

Are All Women Always Victims? Even Female Serial Killers?

by Phyllis Chesler



Julie Bindel

Silly me. There I was, soldiering my way through a book about prostitution written by [Julie Bindel](#), whom I do not know and have never met. Since we are both abolitionists in terms of sex slavery and we both view prostitution as the greatest form of violence against women, I found her email address and asked if she might want to read my forthcoming book, [Requiem for a Female Serial Killer](#). The work is about Aileen Carol Wuornos, the prostitute who has been described as America's first female serial killer. Bindel said yes and I sent her a pdf.

About two weeks ago, on publication day, Bindel sent me [her review](#) of my new book. It was a totally unexpected "hit" job but one which completely missed the mark.

As many authors before me have said: I did not write the book that Bindel reviewed. The fact that *Requiem* is a blend of fiction and fact, a true crime genre, apparently passed her by or even offended her. None other than the great [Bruce Bawer](#) reviewed the book that I actually wrote.

I wrote to the editors at [Unherd](#) on November 23rd and again on November 27th. A week later, on November 30th, I finally heard from one of the editors who wrote that she was “not sure why your article slipped through our generally very tight net. It came at the end of a completely frantic week. But that’s no excuse. I’m afraid we wouldn’t publish a response to a book review as a magazine piece. And alas, we don’t have a letters page. That is, however, something we are considering for the future. And your email is useful in that respect.”

Glad to have been of service but I do not enjoy being silenced.

Bindel’s unexpected “hit” exposes some festering issues among feminists—even among those who share the same view about violence against women. Like men, women can also be territorial, competitive, envious, and mean-spirited; but like all ideologues, feminist ideologues will attack any other feminist who departs, every so slightly from the party line. Poisonous posses form to defame and silence the perceived outlier.

In this case, that would be me.

This phenomenon was true long before the Mullahs issued their fatwa against Salman Rushdie. I used to call it the Chinese Cultural Revolution in feminist America. Feminists eventually called it “trashing” but I think it is a major precursor to Cancel Culture.

Bindel’s review is filled with inaccuracies, misperceptions, and sadly, some lies. She has also appropriated my (unacceptably “tabloid”) language—and uses it in order to damn

my work. Bindel closes with: "Wuornos flipped the script. She blew wide open the reality of women's lives in the face of the worst of male violence." That sounds just like my voice in parts of *Requiem*.

Bindel writes that I've "stripped Wuornos of dignity and (turn) her into tabloid fodder." Why would I title the book *Requiem* if I were not engaged in trying to bury this poor soul with dignity and gravitas?

Bindel seems to think that I'm the one who has portrayed Wuornos as a "monster," and since Bindel views Wuornos as Every Prostituted Woman, she finds what I (haven't) written "voyeuristic" and "exploitative."

In one of many letters that Wuornos wrote to me and which are published in *Requiem*, Bindel seizes upon one letter as proof that even Wuornos knew that I was "a swindle." The problem here is that Wuornos wrote this very same letter to everyone who came to her aid, then implored them to return, blamed others for the misunderstanding, and then cut them loose again. How could Bindel not have known this? Why would she go to such lengths to tarnish my work and my reputation?

Perhaps Bindel belongs to a feminist school that sees women, especially prostituted women, as uber victims, who, if they kill at all, do so only in self-defense—because so many men have abused them for so long. It is retributive justice. From Bindel's far removed point of view, psychologically, Wuornos killed because patriarchy, poverty, and violent men made her do it. Bindel writes "that Wuornos was so brutalized by men during her life that her actions—however extreme, however hard to condone—were committed in self-defense. They could, therefore, be described as understandable."

There is no doubt that Wuornos was "brutalized" and that such brutalization amounted to torture and therefore required drugs and alcohol as well as a "disassociation" from reality. I

write about this in *Requiem*. But, I also came to challenge this line of thinking.

First of all, not all savagely abused children or prostituted women kill. Secondly, such feminists are saying that although Wuornos's seven male victims may not have mistreated Wuornos—they still deserved to die because of how **other** men had mistreated her.

Indeed, Bindel quotes her colleague, Melissa Farley who agrees that I've turned Wuornos into a "monster." Farley believes that Wuornos "killed those men because they raped and threatened her life." (Not because she *thought* they had), but because they *really* had since prostitution is, by definition, a war crime.

Ah, that is what I hoped was true long ago, but cold, hard facts disabused me of such romantic nonsense. Yes, I believe that she killed in self-defense that first time, in a struggle for her life but I was forced to conclude that the next six murders were not committed in self-defense.

This is not the only issue that divides we "happy few," we "band of Sisters."

Bindel's and Farley's denial that women are also serial killers is quite staggering.

There are many kinds of female serial killers: "black widows," women who kill husband after husband for insurance payouts and for real property. Their names are legion. Female nurses (male nurses too) who kill patients, sometimes for money, or "mercy," but also because they can. In addition, women have lured young girls into prostitution and they torture or even kill them if they try to escape. Yes, I know, sometimes women become pimps or Madams in order to escape the grueling, war-like conditions of prostitution.

Wuornos is not like *male* serial killers—she is a rather unique

female serial killer. She is not like other women who've been savagely abused but who do not become killers. Nor is she like murderous wives or murderous nurses. Finally, she is totally different from *male* serial killers who kill mainly women, prostituted women, with erotic perversity, and whom they sometimes pose in grotesque gynecological positions. Read the brilliant Jane Caputi on this point. Male serial killers may kill anywhere from 10–100 women. They strategize their “kills” and are very hard to find. Wuornos had no erotic motive, she left clues everywhere, and was swiftly captured.

I make all these points in *Requiem*.

Then, there's a third bone of contention.

Bindel views prostituted women as disposable human sacrifices. I do, too. If the profound trauma that they've endured—and they have, and if it's led them to experience a complex post-traumatic stress disorder, a feminist can say so, but only very carefully, softly; one must not stigmatize them as “mentally ill.”

Some say that I wrote the “Bible” on this subject in 1972: *Women and Madness*. I was definitely the one who helped Judith Lewis Herman's important 1992 work [*Trauma and Recovery*](#) make its way in the world; this is the work that Melissa Farley prizes greatly.

Thus, even if a woman is acting in paranoid ways, is hyper-vigilant, hallucinating, sabotaging her own case, alienating all those who wish to help her, even then, especially then, the Good Feminist must intone that sexist violence made her that way and that the victim is never to be blamed or held accountable for her actions.

Even if she is legally insane, as Wuornos was by the end of her long isolation on Death Row, one must present that insanity as due to patriarchal violence and to her history of sexist violence. Otherwise, one will run quite afoul of the

feminist Thought Police.

Bindel's and Farley's response to *Requiem* reminds me of some of the feminist responses long ago to the early works about female-female aggression and competition.

The Sisters insisted that this was a lie or at least a dangerous truth, best whispered about behind closed doors. In their view, women are more moral, more compassionate than men.

Women are the kinder, more sociable, more compassionate sex, more like Bindel, who is nearly a quarter-century younger than I am—my Electra-like, matricidal daughter, without an ounce of respect for her Foremothers.