"A Fully Formed Blast from Abroad"? Australasian Lesbian Circuits of Mobility and the Transnational Exchange of Ideas in the 1960s and 1970s

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In 1973 three Australian women—Kerryn Higgs, Robina Courtin, and Jenny Pausacker—returned to Melbourne, having spent two years in London. Later the same year, New Zealander Alison Laurie arrived home after a nine-year stint overseas, which included periods of time living in England, Scandinavia, and the United States. The return of all four had a catalytic effect on lesbian politics in their home communities. Pausacker, Higgs, and Courtin were credited with precipitating a physical and ideological shift away from mixed gay politics toward a feminist perspective on lesbianism. As Laurie herself put it, her arrival made it appear that "lesbian feminism hit Aotearoa New Zealand as a fully formed blast from abroad, but fell on fertile ground, among many of the lesbians from gay liberation for starters."[1]

Contemporary accounts certainly present the women as agents of change and their return as a significant event in the history of Australasian lesbian activism. To a certain extent their impact can be explained by the personalities of the women themselves. All were intelligent, creative women who continued to be influential writers, scholars, and activists throughout their lives. As Jenny Pausacker noted, "Kerryn published the first lesbian novel for adults in Australia. I published the first lesbian novel for young adults in Australia, and Robina's the venerable Robina [a Buddhist nun]. So we

[1] Alison J. Laurie, "From Kamp Girls to Political Dykes: Finding the Others through Thirty-Odd Years as a Lesbian from Aotearoa / New Zealand," in *Finding the Lesbians: Personal Accounts from around the World*, ed. Julia Penelope and Sarah Valentine (Freedom: Crossing Press, 1990), 81.

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were all quite strong personalities, with quite a public focus."[2] Laurie co-founded Sisters for Homophile Equality (SHE), which was the first lesbian organization in Aotearoa New Zealand. She also pioneered the Lesbian Community Radio Programme on Wellington Access Radio and brought lesbian studies into the women's studies program at Victoria University in Wellington.[3] However, the impact the four women had can also be traced to their respective travel experiences. It is clear from other women's memories of the Melbourne trio that their trip to London was perceived as crucial in exposing them to a radical feminist perspective on lesbianism that helped to shape Australian models of lesbian feminism on their return. Laurie, for her part, literally brought back ideas from elsewhere: she smuggled in the lesbian magazines that formed the basis for the home-grown lesbian publication *Circle* (later *Lesbian-Feminist Circle*), published from 1973 to 1986. This overseas experience was interpreted by many lesbian feminists as adding a degree of authority and sophistication to the women's political arguments, indicating an engagement with international feminist theory and activism.

In their work on the ties that connected people and ideas through their transnational movements, Desley Deacon, Penny Russell, and Angela Woollacott have argued: "Of indefinite provenance and infinite outcomes, ideas have flowed around the globe, contained in books and print media, in people's minds, in the very structure of cultural and political institutions. The history of that movement could never be fully narrated, but the focus on an individual life might allow us to follow some stages of the journey."[4] Following the individual journeys of Laurie, Higgs, Courtin, and Pausacker, this article will explore the ways in which circuits of mobility traversed by many Australian and New Zealand lesbians during the 1960s and 1970s facilitated the transnational exchange of ideas around female same-sex desire. The 1960s and 1970s were a significant period for countercultural organizing, as well as a transitional stage in modes of international travel. Indigenous and anticolonial resistance; anti–Vietnam War, civil rights, and student protest movements; peace activism; and, of course, feminism all built on earlier forms of activism to challenge the existing social and political order. Learning from each other and sometimes deliberately rejecting the approaches of existing groups, they adapted strategies and tactics such as passive resistance, consciousness-raising, and the provision of opportunities for the grassroots membership to develop their own organizational skills. One factor that contributed to the transnational flow of ideas was the length of time it took to travel from Australasia to Europe. At this time, inter-

[2] Interview with Jenny Pausacker by Rebecca Jennings, 23 May 2013.

[3] Alison J. Laurie, "My New Zealand Lesbian Studies through Time and Times," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 16 (2012): 76–89.

[4] Desley Deacon, Penny Russell, and Angela Woollacott, eds., *Transnational Ties: Australian Lives in the World* (Canberra: ANU E-Press, 2008), xvi.

continental travel continued to rely primarily on surface routes. Although Laurie remarks that "from an isolated society where sail and steamships took months to reach Europe, by 1970 air travel had replaced the 'Home' boats and Europe could be reached within days," the era of cheap flights in jetliners and the associated shrinking of global distances were, in fact, only just beginning to affect patterns of travel.[5] Long journeys were therefore still commonplace and thus encouraged travelers to consider spending substantial periods of time at their destination or to relocate completely for years or even for life. Extended stays provided the conditions for women to cultivate networks and encounter different perspectives, sometimes simply by reflecting on the differences from home.

The travels of Higgs, Courtin, Pausacker, and Laurie were part of circuits of mobility that stretched across the Tasman Sea (between Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand) to Britain, Scandinavia, and the United States and back to the Antipodes. Through these circuits, Australasian lesbians played major roles in running the early London-based Minorities Research Group (MRG), contributing a perspective shaped by their experiences in Australia and New Zealand to the formation of this British lesbian community and thrashing out their own lesbian feminist theory by borrowing from and adapting the models and praxis they encountered. As these women's stories will suggest, this was a process that involved both the transmission and adaptation of ideas themselves and the creation of networks and practices of debate and communication, all of which structured the development and flow of ideas in particular ways. The transnational transfer of models and practices of sexuality is a complex process: the ways in which women engaged with ideas and reshaped their own notions in the light of personal experience were intricate and multilayered; the flow of ideas went in multiple directions; and individual women's agency was crucial in determining the interplay between Australasian and non-Australasian cultural forms. The circuits we discuss here were not the only ones in play during the 1960s and 1970s. For example, historical and linguistic links between France and the province of Quebec, in Canada, generated political and emotional networks that influenced the formation of feminist theory in both locations, as the pages of the journal *Amazones d'hier, lesbiennes d'aujourd'hui* attest, and lesbian feminists frequently traveled between Canada, the United States, and Mexico to find each other and exchange ideas. Our goal here is to contribute to this wider literature by concentrating on Australasian experiences.

There is an extensive literature on transnational social movements extending from the interwar to the post–World War II period. For example, Fiona Paisley elucidates the racial politics and internationalist perspectives found through the Pan-Pacific women's network, while Alison Laurie argues that the conferences held by the Pan-Pacific Women's Association made erotic

[5] Alison J. Laurie, "Lady-Husbands and Kamp Ladies: Pre-1970 Lesbian Life in Aotearoa / New Zealand" (PhD diss., Victoria University of Wellington, 2003), 147.

attachments between women from different nations possible.[6] Exploring homophile organizations forged by gay men with some lesbian involvement in the postwar period, Leila Rupp situates the activism of the International Congress for Sexual Equality, founded in Amsterdam in 1951, in a longer history of groups attempting to achieve legal reforms and to precipitate cultural shifts in the understanding of same-sex sexuality.[7] Our interest here is less in the formal transnational links sustained through organizations and their personnel and more in tracing the individual journeys undertaken by women along established circuits of mobility as they sought opportunities abroad and then returned home full of ideas about how to influence local forms of community building. While the "London tour" as a common experience for young, female, and artistic Australasians has been explored by a number of historians, the ways in which the practice was informed and complicated by sexual identities has received less attention. Arguing that global patterns of thought and culture have impacted significantly on individuals' intimate lives, Deacon, Russell, and Woollacott recognize that "emotional attachments can be at once the cause and the casualty of long journeys across the globe and lives lived 'out of place.' Yet journeying leads in turn to new attachments that may become the basis for lives stretched across two, or more, locations."[8] An exploration of postwar lesbians' patterns of migration asserts that "lesbian migration has rarely been a one-way journey but rather a complex pattern of shorter migrations and journeys, contingent upon familial acceptance and approval. Relationships with families and communities of origin, to whom lesbians might expect intermittently to return, were neither ruptured nor abandoned, but constantly negotiated and maintained."[9] Extending this analysis into the period covered here suggests that this "complex pattern" continued at the same time as communities of origin expanded to incorporate a transnational sense of connection to other lesbians and feminists.

[6] For a detailed discussion of interracial friendship in the Pan-Pacific women's network, see Fiona Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific: Cultural Internationalism and Race Politics in the Women's Pan-Pacific* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 97–128; for an analysis of women's transnational erotic attachments at conferences, see the account of one such romance in Alison Laurie, "A Transnational Conference Romance: Elsie Andrews, Hildegarde Kneeland, and the Pan-Pacific Women's Association," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 13, no. 4 (2009): 395–414.

[7] Leila J. Rupp, "The Persistence of Transnational Organizing: The Case of the Homophile Movement," *American Historical Review* 116, no. 4 (2011): 1014–39. See also David S. Churchill, "Transnationalism and Homophile Political Culture in the Postwar Decades," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15, no. 1 (2009): 31–65; and Leila Rupp, "Toward a Global History of Same-Sex Sexuality," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10, no. 2 (2001): 287–302.

[8] Desley Deacon, Penny Russell, and Angela Woollacott, introduction to Deacon, Russell, and Woollacott, *Transnational Lives*, 6.

[9] Rebecca Jennings, "It Was a Hot Climate and It Was a Hot Time," *Australian Feminist Studies* 25, no. 63 (2010): 36.

Women's travel to Europe and, particularly, England was possible because of the persistence of colonial-era dynamics between metropole and periphery.[10] Australasians' imagined and real connections to England as "Home" explain the common geography of their circuits. In spite of postcolonial shifts in the relationships between Britain, the "Old Commonwealth" (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa) and the "New Commonwealth" (particularly the African and Caribbean members),[11] "Home" offered Australasians the same citizenship rights as British-born people living in the United Kingdom under the common code of the British Empire and subsequently Commonwealth citizenship under the British Nationality Act of 1948. Commonwealth citizens who had "patriality" under the 1971 Immigration Act could live and work in England for as long as they pleased, or at least until a series of legislative changes tightened access (to restrict the immigration of nonwhite citizens from countries such as Jamaica).[12] Although the notion of London as "Home" to Australians and New Zealanders was in decline by the 1970s (in part because of these legislative changes), the experience of moving there was still so widespread as to be regarded as a cliché. As novelist Kate Grenville put it in describing her own trip to London in the mid-1970s, "I'd always meant to do 'the tour'—you know how people do, in Australia."[13] Thus in the 1960s and 1970s, trips to the "Mother Country" or "Home" were a rite of passage for many young Australians and New Zealanders (typically Pākehā, although Māori did travel overseas too) seeking to find themselves and develop their independence.[14] This was not a new phenomenon, and historians such as Angela Woollacott have recorded a rich history of Australian women who "tried their fortune in London" from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century.[15] Woollacott argues that London consistently attracted more women than men throughout the twentieth century because it offered them greater opportunities for self-development than were open to women in Australia. These "thousands and thousands of Australian women who were drawn to Britain across the twentieth century," she argues, "came for diverse reasons including travel, adventure, personal growth, getting away from home and gendered constraints, and seeking education, training and

[10] Tony Ballantyne has described these connections in *Webs of Empire: Locating New Zealand's Colonial Past* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2012).

[11] Callum Williams, "Patriality, Work Permits and the European Economic Community: The Introduction of the 1971 Immigration Act," *Contemporary British History* 29, no. 4 (2015): 508–38.

[12] Ibid.; and Rieko Karatani, *Defining British Citizenship: Empire, Commonwealth and Modern Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 164–70.

[13] Jennifer Ellison, *Rooms of Their Own* (Ringwood, Victoria, Australia: Viking, 1986), 155–56.

[14] "Pākehā" is a Māori language term for New Zealanders of European descent.

[15] Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

careers."[16] New Zealand women also had a long history of migrating to England, and Felicity Barnes claims that New Zealanders used London in particular "as if it really were part of New Zealand." They fostered, over decades, an "imaginative possession" of the metropolitan center.[17]

Women who desired women participated in this form of travel for a range of similar reasons; their sexuality was not always the immediate motive force. While Laurie clearly identified as "kamp" and went looking for others who were like her, and Higgs identified as lesbian, Pausacker began confused and only later found a lesbian identity through her journeys, and Courtin was less interested in sexuality than in politics, coming to lesbianism through feminism.[18] In her history of New Zealand lesbians, Laurie documents the lives of women who migrated to England from the 1850s until the 1970s. Several of these women traveled to escape from their hostile families or an impossible work situation, while others went looking for kamp culture.[19] Lois Cox refers to the "time-honoured New Zealand ritual, going to England by ship, en route to seeing the world." Her oral histories of Wellington lesbians born before 1950 indicate the same pattern. One woman who traveled to England with her partner recalled that "going off to England was totally liberating because we could be who we wanted to be . . . and it didn't matter a damn." Another "loved London, the hustle and the bustle and the excitement . . . and on the other end of the scale, I like the anonymity that you can have in London as well." Just as it had done for other Australians and New Zealanders, the "Mother Country" offered a destination that was at once far distant from the constraints of family and local cultural mores and yet broadly accepted as a desirable destination for single young Australasians. Cox notes that the women who did not travel with partners "almost immediately found women partners" once there.[20] In addition to such opportunities, London represented an intellectual center and a clearinghouse for ideas, which attracted these young women, offering them the chance to engage with philosophical perspectives and literature that were not readily available to them in Australia or Aotearoa.

[16] Angela Woollacott, "Australian Women in London: Surveying the Twentieth Century," in *Australians in Britain: The Twentieth-Century Experience*, ed. Carl Bridge, Robert Crawford, and David Dunstan (Melbourne: Monash University ePress), 03.10, http://www.epress.monash.edu/ab/.

[17] Felicity Barnes, *New Zealand's London: A Colony and Its Metropolis* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2012), 3, 50.

[18] Laurie points out that "camp" (with a *c*) was "the term used in pre-1970 Australia for both women and men." It was "probably introduced into New Zealand from Australia, almost all the narrators [in her oral history] reported using it." However, in New Zealand the common spelling was "kamp" with a *k* (Laurie, "Lady-Husbands," 167–68).

[19] Ibid., 269–86, 320, 337.

[20] Lois Cox, "That's What I Am: I'm a Lesbian," in *Outlines: Lesbian & Gay Histories of Aotearoa*, ed. Alison J. Laurie and Linda Evans (Wellington: Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand, 2005), 70.

For young women becoming aware of same-sex desires or simply reluctant to conform to social pressures to marry and have children, postwar Australian society posed significant challenges. Homosexuality had been condemned as sinful by both the Catholic and the Protestant Churches throughout the twentieth century, and the continued strong influence of the churches on Australian society into the 1970s had a significant impact on social attitudes toward same-sex desire. The growing dominance of medical models that labeled homosexuality a sickness meant that women who admitted to an attraction for other women could find themselves hospitalized, and the police and judiciary utilized a range of public decency offenses to criminalize lesbianism. Social taboos against homosexuality rendered women vulnerable to the loss of jobs, estrangement from family and friends, and social ostracism, while pressures to conform often led to the breakdown of lesbian relationships.[21] Women in equally conservative Aotearoa New Zealand faced many of the same challenges, but their awareness of antilesbian attitudes was intensified by the infamous 1954 Parker-Hulme case, in which the intense friendship between schoolgirls Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme led them to murder Pauline's mother. This murder remained deeply disturbing for New Zealand lesbians in complex ways. As one Māori lesbian who was born in 1956 pointed out, "There was a whole atmosphere around the event of something very wrong which should be kept hidden," and mothers seemed keen to drag out the story in order to fearfully control their own daughters if they became too intensely involved with a friend.[22] As Laurie notes: "Lesbianism was demonised and mainly presented as linked to promiscuity, pathology, murder and madness."[23] In both nations, strict censorship laws, which prohibited any representation of homosexuality in print, contributed to a culture of profound silence around (particularly female) same-sex desire, and women were left without the cultural tools to make sense of their desires or identify other women like themselves.[24] In this context, many Australasian lesbians looked overseas both for information about their desires and identities and for contacts. Some of this overseas information came from immigrants sharing news of European groups or Australian subcultures, but some women sought it out by undertaking journeys themselves.[25]

Although London exerted the greatest pull, Australian cities also held promise for women from Aotearoa New Zealand, a country whose population

[21] Rebecca Jennings, *Unnamed Desires: A Sydney Lesbian History* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2015), 27, 106.

[22] Julie Glamuzina and Alison J. Laurie, *Parker & Hulme: A Lesbian View* (Auckland: New Women's Press, 1991), 175.

[23] Laurie, "Lady-Husbands," 109. See also Chris Brickell, *Mates and Lovers: A History of Gay New Zealand* (Auckland: Random House, 2008).

[24] Nicole Moore, *The Censor's Library* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2012), 131.

[25] Laurie, "Lady-Husbands," 155.

was small and widely dispersed. The three main cities, Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch, had a combined population of about 1.2 million in 1966 out of a total population of 2.6 million. By contrast, Melbourne had about 2.1 million people and Sydney 2.5 million.[26] Since Sydney was the closest city for New Zealand lesbians who wanted to travel, working-class women tended to cross the Tasman, while more affluent and middle-class women went to Europe.[27] Born in Wellington of Māori, Cornish, Channel Islander, and Scots descent, Laurie began what she called her "unrelenting search for the 'others'" in 1956.[28] Her search initially took her to Auckland, then Christchurch. Having painstakingly located five other kamp women, three in Wellington and two in Auckland, Laurie sailed with three of them to Sydney in November 1958 and found more by going to Kings Cross, which Graham Willett describes as "the historic centre of bohemian and camp life in Sydney."[29] On trips to Melbourne and Adelaide Laurie met "many other New Zealand lesbians," suggesting that this was an established trans-Tasman circuit. She notes that Australians crossed in the opposite direction for visits, "inspired by the large numbers of kamps from Aotearoa New Zealand living over there."[30] Laurie returned to Aotearoa New Zealand but remained restless for a community that would organize against the discrimination, violence, and police harassment endured by the kamp men and women she had met. In 1963 she found out about the US lesbian organization Daughters of Bilitis by writing to the homophile groups ONE, Inc., and the Mattachine Society in the United States for their magazines. She had located their addresses in a book that had been smuggled into Aotearoa. Once she had secured enough American dollars to send off for the publication of the Daughters of Bilitis, the *Ladder* (not an easy task during the "dollar shortage" of the 1960s), she read in it information about the MRG in England.[31] With fewer currency restrictions on sterling, it was easier to subscribe to *Arena Three*, which the MRG published between 1964 and 1971, than to American publications. Laurie found no takers for a local branch of the MRG, so she sailed to England in 1964 to join the MRG herself. "I decided that I must go away," she wrote in her autobiographical essay, "to where there was an organization that I could join, and be part of something that might work for some kind of change."[32]

[26] Department of Statistics, *New Zealand Official Yearbook* (Wellington: Department of Statistics, 1966), 55; *Commonwealth Bureau of Statistics: Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia* (Canberra: Commonwealth Bureau of Statistics, 1966), 175.

[27] Laurie, "Lady-Husbands," 156, 137.

[28] Laurie, "From Kamp Girls," 69. See also Glamuzina and Laurie, *Parker & Hulme*, 165–81.

[29] Laurie, "From Kamp Girls," 72; Graham Willett, *Living Out Loud: A History of Gay and Lesbian Activism in Australia* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 139.

[30] Laurie, "From Kamp Girls," 73–74.

[31] On the dollar shortage, see Gary Hawke, "Economic Trends and Economic Policy, 1938–1992," in *Oxford History of New Zealand*, ed. Geoffrey W. Rice (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992), 415.

[32] Laurie, "From Kamp Girls," 75–76.

Once Laurie arrived in London in 1964, she discovered that "many of the women who had started [the MRG] were 'colonials' as we were called at the time," while the overall membership of the organization in the 1960s was "highly international," including lesbians from the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Rhodesia, and South Africa. Indeed, "at least four New Zealanders were prominently involved in organising the Minorities Research Group's activities during the 1960s."[33] The editorial team in the 1960s also included a number of Australian women, including Carol Potter, who was the partner of Esme Langley, the editor, as well as Rene V., the London-area social activities coordinator.[34] Laurie began to work for the MRG, helping with mailings, giving talks, and running a weekly literary meeting at her flat. While Laurie, Carol Potter, Rene V., and their fellow "colonials" shaped the developing community of the MRG in person, international readers helped to construct ideas of lesbian identity and community through their written contributions to the MRG's magazine, *Arena Three*. Letters, articles, and press cuttings were regularly sent in by Australian readers throughout the 1960s. Since relatively few feature articles appeared in the magazine, particularly in the early and mid-1960s, articles by Australian and New Zealand contributors were particularly influential in forging a collective understanding of the lesbian experience among *Arena Three* readers.[35] In 1964 an Australian reader contributed an article entitled "What Makes It Last?," which explored questions of longevity in lesbian relationships, and in 1965 a New Zealander, Janice O'Brien, contributed an article entitled "Some Problems of the Lesbian Mother."[36] Laurie herself felt transformed by her work with the MRG. She was inspired by a trip as an MRG delegate to a lesbian conference in Amsterdam in 1965, and she then moved on to Denmark, where she became involved with the Forbund of 1948, a mixed homophile group.[37] She began to feel that revolution was in the air with news of the 1969 Stonewall riots, anti–Vietnam War protests, hippie counterculture, and discussions about feminism with the Redstockings, a Danish group started by university students in 1970 and named after the New York group.[38] With other members of the Forbund of

[33] Ngāhuia Te Awekōtuku, Shirley Tamihana, Julie Glamuzina, and Alison Laurie, "Lesbian Organising," in *Women Together: A History of Women's Organizations in New Zealand Ngā Rōpū Wāhine o te Motu*, ed. Anne Else (Wellington: Daphne Brasell and Historical Branch, 1993), 551.

[34] "The London SM Group," *Arena Three* 6, no. 12 (December 1969): 12. Rene V. wished to remain anonymous, so we do not know her last name.

[35] On letter writing as a form of lesbian expression and community formation, see Heather Murray, "'This Is 1975, Not 1875': Despair and Longings in Women's Letters to Cambridge Lesbian Liberation and Daughters of Bilitis Counselor Julie Lee in the 1970s," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 23, no. 1 (January 2014): 96–122.

[36] *Arena Three* 1, no. 4 (April 1964): 3; *Arena Three* 2, no. 11 (November 1965): 2–5.

[37] Laurie, "From Kamp Girls," 77; Laurie, "Lady-Husbands," 155.

[38] Lynn Walker, "The Embodiment of Ugliness and the Logic of Love: The Danish Redstocking Movement," *Feminist Review* 36 (1990): 103–26.

1948, Laurie started Q-Activists, with whom she organized a Scandinavian conference in 1972. She also visited the United States, "because that was where it was all happening now," and she worked on the *Lesbian Tide*. "The ideas were all developing," she wrote in her autobiographical essay. "They were new, stimulating. I felt I was part of a movement which was forming them, finding them, exploring them. There were no limits any more. I felt a strong urge to return to Aotearoa New Zealand. Letters from friends implied that the revolution might actually reach there, too."[39]

While Laurie immersed herself in lesbian organizations and politics during her travels overseas, the three Australian women engaged with a range of left-wing and countercultural political ideas in the 1960s and early 1970s. Kerryn Higgs had been raised in a working-class family in country Victoria but escaped an unhappy family situation to study at the University of Melbourne in the mid-1960s. Throughout this period in her life, Higgs had a number of affairs with other women and struggled to make sense of a lesbian identity in the context of the social taboos surrounding lesbianism in 1960s Australia.[40] Seeking an environment where she could explore her sexuality and escape the social conservatism of Australia, Higgs decided to go to London. She flew to India and then "travelled overland to London on the hippy trail," a path to which she was attracted by the countercultural concern with mysticism. When Pausacker met her in 1971, Higgs was living in a communal house, working on her first novel, *All That False Instruction*, and busking in the London Underground. When Pausacker complained of feeling isolated in London, a mutual friend from Melbourne put Higgs and Pausacker in contact with each other, and the two became friends and ultimately lovers.[41]

Jenny Pausacker came from a middle-class Melbourne family and studied English at the University of Melbourne before deciding to travel to England in 1971. She had experienced one same-sex sexual encounter but felt rather confused about her sexuality, and it was not a conscious factor in her decision to travel. Reflecting on her reasons for the trip to London, she explained:

> Well, people just did. It was still the Germaine Greer, Clive James-y thing, where real life was outside Australia—intellectual or artistic life particularly. I didn't have any idea of what I wanted to do, so I mean I'd just taken the line of least resistance up till then. You get to the end of school, you go to university because the alternative would be getting a job . . . So yeah, I mean again, I had signed up for an MA . . . and, in fact, the university crush said, "Oh, you should go overseas." I was like, okay, so I went around telling people I was going

[39] Laurie, "From Kamp Girls," 80.

[40] This period of Kerryn Higgs's life is described in her autobiographical novel, *All That False Instruction* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2001).

[41] Pausacker, interview.

> to, and they all seemed to think that it was—you know, it was kind of finishing school.[42]

On her arrival in London, Pausacker took a bedsit (a one-room apartment) in a large house in Kensington, where she worked on her MA thesis on Dickensian London and visited tourist sites such as the Tower of London. However, the experience became increasingly isolating, and when her gay male friend James arrived from Melbourne and moved into a shared house in Haringey Road, Pausacker joined him. It was there that she met Robina Courtin, who lived in the house with her sister, Jan, and Jan's boyfriend.

Courtin had grown up in a large Catholic family in suburban South Melbourne, the daughter of an impoverished musician and a journalist. She attended convent schools and engaged strongly with her religious environment, hoping to be a priest when she grew up. However, at the age of fifteen, she became aware of Miles Davis and black American music, which provided an entry into the counterculture. Robina stopped attending mass and began reading philosophy, taking drugs, sleeping with boys, and "thinking about the meaning of life." In 1968 her mother sent her to London to accompany her younger sister.[43] That Higgs, Pausacker, and Courtin made contact with each other through the network of "Australians in London" was a pattern typical of the Australasian experience in Britain for much of the twentieth century. Referring to the "custom of sharing housing and establishing networks," Angela Woollacott argues that "this phenomenon of congregating with other Australians was partly due to the practical incentives of sharing rent and basic expenses; partly to established personal contacts; and perhaps partly [due] to the difficulty of assimilating."[44] For women exploring the possibilities of same-sex desire, the development of such networks was, if not a conscious aim, often a life-changing result of the travel experience. In the context of the cultural silence surrounding homosexuality in Australia, women who became aware of their desires for other women often found it extremely difficult to identify women like themselves, while many more lacked the cultural resources to name or give meaning to their desires. In these circumstances, the more explicit discourses around lesbianism that existed in Britain, the United States, and parts of Europe offered opportunities, through subscribing to lesbian magazines or traveling overseas, for Australian women to establish networks. Despite their common geographical origins, Higgs, Pausacker, and Courtin would have been unlikely to have established contact with each other in 1960s Australia. Their varying class, cultural, and political backgrounds and perspectives, combined with their different understandings of their sexuality, meant that, while in Victoria, they had little shared experience to promote

[42] Ibid.
[43] Interview with Robina Courtin by Rebecca Jennings, 12 June 2013.
[44] Woollacott, "Australian Women in London," 03.5. 03.7.

a chance encounter or a lasting friendship. However, once in London, the greater cultural weight that the migrant experience gives to one's national identity, combined with the phenomenon of sharing housing and establishing networks among Australians overseas, worked to put the three women in contact with each other. The establishment of this network was an essential first stage in the development and transmission of ideas around lesbianism that the three women later became involved in.

Reflecting on her time in London, Robina Courtin recalled: "That was the beginning of my next step. . . . [I] became very quickly [into] really serious radical left politics."[45] From there, Courtin became involved in radical black politics, and, together with another woman, she and her sister founded a group called the Friends of Soledad in support of a case involving Black Panthers in prison in the United States. Moving in radical left-wing circles and continually open to new philosophical ideas, Courtin gradually became aware of feminist ideas and shifted her focus toward the political position of women. Reflecting on her political journey toward feminism, in an interview Courtin explained: "And then slowly beginning to take the female perspective was a huge shift in my mind, massive, and of course it was closest to who I am, so that was the most intense in terms of my own view. And then of course it meant feminist, then I heard radical. I like radical. Then radical feminism, then of course lesbian, and you had to keep going. I always go to the end, you know, the end of it, and then radical lesbian; then of course for a while radical lesbian separatist feminist."[46]

It was Robina Courtin, therefore, who was instrumental in introducing the trio to feminist ideas. Courtin visited women's groups that screened documentaries about women's lives, and she recalls attending a consciousness-raising group with her sister in London. But it was reading and debating feminist literature that had the biggest impact on her thinking at this stage. Pausacker, who had not been involved in political activism of any kind prior to joining the house in Haringey Road, attended the documentary screenings with Robina and Jan, and she approached the new ideas emerging from feminism in an academic way. In an oral history interview she explained:

> Afterwards, I'd give them a Melbourne University English department critique of the style and basic nature of the project, and Jan and Robina would go, it's all right, sister. You don't have to like it. . . . They—this annoyed me so much that I'd go away and think about it a lot, and then come back to them with arguments, and . . . in order to get on more of a winning streak, I thought I'd do what I was best at, and research it. In the Haringey Library . . . I found a hard-backed copy

[45] Courtin, interview. For further detail on Robina Courtin's experiences, see Amiel Courtin-Wilson, dir., *Chasing Buddha: Life Is Not a Sentence* (2000), http://www.robinacourtin.com/biography.php.

[46] Courtin, interview.

> of Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*. . . . It remains unique. . . . So it just, yeah, it blew me away.[47]

Firestone's seminal text argued that the so-called natural division of labor in terms of reproductive functions had led to a power imbalance at the root of society in which women were limited by their inability to control their bodies and by their function in bearing and nurturing children. The ultimate goal of feminist revolution, Firestone argued, should be the complete elimination of sex difference. She therefore advocated an end to traditional family and work structures, the use of artificial forms of reproduction, and the replacement of the traditional family with collectives.[48]

Rather than participation in local feminist activity, it was this first encounter with American radical feminist theory that was crucial in sparking Pausacker and her housemates' engagement with feminism. For all three women, who were each engaged in different ways with cultural and political ideas, it was London's reputation as a clearinghouse for ideas that had drawn them to the city and that gave them access to American feminist literature at a moment when such texts were less readily available in Australia. Pausacker recalled: "Like, so, *The Dialectic of Sex*—I think eventually we stole it from the Haringey Library after renewing it a few times. But it went the rounds of the household. Everybody read it, everyone was talking about it. We were all radical feminists."[49] These discussions within the household helped to shape the women's radical feminist perspective in ways that drew upon both the American literature they were reading and the shared but unique Australian experiences of the individual women. As the women's accounts of their year-long debates demonstrate, the three women did not simply absorb the ideas of American radical feminist Shulamith Firestone unquestioningly and transfer them back to Melbourne; instead, they analyzed and worked over these ideas in the context of their own experiences as women (and for some, as lesbians) growing up in 1960s Australia. Living in a household of Australians, they were able to draw on what Jenny Pausacker describes as a microcosm of Australian society. Their established network promoted a certain type of encounter with new ideas and experiences in London, one that enabled them to filter their perceptions through a powerfully Australian prism. Pausacker recalled: "We represented—Robina, Jan, Kerryn, and me—quite different ways of being an Australian girl, and getting to fight it all out for, what, [the] better part of a year I think, and with a gay guy and a straight guy adding things from the sidelines. That was why we seemed so cohesive when we rocked up in Australia. Because we'd had the arguments."[50]

The model of theoretical debate that the women developed during this year was crucial both in shaping the development of their radical feminist

[47] Pausacker, interview.
[48] Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (New York: William Morrow, 1970).
[49] Pausacker, interview.
[50] Ibid.

ideas and in providing a domestic, small-group-based structure that they took with them back to Melbourne. The group's contact with British feminist networks and organizational structures was limited: Pausacker described an unsuccessful attempt to engage with local feminists when the trio had attended a women's liberation conference in London in the hope of engaging with other radical feminist women. However, they discovered that radical feminism was not on the program at all. Pausacker, Higgs, and Courtin ran an impromptu workshop on the subject themselves but were disappointed at this failed attempt to expand their radical feminist thinking; they retreated back into their own small circle.[51]

On their return to Melbourne in 1973, Jenny Pausacker, Robina Courtin, and Kerryn Higgs brought with them not only a clearly articulated radical feminist ideology but also an established network for transmitting these ideas and models for debating and communicating them. Re-creating an environment similar to the one they had just left in London, all three women moved into a shared house in Argyle Street in Fitzroy, which Jenny's sister, Helen, had organized for them, and became actively involved in local lesbian and feminist politics.[52] While Higgs, Pausacker, and Courtin had been overseas, lesbian politics had begun to develop in Australia at the intersection of two influential movements: women's liberation, on the one hand, and gay liberation, on the other. Both had emerged from a broader left-wing protest movement centered on Vietnam War moratoriums, antiapartheid demonstrations, and radical left-wing politics more generally. The first gay political organization in Australia, the Australasian Lesbian Movement (ALM), had been founded in Melbourne in late 1969 and was initially a chapter of the American lesbian group Daughters of Bilitis. But it soon became primarily a social and support group enabling isolated lesbians to meet.[53] In 1971, a Melbourne branch of the Sydney-based Campaign Against Moral Persecution (CAMP), a homosexual reform group, was also founded, but young lesbians seeking a radical political perspective were drawn toward the newly emerging women's liberation and gay liberation movements.[54] Although a number of women were involved in both movements, the focus of the two remained largely separate in the early 1970s, with women's liberation

[51] Ibid.; Courtin, interview.

[52] On Melbourne lesbian feminist politics, see Robert Reynolds, *From Camp to Queer: Remaking the Australian Homosexual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 142–46; Rebecca Jennings, "Womin Loving Womin: Lesbian Feminist Theories of Intimacy," in *Intimacy, Violence and Activism: Gay and Lesbian Perspectives on Australasian History and Society,* ed. Graham Willett and Yorick Smaal (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2013), 136–40.

[53] Chris Sitka, "A Radicalesbian Herstory," http://users.spin.net.au/~deniset/alesfem/s1sitka.pdf; and Lucy Chesser, "Australasian Lesbian Movement, 'Claudia's Group' and Lynx: 'Non/political' Lesbian Organisation in Melbourne, 1969/1980," *Hecate* 22, no. 1 (1996): 69–91.

[54] Willett, *Living Out Loud*, 60–62.

exploring broader issues relating to women's oppression but not explicitly discussing lesbian concerns. Within gay liberation, lesbians had been taking part in mixed meetings with gay men and assuming a shared political agenda with them, but by late 1972 women were becoming increasingly angry at the perceived sexist behavior of the men. A Gay Women's Group was formed, which met at the Gay Liberation Centre in Davis Street, Carlton, and gradually began to attract some women from women's liberation.

On their return to Australia early in 1973, emboldened by each other and enthused by their discussions of radical feminism, Higgs, Pausacker, and Courtin immediately threw themselves into the feminist and gay political life of Melbourne. Their first appearance at the Gay Women's Group was vividly remembered by many of the women there as a transformative moment. Chris Sitka recalled:

> Then at one memorable meeting three very influential women, newly arrived back in Australia from England, joined the group. Jenny, Kerryn, and Robina had a formidable presence which made a strong impression on the existing members. They had a couple of idiosyncrasies, such as calling everyone "sister." It became very "in" to call each other "sister" rather than by name. Like "Would you like a cup of tea, sister?" or "This sister needs a lift to the meeting." . . . They were very eloquent about their feminist theories, and I remember being somewhat intimidated, if fascinated, by them.[55]

Sharing their radical feminist ideas with the Gay Women's Group, Pausacker, Higgs, and Courtin encouraged the existing members to apply feminist theoretical perspectives to their analysis of lesbianism. Di, an early member of the group, recalled:

> There were three Australian women who'd come back from London, and we were sort of very much in the [mode of], okay, well here's the women's liberation and here's the gay liberation, and we were involved in both because we're lesbians, and they sort of came along with a bit more, no, we should be in women's liberation sort of thing. So that was kind of more the separatist, lesbian separatist sort of stream of things. [They argued] that men still have, gay men even . . . are more approved of by the patriarchy than women of any sort . . . and that we just had so much more in common [with other women] in that sort of a way.[56]

Not long after the trio returned to Melbourne, the Gay Women's Group moved its meetings from the Gay Liberation Centre to the Women's Centre, and by July 1973 the group had changed its name to the Radicalesbians, echoing the New York group of the same name.

[55] Sitka, "A Radicalesbian Herstory," 7.

[56] Interview with Diane Minnis by Rebecca Jennings, 30 December 2012.

Continuing the model of using small domestic groups as the basis for political debate and activism that Higgs, Pausacker, and Courtin had utilized in London, Radicalesbian activity in Melbourne centered on the Argyle Street household and on a small number of other lesbian-shared houses in the area. The women developed a separatist approach, gradually driving out the two men who had been living in the house when Pausacker, Higgs, and Courtin arrived and converting their rooms into a dormitory for visiting feminists. In an oral history interview, Helen recalled:

> The Radicalesbian community did revolve around Argyle Street. Nicholson St sort of, but not as much, but Argyle St was full pelt and that's why, yeah, people were just coming and sleeping there from interstate [from other states in Australia]—it was, you know, the hub. And that's where Robin Morgan, you know Robin Morgan's poems were, and you know we collated that round on the table and the . . . Lesbian Feminist Collection [*sic*], we also made that at Argyle St so everything was being done there. . . . You know, and it was just people who were around, you know sort of like a family. And some people lived in different households to ours but they were visiting all the time, it was always full of action.[57]

As Helen described, revolutionary actions were planned and carried out in the house, including nighttime trips out to spray-paint Radicalesbian slogans around the city and spontaneous actions such as the kidnapping and attempted reeducation of a man who had organized a striptease at Melbourne University. Considerable time was also devoted to reading and debating radical feminist and lesbian literature from the United States, developing theory, and producing a number of writings, including a pirated edition of Robin Morgan's anthology *Monster*; an unpublished collection of feminist essays, "Melbourne Feminist Collection 1"; and papers for a conference organized by the group at Sorrento, Victoria, in July 1973.[58]

Both the activism of the Radicalesbians and the writings that Pausacker, Higgs, and Courtin contributed to the Radicalesbians' publications indicate the ways in which they were reinterpreting American radical feminist theory in the light of Australian perspectives and experience. Texts such as the "Radicalesbian Manifesto," produced collectively at the Sorrento con-

[57] Interview with Helen Pausacker by Graham Willett, 27 December 1996, Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives.

[58] The Radicalesbians published a pirate copy of *Monster*, with Robin Morgan's permission, after her publisher, Random House, made a private deal with the poet Ted Hughes to withdraw the book from sale throughout the UK and the Commonwealth. The deal was made in response to Hughes's threat to sue over the poem "Arraignment," which suggested that Hughes had contributed to his wife, Sylvia Plath's suicide through his battery and womanizing. However, the publisher's actions sparked worldwide protests, and feminists in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and elsewhere produced pirate editions of the anthology. For a detailed account of the Sorrento conference, see Sitka, "A Radicalesbian Herstory."

ference, provided classic statements of lesbian feminist theory by citing the New York Radicalesbians' assertion that "Lesbian is the label which holds every woman in line" and identifying sexism as the root cause of all forms of oppression.[59] The manifesto echoes Firestone in calling for "a genderless society" and in attacking marriage and the nuclear family as central to women's oppression. "Leadership," the Melbourne Radicalesbians claimed, "is destructive, power is sexist, and as we aim for a leaderless society so we work in a leaderless group."[60] However, the Radicalesbians also built on these ideas to develop their own lesbian feminist perspective. Both in theory and practice, the Radicalesbians began to articulate a powerful argument in favor of separatism from men, blending international lesbian feminist theory with a specifically Australian practice of gender. The "Radicalesbian Manifesto," produced the same year Jill Johnston's *Lesbian Nation* was published, concluded: "So we want to establish our own alternative feminist culture. We want a distinct feminist community where we can learn to be/act ourselves as people."[61] Although couched in aspirational terms, this statement in fact reflected a preexisting practice of lesbian separatism in Australia. Higgs, Pausacker, and Courtin had been promoting separatist theorizing and activism since their return to Melbourne earlier in the year, and they were developing their theories in women-only groups based in separatist households. Their ideas built on an established practice of women-only activity in consciousness-raising groups, in collectives, and at women's liberation headquarters, which had been central to the Australian women's movement since the late 1960s. Arguing that separatism was uniquely suited to Australian culture, Pausacker reflected:

> That was the kind of feminism that was appropriate to Australia. . . . It's feminism within a very gender separated society. So men and women working together for a juster society was a bit . . . how would you do that? Because [at a typical Australian barbeque] the men are down there, with the lamb chops, and the women are up here buttering the bread. So yeah. Women working together on stuff just makes innate sense in a separated culture. That's how it had come about. Firestone, I think wherever me and Kerryn and Robina went, there too went Shulamith Firestone, as it were. But I don't think it was really key.[62]

For Jenny, Australian separatism developed as a result of the combined influence of US radical feminist thinking and, crucially, local preexisting culture practices. Already an established practice in the broader Australian

[59] Radicalesbians, "The Woman Identified Woman" (1970).

[60] "The Radicalesbian Manifesto," papers presented at the 1973 Radicalesbian conference at Sorrento, Victoria, http://users.spin.net.au/~deniset/alesfem/s2radlesps73.pdf.

[61] Ibid.; Jill Johnston, *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).

[62] Pausacker, interview.

women's movement, separatism spread quickly through the lesbian feminist community in 1973, with women-only houseshares becoming the backbone of the communities in Melbourne, Sydney, and Adelaide. By the end of the year, a rural separatist community had been established in northern New South Wales.[63]

The pervasiveness of separatism in the lesbian feminist and broader women's movement in this period provided both a testing ground and an interested audience for the development of theories of lesbian intimacy. While much American lesbian feminist literature at this time was focused on theories of sexism and the relationship between lesbians and heterosexual women in the women's movement, most of the work produced by the Melbourne Radicalesbians explored the theory and practice of intimacy between women.[64] In a number of articles, Jenny Pausacker and Kerryn Higgs, in particular, drew on personal and collective experience to advocate new ways of relating to women based on the concepts of universal sisterhood, equality in relationships, and a critique of the couple model of sexual intimacy. An article entitled "Dependence" collectively produced by the Radicalesbians analyzed the issue of emotional dependence within a couple relationship, and the group concluded that, while there were "good" and "bad" forms of dependence, ultimately women needed to be in touch with their feelings and communicate with each other, as each relationship is different. "Our theory can be soundproof," they concluded, "but there's a point where it clicks in our personal experience, and that's the point at which it becomes real."[65] As the Radicalesbians increasingly began to put these ideas into practice in the context of a growing lesbian feminist community in Melbourne, the theories evolved. Experience of the emotional repercussions of a theory of intimacy based on nonmonogamy prompted a deeper reflection on the notion of "primary relationships" and the emotional significance of sexual intimacy in women's interaction with each other.[66] At the Sorrento conference, Jenny and Sue's paper, "On Primary Relationships," began with the following observation:

> When we started talking about dependence in the gay women's group, couple quickly became a bit of a dirty word. A closed circuit, a mutual admiration society. We were all aware—and talking together how could we not be?—that our most important relating wasn't just with

[63] On lesbian separatism in 1970s Australia, see Rebecca Jennings, "The Boy-Child in Australian Lesbian Feminist Discourse and Community," *Cultural and Social History*, forthcoming.

[64] Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967–1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Jennings, "Womin Loving Womin."

[65] "Dependence," Melbourne Feminist Collection 1 (July 1973), http://users.spin.net.au/~deniset/alesfem/s3mfemcoll73.pdf..

[66] See, for example, Jenny Pausacker and Jocelyn Clarke, "Falling in Love Again, Never Wanted To," *Sydney Women's Liberation Newsletter*, January 1976, 14–19 (reprinted from *Lot's Wife*, 27 May 1974).

> one person. And yet it seemed absurd to think we could fuck with all of each other, as things were, or to think that there wasn't some kind of difference with the woman or women we were fucking with. So the term primary relationship replaced the term couple.[67]

The paper moved on to consider the issues that had subsequently arisen with the concept of primary relationships, arguing that "we have to break down the sanctity of relationships which involve genital sexuality" as "we are responding sexually to everyone, whether this involves fucking or not." Carefully tracing the development in the group's thinking over the preceding months, the paper concluded with the claim that if women reject the primacy of sexual relationships, then jealousy and the idea of precedence in relationships will become meaningless. The question of how to move beyond codependent couple relationships but avoid the pitfalls of jealousy in nonmonogamous sexual practice remained an ongoing debate in papers and feminist journals and in the separatist households and communities that formed the base of Australian lesbian feminist community. The existence of the Melbourne Radicalesbians as a group was relatively short-lived, lasting as a cohesive entity for only eighteen months or so, but the ideas that were voiced during this period had a lasting impact on Australian lesbian and feminist identity, shaping the direction of both movements for over a decade.

Across the Tasman Sea in Aotearoa New Zealand lesbianism was also becoming more visible as part of the wider social changes in the air. A 1965 article in the *New Zealand Truth*, a popular scandal sheet, carried a story about the MRG, sharing the information that both lesbians and an organization for them existed.[68] However, a noticeable difference from Australia (as well as from the United States) came from the significant role that indigenous women played in increasing the visibility of a politicized community. Māori urbanization profoundly influenced the development of the kamp community. An informal group of Māori kamp women built support networks in Wellington in the 1960s, and Raukura Te Aroha "Bubs" Hetet, heavily involved in the Auckland kamp scene, helped to found Aotearoa's first lesbian club, the KG Club, on Karangahape Road in Auckland in 1972.[69] Although this was a social space, "its very existence represented a bold political act—an expression of a self-conscious lesbian

[67] Jenny and Sue, "On Primary Relationships," papers presented at the 1973 Radicalesbian conference at Sorrento, Victoria, http://users.spin.net.au/~deniset/alesfem/s2radlesps73.pdf. See also, Kerryn, "Feminist Consciousness and Sexuality," ibid.

[68] Laurie, "Lady-Husbands," 155.

[69] Alison J. Laurie, "'We Were the Town's Tomboys': An Interview with Raukura 'Bubs' Hetet," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 14 (2010): 393. The club itself existed from 1971 to 1985. See Julie Glamuzina, *Outfront: Lesbian Political Activity in Aotearoa 1962 to 1985* (Hamilton: Lesbian Press, 1993), 70.

community."[70] The same year Ngāhuia Volkerling (later Te Awekōtuku), precipitated the formation of the Gay Liberation Front. The New Zealand Universities Students' Association had unanimously selected Volkerling to receive the annual US government sponsorship to tour American campuses, but as they explained:

> In filling out her application form Mrs Volkerling stated that she is "a homosexual Maori woman" and that as part of her study plans in the US, she wished to look at the Gay Liberation and the Red Power movements. She felt that both movements are relevant and of interest to New Zealanders. The Gay Liberation movement is just beginning to gain momentum in this country; many gays are writing and demanding to be heard and recognised as *people* with a useful and important function in New Zealand society.
>
> The Red Power movement of the US Indian peoples is dedicated to bring to the eyes of the American people the plight of the underprivileged red man. New Zealand surely could learn much from this particular movement to aid us in understanding our racial situation.[71]

Te Awekōtuku's goal was therefore to travel overseas in order to learn from and foster transnational political networks that could combine gay and indigenous struggles and adapt them to conditions in her home country. However, the US Consul rejected her visa application because she was "homosexual." In her account of the events, Te Awekōtuku recalls:

> After a meeting at which I was told I was a known sexual deviant by the American consul I went up to the [Auckland] university forum, which happens at one o'clock every Thursday, and I picked up the mike and I said, "Who out there is crazy enough to come and do this with me?" And five materialized. We went off to the coffee bar and talked about calling a meeting. We called it and over forty people came on the very first Sunday. We were so excited over getting more than forty people that we called another meeting and seventy came! We decided we should do something—but what?[72]

In April 1972 they decided to picket the American Consulate, and they issued an information sheet to persuade students to join the protest.

This act of preventing Te Awekōtuku from embarking on a circuit to the United States and back somewhat paradoxically stimulated the growth of a politicized lesbian and gay movement at home. However, as she indicated

[70] Te Awekōtuku et al., "Lesbian Organising," 553.

[71] Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand, MS 029 Gay Liberation Front Auckland, 1972–73.

[72] Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, *Mana Wahine Maori: Selected Writings on Maori Women's Art, Culture and Politics* (Auckland: New Women's Press, 1991), 38–39.

in a speech to the National Lesbian and Gay Conference in Auckland in 1989, the idea of gay liberation arrived in Aotearoa through mobile circuits:

> And how did it cross the North American continent and the Pacific, to end up here, on these shores? Someone brought it back from Sydney. She's not here today, but she still tramps Karangahape Rd, and the person is Sally. Sally suggested to me that something had to be done because she had met people in Kings Cross and they were talking about this happening in New York, this thing called Gay Liberation. Another person came back from Australia, and that was Paul Kells, and he talked about Gay Liberation too, although there were no books about it, no concepts written, and unlike the beginnings of the feminist movement here, there were no actual manifestos.[73]

Te Awekōtuku's call to action was therefore one significant response to the ideas and people circulating at this time, and through her work with other members of the gay liberation movement she began to increase lesbian visibility and develop support services.

It was into this changing context that Laurie returned to Aotearoa New Zealand in 1973. Crucially, she brought two sources of ideas with her. The first was her own experience of lesbian organizing in much larger communities, and the second was a collection of overseas lesbian magazines. She had spent considerable time learning how to build community networks in England through the MRG, in Denmark via her membership in the Forbund of 1948, and through her conference organizing experience. A retrospective 1978 article in *Circle* acknowledged the perspective that these experiences had brought her. The anonymous author stated that "we should mention that Alison Laurie and Marilynn Johnson with their international connections with lesbian groups were more aware of the potential of women uniting to achieve political aims around the lesbian issue than most other lesbians who were in the Gay Scene at the time."[74] Laurie became involved in the creation of a national lesbian organization, Sisters for Homophile Equality (SHE), which was initially formed by women in Christchurch. In spite of its name, SHE was not part of a transnational homophile movement: members of a weekly discussion group had decided to formalize and call themselves SHE and then cast around for a suitable name "to fit the letters."[75] SHE organized the first national lesbian conference.

At that Lesbian Conference, held 1–3 March 1974 in Wellington, Laurie told the audience that "although there is much to be learnt from the experiences of overseas movements, we must realize that New Zealand's situation is unique."[76] This sense of difference influenced the development of

[73] Ibid., 38.
[74] Anon., "Circle . . . from the Beginning," *Circle*, no. 30 (Winter 1978): 33.
[75] Linda Evans, "SHE, 1973–1977," in Else, *Women Together*, 559.
[76] Jo, "Lesbian Conference," *Circle*, no. 4 (March 1974): n.p.

lesbian feminist and gay liberation theorizing. In an analysis of the ideology that was being formulated in groups and at conferences during the 1970s, Lindsay Taylor explained that "the overseas material often contains subtle differences of emphasis that are not strictly applicable in this country." She pointed out that the 1971 London Gay Liberation Front manifesto had been "heavily concerned with ideas of communal living and consciousness-raising that were popular at the time," while Carl Wittman's theorizing depended on "the highly developed gay subculture of San Francisco, a subculture whose complexity and sheer size have few equals in the world."[77] Indeed, the lack of a "significant degree of counter-culturalism," which was based on "the support of a large and highly developed gay world such as is found in New York, San Francisco, or London, but not in Wellington or Auckland," accounted, Taylor argued, for the absence of radical feminism in New Zealand.[78] In her reflection on the 1979 lesbian feminist gathering at Wainuiomata, Jill Livestre suggested that distinctions between cities might be a contributing factor to this problem. She asked: "How does Christchurch manage to have so many women coming out with the commitment to travel to Wellington, miss work, etc? Why are there so many more working class lesbians surviving feminism in Wellington than in Auckland? Answers to these and other questions might have some effect on the trend of dykes to travel south to north, overseas and never be seen again. If we can get past 'Auckland women are so . . . !' bitch session, into really talking about the differences we see, we will learn something valuable."[79] In other words, even though the total number of women involved in developing lesbian feminist community was relatively small, their needs and locally specific challenges (North or South Island, rural or urban, Māori or non-Māori, feminist or not, and so on) were too great and too complex to be met by the stretched resources of women who were frustrated by the mirage of a large, complex, and well-organized political community that appeared to exist elsewhere. As a result, in spite of the arrival of lesbian feminist and gay liberation ideas, women still left the country to find a political community overseas.

The second source of ideas that Laurie brought home was a collection of lesbian publications, including the *Lesbian Tide* and the *Furies*, which she smuggled into New Zealand "hidden in a Volkswagen van, which was not searched."[80] She circulated these publications around her circle of friends and contacts, and the publications' value as a way to communicate political and cultural ideas about lesbians inspired their readers to create a home-grown version. At the end of 1973 Laurie, together with Valda Edyvane, Porleen Simmons, Viv Jones, Glenda Gale, Ann (who did not give her last

[77] Lindsay Taylor, "Aspects of the Ideology of the Gay Liberation Movement in New Zealand," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 13, no. 2 (1977): 127, 132n3.
[78] Ibid., 131.
[79] Jill Livestre, "Experience Reflected, Confirmed and Developed," *Circle*, 1979, 61.
[80] Laurie, "Lady-Husbands," n. xv, 108.

name), Diana Sands, Jill Harvey, and Jan McFarlane, all from Wellington, launched *Circle*. Initially *Circle* merely reprinted articles from those smuggled American lesbian titles.[81] The first issue, for example, included an article on Queen Christina that "had been cut out of a copy of 'The Furies' magazine, one of Alison's suitcase full of overseas lesbian publications."[82] These Wellington lesbians were the ones most immediately influenced by the American material and by Laurie's accounts of lesbian life abroad. This seemed to limit their confidence in their own ability to theorize as lesbian feminists. Christchurch lesbians, on the other hand, lived farther away, on the South Island. With far less access to either Laurie (an authority with her near-decade of organizing experience) or the cannibalized American material, the Christchurch women responded to *Circle* directly, rather than to the context of the ideas that had spawned it. They soon had their own thoughts about its design and what it should include:

> At the lesbian conference in March 1974 some of the Chch. [*sic*] lesbians said that they considered Circle was really bad—sexist, poorly illustrated and badly laid out and they wanted to do the next issue. We found that the Chch. group had more talented artists willing to work on the magazine. They also wrote more original articles than we did. We relied more on overseas material. This is partly a matter of confidence too. Many of us felt that anything we wrote wasn't quite good enough. Mind you, when we were desperate for copy and had already reprinted most of the available material from overseas magazines, we just had to sit down and write.[83]

The struggle to theorize continued. In 1976 the editorial expressed a similar concern: "We had had high hopes last September of producing a magazine that was more a reflection of our politics and which would contain some serious political analysis, but then we felt a bit out of our depth and worried that we would not actually be able to write the articles."[84] Thus while the overseas influences were important, they could also be stifling. Those who had not been as exposed to this material, nor to the idea that there were "correct" interpretations of patriarchy or homophobia, wanted to develop theoretical analyses and move the discussion forward in locally relevant ways.

Circle played a major role in helping to develop a lesbian politics that spoke to and for New Zealand lesbians, and it became part of a national and international network. In 1975 an editorial by Eva Medea explained that

[81] Alison J. Laurie, "'Filthiness' Became a Theory: An Overview of Homosexual and Lesbian Organising from Nineteenth Century Europe to Seventies New Zealand," in Laurie and Evans, *Outlines*, 10–18.

[82] Anon., "Circle . . . from the Beginning," 34.

[83] Ibid., 36.

[84] Anon., "Hello . . . ," *Circle*, no. 23 (Winter 1976): 1.

"sometimes Christchurch women put out an issue of *Circle*, sometimes Wellington women, and once Auckland women put out an issue. This way we hope to involve more people and get as much variety and ideas as possible. We know there are lots of lesbians in Hamilton now, so maybe women from there will get together to contact members and start contributing sometimes also."[85] This community was sustained by a widespread network, and a 1977 inside front cover of *Circle* showed that in addition to the six Wellington lesbians who produced the issue, there were also contributions from "Mary Jo our lezzie friend in Auckland, La Rain now living in Australia, Janet from Wellington who was holidaying recently in Sydney, another Janet on her way from Christchurch to Auckland, Amadee and Lynn who are travelling overland to England, [and] Jan our dykey friend from Hamilton."[86] In addition, in common with other feminist and lesbian magazines, *Circle* participated in a publication exchange. Copies of *Amazon Quarterly* (United States), *Lavender Woman* (United States), *Majority Report* (United States), *Cauldron* (Australia), and *Refractory Girl* (Australia) all provided "inspiration," as did lesbian music. "I've been inspired by a beutiful [*sic*] record, 'Lavender Jane,' while typing this issue," Eva Medea wrote. However, she cautioned that inspiration from overseas sources was insufficient: "We do want to involve women here. It's the only lesbian/feminist magazine in the land, so the articles whatever, should be of interest to lesbians and feminists but especially lesbians as there is the feminist magazine *Broadsheet*."[87] This argument, in favor of a homegrown publication that engaged with overseas material, was repeated twice the following year. One inspiration was *Lesbian Connections*, which *Circle* described as "a national forum for all American dykes and [which] covers news and opinions at a local and personal level while also covering theoretical issues that are important to radical political lesbians." They felt that *Circle* could also function as this type of national forum: "With contributions from all over New Zealand as well as letters from lesbian women overseas we should be able to produce a magazine which reflects the diversity of opinion and feeling of the lesbians in New Zealand with some comment and comparison from the USA and elsewhere."[88] The next issue continued with this theme: "We are too small a nation of lesbians to fully elaborate the ideas of our visions, there are not enough writers, visionaries, artists, amongst us. . . . But it's all . . . there . . . in *Amazon Quarterly*, *Quest* [United States], *Woman's Spirit* [United States] . . . lots of wimmin in numbers elsewhere in the world are saying what quite a few of us here are discovering."[89] The challenge was to strike a balance between engaging with the politics and practices of lesbians overseas, seeing oneself as part of an international lesbian network maintained through circuits of

[85] Eva Medea, editorial, *Circle*, no. 18/19 (May–June 1975).
[86] *Circle*, no. 25 (Summer 1977): inside front cover.
[87] Medea editorial.
[88] Anon., "Hello . . . ," 1.
[89] Anon., editorial, *Circle*, no. 24 (Spring 1976): 2.

women and ideas, while also developing a specific community that met the political and social aspirations of lesbians in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Conclusion

Miriam Saphira argues that "New Zealanders as a whole are great travellers and so are lesbians."[90] In the 1960s and 1970s New Zealand and Australian lesbians drew on colonial-era ties to forge common circuits of mobility, often commencing in London but then traveling across Europe and Asia, or, in the 1970s, visiting women-only rural communities in Wales and Denmark, before bringing their experiences of these communities back to Australia.[91] Tracing the individual journeys of Laurie, Higgs, Courtin, and Pausacker is a way to examine how these circuits of mobility exposed New Zealand and Australian women to lesbian, feminist, and countercultural ideas and political practices being developed overseas, as well as enabling them both to make contact with other Australasian women and to create international networks. Their overseas experience fostered the development of transnational ideas and theories of lesbianism through the contribution of Australasian women to lesbian magazines such as *Arena Three* and to international lesbian and feminist organizing. The operation of networks of Australians and New Zealanders abroad, combined with the opportunities for connecting with existing lesbian networks in Britain and elsewhere, enabled Australasian lesbians to make contact with each other in ways that were much more problematic in the socially conservative environment of 1960s Australia and New Zealand. The circuits and networks they developed played a crucial role in shaping the ideology and practice of lesbian organizing in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand and elsewhere. However, while women such as Laurie, Higgs, Pausacker, and Courtin were often extremely influential in developing lesbian feminism in their home countries, lesbian feminist theory and practice were not simply imported unquestioningly to Australasia. Ideas were adapted to meet local conditions, responding to local differences such as population size and lack of communication between centers, racial tensions, and differing class expectations, as well as evolving in the context of the specific experiences of the local community. They may have arrived as "a fully formed blast from abroad," but when they "fell on fertile ground" they of necessity grew in different directions.[92]

[90] Miriam Saphira, ed., with Heather McPherson and Dr. Fran Marno, *Remember Us: Women Who Love Women, from Sappho to Liberation* (Auckland: Charlotte Museum Trust, 2008), 92.

[91] Examples of these lesbian tours abound. See, for example, Lynn and Amadee, "Travelling Lesbians," *Circle*, no. 25 (Summer 1977): 6–7. Interview with Laurene Kelly by Rebecca Jennings, 19 February 2013.

[92] Laurie, "From Kamp Girls," 81. Sara MacBride-Stewart explores the ongoing differences in terms of lesbian studies in her "Peripheral Perspectives: Locating Lesbian Studies in Australasia," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 11, no. 3/4 (2007): 303–11.

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