

PORNOGRAPHY: THE NEW TERRORISM*

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All through human history, there have been terrible, cruel wrongs. These wrongs were not committed on a small scale. These wrongs were not rarities or oddities. These wrongs have raged over the earth like wind-swept fires: maiming, destroying, leaving humans turned to ash. Slavery, rape, torture, extermination have been the substance of life for billions of human beings since the beginning of patriarchal time. Some have fattened on atrocity while others have suffered from it until they died.

In any given time, most people have accepted the cruelest wrongs as right. Whether through indifference, ignorance, or brutality, most people, oppressor and oppressed, have apologized for atrocity, defended it, justified it, excused it, laughed at it, or ignored it.

The oppressor, the one who perpetrates the wrongs for his own pleasure or profit, is the master inventor of justification. He is the magician who, out of thin air, fabricates wondrous, imposing, seemingly irrefutable intellectual reasons which explain why one group must be degraded at the hands of another. He is the conjurer who takes the smoking ash of real death and turns it into stories, poems, pictures, which celebrate degradation as life's central truth. He is the illusionist who paints mutilated bodies in chains on the interior canvas of the imagination so that, asleep or awake, we can only hallucinate indignity and outrage. He is the manipulator of psychological reality, the framer of law, the engineer of social necessity, the architect of perception and being.

The oppressed are encapsulated by the culture, laws, and values of the oppressor. Their behaviors are controlled by laws and traditions based on their presumed inferiority. They are, as a matter of course, called abusive names, presumed to have low or disgusting personal and collective traits. They are always subject to sanctioned assault. They are surrounded on every side by images and echoes of their own worthlessness. Involuntarily, unconsciously, not knowing anything else, they have branded into them, burned into their brains, a festering self-hatred, a virulent self-contempt. They have burned out of them the militant dignity on which all self-respect is based.

Oppressed people are not subjugated or controlled by dim warnings or vague threats of harm. Their chains are not made of shadows. Oppressed people are *terrorized*—by raw violence, real violence, unspeakable and pervasive violence. Their bodies are assaulted and despoiled, according to the will of the oppressor.

This violence is always accompanied by cultural assault—propaganda dis-

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guised as principle or knowledge. The purity of the "Aryan" or Caucasian race is a favorite principle. Genetic inferiority is a favorite field of knowledge. Libraries are full of erudite texts that prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Jews, the Irish, Mexicans, blacks, homosexuals, and women are slime. These eloquent and resourceful proofs are classified as psychology, theology, economics, philosophy, history, sociology, the so-called science of biology. Sometimes, often, they are made into stories or poems and called art. Degradation is dignified as biological, economic, or historical necessity; or as the logical consequence of the repulsive traits or inherent limitations of the ones degraded. Out on the streets, the propaganda takes a more vulgar form. Signs read "Whites Only" or "Jews and Dogs Not Allowed." Hisses of "kike," "nigger," "queer," and "pussy" fill the air. In this propaganda, the victim is marked. In this propaganda, the victim is targeted. This propaganda is the glove that covers the fist in any reign of terror.

This propaganda does not only sanction violence against the designated group; it incites it. This propaganda does not only threaten assault; it promises it. These are the dreaded images of terror:

— A Jew, emaciated, behind barbed wire, nearly naked, mutilated by the knife of a Nazi doctor: the atrocity is acknowledged.

— A Vietnamese, in a tiger cage, nearly naked, bones twisted and broken, flesh black and blue: the atrocity is acknowledged.

— A black slave on an American plantation, nearly naked, chained, flesh ripped up from the whip: the atrocity is acknowledged.

— A woman, nearly naked, in a cell, chained, flesh ripped up from the whip, breasts mutilated by a knife: she is entertainment, the boy-next-door's favorite fantasy, every man's precious right, every woman's potential fate.

The woman tortured is sexual entertainment.

The woman tortured is sexually arousing.

The anguish of the woman tortured is sexually exciting.

The degradation of the woman tortured is sexually entrancing.

The humiliation of the woman tortured is sexually pleasing, sexually thrilling, sexually gratifying.

Women are a degraded and terrorized people. Women are degraded and terrorized by men. Rape is terrorism. Wife-beating is terrorism. Medical butchering is terrorism. Sexual abuse in its hundred million forms is terrorism.

Women's bodies are possessed by men. Women are forced into involuntary childbearing because men, not women, control women's reproductive functions. Women are an enslaved population: the crop we harvest is children, the fields we work are houses. Women are forced into committing sexual acts with men that violate integrity because the universal religion—contempt for women—has as its first commandment that women exist purely as sexual fodder for men.

Women are an occupied people. Our very bodies are possessed, taken by others who have an inherent right to take, used or abused by others who have an inherent right to use or abuse. The ideology that energizes and justifies this systematic degradation is a fascist ideology—the ideology of biological inferior-

ity. No matter how it is disguised, no matter what refinements pretty it up, this ideology, reduced to its essence, postulates that women are biologically suited to function only as breeders, pieces of ass, and servants. This fascist ideology of female inferiority is the preeminent ideology on this planet. As Shulamith Firestone put it in *The Dialectic of Sex*, "Sex class is so deep as to be invisible." That women exist to be used by men is, quite simply, the common point of view, and the concomitant of this point of view, inexorably linked to it, is that violence used against women to force us to fulfill our so-called natural functions is not really violence at all. Every act of terror or crime committed against women is justified as sexual necessity and/or is dismissed as utterly unimportant. This extreme callousness passes as normalcy, so that when women, after years or decades or centuries of unspeakable abuse, do raise our voices in outrage at the crimes committed against us, we are accused of stupidity or lunacy, or are ignored as if we were flecks of dust instead of flesh and blood.

We women are raising our voices now, because all over this country a new campaign of terror and vilification is being waged against us. Fascist propaganda celebrating sexual violence against women is sweeping this land. Fascist propaganda celebrating the sexual degradation of women is inundating cities, college campuses, and small towns. Pornography is the propaganda of sexual fascism. Pornography is the propaganda of sexual terrorism. Images of women bound, bruised, and maimed on virtually every street corner, on every magazine rack, in every drug store, in movie house after movie house, on billboards, on posters pasted on walls, are death threats to a female population in rebellion. Female rebellion against male sexual despotism, female rebellion against male sexual authority, is now a reality throughout this country. The men, meeting rebellion with an escalation of terror, hang pictures of maimed female bodies in every public place.

We are forced either to capitulate, to be beaten back by those images of abuse into silent acceptance of female degradation as a fact of life, or to develop strategies of resistance derived from a fully conscious will to resist. If we capitulate—smile, be good, pretend that the woman in chains has nothing to do with us, avert our eyes as we pass her image a hundred times a day—we have lost everything. What, after all, does all our work against rape or wife-beating amount to when one of their pictures is worth a thousand of our words?

Strategies of resistance are developing. Women are increasingly refusing to accept the pernicious, debilitating lie that the sexual humiliation of women for fun, pleasure, and profit is the inalienable right of every man. Petitions, leaf-letting, picketing, boycotts, organized vandalism, speak-outs, teach-ins, letter-writing campaigns, intense and militant harassment of distributors and exhibitors of woman-hating films, and an unyielding refusal to give aid and comfort to the politically self-righteous fellow travellers of the pornographers are increasing as feminists refuse to cower in the face of this new campaign of annihilation. These are beginning actions. Some are rude and some are civil. Some are short-term actions, spontaneously ignited by outrage. Others are long-term strategies that require extensive organization and commitment. Some disregard male law, and break it with militancy and pride. Others dare to de-

mand that the law must protect women from brazen terrorization. All of these actions arise out of the true perception that pornography actively promotes violent contempt for the integrity and rightful freedom of women. And, despite male claims to the contrary, feminists, not pornographers, are being arrested and prosecuted by male law enforcers, all suddenly "civil libertarians" when male privilege is confronted on the streets by angry and uppity women. The concept of "civil liberties" in this country has not ever, and does not now, embody principles and behaviors that respect the sexual rights of women. Therefore, when pornographers are challenged by *women*, police, district attorneys, and judges punish the women, all the while ritualistically claiming to be the legal guardians of "free speech." In fact, they are the legal guardians of male profit, male property, and phallic power.

Feminist actions against pornography must blanket the country, so that no pornographer can hide from, ignore, ridicule, or find refuge from the outrage of women who will not be degraded, who will not submit to terror. Wherever women claim any dignity or want any possibility of freedom, we must confront the fascist propaganda that celebrates atrocity against us head on—expose it for what it is, expose those who make it, those who show it, those who defend it, those who consent to it, those who enjoy it.

In the course of this difficult and dangerous struggle, we will be forced, as we experience the intransigence of those who commit and support these crimes against us, to ask the hardest and deepest questions, the ones we so dread:

What is this male sexuality that requires our humiliation, that literally swells with pride at our anguish?

What does it mean that yet again—and after years of feminist analysis and activism—the men (gay, leftist, whatever) who proclaim a commitment to social justice are resolute in their refusal to face up to the meaning and significance of their enthusiastic advocacy of yet another woman-hating plague?

What does it mean that the pornographers, the consumers of pornography, and the apologists for pornography are the men we grew up with, the men we talk with, live with, the men who are familiar to us and often cherished by us as friends, fathers, brothers, and sons?

How surrounded by this flesh of our flesh that despises us, will we defend the worth of our lives, establish our own authentic integrity, and, at last, achieve our freedom?