

ONSCENITY SEMINAR ON SEX AND REGULATION FEBRUARY 2011

Onscenity is a recently-formed group, mainly academics, interested in attempts to regulate sexual behaviour, either real or fictional.

The seminar was held on 1st February 2011. It was chaired by Julian Petley, writer on censorship, and the speakers were Martin Barker, expert on moral panics (eg. *The Video Nasties*, 1984), Yaman Akdeniz of Bilgi University, Istanbul and Laura Augustin, author of *Sex at the Margins* (2007).

Mr. Petley's introduction covered some historical ground before attacking the "extreme porn" sections of the Criminal Justice Act 2008 for being much too vague and subjective. He also pointed out that of the 862 films passed 18R by the BBFC in 2009 less than a quarter were cut and there were only three outright refusals.

Mr. Barker spoke about the way the press write about porn: the misuse of psychological terms like "addiction", the claims that opponents of porn are somehow heroic and its defenders are all being paid, the implication that the porn industry is bad BECAUSE it is big and that any overt sexual depiction is porn, and so on. He suggested that Onscenity should provide a space where people opposed to these attitudes could talk about their research and their tactics for challenging them.

Mr. Akdeniz spoke about the difficulties and risks of upholding liberal attitudes in a country whose government is technically secular but strongly influenced by Islam. However there is no objection to him studying censorship in the UK. He had many statistics on the numbers of prosecutions and convictions under British censorship legislation. He emphasised that blocking or filtering of websites imposed for allegedly 'moral' reasons could as easily be used to stifle political dissent.

Ms. Augustin spoke about campaigns against prostitution, pointing out that those who run the "rescue" industry are impervious to reason and not above associating anyone who queries their approach with people involved in slavery and rape. She also repudiated the anti-sex feminists' claim to speak for all women.

Speakers from the floor amplified what the main speakers had said. The audience included some university students but also activists and representatives of pressure groups such as Backlash and Stonewall.

Mary Hayward