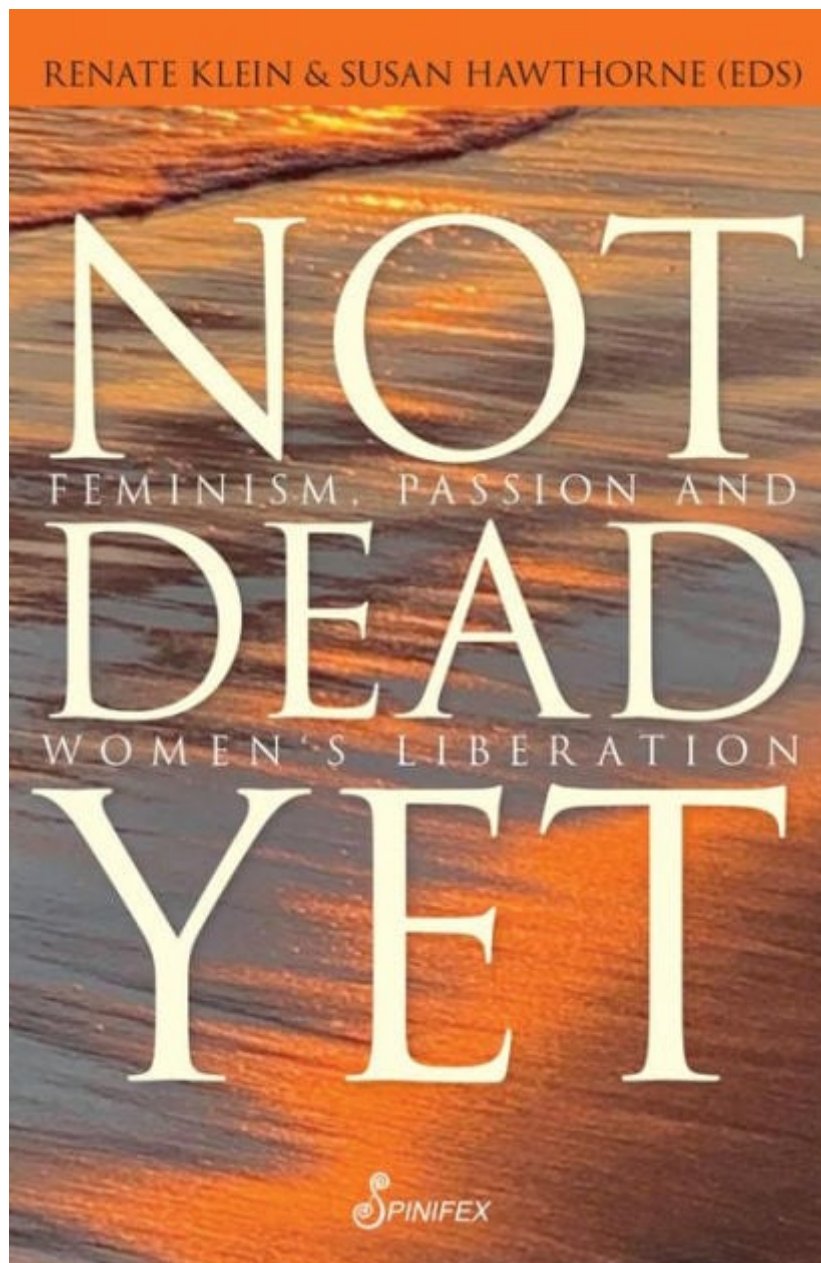


# Not Dead Yet: Feminism, Passion, and Women's Liberation

by Phyllis Chesler



I am holding a precious volume in my hands. It is 447 short pages – but contains multitudes. I am talking about an anthology which features 56 Second Wave radical feminists, all of whom are, blessedly, still alive and kicking. Published by

Spinifex Press of Australia, the book is now available online. It is titled: [\*Not Dead Yet: Feminism, Passion, and Women's Liberation\*](#).

The pieces vary tremendously. The women hail from South America, North America, Europe, the Middle East, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand. Some contributors are living in exile, some voices belong to indigenous and Romani-Gypsy women. These feminists are abortion clinic activists and advocates, academics, actresses, artists, authors, Goddess worshippers, healers, health care workers, independent scholars, lawyers, martial artists, mothers, musicians, novelists, performers of sacred rites, poets, political activists, politicians, psychotherapists, playwrights, potters, and all-round troublemakers. I am honored to be among them.

These feminists were originally anti-sexist, anti-racist, and anti-classist—and long before Critical Race Theory came to town. Most were—or became lesbians. What made them radical—and kept them radical, was their involvement in all the violence against women issues, including rape, battery, prostitution, pornography, and surrogacy.

Radical feminists were not liberal, gender neutral feminists; never believed that men and women were the same; and therefore, on this basis only, that women deserved equal rights. We never argued for honorary male status. This point of view did not triumph in the academy, in politics, or in the media.

“We have not faded away, our voices and visions are still strong; our bodies less so.”

These are the feisty and fabulous women who currently view the transgender *movement*, not individuals who say they are transgender, as primarily one that aims to erase biological

women, increase the possibility of cancer deaths due to unknown hormone overuse, and turn investors, pharmaceutical companies, plastic surgeons, and mental health professionals into multi-billionaires.

My God! What teenage girl growing up in patriarchy has not felt ill-at-ease in her own body? What gay teenage boy has not felt ill-at-ease in his body?

Being an old feminist radical means that most of these contributors tend to see the transgender *movement* as a men's rights movement, one that aims to erase women, womanhood, biological womanhood, and sex-based women's rights.

Even now, in the state of California, transgender women, with fully intact male genitalia, and whose crimes include murder, kidnapping, woman-battering, and child sexual abuse—are, unbelievably, being housed with biological female prisoners whose lives have already been traumatic enough to land them in prison. Now, prison officials are handing out condoms to the women and advising them about the availability of abortions should they [become pregnant in prison](#) as a result of rape.

This is a nightmare scenario and one that radical feminists condemn, and for which they, in turn, are scorned, harassed, condemned, and silenced. Our tragedy is that such anti-woman views and practices are now seen as “progressive,” as a form of “equity,” as a new kind of freedom by many younger feminists and by LGBTQIA folk.

Contributor Denise Thompson is working on a project which she has aptly titled: *The Transgender Agenda: Disassociated Male Entitlement and the War Against the Female*. Contributor Janice G. Raymond, who first sounded the “transsexual” alarm at the end of the 1970s, discusses how identifying as a “lesbian” (now marks) one as a dinosaur, a relic of a despised feminist history and worse—a TERF, i.e. a trans exclusionary radical feminist.” She also addresses the sexism involved in aging and

takes us on a guided tour of feminist history in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Thompson also notes:

*“Already the language is being neutered to imply that specifically female traits apply to men too: ‘pregnant persons’ instead of pregnant women, ‘front hole,’ instead of vagina, ‘chest feeding,’ instead of breast feeding. This deletion of the female starts with language, but who knows where it might end?”*

Lynne Harne reminds me how the feminist movement began to change when it embraced “a series of isms as identity politics took hold... More young lesbians were turning away from lesbian feminism and imitating gay male sexual practices such as sadomasochism.” In her words, the subsequent “queer” movement was “profoundly anti-feminist.”

I agree. Identifying with the superior caste as a way of ridding oneself of a denigrated female identity, is what I sometimes used to call the “lesbian ladies auxiliary” phenomenon. These were lesbians who were more concerned with the tragedy of gay male AIDS than with rape or abortion; with gay-male style sexual pleasures than with the low status issues of child care and male-on-female domestic violence.

The battle for women’s sex-based rights, like the battle against sex slavery and reproductive slavery; the battle against honor killing and forced face veiling; the battle against Female Genital Mutilation—are all battles for new and younger feminists to wage. We are no longer young enough to do more than sound the alarm, share an analysis, support others who are on the ground. We are... becoming history. We have not faded away, our voices and visions are still strong; our bodies less so.

Sandra Butler is poignantly “personal” as she scans her own aging body. Facing a mirror, she views “all that I have asked of this increasingly exhausted vessel, all that it has allowed

me to do. Now my (81 year old) skin is old, softening, dry, wrinkled, and tired. I gently rub lotion all over it with love.”

“In our old age, will we rest on our laurels and become the ‘sweetie’ everyone wants us to be?”

Carole Moschetti wonders whether her entry is to be “a memoir or a memento for the future?” Both I think—imagine if we could read the words of much earlier feminists and suffragists, while they were still alive, words written for us, personal postcards from the past?

Betty McClellan, a psychotherapist and author, speaks for all of us when she writes: “In our old age, will we rest on our laurels and become the ‘sweetie’ everyone wants us to be? Or will we fight on with every ounce of energy we are granted? It’s a no-brainer. We will fight on!” Denise Thompson writes: “Not only am I not dead yet, I still have a lot more work I want to do.”

Sandra Coney finds the “feminism of today” in New Zealand far too middle class. She writes: “It seems very bound up with sexual harassment—which is of course an important issue—but from a very middle-class standpoint. It is professional women and celebrities complaining rather than the cleaners and care givers. I suspect that these low-wage women don’t complain because they are afraid they will lose their jobs, even if they don’t earn a Living Wage.”

The same is true in the United States and I have said as much more than once. What about the female agricultural workers, those who work in factories? They risk much more than just losing their jobs. They risk being beaten, death-threatened, murdered, or losing custody of their children.

Major veteran voices are here: Sheila Jeffreys, Cheris

Kramarae, Diane Bell, Renate Klein, Susan Hawthorne, and Lynne Spender, writing for and about her sister, the great Dale Spender. Ironically, unacceptably, Dale, who wrote about how feminist knowledge was systematically disappeared generation after generation—that Dale herself was disappeared in the Australian academy—and specifically in a book about Australian feminism.

I love so many of their sentences: Phillida Bunkle's: "In the 1960s I took Rebecca West's advice to 'differentiate myself from a doormat;'" and Diane Bell's "Never waste a good crisis. Act now... pursue a wild politics of purpose, persistence... Eschew intergenerational matricide."

Such advice ought to be stitched on pillows and wall hangings, or embossed on mugs and t-shirts.

Thank you, co-editors, Renate Klein and Susan Hawthorne, for introducing me to so many women whose stories and work I did not know—shame on me! At least 19-21 contributors, including the editors, are from Australia and New Zealand—and thank you for re-connecting me with cherished oldsters whose work I do know.

Every single Women's and Gender Studies program should assign this work immediately, if not sooner.

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