**War/Rape/Porn**

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[Woman’s name] penetrated [pregnant woman’s name], first with her fingers, then with a stick. She whipped her naked body, leaving small lashes as [pregnant woman’s name] moaned and protested. Then [woman’s name] shoved a machete up the vagina of [pregnant woman’s name], instantly killing the fetus and leaving the mother to bleed to death.

(African Rights 1995)

I was reading this account of a woman’s perpetration of conflict sexual violence against another woman, considering including the passage in my forthcoming book, *Rape Among Women*, on a long haul flight across the Atlantic. As I thought about the passage, I noticed the man next to me reading over my shoulder. Since this happens fairly frequently, I went about my business.

[Woman’s name] commanded [man’s name] to rape [second woman’s name] in front of her husband, and then to let as many soldiers as he could find fuck her in front of her husband while he begged for both of their lives.

(African Rights 1995)

Then I noticed it. The man next to me, still reading over my shoulder, was visibly aroused, and appeared to be touching himself as he adjusted his blanket to try to hide it. He noticed I noticed, excused himself, and returned about ten minutes later. He *got off on* the horrors of conflict sexual violence.

That is actually crazy. Conflict sexual violence is one of the most brutal forms of *both* conflict violence and gender repression. And the man next to me found it *desirable and sexy.* I can think of very few things I would find more grotesque.

That grotesque, though, is everyday. There is an industry in rape porn (e.g., Boeringer 1994), and in war porn – both literally (e.g., Shawver 1995; Healey 2010) and in terms of the glorification of militarization, brutality, and killing (e.g., Baudrillard 2004). The man next to be being (quietly) aroused by what he read to be war rape porn is a strikingly *normal* undertone, and an expected result of the sexualization of war and the violence of sexualization in (American) militarized culture (e.g., Schott 1996; Sjoberg and Gentry 2008).

The war rape porn *undertone* In my unpleasant airplane encounter is invisible in public discourses of war, sex, and sexual violence. But what if I could have recorded it, and broadcast it? What if people who are either aroused by or insensitive to conflict sexual violence had to see, to watch, to gaze on the awful reality of the fetishization of abuse? If I could *show* people the grotesque nature of getting off on abuse, gender subordination, humiliation, and killing?

It was *performing* the fetish of conflict sexual violence that I thought of when I read Jack Halberstam’s (2011) suggestion that Gaga feminism uses the speculative as a way back into confrontational realness. It is the very silence around the existence and even quiet enjoyment of conflict sexual violence that is a constitutive condition of its possibility – the idea that *rape is hot* is complicit in the commission of conflict sexual violence (Ravenstone 2005; Strassberg and Locker 1998).

Google “war rape.” Imagine masturbating to those pictures. Imagine finding the abuse of those women so sexy that you could not help yourself.

That image is, in Halberstam’s terms – an engagement of ‘performance of excess” which can be characterized as “crazy; unreadable’ (2011: 74). It is meant to inspire discomfort through confrontational realness – on the one hand, it is unimaginable; on the other hand, it is tangibly possible and even desirable. It is both impossible and present in the consideration of its impossibility.

Halberstam’s Gaga feminism suggests that the new feminist should ‘be a fly in the ointment, a wrench in the machinery, an obstacle to the smooth, the seamless, and the quiet extension of the status quo’ (2011: 142). Reading that, I wondered what it would mean to be a fly in the ointment *of war*; to be a wrench in the machinery *of rape culture*; and to be an obstacle to the smooth, the seamless, and the quiet extension of the status quo *normalization of militarization.* Talking about traditional gender orders, Halberstam (2011) suggests that ‘it is not that other ways of being do not exist, it is that we lack the imagination to see and comprehend them’. I thought something similar of militarism – that it is not that the deconstruction of militarism is impossible, it is that we lack the imagination to see, comprehend, and reach for them – especially with the limitations of traditional (gendered) political discourses about war and militarism (see, e.g., Young 2003; Sjoberg 2013).

The shock of thinking about conflict sexual violence *as erotic* next to thinking of conflict sexual violence *as disgusting* is meant to interrupt the normalcy of war, of rape culture, and of the war/rape culture in militarization (e.g., Enloe 2000; Baaz and Stern 2009). The glorification/sexualization of conflict/sex/violence, whether in the encounter I had on the airplane, in internet porn, in video games, or among soldiers actually fighting in a war is at once the everyday and the unimaginable, when it should only be the unimaginable. It will, however, as Halberstam suggests, be the everyday until our capacity for imagination make it visible, and therefore available for confrontation, access, reinterpretation, and deconstruction. The sexualization of conflict/conflict sexual violence/sexual violence is ever-present – the *discussion, showing, and outing* of that eroticism may seem, as Halberstam (2011) suggests, to be ‘naïve nonsense’, but it instead (like other Gaga excesses) “actually participates in big and meaningful forms of critique.”

The critique here is the exposure of the normal *as grotesque* and the grotesque (war/rape) *as normal*, where ‘our understanding of the normal gets manufactured, repurposed, recirculated, and then leveraged for the purposes of control’ (Halberstam 2011). Discussing norms of heterosexuality, Halberstam (2011) suggests that ‘compulsory heterosexuality is a system that makes it seem as if heterosexuality, with all of its imperfections and flaws and glitches, is the only game in town’.

Going ‘gaga’ in analyzing war suggests that compulsory *militarism* is a system that makes it seem as if *militarism*, with all its imperfections and flaws and glitches, is the only game in town. The *normalization* of militarization is manufactured, repurposed, recirculated, and leveraged to replicate and reify war/rape/porn, while making its normalization invisible.

“Going gaga” about war – by revealing the war/rape/porn nexus or otherwise – uses shock and speculation as a way into confrontational realness about the horrors of war. In so doing, I contend that it could provide a way into inciting war theorizing from a hallucinatory intellectual position – one of excess, masquerade, and promiscuous borrowing. Such an approach has the potential to expose both war and itself – a rawness that might break the cycle of normalization of the grotesque *by recognizing the grotesque in self.*  In this way, “going gaga” about war has the possibility to ‘make big moves, bold moves, aggressive moves’ and to ‘do damage’ to inherited notions and enduring conceptions of war/rape/porn (Halberstam 2011).

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