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The Violence of Poverty

Patrizia

September 1989

Yet another rape. But today violence against a woman is more amusing if it takes place in a group: of at least 14. This is what happened in a village in Militello, Sicily. A fifteen year old girl was raped by boys between 11 and 18 years old all looking for adventure. An adventure with a girl whose parents had just returned to Sicily after years of emigration.

The newspapers point out one particular: the girl, who became pregnant as a result of the rape, was mentally disturbed. Her womanhood, her freedom of choice, is trampled on before she starts. First by her parents, who almost kept the fact hidden because of their shame, then the whole village, who interpreted the event as a boyish prank to defend the rapist kids, then the judge. The girl is being prevented from having an abortion. The village priest shows off his sullen moralism.

This time they couldn't even use the alibi of a miniskirt, of the seductive gaze of the continental woman who — they say — attracts men and distracts them from their good feelings of father, husband or brother.

In that environment there is a more subtle violence, a violence that comes from ignorance and fear. The ignorance of the

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boy rapists who pursue images according to which a woman cannot be considered a human being to be respected and loved.

In the south, as in the north, sex is still something dirty, composed of violence and abuse. In Milan a girl is raped by a male nurse in a hospital bed. In Termini station in Rome eighty people stand by and watch as an attempted rape takes place on a station bench. The rapist was then covered by the crowd and escaped. So, look out. From the tiny Sicilian village to the huge metropolis, rape remains the alternative of idiots, the last beach of interior marginalization and the incapacity to communicate one's rage in any other way.

But in a little village the authority of the priest, the judge, the *carabinieri*, the public opinion of "respectable" people who don't want any scandal, bears a fundamental weight on things. In such an environment it is even possible for abortion to be denied to a girl who has been raped.

Violence is practically subscribed to by a power structure which itself exercises a double violence on the population: on the girl who must submit to the decisions made by the family and the rest of the village; and on the boys.

They are all more concerned with obeying laws and morality than about the life of this young woman.

We must begin to shout our rage again, but not by asking for more severe laws or the application of new ones: this only helps the system to castrate any possible search for freedom, our own and that of others, men and women alike.

If we believe that the practice of rape is born from a precise social condition, then we must not humiliate ourselves with demands for laws that only play the game into the hands of those who rape and exploit us daily.

We are not interested in whether those who raped the girl are found guilty or innocent. That would be too easy. We must fight the whole structure that contributes to creating the idea of violence against women and against marginalized people and proletarians in general. And, as usual, the latter, instead of

beating up the bosses, are fighting among themselves, numbing their minds with all the shit that power produces. Violence often grows from conditions of poverty and survival that create the need to possess at all costs what one cannot have through practices of freedom, be it sex or any other part of normal activity.

If we want to overcome this profound contradiction between the request to be "regimented" and a search for liberation within human beings, then we must struggle in our own way and with our own instruments against all the relations of domination that generate violence. Perhaps that day in Militello the boys would have preferred to have beaten up a priest or to have created some perspective for a less rotten life. Today they are locked up in a cell and are asking themselves why. The state will pardon their misdeed, but they will always remain convinced that all that, even their very punishment, was right and fits into the normal way of things.