

This Is Not A Love Story: Armed Struggle Against The Institutions Of Patriarchy

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Many feminist theorists and activists categorically condemn “violence” — be it offensive or defensive, physical or verbal — on the grounds that “violence” (an extremely ambiguous term in itself) has its roots in patriarchal culture and the patriarchal mindset, and is somehow the “invention” of men — as if violence doesn’t appear everywhere in the natural world in myriad forms, usually contributing in significant ways to the balance of local ecosystems. While certain feminist thinkers put forth an analysis of violence and hierarchical power relationships that is well worth considering, a wholesale condemnation of revolutionary violence aimed at the destruction of that which oppresses us is a gross oversimplification of an extremely complex situation: that is, the web of patriarchal tyranny that all of us, wimmin and men alike, find ourselves born into, where violence is used by our oppressors to enforce our political and social submission, and where we are all desperately looking for effective ways to reclaim our lives. Analyzing the role of armed resistance movements (and wimmin participation in them) in the larger liberation struggle against patriarchy and civilization from an entirely “essentialist” perspective — as Robin Morgan does in her often cited work *The Demon Lover* — is a misleading and deceptive form of *Herstorical revisionism*, as it completely discounts the lives of wimmin like Harriet Tubman, who led armed guerrilla raids into the southern United States (basically a slave-owning armed camp) to rescue fellow New Afrikans from captivity, as well as numerous other wimmin like Assata Shakur, Marilyn Buck, and Bernadine Dorn, who enthusiastically embraced armed struggle as a tactic and had no regrets about it. This article will not attempt to defend armed struggle (because in our opinion it requires no justification) but will instead focus on two very specific groups (of many) that engaged in violent rebellion against the institutions of patriarchy.

“No one who understands the feminist movement, or who knows the soul of a real woman, would make the mistake of supposing that the modern woman is fighting because she wants to be a man. That idea is the invention of masculine intelligence. Woman is fighting today, as she has all the way through the ages, for the freedom to be a woman.”

— Anne B. Hamman

A Herstory Of The Revolutionary Cells and Rote Zora: Armed Resistance In West Germany

The Revolutionary Cells (RZ) made their first appearance on November 16th, 1973 with an attack against ITT in West Berlin to point out the participation of this multinational corporation in Pinochet’s military putsch in Chile. In 1975, the first high-explosive attack was undertaken by the wimmin of the RZ against the Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe, Germany, the day after it supported a new abortion law. The RZ wimmin naturally demanded the total right for every womyn to have an abortion, as a right to self-determination over their own bodies. In 1976, numerous wimmin broke with the RZ and formed their own splinter group and from 1977 onwards, the militant feminist anti-patriarchal urban guerrilla group Rote Zora (Red Zora) acted autonomously and independently, though some wimmin still participated in the Revolutionary Cells, which had by then shifted its focus to acts of clandestine sabotage in support of the larger anti-nuclear movement in Germany.

Red Zora attacked predominantly patriarchal institutes, companies, and persons representing and building up a male sexist society, which is oppressing and exploiting wimmin worldwide. They have conducted campaigns against porn traders, sex shops, international traders of wimmin (those who profit from importing Asian wimmin as “brides” for West German men), doctors who are carrying out forced sterilizations, the Doctors Guild (“We see the Federal Doctors Guild as exponents of rape in white trenchcoats” – RZ), as well as drug companies like Schering who produced the birth-defect causing drug *Duogynon*. Another popular Red Zora tactic was the illegal reprinting of bus and streetcar fares. In individual cases, the Red Zora worked to put together a critique of the peace movement in 1984. In this paper, they criticized the peace movement as a bourgeois movement with an apocalyptic vision. The Red Zora said that the major mistake of the peace movement was to concentrate their political goal only on the preservation of peace in the metropolis instead of discussing the imperialist context between armament and crisis: Third World misery and social cutbacks; sexism and racism.

The Red Zora in the 90’s

In the first two or three years of the 1990’s, the RZ concentrated their actions on the issue of West German foreigner and refugee policies. Attacks such as the one on the Center for the Central Register in Cologne, or the kneecapping of Hollenburg – the Chief of Immigration Police in West Berlin – show the wide range of these militant politics. While those who were attacked were directly responsible for the racist refugee policies in Germany, the intentions of the attacks on the institutions involved in formulating these racist policies – whose documents, files and data were destroyed – was to procure a space which wasn’t controlled or regulated by the State.

Since the early 70’s, the RZ and Red Zora have carried out over 200 attacks against the infrastructure of patriarchal culture. Red Zora’s most comprehensive and successful attack campaign so far has been the planting of incendiary bombs in ten branches of the Adler Corporation, one of West Germany’s largest clothing manufacturers selling discount clothing in the FRG, produced by low paid wimmin in South Korean and Sri Lankan factories.

“The wimmin at Adler in South Korea struggle against the exploitation of their capacity for work and are putting up a fight against the daily sexism. They call for support from the FRG for their struggle. As a result, the shitty living and working conditions of wimmin in the vacuous production centers of the three continents and especially those of Adler in South Korea and Sri Lanka are becoming more widely known here through leaflets, events and actions at Adler’s retail centers. In these actions, anti-imperialism can be practical. So it was possible for the struggle there (by the wimmin in South Korea) and the struggle here (by Red Zora) are compatible: We aren’t fighting for the wimmin in the Third World, we’re fighting alongside them.”

– Quote from Red Zora, in their Adler statement

In 1987, when Red Zora and their sister group in West Berlin, the Amazonen, fire bombed ten Adler outlets throughout West Germany, they caused millions of dollars in damages. Because of this, Adler was forced to meet the demands of the textile workers, clearly proving that militant resistance can be very effective. Both the Revolutionary Cells and Red Zora have anti-authoritarian

structures and a decentralized decision-making process for choosing targets. As well, they point out that militant direct actions are just one part of the revolutionary movement:

“Although we participate in far-reaching and extensive legal work campaigns and social movements through our militant actions, these actions aren’t of any more importance than handing out flyers or leaflets, going to demonstrations, having sit-ins, publishing newspapers, educating people, or squatting houses. We don’t have a hierarchical system for choosing actions. Thinking in hierarchical divisions puts actions in a perspective of privilege and makes it prone to a patriarchal way of thinking.”

– Quote by members of the RZ in an interview that appeared in *Autonomie* in 1980

One reason for the tactical successes of the Red Zora is that in their direct actions – militant as they are – they address issues that many people are already educated on and sympathetic to. For example, Red Zora has gained wide popular support because their actions appeal to the massive feminist movement that already exists in West Germany, where the anarchist and radical media had been doing much work for a long time to educate the public on issues involving sexism, wimmin’s oppression and exploitation, and wimmin’s rights to the control of their own bodies. While the RZ doesn’t claim as much support as Red Zora, in 1987, supporters of the Revolutionary Cells published the book *Der Weg Zum Erfolg* (The Way To Success), explaining their strategies, politics, and actions. Less than a week after the book hit the shelves of radical bookstores, the entire printing (around 3000) was sold out.

The high degree of effectiveness of many RZ and Red Zora actions wouldn’t be possible without popular support. By themselves, their actions might only serve to alienate them from the more long-term struggle. However, with the support of the mass movements, members of the RZ and Red Zora are able to work among the numbers of people active in the above-ground struggle without exposing their underground identities. In their herstory, only one womyn has been arrested for membership in Red Zora, but due to lack of evidence against her, charges were dropped.

Resistance Is Possible: Excerpts From An Interview With Two Anonymous Members Of The Red Zora

(Editors note: This was first published in June of 1984 in the German women’s magazine, Emma, and was the first interview where active members of the Red Zora explain why they struggle autonomously inside the RZ’s and the nature of their relationship to the wimmins movement)

Interviewer: Let’s start with who you are.

Zora 1: If this is a personal question then we are women between the ages of 20 and 51. Some of us sell our labour, some of us take what we need, and others are “parasites” on the welfare state. Some have children, some don’t. We buy in disgusting supermarkets, we live in ugly houses, we like going for walks or to the cinema, the theatre, or the disco. We have parties and cultivate idleness. And of course we live with the contradiction that many things we want to do can’t be done spontaneously. But after successful actions we have great fun!

Interviewer: What does your name mean?

Zora 2: “The Red Zora and Her Gang” is a children’s book about a wild street kid who steals from the rich to give to the poor. Until today it seemed to be a male privilege to build gangs or to act outside the law. Yet particularly because girls and women are strangled by thousands of personal and political chains this should make us masses of “bandits” fighting for our freedom, our dignity, and our humanity. Law and order are fundamentally against us, even if we have hardly achieved any rights and have to fight for them daily. Radical women’s struggles and loyalty to the law – there is no way they go together!

Interviewer: Yet it is no coincidence that your name has the same first letters as the revolutionary Cells (RZ):

Zora 1: No, of course not. Rote Zora expresses the fact that we have the same principles as the RZ’s, the same concept of building illegal structures and a network which is not controlled by the state apparatus. This is so we can carry out our subversive direct actions – in connection with the open legal struggles of various movements. “We Strike Back” – This slogan of the women of May 1968 is no longer as controversial today regarding individual violence against women. But it is still very controversial, and most of the time taboo as an answer to the power conditions that steadily produce this violence. The women of RZ started in 1974 with the bombing of the Supreme Court in Karlsruhe because we wanted the total abolishment of 218 (the abortion law). Then followed the bombing against Schering during it’s Duogynon trial, and constant attacks against sex shops. Actually, one of these porno stores should burn or be devastated every day! Therefore we think it absolutely necessary to tear the oppression of women as sexual objects and producers of children out of the “private domain” and to show our anger and hate with fire and flames.

Interviewer: Do you understand yourselves as being part of the women’s movement, or of the guerrilla movement, or both and how do you see the context?

Zora 1: We are part of the women’s movement. We struggle for women’s liberation. Besides theoretical commonalities there also exists another unity between our practice and the legal women’s movement, that is the personal radicalization which can encourage other women to resist and take themselves and the struggle seriously. It is the feeling of strength if you see that you can do things which before you were afraid of, and if you see that it brings about something. We would like to share this experience. We don’t think it has to happen in the forms we choose. For example, take the women who disrupted a peep show by drawing women’s symbols and dropping stink bombs – these actions encourage us, strengthen us, and we hope women feel the same way about our actions. Our dream is that everywhere small bands of women will exist, that in every city a rapist, a women trader, a battering husband, a misogynist publisher, a porn trader, a pig gynecologist should have to feel that a band of women will find them to attack them and make them look silly in public. For example, that it will be written on his house who he is and what he did, on his car, at his job – women’s power everywhere! It requires a continuous movement whose aims cannot be integrated, whose uncompromising section cannot be forced into legal reforms, whose anger and dedication to non-parliamentary struggles and anti-institutional forms is expressed without limit.

I Have Not Signed A Treaty With Any Government: A Brief Look At “Direct Action” and “The Wimmin’s Fire Brigade”

In 1982, five Canadian anti-authoritarian activists, variously known as Direct Action, the Wimmin’s Fire Brigade, and the Vancouver Five, conducted a highly visible series of guerrilla actions against patriarchal, industrial civilization. When the five anarchists — two wimmin and three men — who comprised these cells were finally captured by the Canadian state in 1983, they were charged with a host of clandestine attacks on industries that represented some of the most notorious war criminals, environmental despoilers, and exploiters of wimmin and children.

The most serious charges that these anarchists faced when they were caught were related to three bombing operations, all conducted in support of massive public campaigns of protest: one against the Litton Systems plant near Toronto, where parts for Cruise missiles are made; another against the environmentally destructive Cheekye-Dunsmuir power project of British Columbia on Vancouver Island; and also a smattering against retail stores of Red Hot Video in Vancouver, where videotapes glorifying rape and other forms of savagery toward woman and children were sold. In addition, the Five were also charged with conspiring to hold up a Brinks armored car to finance their struggle (the hold-up never took place) and a variety of other weapon offenses.

Each of these actions produced very specific tangible results that assisted the above-ground campaigns they were meant to compliment : In the case of Litton Systems of Canada, there had already been an ongoing mass struggle of sit-ins and other forms of civil disobedience before their Toronto factory was partially destroyed by a bomb attack in 1982. These demonstrations escalated after the bombing resulting in Litton losing their contract to produce the guidance system for an advanced version of the Cruise missile being developed by NATO and the United States military.

But the actions that we most want to analyze — within the context of this article — are the actions carried out by Ann Hansen and Julie Belmas, two members of Direct Action who formed the Wimmin’s Fire Brigade and firebombed three Red Hot Video Stores in the city of Vancouver (Red Hot was an American chain that had built up an inventory of video tapes pirated from hardcore porn films). These actions are worth looking at because they are a powerful reminder that the *physical dismantling* of patriarchy is just as important and necessary as the dismantling of patriarchy in our minds. Wimmin’s groups had been fighting for six months against the Red Hot chain when The Wimmin’s Fire Brigade lit the way to victory with firebombs: Within a few weeks, scores of wimmin’s groups of all stripes had issued statements of sympathy and understanding for the action, demonstrations had been held in a dozen centers across the province, and six porn shops had closed, moved away or withdrawn much of their stock out of fear that they would be the “next target”.

The Wimmin’s Fire Brigade (WFB) actions were so successful because it was so well-integrated into, and complimentary to, the public campaigns. As *B.C. Blackout*, a biweekly autonomist newsletter put it, “the action of the WFB could only have the impact it did because of the months of spade work by many groups and individuals educating themselves, doing research, making contacts, pressuring the authorities, documenting their case — in short, building the infrastructure for an effective, grass-roots movement.” Since Vancouver already had a well-organized and militant campaign at work in opposition to the merchandising of violence against wimmin, the support was there when the WFB struck.

The support was also there when Ann Hansen and Julie Belmas went to trial the following year. Every day hundreds of female and male supporters rallied on the courthouse steps carrying banners with messages like “Ann Hansen is a Freedom Fighter Not a Terrorist!”. In her final court statement just before her sentencing, Ann Hansen concluded with the comment: “Businesses such as Litton, BC Hydro and Red Hot Video are the real terrorists. They are guilty of crimes against humanity and the earth, yet they are free to carry on their illegal activities while those who resist and those who are their victims remain in prison. How do we, who have no armies, weapons, power or money, stop these criminals before they destroy the earth? I believe if there is any hope for the future, it lies in our struggle.” As expected Ann was given life (she’s now out) and Julie was given 20 years. At her sentencing, Ann got one more opportunity to express herself, and she did just that by picking up a tomato she had smuggled into the courtroom and heaving it in the direction of the judge. It splattered on the curtain above his head, and he ducked out of the courtroom before he was called on to witness any further disruption of the courts decorum. In May 1983, the long-running canadian anarchist paper Kick It Over published a statement by Ann Hansen and Julie Belmas that was written from their jail cells. We would like to conclude this article with a passage from this prison statement titled, “We Are Not Terrorists”...

“Being womyn identified, politically conscious, environmentalists and determined to challenge the power and profit motives of the patriarchal society that insures the rape and mutilation of our mother earth, we refuse to accept their labels of us as terrorists. We know that there are many sisters who share our radical analysis of the issues around the charges laid on us. For centuries the authorities have reacted violently to womyn who resisted; they used to brand us as “witches” and burned us, now they label us as “terrorists” and will try to bury us in their cement tombs.

The State and it’s media are portraying us as elements of a “lunatic fringe” so that people will be frightened of us instead of relating to us with their rebellious spirits. We must not allow the liberalism of this society to hide the sickness of the rulers and rapers behind their institutions, laws and lies. We are always threatened with their violence, whether it be through nuclear power plants, nuclear weapons, industrialism, prisons or sexual terrorism in our everyday society. We will face their horrors boldly and challenge their corporate interests with the determination and strength of womyn warriors. We will see a resistance movement building, in an attempt to rid the earth of further corporate destruction so that future generations can survive.

It is not possible in this society to be a “liberated” womyn without being in a constant state of conflict and struggle. However, if our conflict and struggle is not guided by a consciousness of the magnitude of the problem, then our energies will be misdirected and futile. The womyn’s movement can not be a one-issue oriented struggle, but must understand and embrace the ecological struggle, indigenous peoples resistance and anti-imperialist liberation movements because the same patriarchal institutions that perpetuate our oppression also oppress the animals, the indigenous peoples, the third world peoples and the earth.”

In Total Strength And Resistance

Continually spinning through sisterhood

Ann Hansen

Julie Belmas

Once Again, this article is nowhere near as comprehensive as it could be: herstory is full of innumerable examples of strong, defiant wimmin who have utilized revolutionary violence in their own struggle for liberation, and to deny this or attempt to discredit revolutionary violence by branding it “male identified” is bullshit and an insult to wimmin everywhere. Political oppression can only be ended through resistance, and quite often this resistance will have to take on “violent” forms. Every real freedom fighter — whether they are female or male — recognizes this at some point, and stops wasting their time engaging in irresolvable philosophical debates and instead channels their energies towards the destruction of that which oppresses us all.

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Originally published in "Disorderly Conduct" #5. For more information on the revolutionary politics of Direct Action and the Wimmin's Fire Brigade, we suggest you order the pamphlet, "Writings of the Vancouver Five (available through the Green Anarchy Distro PO Box 11331 Eugene Oregon 97440 for \$3). Ann Hansen has also published a book recently called "Direct Action: Memoirs of an Urban Guerrilla", which is available through the AK Press Mail-order Catalog

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