

# ...et Terrorisme Psychologique

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It is politically demoralizing to realize how radical or good ideas for women can be so easily taken over by liberals. The movement started three years ago, and most of the hard self-questioning work has been done in the last three years. We could have hoped, as some women are still hoping and believing, that the next generation, our daughters or younger sisters, would be radical and making even fewer concessions than we, and therefore would call us conservative or old-fashioned. But unfortunately it did not occur like this at all. The women who come to the movement now are liberals who have just become interested in and less frightened of the movement because it has, from what I can see in France, become a fashionable thing. The present situation in the movement is one which attracts those women to whom it apparently looks like an "easy situation" and one which employs arrogance towards most women.

They turned being feminist from being someone who represents women as a whole into being something elitist—something better than women as a whole. They turned the radical idea of feminism into something to serve themselves ahead of women as a whole. If feminism is not radical, then what is called "feminism" will be turned against women.

... Psychological terrorism can be an extremely useful tactic for liberal women inside but also outside of the movement to avoid the real political problems, issues, and goals of the movement by personalizing every new idea and every political discussion and therefore by trying to recoup everything which might look good for what we can call their opportunism.

One can imagine the terrible influence of these women inside the movement. They don't want anything to happen unless they know it's going to be good for them personally, unless they can control it for themselves, personally, for their advancement—which in their case means advancement with reference to men. They are afraid of the radicals and the radical ideas because they're afraid they'll hurt their

position with men. So their aim is to stop the radicals or control them.

What happens in the movement when some women take a radical initiative is that the liberals suddenly get very mad and very scornful of these women. They act as if the radicals ought to have "asked permission." And this is one of the crucial things. The liberals want to know absolutely everything about what is going on in the movement so they can have the police/male chauvinist feeling that they are supervising or able to supervise everything.

Liberals use psychological terrorism to slow down the movement because they are frightened of radical ideas. But why are they frightened? Some friends said to me that, after all, almost everyone is frightened when something new happens in his or her life, and that it is a normal reaction. I agree, but only to a certain extent. From what I have personally seen of the liberals' attitude, their fear comes from the fact that when they hear a new idea their first reaction is: "Am I going to be able to use this idea?" So long as they are not immediately sure of that, they have the tendency to automatically block and reject anything new. After a few minutes or a few days they know how to deal in an opportunist way with the new idea, how to exploit it.

... Liberals have deformed the idea of individualism, as they deform all the new concepts they hear. Individualism appears in two forms. Revolutionary individualism permits a dynamic practice in a necessary situation, for example the preparation of a small secret action, and therefore helps to reach radical goals without being under the terrorism of the liberals, and slowed down in any case. In counterpoint there is the liberal individualism which is mostly opportunist and where the goals are not for the movement but for their own self-publicity. In such a case, their "individualism" is just an alibi for their general, perpetual exclusive attitude.

... Liberals are often scared that they will not be able to get other women to agree to the idea or tactic they are advancing for their own power and self-publicity. And other women are damned right to be suspicious of these ideas. To be effective for liberal opportunism an idea or tactic then becomes ineffective for radical goals. So liberals need to use psychological terrorism as the last desperate attempt to "succeed" in their exhibitionist show. Psychological terrorism reminds me very much of an "adult" atti-



tude in front of children, which is to beat children when they cannot be persuaded in other ways. Well, as long as liberal ideas cannot pass through political arguments and through a political discussion, they need a way to beat women. But it is more subtle than parents toward children. Oh, yes! They will only beat the minds of women, knock them down and make them feel confused and guilty about anything.

Confusion is the very first necessary step to manipulating the minds of women and using women for your own desires. Needless to say one of the first points the women's liberation movement has been fighting all over the world is isolation, and the second, confusion. Isolation is the first attitude a woman must break, the first concrete step to getting to a better way of relating to life, and for "feminist" activities. It will also help her to find out that her problems are not that different from the woman next door, and that the struggle against the exploitation of the society is a struggle that we shall do together, not isolated in our rooms or apartments. And what is more thrilling in life than realizing that you are not alone anymore, that you can share your anxieties but also your desires and your will to fight?

The more you understand the fewer concessions you will make. This is why greater consciousness and clarity comes as a threat to the liberal.

But what is the game of the liberals? Precisely to make the women who have understood or felt all this already feel once again confused about it. Their game has the precise tendency to make the movement, and the women, of course, regress in their consciousness-raising. The liberals create inside the movement a feeling of isolation for every woman of the same type that women know outside the movement.

... They worry about the image of women, the image of the movement—and try to present what they see as the best image. But it is an image designed to appeal to upper class men. They make women, the masses of women, feel guilty for not living in the proper way, in the "new way of life" way, the proper feminist way. They have created a new good woman that women must live up to in place of the old "good woman" standards—actually it's pretty much the same—except this new good woman they call feminist.

... Of course, sometimes women (like me) get extremely mad at them. But before we can criticize them, they have a way of "forbidding" criticism. I shall give one example which happened to me not very long ago. I was in a car, ready to try to have a strong political argument with one of the liberal women. Before I opened my mouth, she said: "You know, Claudine, maybe I am violent sometimes, but it is simply due to the fact that I am not self-confident enough. You cannot imagine how insecure I feel. I am not at all as self-confident as I may look sometimes."

Well, what can you say after that? I felt squeezed: if I had

started criticizing her practice inside the movement, she would have immediately said, "This is due to the fact that I feel insecure." So she mixes personal affectivity in the middle of a political discussion, which is the best way of protecting herself from any deep political criticism, and which permits her to go on with the superficial relationships she has with the other women, and therefore to use psychological terrorism anytime she wants to as much as she wants to.

... Liberal women will do anything to become "women's lib stars", even call themselves radical. One sentence they use all the time illustrates their competitiveness. In talking about an article on women, instead of criticizing it they will say "This one is ten years in advance, this one is twenty years in advance, etc. . ." Again, they are protecting themselves in advance from any criticism. And when some women dare to give them some reasonable criticism on very specific feminist political points, they generally respond very badly: Why are you so judgmental? Why are you getting so emotional? Well, first of all, an article is not twenty years in advance; this is nonsense. Secondly, the women who are getting emotional are they. The ones who are so judgmental on a personal basis are they. We radicals are judgmental on a political basis. Sometimes we talk about the personal, the personal is political, as long as political issues are reflected in concrete personal life and experience; but we don't make political issues into personal ones, into personality conflicts and rivalries. When a political discussion is necessary, it becomes to them only a name-calling fight where what is involved is more the reputation of the person than just the rightness of her ideas.

Also, what this "ten years in advance" reflects is the concern of the woman about what people think. It becomes a social thing instead of a political question. And what is self-publicity if not another side of social life?

There is one other face of manipulation we must mention: the liberals very often adopt a sudden charming attitude towards radicals, women we all know they dislike very much. It is a way of disarming the mistrust more and more radicals feel towards liberals. The liberals therefore use charm and seduction to try to get the radicals back under their power. They know that sometimes people can be flattered by some "gentle" remark and not see the hypocritical attitude behind it. Then at the least expected moment they go back to their use of psychological terrorism.

So the liberal tactic needs two schema. By this I mean that psychological terrorism needs a counterpoint to make the tactic complete. This is why the attitude of the liberals is always a counter-balance position between charming and terrorizing other women. It is a very delicate balance which is used to keep us *off* balance and confuse our feelings about them.

It is time to denounce this delicate balance. No more confusion, no more ambiguous opinion about them. Our opinion is strict and rigorous now that we know the simple schema they are using to manipulate us. Psychological ter-



rorism is a seductive, charming attitude, a double-edged method liberals are using to reach their goals which correspond to society's preferences and to the preferences of men.

... Some will say that this kind of criticism should stay within the movement. I don't agree because the destructive work the liberals are doing includes and concerns all women. These women are worse than anything else because they are destroying the movement from the inside, frightening women who are scared of staying in such a terrorist atmosphere. We radicals have always been in an "in-between" position, squeezed between liberals and the rest of the capitalist, paternalist society. We have always accepted this uneasy position, with the idea that it was very important not to have a split between women because it would give an alibi to the society to operate once more against women. But this is nonsense. Society does not need alibis to operate against us, and is daily enjoying racism and anti-womanism, thank you. The second point is that this "in-between" position that we have finally gives an advantage to men and to liberals who know how to profit from the guilt feelings of women and their unstable and unclear position. Also, this position is a very defensive one, because we have to justify our "extreme" position all the time.

After having denounced the attitude of the liberals, I would like now to denounce the myths radicals have about liberals. One very false one is: because they are liberals, they are less extremist and therefore they reach the masses more directly than we do because they don't frighten them. I shall give a few examples from the French movement which demonstrate the exact contrary.

What I want to show is the fact that radical ideas effectively turn on the masses, but only when the radicals can use the media directly. (Liberals have more access to the media than do radicals since they don't frighten the media. Therefore in France, most of the radical ideas are presented to the masses of women second hand by the liberals and completely distorted.)

I shall give the example of the slogan "Contraception and abortion free and without anything to pay" (in French: *Avortement contraception libres et gratuits*). This idea comes both from the U.S. and from the radical tendency of the movement. Despite France's important Catholic background it was an idea which really reached the masses of French women. Just two years ago abortion was a "taboo" subject of discussion. Nowadays, I can hear women from any social class and any religion daring to talk about it—even about *her* abortion.

Another example concerns the situation of unwed mothers who are under 21 in France, and, more specifically, the unwed mothers who are in high schools and who were treated like whores until two years ago. When a young woman in high school is pregnant, the headmistress fires her automatically because she could give bad ideas to her comrades in her class. Also, she will not be taken back into the high

school after the child is born. So being pregnant in high school most of the time ruins your whole life. The parents have a tendency of kicking their daughters out of their home because they don't want the neighbors to know about it. Some of these unwed mothers, or on the way to becoming unwed mothers, are put in special state schools (which look much more like jails, as a matter of fact) where they learn how to sew and take care of a child, which is going to be a great help to them when they look for a job: no diplomas, no education and a child... Well, needless to say, two years ago it was a subject even more taboo than abortion. At the very beginning of the struggle, though everyone was against us, even the socialist groups were not interested (it was not serious enough for them), though even some radical women had the feeling it would be impossible to reach the attention of the masses of women on this subject, we supported the hunger strike of some pregnant young women of 13 and 15 years old and, with their approval, occupied the state school where they were confined. The press and the TV talked about it every half-hour that specific Sunday, let the unwed mothers express themselves directly through interviews, and the case was won. The day after, they were received with Simone de Beauvoir by the responsible minister for all of France. But also, what was won was the fact that suddenly all French people talked about it, and even more so the women who are the most exploited, the women from the lower classes. Most of the young unwed mothers come from very poor families. The action became immediately very popular among all different social classes, as a matter of fact. The whole idea of the struggle reached the masses of women without being distorted much.

These examples show how such a regressive, such a backward country as France can be reached and willing to accept radical ideas. France and with it French people are less anti-woman than we thought at first. It also means that the radicals are too pessimistic about the consequences their spectacular actions have on French women. And if we radicals are sometimes wrong about the French women's reaction, it is in some way also due to the fact that the media give a false image of French women on TV, radio, etc. ... and that we radicals are also alienated by this image. This explains our good surprise about the reaction of the French people, even of some religious French women. In general I think we can say that most of the time the people of a country are less rightist or reformist than the men or women who are representing or elected by them and therefore talking for them. The same type of thing happened within the M.L.F. (the French Women's Liberation Movement). Generally the liberals who dare to speak for the movement and pretend to be delegates speak in such a subtle way that it does not frighten any representative of the media, and their speeches never correspond to our beliefs on political feminist points.

This is why radical women should be more effective and active without feeling anxious and without any guilt feeling. By letting the liberals be the only ones to use the media, we are letting them manipulate the minds of half the



population of the country, letting them be the new "in" people of the country, letting them create a fashionable atmosphere around the women's struggle so that it loses all its real effective impact.

But it is time to be on the offensive now, before the liberals completely smash the goals of the movement. And let's not waste our energy any longer on nonvaluable things like liberal fights, which are fights on a personal level, but let's use our energy in a more dynamic way for a real concrete purpose, a political one where struggles are worth being fought. As long as the liberal schema are international, I hope this article will help groups everywhere in what they are doing for women with women. The time for the offensive is now. It is just a beginning—the women will go on!

(Uncle) Toms; I told him, only have power if we let them have power. I mean, if a Tom says get off the streets and you get off the streets, then that's your fault, not his. If on the other hand a Tom tells you to get off the streets and you don't—well, then the power structure has no use for him.

— Nikki Giovanni,  
GEMINI, 1971



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"Without Women There Won't Be a Revolution" demonstration Paris, Nov. 20, 1971