

Hite Of The Matter

From Rose Collis, writer on cultural politics, soap opera and comics

Shere Hite - crazy name, crazy lady, smart cookie, *cultural historian* (my italics). Consider this: she spends years quizzing thousands of women about their sexuality and sexual relationships. 'How do you achieve orgasm? Do you make it? Do you fake it?'

Then, every few years (it seems), with a regularity that would make menstrual calendars redundant, out comes a *Hite Report*'. One book begets another: 'advice books' based on 'reports'. Nice little earner, don't you think?

And what lies at the Hite of the matter? The startling revelation that no, actually, men still seem reluctant to talk about their sexual attitudes (let alone change them), but that it really doesn't matter because, after all, *women* have changed so much - haven't they?

This, then, is the world according to Hite. Which leaves us with the yawning question: what purpose do Hite and her 'reports' actually serve? Are

Not Guilty

Yasmin Alibhai is big on pride; racial pride, that is. The concept of sexual pride - and how humiliating it would be to keep a reluctant man with you by force of law - seems to have escaped her.

Reading Ms Alibhai's essay (*MT* December), I felt shame; not at being white, which was obviously her intention, but at being a woman. I can barely comprehend that we came all this way, that we died under race horses and on funeral pyres, just so a princess like Ms Alibhai could contemplate the luxury of mindless tradition.

As a white woman of working-class origin, I am angry that this country fought off the blinkers of Western cultism - for that is what religion is; a cult which recruits from children rather than adults - only to fall prey to its Eastern variation.

In a year when the World Watch Institute of Washington announced what we knew all along - that crime against women is more prevalent than any other crime in the world - I am angry that racial attacks seem to merit a solemnity which sexual attacks do not.

I am angry that middle-class Asians force the politics of gender and class back into the

they, then, merely affirmations-in-print of what a proportion of women already know is happening? Or do they function (as, doubtless, their author would like to imagine they do) as seminal texts to back up theoretical sweeping socio-sexual developments?

The Hite readership would appear to consist (mainly) of women who are already aware that relationships between the male and female of the species are not exactly without their problems and that a change is-a gonna come. They look eagerly to the hyped Reports for the means to the end they seek.

Instead, the creator of these texts, in discussing her 'reports' - or, as we know them, *best-sellers* - appears to assume that women already have all the power necessary to make vital social changes.

It's worth wondering how many women without Hite's education and relative affluence, dealing with running a household, bringing up children - socially and financially entrapped - would agree. Or have even heard of a Hite Re-

margins. I am not going to bear any longer a guilt brought about by a colonisation that people of my age, class and sex had no say in.

To turn the whammy on Ms Alibhai, I will no longer be your tame Whitey; the whipping boy willing to bear the brunt of the blame you don't dare bring to rest in your cherished country of origin, with its tribalism, intolerance and corruption.

Unlike the self-loathing middle-class toe-rags Ms Alibhai is used to processing, the white working-class are not big on guilt. We have been molested, mauled and milked in the name of culture and tradition by our own countrymen since the year dot; please don't desecrate every value that Western workers and Western women fought so hard to win just because we're white. Try to appreciate our grace under pressure, as we appreciate yours.

Because I am sick of hiding in the shadows of history; I am sick of tolerating a bigotry and superstition I would not countenance for a moment if it came from a fellow Whitey. To reiterate; I, Whitey, resign from the Consensus Club. Good luck.

Julie Burchill, London

port, let alone have spare cash to buy one or time to read the damn thing. Things change faster for some women than others, I guess.

It's also interesting to note how Hite pays lip-gloss service to women's relationships with each other, speaking vaguely about ways that women can live without men. The four-letter word itself - *l-e-s-b-i-a-n* - doesn't seem to fall too easily from her mouth. But, of course, that might put off all those faintly-disenchanted married women who will - almost certainly - constitute her main audience.

As it stands, Shere Hite and her books are safely subversive material: palatable to publishers (who think they're producing something radical), to the apathetic media (who think they're covering something radical) and to readers (who think they're beyond something radical), apparently only too eager to make wealthier a post-feminist media phenomenon who never seemed to get past the first post.

Women still need to aspire to greater Hites.*

Answers Please

What a joy to read Stedman Jones' refutation of Fukuyama's interpretation of Hegel (*MT* Nov). But what about the sting in the article's tail: '...Marxism's historical failure to provide an acceptable alternative to Hegel's distinction between public and private'? A distinction which, if removed, according to Marx would mean the abolition of private property and an end to the state and social alienation.

Is *MT* going to rise to the challenge, or has Mr Jones unearthed the fundamental weakness of marxism today?*

Michael Weiss, East Sussex

Twists In Time

Gareth Stedman Jones did well to compare Fukuyama's 'end of history' thesis with its inspiration, the work of Hegel.

But if we believe both Fukuyama and Stedman Jones that the historical alternatives to liberal democracy are exhausted, we are heading for deep trouble indeed. Fascism is, regrettably, far from dead. Stalinism may be in crisis but it is hardly dead either. As for socialism, Marx explained how this overcomes the 'end of history' in his critique of the writings of Hegel.*

Keith Flett, London

Market Murder

The superficial ramblings of *Financial Times* guru John Lloyd in 'Left Out Of Line' (*MT* October) come close to an outright call for counter-revolution.

Lloyd's article hinges on a juxtaposition of 'the market' and 'socialist planning'. Since the latter is 'married to murder' while the former merely 'can be cruel and is always inegalitarian', Lloyd opts for markets.

Markets are better than planning because they don't murder. Not only is this an entirely moralistic position, it is also patently untrue. There can be no doubt that the rule of market forces in the Third World results in mass murder, particularly of young children dying in appalling numbers from malnutrition and entirely preventable diseases.

Take commodity prices. Over the past 10 years, commodity prices by and large have dropped, but the prices of the manufactured goods Third-World countries need to import have risen.

This results in a squeeze on foreign exchange, less money available for health and education services, increased poverty, misery, malnutrition and death.

As protection from the vagaries of market forces, some commodity agreements have come into being, but they can all too easily be sabotaged by Western buyers. Thus the United States has just wrecked the International Coffee Agreement. The consequent unrestrained role of market forces in the buying and selling of coffee may mean that John Lloyd gets a cheaper cup of Nescafe, but certain African countries (Uganda, for example) will be further impoverished.

The 'world market' is not a conveniently neutral economic concept. It is a social relationship - and a profoundly unjust one. More equitable relationships will have to be based on need, not on profit. They will therefore require some form of planning, no matter how much John Lloyd may growl his disapproval.*

Paul Fauvet, Maputo

Editorial Note:

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