Changing stereotypes about women and myths “are problems that are harder to address through law reform … and in some ways, they require a reorientation of the thinking of the actors in the system,” she adds.

Responding to the bewilderment expressed at the outcome of the Ghomeshi case, Benedet says that the “core allegations” of the complainants were deemed less important in the end than the “collateral issues,” which ultimately hijacked the case.

“The question is whether there is a reasonable doubt, and if that reasonable doubt exists without ever having to decide those core allegations. And he [the accused] doesn’t have to take the stand—it’s enough for the judge simply to say: Well, I’m not saying that you [the complainants] are lying, but on the core of that allegation, you’ve lied about enough things, that I simply can’t accept your testimony.”

“People were understandably surprised by that,” she says. “They wonder, what is the purpose of this system if all it’s going to do is decide these collateral issues and not actually decide whether the assault took place? If the focus is always going to be on those collateral issues, what does it mean for a woman who is sexually assaulted and whose credibility is in peril?”

“I think what people are responding to, in the Ghomeshi case, is a deep frustration.”

—JANINE BENEDET
Following Jian Ghomeshi’s acquittal, women’s advocates and legal experts began discussing ways to make the justice system more hospitable to sexual assault victims. (CP Photo: Richard Lautens)

“It means she can be raped with impunity because she is not a believable witness. So it doesn’t matter whether it happened or not.”

Benedet would also like to see the greater use of experts in court.

“We say we don’t need an expert to tell us that it is normal for someone who’s been sexually assaulted to reach out and continue to try to maintain a positive relationship with the abuser, in an attempt to process and normalize something that’s happened to them,” Benedet says.

And yet, she says that a frame of reference is needed to understand the behaviour of sexual assault victims when their behaviour seems “inexplicable, or damning, or problematic.” As a society, she says we must be more “generous in our thinking, and to be careful of that tendency to search out the perfect victim.”

“Women [who report sexual assault] have historically been placed in that category of being unsavoury witnesses,” she continues. “I think what people are responding to, in the Ghomeshi case, is a deep frustration that no matter how much reform and no matter how much we claim to have progressed, we don’t really seem to have moved away from that.”

Another legal change could involve placing limits on defence lawyers’ cross-examination of complainants. Judges in Australia and England are permitted to intervene when defence lawyers become too aggressive toward the complainant. Some would argue that the rights embedded in Canada’s Constitution have prevented this type of intervention.

Benedet does not agree. “The right to a fair trial and the right to cross-examine are not unlimited, and they certainly don’t extend to a right to rely on irrelevant, biased or stereotypical reasoning in order to defend one’s client.”

She wants judges to have a greater scope to intervene when cross-examination is irrelevant or based on discriminatory reasoning, and for courts of appeal to back them up.

“Even better would be some kind of legislative direction as to what circumstances warrant intervention,” Benedet adds. “It’s more than simply changing laws. It’s about changing the culture of the legal system and the way that trials operate.”

Ontario women who have been sexually assaulted can receive a limited number of hours of legal aid. “I would love to see that extended across the country,” Benedet says.

“You need someone who can … prepare women for what they are going to experience in the system and to answer their questions because no one should be surprised by what happens when they go to court.”

Benedet also makes a compelling argument to re-examine the interpretation of the constitutional requirements that judges apply in regards to the reasonable-doubt standard and the presumption-of-innocence standard. “Judges have developed—for sexual assault cases in particular—a kind of formula for how they apply that [constitutional requirements] when you have the evidence of the accused and the evidence of the complainant.”

She would like to see a shift, so more judges would say: Alright, I’m going to measure those stories against all of the external factors that I know. I’m going to look at whether the complainant’s story remained relatively consistent under cross-examination. And I’m going to do the hard work of saying, I don’t believe him, and I do believe her, and I’m convicting.

“Unfortunately, we have too many cases on those kinds of facts where judges say: Well, you know, he took the stand and he said it was consensual, and he didn’t change his story, and that could be true, and so I’m acquitting.”

“That creates a problem, because in most sexual assault cases, there aren’t witnesses and there isn’t anything—other than the complainant’s evidence—which can be measured against some extraneous factors.”

Benedet says, “When women are telling coherent stories that stand up under cross-examination, they are giving everything they possibly can and it still is not enough. And so I’d like to see us take a hard look at that reality because it makes it very difficult where there’s no forensic evidence, or a witness, or something to counter a claim by the accused [that she was consenting].”

Dismantling rape culture requires a concerted effort, but activists and legal experts are determined to see changes made. As Lee Lakeman says, “Now is the hour.”

HERIZONS FALL 2016 13
This is what a feminist magazine order form looks like.

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Has anybody noticed that no one’s talking about Hillary Clinton’s pantsuits anymore? The catty comments about her hair colour have evaporated, too, and no one’s even complaining about the shrill sound of her voice. You’d think that sexism in politics is on the wane.

Not so. While the commentary hasn’t been as cosmetic as it used to be, it’s now pressing a double standard seldom seen in a political campaign. I’m talking about the personal attacks on her character.

Exactly why is she believed to be so untrustworthy? The big issue seems to be the fact that she handled classified information on a private email domain while she was secretary of state, a practice that, some of her critics claimed, seriously compromised the country’s security and the transparency of the U.S. State Department.

But the FBI recommended no charges be laid, and later, when she turned over an additional 15,000 emails, only three of them were deemed classified—a term that casts a notoriously wide net, in any case.

It may have been careless, as the FBI stated after its investigation, but it hardly constituted wrongdoing, and it’s hard to believe the reputation of a male politician who’d made a similar error would have been as seriously called into question. Clinton had, it’s true, deleted something like 30,000 personal emails before she handed over her computer to the authorities, but I certainly understand why Clinton wouldn’t want to open up her personal life to an agency like the FBI.

And I will admit that there may have been some financial shenanigans alongside husband Bill while he was president. Not only are her financial affairs out in the open, it’s also an issue that her opponents have flogged long past its best-before date.

Note that, as of this writing, her opponent Donald Trump still has not even made public his tax returns.

Why is Hillary Clinton said to lack qualifications for the job when former U.S. president George W. Bush was elected governor of Texas with absolutely no previous electoral experience, having lost his bid for the House of Representatives? His credentials going into office? He was the owner of major league baseball’s Texas Rangers and ran an oil company before that. Not an impressive résumé. And let’s remember that former Republican president Ronald Reagan ascended to the governorship of California based on his record as head of the Screen Actors Guild.

In fact, Hillary Clinton is one of the most qualified presidential candidates in history: a successful activist credited with improving her country’s children’s health insurance, a national policy advisor on health care, a New York state senator and, in 2010, U.S. secretary of state during one of the most challenging times for U.S. foreign policy. She basically had to mend relationships severely damaged by the previous Republican administration and led U.S. efforts to impose tough sanctions against Iran.

What qualifies Donald Trump for the position? I count six bankruptcies, one of them a casino. (It’s actually quite difficult to lose money on a casino.) He also once owned the Miss Universe competition, where he pushed for smaller bathing suits.

Obviously, the standards set for Clinton have been much higher than the ones set for the male candidate. He got the job as the Republican candidate with zero policy or public service experience. I guess we can take some solace from the fact that the petty complaints about Clinton’s wardrobe have given way to criticisms about things much more substantial—such as the record of her husband, who isn’t running. It means people are worried that she’s going to win in November.

Then again, it may be that political observers are shying away from the Democratic candidate’s fashion statements because concentrating on the pantsuits would be ludicrous in light of Donald Trump’s comb-over.

Media isn’t the only culprit using sexism against the Democratic candidate. Clinton may be getting less hassle in the fashion department from the press, but that hasn’t stopped Trump campaigners from doling out T-shirts carrying the slogan “Trump the Bitch.”

Now there’s a fashion statement.
Last Rights
Women Speak out on Assisted Dying

By JOCELYN DOWNIE

This article looks at the evolution of Canada's new assisted dying legislation law and highlights the contributions of several women whose actions and views have shaped the issue over the last 25 years.

In the early 1990s, Sue Rodriguez challenged Canada’s Criminal Code prohibition on assisted dying. The 42-year-old, who was living with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), fought for the right to end her life at a time of her choosing with the aid of a physician. She believed the ban infringed on her right to liberty and security of the person as well as her right not to be subjected to cruel and unusual punishment, and her equality rights.

However, in 1993, the Supreme Court ruled 5 to 4 that Canada’s law did not violate Rodriguez’s rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Any limitations created by Canada’s ban on medically assisted dying, the court determined, were consistent with the charter.

Both female judges on the Supreme Court of Canada at the time—Justice Beverley McLachlin and Justice Claire L’Heureux-Dubé—dissented from the majority view, which was written by Justice John Sopinka. Justices McLachlin and L’Heureux-Dubé believed that Rodriguez’s Charter rights were violated by the Criminal Code prohibitions on assisted dying.

While Rodriguez was ultimately unsuccessful in court, her tenacious effort brought the issue of assisted dying to the fore and galvanized a movement. Two decades later, Kay Carter and Gloria Taylor picked up where Rodriguez left off. The two women were at the heart of the Carter vs. Canada case, which eventually saw the Supreme Court of Canada declare Canada’s prohibitions on assisted dying a violation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Like Rodriguez, Taylor had ALS, while Carter had spinal stenosis; both wanted the right to have a physician-assisted death at a time of their choosing. In her 2012 B.C. Supreme Court judgment in Carter vs. Canada, one many regard as a legal tour de force, Justice Lynn Smith ruled that Canada’s ban on assisted dying was a violation of the plaintiffs’ right to life, liberty, and security of the person, and that it did so in a manner that was not in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice. The federal government appealed the ruling to the B.C. Court of Appeal, which overturned Smith’s ruling in 2013.

On February 6, 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada issued its decision in Carter vs. Canada. The court declared that the Criminal Code prohibitions on assisted dying violated the charter and were invalid. It also suspended the coming into effect of its decision for a year, to give Ottawa time to introduce new legislation, should it chose to do so.

As legislators, women have been central players on the issue since the early 1990s, when Senator Joan Neiman, a champion of the decriminalization of assisted dying, chaired a special Senate committee on euthanasia and assisted suicide. While the committee ultimately recommended against decriminalizing assisted dying, its final report provided a foundation upon which subsequent legislative reflections were built. More recently, in 2015, Veronique Hivon, a member of the Quebec national assembly, oversaw an extraordinary process of consultation, research and reflection that led to permissive assisted dying legislation coming into force in Quebec.

Meanwhile, in Ottawa, after Justin Trudeau’s Liberals took office in November 2015, the government asked for a six-month extension to come up with a new law. It was given four months, extending the deadline to June 6, 2016. On April
When the bill came before the Senate, senators put forward suggestions for major amendments. Some suggestions would have made the legislation more permissive, while others would have made it more restrictive. One group of senators sought to make the legislation consistent with the conclusions of the Supreme Court of Canada in the Carter case, as well as consistent with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. They also sought to remove some of the restrictive provisions in the bill, including the following additional requirements for access to medical assistance in dying:

(a) that a person would have a serious and incurable illness, disease or disability;
(b) that a person would have to be in an advanced state of irreversible decline in capability;
(c) that a person’s illness, disease or disability, or their state of decline, would have to cause them enduring physical or psychological suffering that was intolerable to them and that could not be relieved under conditions that they considered acceptable; and
(d) that a person’s natural death would have to be reasonably foreseeable, taking into account all of their medical circumstances, without a prognosis necessarily having been made as to the specific length of time that they had remaining.

Not surprisingly, there were calls for significant amendments to Bill C-14, and the House standing committee on justice and human rights was tasked with reviewing the bill. But C-14 was returned to the House with only minor amendments. Meanwhile, the Senate put the bill through a “pre-study”—a process used to identify issues of concern in order to give the House the opportunity to make amendments even before sending it to the Senate. However, the bill was passed by the House without addressing the issues identified in the Senate pre-study.

Gloria Taylor was at the centre one of the two women at the centre of the Supreme Court ruling that struck down Canada’s prohibition on assisted dying as unconstitutional.

(Photo: CP/Darryl Dyck)
A majority of senators agreed that the bill should be amended to reflect the Supreme Court of Canada’s less restrictive criteria for access to medical assistance in dying—that is, to simply require that a person have “a grievous and irremediable condition causing enduring and intolerable suffering.”

The bill was then sent back to the House of Commons with amendments, but the House rejected almost all of them (including the Senate’s proposed less restrictive Carter- and charter-compliant criteria). The Senate backed down when the bill came back from the House and the legislation passed, and came into force on June 17, 2016.

Although the Senate’s more permissive amendments did not become part of Canada’s new law, many of the most important interventions were made by a number of female senators during the Senate debates on Bill C-14.

Speaking in support of an amendment that would have included access to medical assistance in dying through requests made in advance of the loss of the capacity to consent, Senator Nancy Ruth expressed her view on medically assisted dying and gender. “The facts are that women are more likely to be the caregivers to others, to their parents, to their in-laws, their husbands, sometimes their children and friends,” Ruth said. “Women are paid and unpaid. We live longer. We often outline our own caregiver, family and friends, and we spend our last days in institutional settings, more or less alone, and more or less dependent upon the effect of systemic disadvantage.”

Speaking in support of an amendment that would have removed Bill C-14’s requirement that a patient’s “natural death” must be “reasonably foreseeable,” Senator Frances Larkin told the Senate, “You can say it is the whole basket of things, but if I, as a 62-year-old, had the same conditions as the 90-year-old in the Ontario Superior Court decision [in which a patient was granted a judicial authorization for medical assistance in dying prior to the legislation coming into force], with the same frailties and medical conditions, but I have many more years to my natural foreseeable death, I wouldn’t qualify under this bill. That to me raises a spectre of ageism in a health care system where it is already rife, and this suggests to me potential for rampant growth of that.”

Also speaking in support of that failed amendment, Senator Chantal Peticlerc, a former Paralympic athlete, addressed the issue of assisted dying and disability. “But let me tell you, there is nothing more frustrating, when you are a person with a disability and vulnerable, than to feel as if you have no control over your own life,” she said. “When you have a disability, the worst part is feeling as if you have no control over your own life and your own body... It happens to me from time to time.... I can only imagine how someone would feel if they were vulnerable, in great pain and unable to have control over their own choice. That, to me, would be betrayal not only of the body but also from our country.... There is a fine line between protecting the vulnerable and patronizing them. It is my personal belief that this bill is crossing that line. That is not acceptable.”

Opposing an amendment that would have required those seeking medical assistance in dying to obtain authorization from a court beforehand, Senator Mobina Jaffer, Canada’s first Muslim senator, raised the issue of immigrant women’s poverty. “But I want the bill for the immigrant woman, who is sleeping in a hospital, who has no access to funds and cannot get legal aid in my province,” she said. “You can’t get legal aid in my province if you have a child that’s being abused. You can’t get legal aid in my province in custody cases. Do you think that an immigrant woman sitting in the hospital is going to be looked at by legal aid? Forget it. It’s not going to happen.”

Senator Lillian Dyck, who is a member of the Gordon First Nation in Saskatchewan, challenged arguments by some who claimed that medical assistance in dying should be opposed, in part because of the epidemic of suicide amongst the Aboriginal youth of Canada. “But I think if we continue to see our [Indigenous] youth in that fashion, if we continue to see them as vulnerable, that is a big mistake. It is a mistake because you are telling them, ‘You’re vulnerable. You’re weak. We’re afraid for you.’ I think that’s an awful message to give to youth,” Dyck told the Senate.

What we see in these statements is a focus on people’s rights and their vulnerabilities, and an awareness of the intersecting axes of oppression in Canadian society. These concerns are obviously not the sole domain of female politicians. For example, this awareness was also displayed by Canada’s first quadriplegic MP, Stephen Fletcher, who tried unsuccessfully to decriminalize medical assistance in dying through a private member’s...
bill, and Canada’s first openly gay MP, Svend Robinson, who championed Sue Rodriguez in the 1990s. However, the voices raising these concerns through the Senate process were almost exclusively those of women.

Sensitivity to the issues will be needed in the very near future. Federal Minister of Justice Jody Wilson-Raybould and Health Minister Jane Philpott were directed, in the medical assistance in dying legislation, to initiate three independent reviews on topics that were deemed too complex and controversial to resolve in the time the government had to introduce legislation in response to Carter vs. Canada. Specifically, the ministers will initiate independent reviews relating to medical assistance in dying for mature minors and individuals whose sole underlying condition is a mental illness, as well as for those making requests for medical assistance for dying in advance of their loss of the capacity to make such a request.

The impact of Parliament’s future decisions on these issues could be very different depending on a person’s gender, age, culture, ethnicity and income. Shortly, senators and others will be asking such critical questions as:

• Should Canada allow individuals who are under the age of majority but who have the capacity to understand the nature and consequences of the decision to request medical assistance in dying?

• Should Canada allow individuals to have access to medical assistance in dying through a request made in advance of the loss of the capacity to make a request for medical assistance in dying?

• What are the implications for questions about medical assistance in dying through advance requests, given that women represent the majority of those living with dementia and are the majority of informal and formal care-providers?

• What are the implications of studies that have demonstrated gender-patterned results and reasoning with respect to end-of-life decision-making, leaving women vulnerable to not having their wishes respected?

• What are the implications for Parliament’s decisions of the fact that gender is a well-established determinant of mental illness?

• Would those who live in poverty, a majority of whom are women, be disproportionately adversely impacted by procedural safeguards that may be considered for access to medically assisted dying for mature minors or individuals whose sole underlying condition is a mental illness?

The ministers of justice and health will be confronted with such questions the next time Canada’s law on medical assistance in dying comes up for debate.

In the meantime, the legacy of Sue Rodriguez, Kay Carter and Gloria Taylor continues. On June 27, Julia Lamb, a Chilliwack, B.C. resident who has spinal muscular atrophy, announced she is challenging Canada’s new law on medical assistance in dying. While Lamb’s condition does not cause her to experience enduring and intolerable suffering now, she anticipates that it may do so in the future, but before her “natural death” becomes “reasonably foreseeable.” Under Canada’s new law, she would not be eligible for medical assistance in dying.

Lamb believes the newly passed legislation limits her right to life, liberty and security of the person in a way that is not consistent with the principles of fundamental justice in the charter. And she also believes the law violates her right to equality.

The future of Canada’s assisted dying law may not be reasonably foreseeable. However, it’s almost certain that women will continue to play outsized roles as plaintiffs in charter challenges and as litigators, judges, members of Parliament and Senators.

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[Photo: CP/ Chuck Stoody]
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BODY OF EVIDENCE

The Messy Debate over Female Ejaculation

By KATE SLOAN

t happens one night following a particularly pleasurable session with your vibrator. You take a moment to gather yourself, before looking down. The bed is wet. No—it’s soaked, nine inches across. Worried that you accidentally peed the bed, you check, and to your surprise, it smells nothing like urine. So, you sit there and you think: What is it?

It is a question that has vexed people the world over. The topic has also turned into a full-on debate about women’s sexual functions and their lived experiences—one that is rife with shame-based undertones and attempts to take the sexual nature of female ejaculation out of the discussion altogether.

Let’s start with modern science, which has so far provided an unsatisfying response to female ejaculation and the fluid that typically accompanies it. The Journal of Sexual Medicine reported in December 2014 on a French study that analyzed the biochemical makeup of female ejaculate fluid. For the study, participants first emptied their bladders. Pelvic ultrasounds performed during the lead-up to orgasm showed the women’s bladders filling up. When the fluid released was chemically analyzed, urea, creatinine and ureic acid—three substances found in urine—were among the substances identified. The concentrations varied widely. The study’s authors concluded that “squirt ing is essentially the involuntary emission of urine during sexual activity.” For the lead researcher, gynecologist Samuel Salama, the mystery was solved. “You can read a lot of bullshit on the topic,” he says. “[Our study] is indisputable proof of the major participation [of the bladder].”

Salama may have documented the participation of the bladder, but no fewer than five studies have reported significant chemical differences between female ejaculate and urine. Researchers have found female ejaculate to contain prostate-specific antigen and prostatic acid phosphatase (PSA), substances found in semen. In women, the Skene’s glands, part of the G-spot, release these substances during orgasm. The G-spot is often referred to as a female prostate because it functions similarly to the male prostate.

A group of researchers at Dalhousie University conducted a study of the chemical composition of female ejaculate fluid back in 1984. The study, led by Ed Belzer, found notable differences between the fluid expelled by participants during ejaculation and the composition of urine. Belzer’s study found varying amounts of PSA in the female fluid and concluded that more research was needed.
Though largely forgotten for 2,000 years, female ejaculation has been documented throughout history. Aristotle spoke of it around 300 BC and the Hindu text *Kama Sutra*, which dates to between 400 BC and 200 AD, mentions “female semen.” It was also scientifically documented in the 16th century, when Dutch doctor Reinjier De Graaf studied these emissions and the glands that produced them. De Graaf referred to the fluid as “pituio-serous juice.”

And yet by the 20th century researchers were split as to whether or not this juice really existed. In 1950, German-born gynecologist Ernest Gräfenberg published an article in the *International Journal of Sexology*, “The Role of Urethra in Female Orgasm,” and was credited with “discovering” the erotic zone on the anterior wall of the vagina which came to be known as the G-spot. Gräfenberg, a Jew who was ransomed from a Nazi prison by birth control advocate Margaret Sanger and moved to New York in 1940, also described female ejaculation and linked the female zone to the male prostate. Sex researcher Alfred Kinsey, who published *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* in 1953, dismissed female ejaculation as “lubrication.” And in the 1960s, sex researchers Bill Masters and Virginia Johnson concluded that the few ejaculation-like events they witnessed were simply urinary incontinence.

The mysterious liquid, produced in volumes as little as a spoonful and as large as eight ounces, soon exited the world of science and later entered mass media. It started to show up in pornography during the 1980s, in titles like *Deep Inside Annie Sprinkle* and *Rainwoman 1*. It then took its place in pop culture during a 2001 episode of *Sex and the City*, in which the character Samantha explores lesbianism. “Was that good or bad?” she asks after her female lover ejaculates. Three years later, on the TV series *The L Word*, a sexually inexperienced character named Dana ejaculates during sex—much to her mortification. “I’ve never been more humiliated, or embarrassed, or ashamed of anything in my entire life,” she says. Her sex-savvy friend Alice tells her, “Dana, women strive for this! They read books about the G-spot. They go to workshops.”

In Toronto, Shannon Bell leads such G-spot workshops. A female ejaculation trailblazer, Bell believes that “Ejaculation is a biological function of the female body, and, like its male counterpart, it is a body’s right.” In her 2010 book, *Fast Feminism*, Bell argues that all women can learn to ejaculate. Most researchers believe that about 40 percent of women have ejaculated. Bell, a political science professor at York University, believes that doing so is a powerful political act in a world that shames female sexuality. She has even disavowed the term “G-spot,” because it is named after a man. Plus, Bell says, it isn’t a spot, but an area that includes the entire anterior wall of the vagina. She calls it the “female phallus” because it swells upon arousal—like a penis—and is involved in ejaculation.

As for the urine versus ejaculate debate, Bell says the focus on the fluid’s makeup is a way of downplaying women’s sexuality. “I don’t know what the political import is to prove that it’s urine. It seems weird to me,” she says. “If you compare it to studies on male ejaculation, there’s almost an investment in women’s ejaculate not being as sexual a fluid as men’s.”

An American sex blogger who calls herself Epiphora also believes the debate hinges on a double standard. “Male pleasure is seen as standard, common and sensical, [while] female pleasure is seen as amorphous and mysterious,” she says. “Female ejaculation is also similar enough to something that men do that I think it feels threatening.”

Trivializing and silencing women’s sexual responses is of course nothing new. During
the Victorian era, female sexuality was often diagnosed as “hysteria.” In 1905, the influential psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud claimed that sexually well-adjusted women will give up clitoral orgasms for vaginal ones as they mature. His conclusion was based on scant evidence, but it would make normal, healthy women feel inadequate for decades to come. Today, the debate over the composition of female ejaculate seems, at times, driven to achieve a similar effect. As Epiphora asks, “Are we trying to ‘prove’ it’s pee so we can keep shaming people for doing it?”

If so, it doesn’t seem to be working. A 2013 survey on female ejaculation by the department of urology at the Rudolfstiftung Hospital in Vienna reported that 80 percent of 320 participants said ejaculating was an enrichment of their sex lives. This stands in sharp contrast to Samuel Salama’s French study in 2014, which reported that “abundant squirting during sexual activity may represent a real problem to some [women].” It also concluded that ejaculate was urine.

Pathologizing women’s sexual response can lead to ignorance and harm. Spanish sex educator Diana J. Torres encountered women who attended her sex workshops and reported that they had undergone surgery to cure what they believed was “coital incontinence.”

“[These were] super-young women who went to the gynecologist because they were scared of their own ejaculation,” Torres says. They mistakenly thought they were urinating during sex. In her book Female Ejaculation and the G-Spot, Deborah Sundahl writes that, in addition to stopping ejaculation, cutting into a woman’s prostate can also permanently reduce sexual sensitivity.

Although the debate about female ejaculation is far from over, one thing is clear: The methodology of scientific studies on female ejaculation needs to change. “Some sort of blend of science and personal experience needs to happen,” Epiphora says. “The really important thing is that we listen to women about what makes them ejaculate, and let them do that in a lab setting, instead of imposing a technique upon them.”

In her role as a Toronto sex educator, Tara McKee has observed that the debate about female ejaculation tends to ignore some important, fundamental elements of sex.

“I have always said that fluid during sex is something sex-related,” McKee says. “From a science perspective, yes, we want to know where it comes from, and why. But from a sexual enjoyment perspective, maybe it doesn’t matter.”

In her G-spot workshops, McKee explains that both male and female ejaculate contain traces of urine, since they are both fluids emitted from the urethra. She is always surprised at how this information is perceived as scandalous by workshop participants. “It’s like saying, ‘I want to have sex and not notice anyone’s sweat,’ or ‘I don’t want anyone to pass gas while I’m having sex with them.’” Urine’s no dirtier than any other sexual fluid, McKee insists.

In other words, knowing whether or not female ejaculate contains mostly compounds found in urine isn’t likely to change the ways in which women seek pleasure—or how they respond to it.

A version of this article appeared in the Fall 2015 issue of Maisonneuve.
Ten years ago, singer-songwriter Serena Ryder came to national prominence with the release of the single “Weak in the Knees.” A heartbreakingly beautiful ballad about unrequited love, the single garnered Ryder a Juno for best new artist, the first of what is now a handful of the Canadian music awards.

On the summer day of this interview, she is anticipating the release of the first single off her sixth studio album, the philosophically titled Utopia. The anticipated follow-up to 2013’s Harmony, Utopia seems the natural next step for an artist who continues to explore the themes of love and loss through a lens of ego-less honesty.

The album’s first single, “Got Your Number,” released at the end of June, is reminiscent of the bass-heavy “Stompa,” the hit single from Harmony. Set in a bowling alley during a “Women’s Psychic Weekend,” the video for this driving pop song, with its earworm of a chorus, is fun, funny and features an all-female cast. It’s also the most accessible single Ryder has released. It’s got a fantastic bass line, smart lyrics and a singalong chorus: “Got your number, got your number/ Finally awaking from the spell I was under.” It is indicative of a number of songs on Utopia, an album that just might turn Serena Ryder into a household name.

“I feel [Utopia is] both a change of direction and a natural evolution musically,” says Ryder. “I’ve realized a lot of struggle in my life has come from fighting the wind, where nature is trying to take me naturally. A lot of this album has come from the struggle. I’ve had to fight. I’ve had to surrender, and then I’ve had a lot of balance.”

Fight. Surrender. Balance. Those three words are shorthand for the process of learning to love herself, a process that informed both Harmony and Utopia, both of which were created in the aftermath of painful-breakups.
“I fell out of love with myself, fell back in love with myself and made an album,” Ryder says simply. “And what happens when you fall in love with yourself? You fall in love with another person.”

A third album revisiting the themes of Harmony and Utopia seems unlikely. Ryder is in love with, and engaged to, Trews frontman Colin MacDonald. She seems grounded and happy, two states of being that haven’t always come easily to the 33-year-old musician who deals with anxiety and depression.

“Depression tells you lies and masks who you are, and puts a mask over your eyes so you can’t see anything beautiful—not even yourself,” says Ryder. “I lifted the veil of depression through things I chose to do in my life, things like eating well, exercising, sleeping more, taking care of myself and being gentle with myself.”

During her tour for her 2008 release, Is it OK?, Ryder suffered frequent anxiety attacks that made her feel alone and isolated. It’s been more than a year since she’s experienced the heart-racing dizziness that makes a person feel, at best, like they are going to faint, and at worst like they are going to die.

“I feel like the worst part about being depressed or having anxiety is that you think nobody else feels that way,” says Ryder. “Nobody can possibly know how you feel. It’s so terrible. And so you feel you need to keep a secret. It’s the stigma that hurts. I found that the more people I met who were in the same boat as me, the less it hurt and the less I felt ashamed.”

By being open about her challenges with anxiety and depression, Ryder is helping to encourage the national dialogue on mental illness and mental health.

“For most of my career, people come up to me on the street or after a show and say that just me talking about mental health has been helpful to them.”

Recently, Ryder has expanded her circle of influence by joining fellow Canadian celebrities Mary Walsh, Howie Mandel, Clara Hughes and Michael Landsberg in being a spokesperson for Bell Media’s “Let’s Talk” campaign, which is aimed at educating people about mental illness.

Getting behind causes she believes in is nothing new to the socially active singer-songwriter. Ryder, by giving both time and money, supports more than 40 environmental causes.

“I have a lot of investments in different eco organizations. I put a lot of what I make on tour into what I care about,” she explains. “I put a lot into my family and my home, which is Mother Earth.”

In August 2015, Ryder, whose love of nature was fostered travelling the trails behind her childhood home in Millbrook, Ontario, was featured on CBC’s second installment of Quietest Concert Ever, a series that brings music to unique outdoor spaces while respecting the sanctity of the environment. This is achieved by having music broadcast to an audience that hears the music through wireless headphones.

Ryder performed on the ocean floor during low tide in the Bay of Fundy. The Bay of Fundy, located in New Brunswick’s Fundy National Park, is considered one of the seven natural wonders of North America. It boasts one of the greatest tidal ranges in the world, measured at 50 vertical feet.

In practical terms, that meant that the stage Ryder performed on could be submerged in under three hours. The technical team had 12 hours to set up the venue, produce a concert for an audience of more than 1,000 and get all the gear back to higher ground. The show was tested exactly once before being recorded.

It went off without a hitch. Ryder sang through a gold-plated Sennheiser handheld transmitter and her band used similar “noiseless” equipment. The audience quietly danced along. The concert was the green, pop-rock equivalent of a silent rave.

“When I was asked about it, I responded with a gigantic ‘yes,’” recalls Ryder. “It was so cool an idea. It was magical.

“The beauty of having the headphones was that we were able to hear the music—the energy was going up, but it wasn’t affecting nature. The sound—it wasn’t going out and bouncing off the trees or the mountains. We could be in nature without disturbing it.”

“Parks Canada was a partner on the show and obviously their priority is to keep the integrity of the space. So whatever CBC did, they did with respect for nature.”

Ryder takes inspiration not only from the physical aspects of nature but also from the metaphysical. The title for her new album links to a parable about two wolves and an elder.

“Basically, an elder is talking to a child and says, ‘There is a battle going on inside each of us between the light wolf and the dark wolf.’ The child asks, ‘Which wolf wins?’ And the elder replies, ‘The one you feed.’”

In most accounts, the story ends there. However, longer versions observe that wisdom comes when both animals are nurtured—dark and light.

“I believe if you feed both wolves you get utopia. My definition of utopia is when the light and dark
marry. So I have that as a symbol for the record … a 3-D triangle that is dark, light and grey.”

Three years in the making, *Utopia* divides its 12 songs equally into three distinct categories: dark, light and, of course, grey.

“Making [*Utopia*] has taken me to dark places, light places and places in the middle,” she says. It’s my goal in life, and I think everyone’s, to find some kind of balance. That’s what *Utopia* represents for me.”

That balance for Ryder is coming, in part, from taking on only work she wants. For example, she anticipates that the tour for *Utopia* will be extensive in terms of the countries she will travel to. However, she is committed to doing fewer concerts.

“It will be quality not quantity,” she laughs, adding more seriously: “For your emotional, spiritual and mental health, sometimes you have to be like a turtle.”

For a turtle, Ryder is not afraid of putting herself out there. Last summer, for example, she was the voice behind the official anthem of the Toronto 2015 Pan Am/Parapan Am Games.

“I was asked to write a song with Stephan Moccio, who lives in L.A. now, for the Pan Am Games. We wrote a song and it wasn’t chosen. Another song was chosen and that was “Together We Are One,” written by Murray Daigle, Jasmine Pelham and Bobby John [Pelham]. And they still wanted me to sing it. We listened to it, and it totally kicked our bum asses.”

Sure enough, Ryder’s performance of “Together We are One,” at the closing ceremonies of the Games was mind-blowing.

“It was the largest audience I had ever played in front of,” says Ryder, who was backstage when Kanye West did his famous “mic drop” 13 minutes into his set at the Games’ closing ceremonies.

Unlike many of the rapper’s critics, who viewed West’s throwing of his mic in the air and walking off stage as an act by a temperamental divo (a mic malfunction may have been a factor), Ryder sees the mic drop incident as an example of artistic expression.

“I think a big part of Kanye’s artistic essence is to create friction, and I have learned from being in my relationship that friction is what creates fire. And healthy friction is really good, and I think Kanye is a master at creating that.”

Ryder, who is also a painter, believes that all art, whether it’s West’s or her own, must stand on its own as a finished product released to the world.

“I don’t mean to sound weird, but it’s not up to me to define the music. It’s for other people to put what labels they want on it—my definitions are for me. Music is like abstract art; it’s whatever you see and what you feel.”

With a handful of singles, including the highly danceable “Fire Escape,” which features ethereal vocals begging for a remix, “Electric” and “Me and You,” *Utopia* is more radio-friendly than Ryder’s previous album. And the vocals on powerhouse ballad “Killing Time” clearly demonstrate why Ryder’s maturing voice is increasingly being compared to Adele’s.

There is a confidence, openness and expansiveness to the sound of *Utopia* that *Harmony* sought to reach. Featuring strong melodies, evocative lyrics, and rich vocals, *Utopia* is a cohesive, masterful and accessible album.

And, like Ryder these days, it is ultimately happy.

“Depression tells you lies and masks who you are, so you can’t see anything beautiful—not even yourself.” —SERENA RYDER
On the Bedside

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BURKINI BAN BAFFLING

As an English teacher who regularly tortures adults from various countries with the intricacies of language, I’m always searching for good examples of difficult concepts, such as figures of speech that may vary from culture to culture. What makes a good metaphor, and what the hell is onomatopoeia? Nothing, however, is quite so torturous as irony. It is routinely misused and misidentified, and it’s always tempting to use straightforward examples such as the Titanic, which was loudly and proudly touted as unsinkable, but hit an iceberg on its first voyage in 1912 and promptly sank.

Thanks to the French, I now have a much better example. In a fit of Gallic wisdom, 15 towns recently banned the burkini, a delightful piece of swimwear that is a cousin to the full-length burqa garment worn by some Muslim women.

On August 24, the world was treated to pictures of less flics on the beach at Nice, one of whom forced a woman to remove part of her burkini. Obviously in fear for his life, the cop was aided by four colleagues sporting batons, guns and perhaps tasers. This interesting tableau was completed by the nearby presence of several groups of French women on the beach wearing little more than skin.

Speaking of skin, the bikini was designed in the late 40s by Parisian engineer Lois Reard, who named the swimsuit after the Bikini atoll where postwar testing on the atomic bomb had taken place. He no doubt felt that a combination of nuclear bombs and skimpy swimsuits would surely bring world peace.

The bikini was banned in Australia, several U.S. states and a number of European countries, including—is it possible to overdose on l’ironie—France. Not until movie stars such as Brigitte Bardot and Marilyn Monroe started wearing them in the 50s did the bikini become acceptable.

Meanwhile, back to the French beaches this summer. The French equivalent of the Supreme Court said non and reversed the burkini ban after pictures of French flics bullying women went viral. However, the argument goes on—does the court have jurisdiction over just the one town or all 15?

In Saudi Arabia and Iran, it’s lawmakers, family members and clerics telling women to put the hijab, niqab, burka or bukini on. In France, it’s police, mayors and city councils ordering them to take the burkini off.

On August 30, France’s Prime Minister Manuel Volls, a supporter of the burkini ban and a contestant in the irony sweepstakes, suggested that naked breasts are more representative of France than a headscarf.

One of the charming ironies here is that the very men in who would bully Muslim women out of their burkinis often intone the mantra that it is a symbol of the Muslim oppression of women. It is, of course, also oppressive to try to force women to take clothes off, as protesters in London and France reminded the world after the burkini incident.

The only difference between those still espousing the burkini ban in France and the imams who want to cover women head to foot with only a tiny bit of netting to see through is vocabulary. One group passes laws saying “take it off” while the other has rules telling them to “put it on.” Both groups are sexist bullies.

Meanwhile, Canada has taken a small step in the right direction. On August 24, the same day the picture of the idiocy on the Nice beach hit the world’s front pages, the RCMP, perhaps in an effort to get in on the irony game, announced that women recruits may now wear the hijab.

A French court deemed burkini bans illegal after police on a beach at Nice, France ordered a woman to remove part of her garment.
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UNDERCURRENT
SARAH JAROSZ
Sugar Hill

There are few Americana/roots musicians with such purity as Sara Jarosz.

Hailed by the New York Times as “one of acoustic music’s most promising talents,” her style is reminiscent of ’90s singer-songwriters like Shawn Colvin. A little grit and a lot of honesty, accompanied by excellent musicianship, has been a hallmark of her work throughout her career. Her fourth studio album, Undercurrent, carries on in the tradition.

The often Grammy-nominated Jarosz doesn’t disappoint. With more pop notes than her previous albums, Undercurrent falls solidly into the type of folk that’s synonymous with early Indigo Girls. For example, the song “Green Light,” a potential crossover number, would be perfectly at home on adult contemporary radio.

Whether playing guitar, mandolin or banjo, Jarosz is as masterful a musician as she is a vocalist. And as a songwriter, she is incredibly poetic and evocative. Undercurrent is a rumination about an impossible love fraught with secrets, miscommunication and regrets.

It’s not surprising that where she shines is on the more traditional country songs like “Still Life,” which suggests “Baby, I’d tell you more if I knew just what to say/But you never ask me anyway/ Baby, I’d ask for less if I knew I had your ear.”

Undercurrent is wholly impressive, from the opening track, “Early Morning Light,” that asks the question “Should I stay or should I go?” to the closing “Jacqueline,” a confounding song about Jacqueline Kennedy—pillbox hat and all.

Recommended.

LOVE & LUST
JADEA KELLY
Darth Jadea Music

Jadea Kelly is one of the most innovative singer-songwriters in Canada today. A CBC Radio mainstay, she has just released her fourth album in eight years, Love & Lust, which pushes the roots and pop qualities of her songs.

Kelly has the perfect voice for ’50s-style country. It’s got a lilting quality with a subtle twang that can come and go as the song requires. Sounding like the love child of Patsy Cline and Neko Case, Kelly possesses a vocal acuity that supports her songs, which combine familiar roots element music with contemporary rock instrumentation. With its orchestral arrangements and new music structures, Love and Lust offers exceptional production.

Paired once again with Stew Crookes, the producer of her outstanding 2013 album, Lone Wolf, Kelly delivers another fantastic effort. The core themes of Love & Lust are heartbreak and infidelity—the stuff that tests the depth of our humanity and the limits of our compassion. Raw, sincere lyrics perfectly illustrate the power of lust while exploring the boundaries of human frailty and vulnerability. The album’s 13 songs (whittled down from an initial crop of 65) skilfully build the arc of reconciling a painful breakup, from the initial impact to eventual acceptance.

It’s a melodic masterpiece that goes to some pretty dark places. In fact, the first two songs, “Make it Easy and On The Water,” suggest drowning to ease the pain. Not particularly cheery lyrics, but provocative in their honesty. Love & Lust is a lushly produced album that’s the perfect soundtrack for any romantic disaster.

Recommended.

ADORE LIFE
SAVAGES
Matador Records

If you miss the days of Poly Styrene and X-Ray Specs or the soul-ripping rock of Patti Smith, Savages is just what you’ve been looking for. The queer-friendly female post-punk band is known for live performances that leave not only the group but also the audience drained.

Adore Life, the stellar follow-up to their 2013 debut album, Silence Yourself, captures the spirit of the moody new wave band Joy Division (“Love Will Tear Us Apart”) and combines it with the energy of the ’80s English rock band Siouxsie and the Banshees. Heavy, hard and frenetic, Adore Life is not so much a perky little phrase perfect for a Wham! T-shirt as it is a challenge.

Adore Life tackles the theme of love, ultimately coming to the conclusion that it’s a complicated, messy thing, whether it’s about polyamory or relationships that are past their expiry date. The intense lyrics don’t tell conventional love stories, but they tell honest stories about the complexities of love. Adore Life is a collection of love songs that are full of anger and confusion.

Lead singer Jehnny Beth’s powerful vocals, with their dark edge, are spine-tingling in their richness and despair, haunting even. This British foursome traverses the line between punk and noise rock, creating a sound that is both compelling and threatening. Adore Life is definitely not for everyone, but if you want to thrash out, this is one for the collection.
O N L Y  B Y  B L O O D  
RENATE KRAKAUER  
Inanna Publications  
REVIEW BY LISA TREMBLAY  
Family secrets come in different sizes. The secret that unravels in Renate Krakauer’s Only By Blood is a mountain.  
In a book spanning more than six decades, Krakauer tells a gripping and thought-provoking story of familial survival, loss and reunion that begins ominously in 1942, in the midst of the Nazi occupation of Poland, and ends in 2006 in a comfortable senior’s home in Toronto.  
As the author slides back and forth between time periods and generations, the story of two Polish families—one Jewish and one Christian—unfolds.  
Under the Nazi regime, the Jewish family struggles to survive in a ghetto and then later in the countryside, hiding in barns, cellars and caves. To save their daughters, the parents seek the help of a Christian family who worked for them before the war. The family takes enormous risks to protect the children, but in the midst of fear and chaos a decision is made that tears the families apart for decades.  
One woman knows the truth, but she never reveals it. In her decades-long silence, she protects herself from judgment. But the silence also prevents her from releasing the suffering she endured during the war, and from connecting with the people who experienced it with her. On her deathbed, in an effort to clear her conscience, she urges her daughter to make things right but does not provide details. The daughter then begins a journey that will uncover the truth and rock the foundation of her life.  
Only By Blood captures the terror of the Holocaust and the heartbreak families suffered following it. It poses ethical questions of right and wrong, and reveals the truth about family secrets that haunt people throughout their lives and destroy relationships. The book also raises important questions about faith. Is a person’s faith the one they are connected to by blood or the one they are raised with? Readers will ponder these questions long after turning the last page.

C L O S E  T O  H U G H  
MARINA ENDICOTT  
Doubleday Canada  
REVIEW BY KERRY RYAN  
Marina Endicott’s Close to Hugh is a tangle of real-ish life condensed into one highly charged week in the life of protagonist Hugh Argyle and more than a dozen of his friends, enemies and family members. For the reader, it’s a bit like falling down a rabbit hole.  
To begin, the cast of characters is unwieldy. Hugh, his sort-of siblings Della and Newell, his new lover, Ivy, and Newell’s boyfriend, Burton, form the older cohort. Through mentorship, kinship or courtship, they’re all intertwined with a cadre of high-school-aged actors and artists.  
Though the plot unfolds over only seven days, it’s hard to imagine it covering any more ground. There’s a funeral, a fist fight, a whole bunch of parties, a hospitalization for self-harm, a dramatic rescue from prostitution, and an unravelling marriage and career. Oh, and it’s a love story.  
Many of the characters are operating in a fog. Hugh has an undiagnosed brain injury after falling from a ladder. His dying mother, Mimi, has dementia and Ivy has career-limiting memory problems.  
Even Endicott’s language is scrambled. Hugh’s last name, Argyle, is an anagram for gallery, and also for some other characters’ surnames (for example, minor villain Lise Largely). The sections told from Della’s perspective are written in verse. And then there’s an ongoing gag, where Hugh’s name is misheard as “you” (which, after almost 500 pages, becomes a little tiresome). The playfulness provides a counterpoint to the novel’s dark moments, which are many and varied.  
Through subplot, Close to Hugh tackles thorny issues such as emotional abuse within gay relationships, mental illness, and young adults who fall in love with much older men.  
The novel is dense and intense; it demands full immersion from the reader. But it also rewards: Endicott’s portrayal of midlife love and sex (even giddy romance!) is wonderful, and it’s a topic that seems so rare in fiction—either it’s taboo or it just doesn’t sell books.  
Endicott doesn’t untangle all the knots she ties, but that’s okay. It means that Close to Hugh stays alive in the reader’s mind long after the book is back on the shelf.

A  P L A C E  C A L L E D  S O R R Y  
DONNA MILNER  
Caitlin Press  
REVIEW BY ANJANA BALAKRISHNAN  
Sorry is a word that gets used too much, but never enough where required.  
Donna Milner’s latest novel, A Place Called Sorry, narrates the tale of the Beale family through the eyes of Addison Beale. The family lives on a ranch located 12 bush miles from a town called Sorry. Describing how the town got its name, Addie sets the tone of the story. When a roadhouse during the Gold Rush closed, residents put up a sign that read “SORRY” in bold letters, and, as an afterthought, added, “Closed.” Later, as the “Closed” faded, the Sorry signboard
became a landmark for travellers and the name stuck. This gradual, insignificant turn of events is how the novel unfolds—unhurried.

Addie’s mother, Fern, leaves home after the untimely death of her young son Evan, leaving a gaping hole in the lives of three ranchers—teenager Addie, her faithful father and her doting grandfather. Years later, when Addie’s best friend, an Indigenous youth named Alan Baptiste, and his mother Rose move in with them, Rose instantly begins the process of healing for the family, living up to Addie’s belief that the women of the community hold it together.

Donna Milner is a master at telling lifelike stories, slow and predictable everyday stories that are remarkable in how they change lives. When the reader meets Alan Baptiste, we know that he will pivot everyone’s lives. His story shows both the viciousness of discrimination and the human capacity for compassion.

Though it’s foreseeable, Alan inevitably does what he must. Similarly, when Addie discovers grandfather Chance’s journals, we know that it will reveal a history that had previously been untold.

Donna Milner weaves into this intuitive tale of family and history, the wisdom of the land and the forbearance of its people. “History is the stories we tell—and the stories we don’t tell,” as she tells us. This book shows readers what happens when the told stories meet the untold ones.

Milner’s novel flows unhurriedly, skilfully hiding her command of the craft. You will not put it down while reading, nor will you want to get on with your life when it’s done.

SNAPSHOTS OF A GIRL
Life Stories
BELDAN SEZEN
Arsenal Pulp Press

REVIEW BY JOANNA CHIU
The mass shooting at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida reminded us that queer acceptance has been a hard-fought battle. Before large-scale victories, LGBT rights were first fought on an individual scale, within families and communities and within one’s own mind.

Snapshots of a Girl by Beldan Sezen is one such story. The graphic novel explores the defining moments of Sezen’s life in various cities of Europe as she very slowly comes to grips with the fact that she is attracted to women. Through a mix of prose sections and illustrated scenes, Sezen details years of unsatisfying relationships with men. In each relationship, a similar theme runs through: She would sleep with men, yet any attempts at intimacy were met with disdain, humour and drama, until finally, after a decade of dissatisfaction, Sezen was able to acknowledge what was always true. She was queer.

In addition to being truthful to herself, Sezen also wanted to be truthful to her traditional Turkish family. Each member of her family had their own way of accepting Sezen’s sexual orientation. For example, her father was initially upset about his daughter’s deviance from social norms but he mellowed with age and was anticlimactic with his acceptance. “What two people do in their bedroom is their own business!” he states and then offers Sezen some gum, and asks if she needs any money.

Originally, Snapshots of a Girl was published in Italian, and the impact of the prose portions of the book seem to have been lost in translation. For the English reader, these sections sometimes seem difficult and rambling. The majority of the book is expressed clearly in short dialogues and vignettes.

Ultimately, Snapshots of a Girl is an engrossing look into one person’s struggle with her identity and her search for love.

RED STAR TATTOO
My Life as a Girl Revolutionary
SONJA LARSEN
Random House Canada

REVIEW BY DEANNA RADFORD
In the opening scene of Sonja Larson’s memoir, it’s 1973 and she’s eight years old with a canvas bag and a teddy bear. She and a 20-something travel companion have embarked on a hitchhiking expedition from their commune in Quebec to another one in California.

The free love communes of the 1960s and 70s rejected conservative values and mores, and here it was no different. Despite idealism and good intentions though, there was a lack of boundaries. She writes, “The adults believed in
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MATRICENTRIC FEMINISM

Theory, Activism, and Practice

BY Andrea O’Reilly

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“Andrea O’Reilly coined the term ‘motherhood studies.’ In Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice, she is now moving motherhood studies to the next stage by first defining ‘matricentric feminism’ — feminism that puts motherhood at its center — then detailing how matricentric feminism can and should be enacted in theory, activism, and practice. In doing so, O’Reilly has written a groundbreaking, even field-defining book, which is now a must-read book for anyone interested in understanding both the past and future of motherhood studies and a mother-centered feminism.”

—LYNN O’BRIEN HALLSTEIN, Associate Professor of Rhetoric, College of General Studies, Boston University

Feminist Publishing on Mothering, Reproduction, Sexuality and Family

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telling children everything." The extreme openness meant a lack of adult decision-making and surviving sexual abuse. She observes: "Sex was an instinct, not good or bad, the grown-ups said. Silence was an instinct too." Larsen illustrates the silence and contradictions that affected her childhood and family life: violence, substance abuse, untreated mental illness and tragedy.

When Larsen's parents separate, her mother becomes a communist and her father a drug dealer. She occasionally attends public schools. At nine, she learns the tenets of communism and thus becomes a girl revolutionary. By age 16, her political convictions lead her to Brooklyn, and she enters the Communist Party USA provisional wing headquarters, where she’s the youngest member of the militia.

A charismatic individual referred to as "the old man" was the de facto head of the compound. Larsen quickly became part of his inner circle. He exploited the vulnerabilities of the young women under his control, including Larsen. In everyday parlance, "the revolution" was imminent. After the planned revolution flops, and after years of mental and sexual abuse, Larsen makes a break for it. At age 19, a canvas bag is the one possession she escapes with.

The canvas bag serves as a book-end for another a harrowing period of Larsen’s life. With empathy and anger, she traces the struggles of the women in her family and the effects of patriarchy and poverty. She portrays the everyday emotions and growing pains of adolescence in clear prose with resonance. The book offers a gripping look at Larsen’s upbringing and her reconciliation with it.

This book is not exactly a story about her tits, but an epic journey full of change, growth and loss—both literal and figurative. From their pre-pubescent appearance to a mid-life brush with her own mortality, Hayden’s tits happen to play an important role at each waypost, influencing her self-image, relationships and some big decisions.

If you’re worried that another memoir about hard questions, complex relationships and cancer might be too heart-wrenching to handle, rest assured that Hayden’s humour will likely ease you through the roughest patches. For instance, she describes the odd and emotionally charged process of choosing prosthetic breasts like so: "[The nurse brought us] the bucket of rubber boobs. A sea of rubber boobs. All different sizes. I rummaged around and found some double As. ‘How about these? Little fried eggs that won’t hurt my back at all.’"

While the book undoubtedly deals with the hard stuff, after it has you choked up, it’ll have you giggling again in the next second.

The Story of My Tits leaves no stone unturned. One gets the feeling that every defining conversation and event in Hayden’s life has been included, and sometimes the text and image combinations offer more information than necessary. But rather than bogging the story down, these details, paired with gritty, expressive, movement-filled illustrations keep the story flowing and create a sense of intimacy. The scenes often move seamlessly between real happenings and Hayden’s hyperbolic imagination to create a multi-dimensional tale that is bursting with symbolism, metaphor and life, but which is also totally lacking any of the predictability or triteness that can sometimes be found in “inspirational” cancer survivor stories.

This graphic novel is about finding acceptance and love, and moving through grief again and again while becoming more whole in the process. Most importantly, it delves into one remarkable woman’s history with joyful, unabashed honesty.

THE STORY OF MY TITS
JENNIFER HAYDEN
Top Shelf

REVIEW BY ANNA EIDT
The graphic memoir genre has been gaining traction over the past decade, and this candid illustrated story of Jennifer Hayden’s life is one to add to the pile of mounting evidence that graphic novels can serve as a powerful vehicle for autobiography.
to the book recounts two deadly battles in the 1700s between Cree who traded with the British and Sioux warriors who worked for the French. White men’s conflicts with each other over land, furs and other resources resulted in enormous suffering for the tribes.

Jump 200 years later, to 1924, and we see how colonial settler conflicts—in this case between the Anglican and Catholic churches over the hearts and souls of the Cree—continued to divide, oppress and wreak havoc in the lives of the Cree nation. Exactly how the missionaries carried their gospel to the heathens is revealed: Even they provided food in times of need, they promised health in times of epidemics and they would put in a good word with Indian agents—if the Cree destroyed their drums and stopped practising paganism.

While the pettiness and sheer hypocrisy of the missionaries is destructive, the Cree’s resistance to assimilation is affirmed. They knew that the divine is in the ancient landscape. They continue to show respect for the spirits of the animals they kill for food. Even as they succumb to the pressure to attend services in the Catholic or Anglican Church, they fight back against white merchants who earn and sell their ancestors’ bones and the belongings that were buried with them. Strong female characters in Scattered Bones enrich the story and illuminate the sexism and racism at the core of Canadian colonialism.

Siggins is an author of 12 books, including a biography of Louis Riel and a non-fiction book entitled Bitter Embrace: White Society’s Assault on the Woodland Cree.

FEMINIST PEDAGOGY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Critical Theory and Practice
EDITED BY TRACY PENNY LIGHT, JANE NICHOLAS AND RENEE BONDY
University of Toronto Press

REVIEW BY DEBORAH YAFFE

When I began teaching women’s studies in 1990, I’d never heard of feminist pedagogy and was acutely unsure of how to translate my experience in the women’s liberation movement into a classroom setting. Feminist Pedagogy in Higher Education would have helped me enormously, and I found it an interesting read, even though I am now retired.

This collection of instructors’ reflections draws on experience in English Canada, the U.S., Australia and England. Unsurprisingly, there are numerous commonalities and differences in approach. In their introduction, the editors sketch the pivotal development of women’s studies as a discipline during a time of more general liberatory struggles. They also point to widespread constraints imposed by globalized corporate models favouring training for the labour market over education for personal and social transformation, a theme echoed by many of the individual essays.

But what is feminist pedagogy? Implicitly and explicitly, the various authors invoke analytical and practical attention to academic structures, educational processes, power relations in the classroom and intersectional analyses of teachers and students as gendered, racialized, classed and embodied subjects. Some emphasize the importance of students’ personal empowerment as an aim. Others stress the necessity of using that personal transformation to strive for social change and to explore models of community-based learning.

Everyone these days acknowledges the fundamental importance of intersectionality (multiple, simultaneous, overlapping and interlinking identities as sites of complex relative privileges and oppressions), but only some authors discuss how they incorporate intersectionality into their classroom practices. bell hooks was the most-often-cited authority: She’s a goddess, but is there a need for more diverse inspiration?

From strategies on introducing the concept of gender analysis to conservative student populations, to studying gendered prison graffiti, from the dynamics of sexual relationships in classrooms to instructors’ complicated nuances of inhabiting queer, fat, racialized or sexualized bodies, this book offers a variety of provocative and challenging trains of thought in different sorts of academic settings.

Inevitably, there are some overlaps and some gaps, too. I’d have loved something from French Canada. But there is useful dynamic interplay between many chapters, with something for everyone interested in academic feminism.

DYING FROM IMPROVEMENT

Inquests and Inquiries into Indigenous Deaths in Custody
SHERENE H. RAZACK
University of Toronto Press

REVIEW BY LIANNE C. LEDDY

In Dying from Improvement: Inquests and Inquiries into Indigenous Deaths in Custody, Sherene Razack argues that systemic state violence against Indigenous peoples continues to occur in Canada, despite a general belief that we live in a tolerant, post-colonial country. When an Indigenous person dies in police custody, the official cause of death often refers back to the person’s lifestyle, highlighting substance abuse or ill health, which makes the loss of Indigenous lives seem inevitable in the face of a caring and benevolent Canadian society.

Drawing on inquiry transcripts, official reports and media coverage, and using accessible language, Razack challenges us to think of colonialism not as something that is part of a distant past, but rather as an ongoing process that is very much embedded in our justice and health care systems.

While some readers may recall the so-called “starlight tour” that resulted in the freezing death of 17-year-old Neil Stonechild (Cree) after police left him on the
outskirts of Saskatoon, Razack argues that law enforcement serves to keep Indigenous peoples marginalized in cities. Other Indigenous men have met similar ends in police custody: Frank Paul (Mi’kmaw) was left to die in a Vancouver alley; Paul Alphonse (Secwepemc) died in hospital with a boot print on his chest that was discussed less than his alcoholism at his inquest; and Anthony Dawson’s death was originally blamed on his weak heart and drugs, not—as was actually the case—positional asphyxia while in custody.

Investigations into these deaths blamed weak Indigenous bodies and victims’ backgrounds and actions, concluding overall that these deaths were “ordinary and non-controversial.” These specific case studies remind us that police encounters with Indigenous peoples are violent and that they serve to facilitate settler colonialism.

This is a difficult but important book to read. Razack balances her analysis of state violence with the agency of Indigenous family members, but she deals with a topic that few Canadians want to acknowledge. Razack recounts the systematic inhumanity of the Canadian justice system, which can be summed up by a mother whose son was found after being left to freeze to death: “Who would do such a thing?”

The answer—a pervasive pattern of settler colonialism throughout Canadian society—is as uncomfortable as it is nameable.

**RESILIENCE AND TRIUMPH**

**Immigrant Women Tell Their Stories**

THE BOOK PROJECT COLLECTIVE

Second Story Press

REVIEW BY MAYA KHANKHOJE

This weighty anthology of 54 personal accounts by immigrant and refugee women in Canada features women from diverse backgrounds who survived the travails of immigration and achieved a sense of belonging in their new homes.

The compendium was edited and compiled by a group of professors, educators and human rights advocates from Africa, East and South Asia, the Middle East and the Caribbean.

**Resilience and Triumph** is divided into five sections: Arrival: Losses and Gains; Integration or Assimilation? The Process of Settlement and Negotiation; Identity: Journeys to Becoming and Belonging; Exploring Feminisms and, finally, Activism: Shaping our World.

What can be heard loud and clear is that the journeys have not been easy, and that the end results have been mixed. However, all the authors express the need to keep up the momentum of their feminist and anti-colonial struggles.

Patrice Yamada describes the discrimination suffered by Canadians of Japanese origin, leading her to conclude that “there is no justice, only acceptance and forgiveness.” Sara O writes an impassioned letter to her illiterate and mentally ill mother, who inspired her to become a human rights lawyer.

For contributor Yumi Kotani, feminism holds multiple meanings. She believes that “a closer look at the women’s life journeys—which they have taken in different parts of the globe over different time periods—defies any attempt at formulating a singular, or linear, or academic, or Western-centred narrative.” This view is articulated by other authors, particularly women of the Islamic faith who have opted to wear the hijab. As she sees it, some women fight for the right to remove their clothes while others fight for the right to cover themselves up.

In many contributions, the universality of human rights is articulated while colonialism is repudiated. Franz Fanon is quoted as saying, “any form of superiority bred into a people leads to very bad results in the psyches of both the colonizer and the colonized.”

This point is made time and again by many of the book’s writers, who reject the condescending attitude of many Western feminists who see women from other cultures as victims, rather than agents of change in their own societies.

Contributor Veena Gokhale calls herself a “nuanced” feminist: “But I no longer hold the black-and-white world view I used to have—that people who are left-wing, feminist or green are necessarily in the right, while others are in the wrong.”

The authors describe how to shape the world through activism, particularly in Canada. Isobel Granger followed one of her parents’ favourite sayings: “Don’t hate, educate.” Following this dictum, she became the first Black officer to join the ranks of the British South Africa Police in Zimbabwe and now imparts gender awareness workshops for Canadian police officers.

Dolores Chew, an academic and activist with 40 years of feminist practice in Quebec, reminds readers that “class privilege often trumps inequality based on race or language, even in a province where this is a very fraught issue.”

What can one learn from this wonderful book? That we are all stronger than we think; that we are all uniquely different, yet we have more commonalities than differences; that patriarchy is alive and well, thank you; that women would rather be victorious than be victims; that Canada has a long way to go in its treatment of immigrants, particularly female immigrants; and that this is Canada’s loss.

**AT THE EXISTENTIALIST CAFÉ**

**Freedom, Being and Apricot Cocktails**

SARAH BAKEWELL

Knopf Canada

REVIEW BY KRIS ROTHSTEIN

In this thorough, conversational history, British biographer Sarah Bakewell strives to define (sort of) the philosophy of existentialism, give it context, describe its characters and their ideas, and explain why these ideas are important, both to the world and the author. It’s the story of a

Continued on page 41
Montreal-based Carolyn Marie Souaid has written a gorgeous book of poetry celebrating life and, in particular, a life dedicated to the arts. Deeply meditative, insightful and moving—and delightfully inflected by visual and other art techniques—this collection includes one of the most beautiful poems I’ve read, “Watching You Do Tai Chi at Dawn,” which closes the collection. “There’s a burgeoning gap in the sky/ as the clouds part above you,” it reads, “… you/ graceful as a gull,/ the perfectly stilled world/ in your gaze.// It could be any day, but it’s Friday ./ Tomorrow we return to the city. And so I study you/ as an artist scans the planes and curves/ of a partially lit stone/ But there’s no great revelation./ … // There’s just one crested wave./ And then another, and another.”

Souaid is particularly adept at portraiture, shading in characters in light of their surroundings. In “Figure and Ground,” she writes, “A guy on the outskirts of town/ believes wholeheartedly in his existence./ Swears it up and down to the kid/ who’s tied him to the end of her string/ like a balloon./ ‘Let me go.’ He’s not smiling./ … // … pleading/ to please, please release him— (like the song)./ And she agrees, cutting the string/ so that across town, a graveyard registers/ the quickened fl utter of a heart,/ or hearts;/ the last autumn rush of geese.”

Poet, researcher and global citizen Salimah Valiani relinquishes clarity of the commonplace in favour of more recognizably socio-political questions in her elegantly astute and philosophical collection Land of the Sky. Valiani was awarded the 2012 Feminist Economics Rhonda Williams Prize for her advocacy for workers’ rights. In “Poetry or Gold,” she exquisitely contrasts differing value systems: “gold, the taste/ of freshly cut rose petals// poetry, the scent/ of a wild rose bush// … // gold to reproduce/ alluring words/ one-time events/the self// poetry to re-envision/ the history of a species … gold, the gasping glitter/ of raw chrome night/ poetry/ the fog of dawn hanging low.”

She moves towards a more frankly personal and interrelational, even spiritual, perspective. The poem “Undoing time or, Deconstruction of Time or, Revelations of Ramadhan” asks, “time is what workers have/ when without money// … but is time action?”

“time is hearing the nearly-silent,” she writes, “a fridge humming/ laptop autosaving// time is/ feeling breathing/ … // time is sitting with people/ saying and doing little/ ticking together … time is the breathlessness of consciousness.”

Skating is an analogue for writing in Elee Kraljii Gardiner’s Serpentine Loop and further extends as a device to shape this stirring and precise debut poetry collection. A figure practised for technique becomes second nature, allowing the perspicacious poet-skater to “retrace, repeat,” to outline stories, memories and the “scribe” of grief. “Once a Month” poignantly portrays a relationship with a mentor: “On the ice she is another woman.// She seems to skate away from me/ more often than she approaches.// It does not occur to me that at the rink/ I may be a different girl.// To sharpen the blade, she holds/ one boot upside down on her fist./ So do I, little shadow….// … Though I am a careful observer I am no closer/ to performing it myself./ … // Her movements speak another language—/ one I will command, eventually./ My edges skim the surface, blades silent no matter/ how hard I skate. I have seen girls develop,/ make an invisible act audible.// Ahead of me is the possibility of jumping/ from girl to woman, water to ice.”

Gardiner’s sparkling and sensitive kinematic style is everywhere evident, such as in the vivid long poem “Final Flight.” It recounts a survivor’s story of Sabena Flight 548, which crashed en route from New York City to Brussels in 1961, killing the entire U.S. figure skating team. “Daily funeral services:/ grief is a waterwheel,” writes the poet; “Worn and grooved with pain…./ Skaters return to the rink, a sud- den cathedral./ This is their ritual: prayer of movement.// In the days that follow the crash, passersby shiver at the sight of her, suspect they have brushed a ghost./// Fifty years later, she explains/ the guilt of living … Love is not dulled by decades,/ is as sharp and bright now/ as their smiles at take-off.”

POETRY SNAPSHOT
REVIEWS BY MARIIANNE MAYS
Continued from page 39

European century and all of the politics, history and culture that comes along with it, including communism, fascism, feminism and anti-imperialism.

The bulk of the book is a detailed and illuminating history of most of the major figures of 20th century philosophy and culture, including Edmund Husserl (father of phenomenology) and Martin Heidegger, protégés like Jean Genet, and the central figures of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus.

Bakewell's main innovation is writing an accessible and personal narrative without sacrificing intellectual rigour. I admit to being more interested in the author's own journey through existential philosophy (how she discovered it, why it appealed to her) than in the biographies of great (mostly) men. The mixture of biography and autobiography is highly appropriate for the subject, as existentialism is so focused on the individual.

While Bakewell is quite dismissive of later philosophies (specifically postmodernism) her mash-up of genres is, in fact, a postmodern enterprise, and its proponents would applaud the unconventional style and form. The book is responsive to readers' needs, seeking to answer the particular questions that arise at any given point and endeavouring to inform without being boring. The approach is fairly reverent to the great figures, but it also allows for the contradictions of messy lives, passionate disagreements, mundane routines and wild freedoms.

THE FEMINIST BOOKSTORE MOVEMENT
Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability
KRISTEN HOGAN
Duke University Press

REVIEW BY EVELYN C. WHITE

During a recent visit to the San Francisco Bay area, I was saddened to see that spaces that once housed vibrant feminist bookstores were now inhabited by luxury latte lounges and trendy yoga studios. The bookstores stood among more than 100 throughout North America that thrived from the early 1970s to the 2000s and provided welcoming spaces to attend readings, organize political events, savour healthy snacks, enjoy intimate concerts and mingle with like-minded peers.

At a time when corporate booksellers had effectively dismissed the political (and economic) clout of the women's liberation movement, feminist bookstores stocked, affirmed and celebrated the works of writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Dionne Brand, Nicole Brossard, Anne Cameron, Chrystos, Susan Griffin, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, Jane Rule and Betsy Warland, to name a few.


“At the height of their transnational movement, bookwomen were learning with and accountable to each other,” writes Kristen Hogan in her important release, The Feminist Bookstore Movement. “Feminist bookstores have not been simply places to gather but sites of complex conversations. … I identify bookwomen’s activism as part of a … legacy and model we need.”

A former staffer at BookWoman, which is still going in Austin, Texas, Hogan brings a wealth of intelligence, integrity, spirit and personal experience to her fascinating history of the rise and fall of feminist bookstores. The narrative is especially noteworthy for its discussion of the vital role lesbians played in the evolution of a movement that “walked the walk” of inclusion with a commitment far beyond the “happy feeling” embrace of diversity as it is often practised today.

Hogan chronicles the Toronto Women’s Bookstore’s staunch support of women of colour writers, including Shani Mootoo, Dionne Brand and Vanessa Alleyne. The latter author penned There Were Times I Thought I Was Crazy, a powerful memoir about her journey as an African-Canadian incest survivor.

“That’s a pretty good example of a book that probably no other bookstore sold, that we continued to sell dozens and dozens of copies of, and we did the launch for it,” a former Toronto Women’s Bookstore manager told Hogan.

As for information, Hogan also documents the origins of Feminist Bookstore News. Started in 1976 by Carol Seajay (co-founder of Old Wives’ Tales bookstore in San Francisco), the publication served as a treasured “talking drum” as economics, technology and sociocultural shifts forced feminist bookstore owners to develop strategies to remain profitable and politically relevant. Its once-stalwart readership reduced by online behemoths Amazon and big box book retailers that had crushed independent bookstores of all stripes, Feminist Bookstore News folded in 2000.

Hogan’s richly researched text is resplendent with photos that commemorate the 1970s–1980s era of feminism. I rejoiced in thumbing through images of women I’d met over the years at music festivals, women’s studies conferences, pride marches and, of course, feminist bookstores.

Indeed, the engaging narrative prompted winsome memories of my brief, mid-1980s stint as an employee at Womanbooks in New York City while in journalism school. The passage of three decades has not dimmed my affection for the colourful posters, shelves of dazzling books and smiling co-workers that greeted me when I began my shift.

I’m honoured to have been a part of the tradition that Kristen Hogan recounts, to sublime effect, in her outstanding contribution to lesbian and feminist letters.
Janis: Little Girl Blue, by the award-winning Amy Berg (Deliver Us from Evil, West of Memphis), documents the life of Janis Joplin, undoubtedly one of the greatest vocalists ever.

Raising in an upper-middle-class Texan family in the 1950s, Joplin grew up feeling marginalized and lonely. Joplin was neither a classic beauty nor a shrinking violet. She kicked and headbutted her way out of the conservative South into the San Francisco music scene, where she quickly became an influential musical figure in the 1960s. Her voice welded the blues with rock music and delivered a raw, powerful and dark talent more than 50 years ago.

The film depicts Joplin as a bright burst of light, a free spirit who struggled with her role as an outsider who caught the edge of a cultural shift.

This documentary includes interviews and historical concert footage, as well as letters Joplin wrote to her family (read by Cat Power’s Chan Marshall), chronicling her rise to fame, her love of music, her ambition and her desire to make her family proud. Joplin’s poor self-image fostered a dependence on drugs, despite great critical attention and success. Tragically, Joplin died of an overdose of heroin at 27, at the height of her fame.
Society’s rejection of women who don’t fit into cultured fantasies didn’t end in the 1960s, as evidenced by *The Cult of JT Leroy*, a documentary by Marjorie Sturm.

One of the biggest sensations in literature at the turn of this century was JT Leroy, who was elusive in a world where elusivity burns with its own value. The JT Leroy phenomenon became one of the biggest literary hoaxes ever. It featured a truck-stop teenage transgendered prostitute who became an edgy literary sensation and published hot indie books with a buzz that vibrated like a rusty nail in a world of jaded, self-conscious scene-makers.

Within five years, it was revealed that the true writer was a middle-aged woman named Laura Albert and that her stepsister, Samantha Knoop, publicly played the role of JT Leroy. Immediately vilified for deceiving leading figures of the literary and performance scenes, Albert has never been taken off the hook for making a vampiric literati look foolish.

Aside from identity appropriation and deception, one might wonder if Albert even had a chance of writing such books without the JT masquerade. Against a backdrop of rampant consumerism, would a middle-aged woman have had the same cachet as the invented JT persona? It’s unlikely.

Albert’s confession didn’t redeem her. In the film, interviews suggest that an intense drive for attention may have been motivated by a need for recognition and childhood trauma.

Perhaps when mental illness becomes more glam, Albert will re-emerge as a heroine.

Laura Albert was also vilified for masquerading as a transgendered writer in a world where trans people who live authentic lives are often marginalized, terrorized and reduced to poverty. This subject is examined in *Mala Mala* by Antonio Santini and Dan Sickles. The breathtaking chronicle of self-identity and personal transformation is told through a series of ultra-real dreamscape and interviews and cinéma-vérité documentary techniques.

Filmed in Puerto Rico, *Mala Mala* is told in a series of micro-stories about the fierce ambition, dreams and compassion, self-acceptance and heartbreak of trans men and women, many of whom have been marginalized as sex workers.

The film looks at Butterfly, a foundation of trans activists fighting for their rights in Puerto Rico. In *Mala Mala*, some of those chronicled believed that only youth, glamour and beauty were the only interesting options for female identity. And yet the film asks, since we all age, why can’t the average middle-aged woman be enough to carry the public imagination to new, startling or shocking and illicit territories? Disguise may be our default act of rebellion.

Hope comes through in *Mala Mala*. The film demonstrates the courage, transformation and empowerment of many of its subjects. In part because of the work of Butterfly, Puerto Rico’s legislature passed a bill that prohibits employment discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation.

The invisibility and denigration of the female is the blood threading through all three of these films. The message is to resist the urge to submit to a mainstream culture that can’t tolerate those who cannot be easily commodified. 🕊
he world has fallen in love with Korea. There’s even a word for it, hallyu, and it refers to the increase in global popularity of South Korean culture that started in the 1990s.

K-pop is a Korean dance-pop sensation that’s part of the Korean wave, and it has millions of dedicated fans throughout the world. Stadiums hosting the Korean boy and girl groups have sold out on five continents. In India, teenagers seek Korean-style haircuts similar to their favourite idols. Israeli and Palestinian teens have reportedly found common ground through their mutual love of K-pop. Now, K-pop is big in Saudi Arabia. The government-sponsored phenomenon has raised South Korea’s cultural capital to the point where, in East Asia, K-pop’s biggest international market, Korean is now synonymous with cool.

Ottawa even hosted a 13-team competition last year of homegrown K-pop teams hoping to advance in an international competition that drew performers from 69 countries.

Behind its light and poppy sounds, however, are more sombre notes about the industry’s poor treatment of its performers and, in particular, its treatment of women. In many respects, K-pop isn’t different from North American pop music, where artists face pressure from the managers and record companies who call the shots. In Korea, the industry is dominated by companies that enlist performers as young as nine who go through training regimens for years in order to learn how to sing and dance while they attend school. Critics have also referred to performers’ binding arrangements, which can tie them to a company for more than a decade, as “slave contracts.”

Euny Hong, author of The Birth of Korean Cool, has written extensively about the often-intense pressure young people in Korea face to achieve success and to respect authority. This means that it’s not an option for most would-be performers to form their own band and become an independent artist.

“The most famous rock bands formed independently, without the help of a producer or record label,” Hong observed in The Paris Review. “This was never going to happen in Korea. Kids didn’t have the time to jam with friends. They were studying—all the time—or helping with the family business. Organically formed bands could experiment with new sounds, or improvise, or goof off, but Koreans had no such luxury.”

The Korean entertainment system stepped in to create pop music idols, which Hong characterizes more as consumer products than musical artists. “Producers design the band they want—down to the precise look, sound and marketing campaign—before they even audition members,” Hong writes.

Not surprisingly, appearance is paramount. K-pop idols are often required to undergo plastic surgery on their still-growing bodies; eyes are rounded, jawbones are shaved to be more pointed and noses are raised. Korea has the highest rate of plastic surgery in the world. In an interview with a web series called The Real Talk, a young woman named Stella Kim, who trained to be a member of
Korea’s K-pop, like its counterpart in North America, reinforces traditional sex roles. Shown here is the six-member group Dal Shabet.

Korea is a socially conservative society where, only 10 years ago, a single woman couldn’t be listed as the head of a household. Women’s equality indices in Korea remain among the lowest in the developed world. Still, to some, the idea of women showing a lot of skin onstage and acting sexually assertive while performing suggests a level of empowerment.

Oh Ingyu, a professor of Korean studies at Korea University’s Research Institute of Korean Studies, points out that both male and female K-pop stars are expected to look sexual. To that end, they remove some of their clothing during performances. A male star without well-defined muscles, six-pack abs and a handsome smile won’t go far, he says.

“It’s not about empowerment,” Oh says, “it’s about subjugating male and female bodies to global capitalist power. I mean, who’s going to make money eventually? The guys who own the shares, they’re the ones packing their wallets. They don’t have to show off their bodies.”

Female K-pop group members’ stage personas typically reflect the virgin/whore dichotomy, with some stars embracing different extremes depending on trends or a particular song’s concept.

“The cute ones represent the Korean [virtuousness], the old-fashioned Korean girls … behaving politely, morally clean and pure,” Oh observes. “Then you have the rest of the girls who are really glamorous, sensual and more into sexy poses.”

The girl group Sistar, is clearly on the unvirtuous end. “They go right to the point, which is that ‘we’re all about sex.’”

Katie Evans, who blogs at MoonROK about K-pop, says the girl groups are criticized both for being too sexual and, at other times, for being too childlike.

“Some fans believe modest or cute concepts and songs oppress female artists by not allowing them to express their sexuality, while others believe sexy concepts encourage men to objectify women, putting them at a higher risk of sexual assault,” Evans writes. “Both of these ideas are ridiculous, but they expose the limited ways we allow ourselves to think about female artists.”

Evans also sees a double standard in regards to how men and women are treated for taking some of their clothes off.

“While the pelvic thrusts and shirt-ripping of male groups like Big Bang and 2PM were lauded in the online K-pop communities I frequented, ‘Genie’ [a song by Girls’ Generation] drew
Recently, during the month of Ramadan, I went for Iftar dinner with a good friend who is also Muslim. As we sat in an Italian restaurant after sunset devouring our pasta and garlic bread, I told her I had just finished reading *The Relevance of Islamic Identity in Canada: Culture, Politics, and Self*, a collection of 11 essays edited by Nurjehan Aziz and published by Mawenzi House. I remarked how refreshing the book is in its honesty about the everyday identity negotiations of Muslims in Canada, but lamented how it reinforced what I already feel to be a burden: constantly having to talk about being a Muslim.

In a post-9/11 world, my friend and I are just two of countless Canadian Muslims who find ourselves needing to articulate our Muslim-ness on a daily basis—a seemingly superfluous task. Yet, according to former *Toronto Star* national editor Haroon Siddiqui, this is just one symptom of living in “Canada’s newest dark chapter.”

Aziz’s *Relevance of Islamic Identity in Canada* was published in the final days of a Harper-led decade of state-sanctioned anti-Muslim bigotry in which—as Siddiqui argues in his comprehensive 53-page essay—“the West … is becoming incompatible with its own secular, democratic values.” Through a point-by-point analysis, Siddiqui outlines how Harper’s government was systematic in “maligning Muslims and mollycoddling Islamophobes.”

Take, as one example, former prime minister Stephen Harper’s 2014 Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act, which outlawed “[what was already outlawed.]” Then, consider the
fact that 17 murders in Canada were classified as “honour-based killings” during a time when the hundreds of Aboriginal women who went missing or were murdered were considered “not high” on the PM’s radar. Finally, consider that during this time, Status of Women Canada spent five times the funds addressing “harmful cultural practices” and “honour crimes” that it spent on violence against Aboriginal women.

In response to this anti-Muslim bigotry in Canada, Aziz asked the question, “What does it mean to be a Muslim?” The response is a mixed bag, but the message is clear: Although Muslims are not all the same, they are still perceived as such.

In her contribution, novelist Safia Fazlul, a self-identified “inconsistent Muslim,” narrates the quirks that make Canada the country it is, such as the irony of an Islamic centre built beside a sex store in downtown Toronto. For Fazlul, this speaks to Canada’s “general live-and-let-live” disposition: one that only escalates to discrimination when “traditional Muslims” and “liberal Canadians” attempt “to make inroads into each other.” Academic Asma Sayed expresses her desire to pass down both secular and religious traditions to her children, including a simultaneous belief in Santa Claus and in the importance of regular attendance at Sunday school at the mosque. For Sayed, who identifies as “secular or agnostic,” being Muslim is an identity that she cannot let go, “because that is what others see in me.” Her piece reflects novelist Ameen Merchant’s simple yet sweeping motto: “I am a Muslim. But I am also not just a Muslim.”

For some Muslims, says Aziz, what it means to be a Muslim simply does not arise; it is a given. Instead, their responses engage with pertinent debates about Islam in the West. Scholar Narendra Pachkhede analyzes contestations over the building of mosques in North America and Western Europe, an act that is “constitutive” in the development of Islamic identities. Professor Karim Karim asks, “Is there a place for religious discourse in secular society?” His response is yes, as evidenced by the use of the post-secular language of ethics, democracy, and pluralism by the Aga Khan, the iconic Ismaili leader, and his limited references to religion or scripture.

These pieces are representative of a refreshing collection that does not present a singular, uniform Islamic identity. Rather, The Relevance of Islamic Identity in Canada sincerely vocalizes the tensions and challenges faced on a daily basis by Muslims living in Canada—what novelist Mayank Bhatt calls “religion’s many dimensions.” What it reveals is that Islamic identity is a journey, one that every Muslim navigates by and for themselves. It can change over a lifetime. It can change without even knowing it has changed. Yet it is undoubtedly informed by external forces. Such is the nature of identity.

Women who practice hijab and niqab externalize their Islamic identity and are therefore immediately recognizable as Muslim, something that positions them as targets of vilification in Canada. Take, for example, the woman in hijab who was attacked by a woman at a grocery store in London, Ontario in June 2016. She was punched and spat on, and her hijab was pulled off her head. This incident, just one of many, reflects the results of a recent Environics survey which found that 42 percent of Muslim women in Canada, compared to 27 percent of Muslim men, have experienced some form of discrimination in the past five years, mostly in public places such as restaurants, public transit or stores. Further, according to Statistics Canada, Muslims are the only religious group to experience an increase in hate crimes (an increase of 44 percent in 2013), whereas hate crimes in Canada, as a whole, went down by 22 percent in the same period.

For writer and artist Zainub Verjee, an instance of discrimination reflects a particular moment in a Muslim’s life when Islamic identity becomes foregrounded, a “subjective moment and experience telling me that I, too, was a Muslim.” In a post-9/11 world, this foregrounding leads to “an everyday experience [where] … a Muslim feels
compelled to explain what it means to be a Muslim.”

This collection’s strength lies not only in its relevance for a Canadian public wishing to learn about the lived realities of Muslims in Canada but also in its emphasis on conversations that must take place within Muslim communities, one of the foremost being about gender relations.

Verjee cites scholars Yasmin Jiwani and Sunera Thobani, who argue that the mainstream gaze is more heavily focused on women’s bodies as “the site of the clash of civilizations.” The challenge for Muslim women, then, is twofold. Not only are they visible targets outside Muslim communities, but they are also continually navigating their position within Muslim communities.

Human rights advocate Monia Mazigh offers a powerful argument for partnership (musharaka) as a paradigm for Islamic marriages, as opposed to the concept of male privilege or guardianship (qiwamah) still followed in many marriages. Though marriage in Islam remains a lofty “moral and spiritual commitment,” in many contemporary Islamic marriages “women suffer from both the weight of tradition and the financial demands of modern life.” Mazigh argues for partnership or companionship, along with its complementary values of equality, justice and risk-sharing, such that equitable contributions (negotiated on an individual basis) are made by both partners. A simple proposition, yet one that Mazigh anticipates will be met with resistance and opposition from “traditionalist minds.”

Another presumably controversial argument is offered by Islamic philosophy scholar Mohamed Abualy Alibhai, who reflects on the struggle of Islamic feminist scholars such as Amina Wadud. Islamic feminists “who argue for women’s rights on scriptural grounds by promoting egalitarian, women’s-point-of-view interpretations of the Quran and the Shariah,” seek to challenge those verses that “seem to support gender inequality” and are used (by patriarchs) as justification for male superiority. In response, Alibhai offers a process of rethinking the revelation of the Quran as part of the “cultural-specific cognitive system” of 7th century Arabia “with no binding force on subsequent generations of culturally diverse Muslims.”

Both Mazigh and Alibhai reflect how Muslim communities themselves are constantly engaging with notions of faith, identity and social justice. Thus, underlying these essays is a sense of resistance and activism to anyone (Muslim or not) who seeks to define a singular way to be a Muslim.

This challenges Aziz’s statement in her preface, where she says, “being a Muslim … means being a victim.” The term “victim” connotes passivity. Rather, what I heard when I recently interviewed a group of young Canadian-born Muslim women who practice hijab for my graduate thesis was not passivity or indifference but rather anger, frustration and fear—which they have transformed into action and activism. And though the women expressed a sense of not belonging to the nation that they called home—a general perception of being Muslim, not Canadian—and a sense of pervasive, everyday racism, what the women did not express was a feeling of victimhood. Rather, they were proud to simultaneously be Canadian and Muslim and were ever ready to challenge direct attacks on their Islamic identity through film, education, and humour.

So when we think about Islamic identity in Canada, as Ihsaan Gardee and Amira El-Ghawaby of the National Council of Canadian Muslims write, it “isn’t about political correctness or hiding truths, it’s about acknowledging and contextualizing truths.”

Let’s acknowledge all of the ways to be a Muslim in Canada. Only then can we move towards a newer, brighter chapter in our nation. ◆

K-pop, may have reasons to approve of men wearing less clothing, but not women. “They are going to think about male members of boy groups and think it’s okay to be in this state of undress, because that’s what I want to see,” Liebler says. “But I don’t want to see a female member of a group in this state because she represents me, and I don’t want to be seen that way.”

K-pop is also an industry in which female performers are routinely shamed or fired if they have, or are rumoured to have a boyfriend. Male idols, meanwhile, joke about their sexual prowess.

Anthropology professor Millie Creighton at the University of British Columbia has studied the Korean wave’s popular culture phenomenon. She says it may be premature to blame K-pop alone for reinforcing sexism. “K-pop and K-Wave may be taking cues from Western forms of this, at least in earlier stages,” Creighton says. She also believes there may be some liberating aspects of K-pop. It can liberate “if only to the cultural imagination and people’s ability to be exposed to such images, to think about them, and even to approve or criticize them,” she says.

The treatment and portrayal of women in K-pop may reflect the sexism found in the popular music industry worldwide and in Korean society. But as women’s influence on Korean society grows, and the industry matures, we will hopefully see improvements in how K-pop idols are treated and in their performance onstage in the future. ◆
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