Anarcha-Feminism

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Abstract

Anarcha-feminism emerged as a 'school of thought' in late nineteenth-century Europe and America. Informed by the experience of female subjugation, anarchist women undertook a radical critique of sexual double standards and the gendered division of labour in ways that anarchist men were less inclined to recognise. In addition to describing the sociopolitical conditions from which anarcha-feminism arose, this chapter highlights the following key thinkers: Louise Michel, Charlotte Wilson, Lucía Sánchez Saornil, Lucy Parsons, Voltairine de Cleyre, and Emma Goldman. As a dynamic, loosely formed network of activists who came from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, these women held differing ideas on how to create a free society. Yet, several intersecting principles were reflected in their activism, if not explicitly through their public advocacy, then implicitly through their unconventional lifestyles: the liberating potential of individual autonomy, the necessity of sexual freedom in order to achieve autonomy, and the inseparability of women's liberation from the larger schema of human liberation. Beyond supporting the broader efforts of the anarchist movement, anarcha-feminism offered a model of womanhood that articulated women's sexual agency as an economic and personal imperative, which in turn provided a radical alternative to the suffrage movement and a critical framework for modern feminism.

Within the anarchist political and intellectual milieu of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, anarcha-feminism emerged as a distinct, albeit loosely formed, 'school of thought' that was reflected in the transnational activism of anarchist women, especially in Europe and the United States. Anarchist women tended to interpret the anarchist critique of authority through the lens of their experiences *as women*, especially constraints resulting from sexual double standards and the gendered division of labour—in ways that anarchist men were less inclined to recognise. Some were especially outspoken about social ills that limited women's autonomy and personal happiness, such as compulsory marriage and motherhood, lack of access to birth control, and sex trafficking. As this chapter will demonstrate, in the process of supporting the wider cause of the anarchist movement which centred on class struggle, anarcha-feminists presented an alternative model of womanhood that challenged norms of feminine docility and propriety—if not explicitly through their argumentation and activism, then implicitly through their unconventional lifestyles. In turn, they exerted pressure on the male-dominated anarchist movement to recognise the ways in which women are subjugated differently from men, and on the women's movement to acknowledge the limitations of political enfranchisement as a viable solution to inequality.[1]

In what follows, I provide an overview of the historical events, central ideas, and *praxis* of anarcha-feminism as it was reflected in the activism of female anarchists in Europe and

[1] This essay reinforces and extends two of my prior publications: Donna M. Kowal, *Tongue of Fire: Emma Goldman, Public Womanhood, and the Sex Question* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016) and Linda D. Horwitz, Donna M. Kowal, and Catherine H. Palczweski, 'Anarchist Women and the Feminine Ideal: Sex, Class, and Style in the Rhetoric of Voltairine de Cleyre, Emma Goldman, and Lucy Parsons', in Martha Watson and Thomas Burkholder (Eds), *The Rhetoric of Nineteenth Century Reform and the Perfecting of American Society*, vol. 5 *Rhetorical History of the United States* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2008), 309–353.

the United States. In addition to describing the sociopolitical conditions from which anarcha-feminism arose, I highlight the contributions of several noteworthy activists: Louise Michel (1830–1905), Charlotte Wilson (1854–1944), Lucía Sánchez Saornil (1895–1970), Lucy Parsons (1853–1942), Voltairine de Cleyre (1866–1912), and Emma Goldman (1869–1940). Although these women did not call themselves 'feminists' or 'anarcha-feminists'—as these labels were adopted by scholars and activists in later years—their political leanings clearly blended anarchist and feminist goals. The purpose of this essay is to illustrate how their political activism and unconventional lifestyles—understood in concert as a loosely assembled network of female anarchists—constituted anarcha-feminism as a core tradition of anarchism.

Anarcha-feminism emerged as a branch of anarchism during a period when women's exclusion from public affairs was systemically enforced through legal, political, economic, familial, and religious institutions. In the main, the sphere of women's influence was rooted in the home, obliging them to dutifully perform the domestic roles of mother and wife even as economic conditions may have necessitated they earn wages to support the livelihood of their families. Indeed, while white, middle-class women were not expected to work outside the home, poor and immigrant women were impelled to work in factories and on farms, in unregulated industries that exploited them as cheap labour. Insofar as working women often lacked the freedom to control their wages and own property (in addition to being politically disenfranchised) and were typically excluded or marginalised by labour unions, they were far more likely to be drawn to socialist, communist, and anarchist solutions to inequality—solutions that squarely addressed class division and labour exploitation—in comparison to women who enjoyed economic security (who were more likely drawn to reform efforts focused on women's suffrage).[2] Moreover, as Glenna Matthews argues, working-class women were 'less bound by decorous norms of appropriate female behaviour',[3] which perhaps legitimised their participation in public affairs and empowered them to engage in more militant forms of activism. In any case, the incongruity between having the relative freedom to work and not having the freedom to control when they had sex and how many (if any) children they would bear—reproductive decisions that influence women's ability to pursue work and participate in public life—was all the more striking for working-class women. These are among the conditions that shaped anarcha-feminism into a political ideology and lifestyle that recognised the socioeconomic imperative of women's sexual freedom (or free love, as it was called) in the greater cause of human liberation. In this regard, the arguments of anarcha-feminists exposed the deeper roots of gender/sexual inequality in a way that called into question suffrage movement claims that granting women the right to vote would improve the quality of their lives. By uniting anarchist and feminist ideas, argues Margaret Marsh, anarchist women's 'attacks on marriage and the family, set in the context of a liberated female sexuality, alienated them not only from most feminists but also from many of their male comrades'.[4]

Indeed, male anarchists enjoyed a priori as men the freedom to assert their voices in public affairs, to secure gainful employment, and to execute power over the household. Occupying a position of male privilege, for the most part, they tended to dispute or appear indifferent to arguments for women's equality. For example, French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon theorised

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[2] Sara Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 68–69; Margaret Marsh, *Anarchist Women, 1870–1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 20–21.

[3] Glenna Matthews, *The Rise of Public Woman: Woman's Power and Woman's Place in the United States, 1630–1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 197.

[4] Marsh, *Anarchist Women*, 72.

the conventional family unit to be foundational to the natural order of a free society, and Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin prioritised the interests of working-class men above women.[5] On this latter point, American anarchist Benjamin Tucker went as far as to question the notion of equal pay for women when he argued in a *Liberty* editorial in 1891 that 'the average woman's lack of ambition, of self-reliance, of sense of business responsibility, and of interest in her employer's undertakings' made her inferior to men—at least until 'these deficiencies be overcome'.[6] In addition to sociopolitical and economic power, it should be recognised that male anarchists undoubtedly enjoyed the pleasures of free love in their romantic relationships with women—without the risks of unwanted pregnancy and the scorn of promiscuity that female anarchists likely experienced. The inconsistency between advocating human liberation while continuing to uphold patriarchal norms must have been all too apparent for anarchist women.

Beyond the systemic subjugation of women and the lack of attention to women's equality within the masculine leadership of the anarchist movement, anarchist women were influenced by a variety of events that garnered international attention. In fact, these events influenced radicals of a variety of backgrounds and political associations: the Haymarket Square bombing, trial, and executions (1886–1887); the Paris Commune (1871); the Bolshevik Revolution (1917); the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939); and labour uprisings throughout Europe and the United States. Taken together, the above sociopolitical conditions and events gave rise to what became a dynamic, transnational counterpublic of anarchist women. Counterpublics, as defined by Nancy Fraser, are 'parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourse to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs'.[7] In addition to positioning themselves against capitalism and institutionalised authority, anarchist women were united in their commitment to empowering women as autonomous agents. They arose from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, which were reflected in their differing and sometimes conflicting ideas on how to create a free society, as well as their participation in internal debates over anarchist ideology and tactics (for example, some were willing to resort to violent methods of resistance, others less so). They were fiercely independent. Although they occasionally clashed in argumentation, rhetorical style, or personality,[8] they also supported and were inspired by one another, and had a shared understanding of the intersection of the causes for human liberation and women's liberation.

Just as anarchist philosophy reflects a wide range of perspectives—as L. Susan Brown points out, 'within the anarchist "family" there are mutualists, collectivists, communists, federalists, individualists, socialists, syndicalists, feminists, as well as many others'[9]—anarcha-feminist thought is not uniform. In general, though, there are several intersecting points of emphasis that shape anarcha-feminism into a distinct category of anarchism: the liberating potential of autonomy for women, the precondition of sexual freedom in order for women to realise autonomy, and the inseparability of women's liberation from the larger schema of human

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[5] Marsh, *Anarchist Women*, 19.

[6] Benjamin Tucker, 'On Picket Duty', *Liberty*, 8:24, whole no. 206 (November 21, 1891). HathiTrust Digital Library: http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015032019310;view=1up;seq=1

[7] Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', in Craig Calhoun (Ed), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 124.

[8] For an analysis of the differing argumentation and rhetorical styles of anarchist women, see Horwitz, Kowal, and Palczewski.

[9] L. Susan Brown, *The Politics of Individualism* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1993), 106.

liberation.[10] As the profiles of anarchist women below demonstrate, even when they did not address each of these ideas explicitly in their argumentation, the way they lived their lives in pursuit of personal and political autonomy embodied them in spirit. Moreover, they were often perceived by social conservatives as asserting a new model of womanhood that defied Victorian norms of feminine behaviour, which began to be uprooted during their lifetimes.

Some of the anarchist women profiled here had sexual relationships outside of marriage (either with men or women) and demanded the abolition of the patriarchal institution itself. Still, despite their radical politics, for the most part they also tended to reinforce heteronormativity by addressing sexual freedom implicitly in the context of relationships *between* women and men. As the discussion below demonstrates, there were exceptions to this pattern of thinking, which reflected the reality that homosexuality was largely treated at the turn-of-the-century as an illness, a crime, or immoral behaviour—after all, the emerging discipline of sexology had just begun to challenge sexual taboos and the fallacious notion that there were only two sexes.[11]

Beginning with the European context, the following paragraphs provide a brief sketch of the life and activism of Louise Michel, Charlotte Wilson, and Lucía Sánchez Saornil, immediately followed by several women from the American context, Lucy Parsons, Voltairine de Cleyre, and Emma Goldman. While some of their paths crossed and some did not, taken together as representative examples, these women reflect the diversity of backgrounds, arguments, and personalities that constituted the anarcha-feminist counterpublic.

Louise Michel: Widely regarded as a forerunner of French radicalism, Louise Michel earned notoriety for her role in the Paris Commune of 1871. As an 'illegitimate' child raised by her mother, who was a maidservant, and her paternal grandparents, who sympathised with the French Revolution, Michel's early years were shaped by both economic hardship and the spirit of revolution. As an adult, she worked as an elementary school teacher before devoting herself fully to the cause of liberation.[12] In the events leading up to the Commune, Michel provided support for families by supplying food and allowing refugee children to attend her school.[13] Beyond caring for the victims of war, she arose as one of the leaders of the armed resistance, fighting in uniform alongside men, delivering aid to the wounded, and, most famously, joining other women in the act of brazenly preventing the seizure of cannons by covering the chase with their bodies.[14] When the bloody conflict ended, Michel was sentenced to seven years of prison and exile for attempting to overthrow the government—a life-changing experience that drew her to anarchism. When she resumed her activism upon being released, now as an avowed anarchist, she endured additional prison time for disturbing the peace, delivering inflammatory speeches, and inciting to riot.

On the matter of women's emancipation, Michel rejected marriage and challenged the double standards that allowed men to enjoy greater freedom. In her memoir *The Red Virgin*, she ridiculed the perception that maternity limited women's role in the revolution: 'How marvelous it would

[10] Kowal, *Tongue of Fire*, 14–21.

[11] For further analysis, see Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011) and John Lauristen and David Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864–1935)* (New York: Times Change Press, 974).

[12] 'Translators' Introduction', *The Red Virgin: Memoirs of Louise Michel*, ed. and trans. Bullitt Lowry and Elizabeth Ellington Gunter (University of Alabama Press, 1981), ix.

[13] Gay L. Gullickson, 'Militant Women: Representations of Charlotte Corday, Louise Michel, and Emmeline Pankhurst', *Women's History Review*, 23:6 (2014), 842–843.

[14] Ibid., 843.

be if only the equality of the sexes were recognised, but while we wait women are still, as Molière said, "the soup of man" … We women are not bad revolutionaries. Without begging anyone, we are taking our place in the struggle; otherwise, we could go ahead and pass motions until the world ends and gain nothing. For my part, comrades, I have refused to be any man's "soup"'.[15] She also questioned the moral and educational codes sustained 'under the pretext of preserving the innocence of little girls' and the economic disenfranchisement which renders women 'slaves' to men, and drives some to prostitution.[16] Directing her message explicitly to male activists, she further declared, 'We know what our rights are, and we demand them. Are we not standing next to you fighting the supreme fight? Are we not strong enough, men, to make part of that supreme fight a struggle for the rights of women? And then men and women together will gain the rights of all humanity'.[17]

Michel's social circle extended to the wider milieu of European and American anarchists, including Kropotkin, Wilson, and Goldman. Michel also developed political rivals, and Goldman was among those who came to her defence. In addition to being subject to a failed assassination attempt in 1888, conservative critics sought to damage Michel's reputation by spreading rumours about her alleged sexual relationships with other women—'an innuendo hurled at women who refused to follow and adopt traditional feminine roles'.[18] Her public persona as 'The Red Virgin of Monteparte', argues Marie Marmo Mullaney, was a product of her record of militant activism and the stories of her alleged sexual deviance, which cast her 'as a kind of anarchist vestal virgin, a priestess of piety and vengeance, and embodiment of revolutionary virtue and pristine, unsullied ideals'.[19]

Charlotte Wilson: Charlotte Wilson (née Martin) was an English anarchist who is most known for co-founding with Kropotkin the London-based journal *Freedom* in 1886, which included Michel among its contributing writers. Two years earlier she engaged in her first political act, publishing a letter defending female workers in the March 8, 1884, issue of *Justice*, the paper of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF).[20] In her letter 'To the Editor of *Justice*', Wilson refuted the SDF chair's argument that women threatened to displace men in the labour force and advocated that women should rise up and demand equal pay.

Compared to the other women profiled here, Wilson came from a notably privileged background as the daughter of a physician and a student at Newman College, Cambridge University's elite women's college. This was not entirely unusual insofar as some middle-class women gravitated toward anarchism through intellectual interests and associations. Wilson's family was devoted to the Anglican Church, and, as Susan Hinley notes, there is consequently a distinct 'evangelical moral accountancy' in her approach to anarchism, particularly in the way she transferred the 'values of charity and improvement into secular and radical terms'.[21] Upon leaving Cam-

[15] Louise Michel, 'Women's Rights', *The Red Virgin: Memoirs of Louise Michel*, ed. and trans. Bullitt Lowry and Elizabeth Ellington Gunter (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1981), 140.

[16] Ibid., 141.

[17] Ibid., 142.

[18] Marie Marmo Mullaney, 'Sexual Politics in the Career and Legend of Louise Michel', *Signs*, 15:2 (Winter 1990), 306–307.

[19] Ibid., 13.

[20] Nicolas Walter, 'Charlotte M. Wilson, 1854–1944', *The Raven Anarchist Quarterly*, 6:1 (January–March 1993), 71.

[21] Hinley, 'Charlotte Wilson, the "Woman Question", and the Meanings of Anarchist Socialism in Late Victorian Radicalism', *International Review of Social History*, 57:1 (2012), 9.

bridge, Wilson married a stockbroker and moved to north London where she became immersed in the local culture of middle-class, intellectual, and social activism. She attended anarchist meetings aimed at rallying support against tsarist Russia and produced lectures and articles advocating nihilism.[22] She also participated in the Men and Women's Club created by Karl Pearson, which was intended to provide a forum for discussing social problems concerning marriage, sexuality, and prostitution.[23] She was especially effective as an organiser of the Freedom Group, a network of activists associated with *Freedom*, and the Fabian Society, a group of socialist-leaning thinkers that included sexologists, poets, and other intellectuals. Committed to putting anarchist ideas into practice, she supported a cooperatively created international anarchist school that would 'fit children for freedom'—led by none other than Michel as headmistress.[24] Beyond this, Wilson promoted university education for women through the London Society for the Extension of University Teaching as well as philanthropic giving through the Christian-identified Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants. Concerning her philanthropic activity, Hinley points out that 'Wilson was publicly advocating secularism and anarchist revolution at the same time that she was volunteering and organising in this [evangelical] organisation'.[25]

Wilson's engagement in anarchist activism faded after 1895 when she shifted her attention to caring for her daughter and ailing parents.[26] Eventually she returned to activism, this time advocating for women's suffrage, a position that contradicted her former anarchist sensibilities[27] (incidentally, a fluid politics that adapts to changing circumstances is another phenomenon that is not unusual among anarcha-feminists). At the age of 52 in 1906, yet another stage of political activism emerged as she got involved in the Independent Labour Party and reconnected with the Fabian Society as a spokesperson for the Women's Group, among other organisations, all the while maintaining a focus on women's suffrage and social emancipation.[28]

Lucía Sánchez Saornil: During the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), anarchist women formed local, regional, and national anti-fascist, libertarian organisations to oppose the aristocratic, conservative-leaning Nationalists but also to add women's voices to the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist movement. In 1936, Lucía Sánchez Saornil co-founded Mujeres Libres (Free Women), an anarchist organisation 'with the clearly articulated feminist goal of female liberation from the "triple enslavement to which (women) have been subject: enslavement to ignorance, enslavement as women and enslavement as workers"'.[29] She and two comrades, Mercedes Comaposada and Dr. Amparo Poch y Gascon, also collaborated in creating a school to educate working-class urban and rural women, teaching both literacy and technical skills. Furthermore, as part of the mission of Mujeres Libres, they instituted programmes aimed at educating women about sexuality and midwifery.[30]

'For the women of Mujeres Libres', writes Temma E. Kaplan, 'the Civil War became synonymous with the struggle of women's liberation from menial jobs, from ignorance, from exploita-

[22] Ibid., 12–13.
[23] Walter, 'Charlotte M. Wilson', 70.
[24] Hinley, 'Charlotte Wilson', 27.
[25] Ibid., 10.
[26] Ibid., 32.
[27] Ibid., 33.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Mary Nash, *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* (Denver: Arden Press, 1995), 76.
[30] Martha A. Ackelsberg, *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 138.

tion at work, and from unjust treatment by fathers and husbands'.[31] However, as Mary Nash argues, Mujeres Libres 'tended to exalt motherhood … and never openly broached the subject of abortion or dealt with such issues as family planning and birth control'.[32] For the most part, Sánchez Saornil did not consider sexuality as a political issue, and therefore, despite being openly lesbian, she did not use Mujeres Libres as a medium to advocate sexual freedom.[33] The distinction she made between sexuality and politics differed from other anarchist women—particularly de Cleyre and Goldman, who viewed sexual freedom as a psychosocial imperative for women's vitality and quality of life, which of course made the sexual—in other words, the personal—political.

Beyond her prominence as one of the leaders of Mujeres Libres, Sánchez Saornil is recognised for her poetry, and some of these works did explore sexuality. Under the masculine pseudonym Luciano de San Saor, in her early years as a poet, she published her work in journals that featured avant-garde 'ultraismo' literature. Her pen name reportedly freed her to write about sexuality, including homoerotic themes. Her writings also appeared in a variety of Spanish anarchist publications such as *Tierra y Libertad, Solidaridad Obrera*, and *Estudios*.[34] One of the pieces she is most known for is titled *Romancero de Mujeres Libres* (*Free Women's Balladeer*), a collection of poems which she edited and published in 1937 (in her own name) in the *Mujeres Libres* journal.[35] In the poem titled 'Mujeres Libres' Anthem', she proclaimed, 'Let the past vanish into nothingness! What do we care for yesterday! We want to write anew the word WOMAN'.[36] In another poem about the hardship of a laundress' life, she employed imagery of the drudgery of her work and pleaded 'Poor of the world, come to her! Let the battle horn sound! Down with all codes, Let the flames run swiftly!'[37] Sánchez Saornil's writings about women thus invoked vivid images of subjugation combined with calls to militant action. Her prominence as a writer, publisher, and activist placed her on the radar of Goldman, who saw great promise in the anarchist struggle in Spain. In addition to publishing an essay in *Mujeres Libres* in 1936[38] and corresponding with Sánchez Saornil and other Spanish comrades, Goldman visited Spain and led an English language promotional campaign in support of the revolution there.[39]

Lucy Parsons: As a fixture in the Chicago anarchist community that captured international attention following the Haymarket square affair on 4th May, 1886, Lucy Parsons (née Gonzales) is an important national figure, although there is somewhat limited information available about her early life. Her husband Albert was among the four anarchists sentenced to death for allegedly igniting a bomb during a labour demonstration despite inconclusive evidence.[40] In ad-

[31] Temma E. Kaplan, 'Spanish Anarchism and Women's Liberation', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 6:2 (1971), 105.

[32] Nash, *Defying Male Civilization*, 91.

[33] Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 138.

[34] Ibid., 126.

[35] Jean Andrews, 'Poetry and Silence in Post-Civil War Spain: Carmen Conde, Lucía Sánchez Saornil and Pilar de Valderrama,' in Manuel Bragança and Peter Tame (Eds), *The Long Aftermath: Cultural Legacies of Europe at War, 1936–2016* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 48–49.

[36] Cited in Ackelsberg, *Free Women of Spain*, front matter.

[37] Cited in Tabea Alexa Linhard, *Fearless Women in the Mexican Revolution and Spanish Civil War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 132–134.

[38] Cited in Kaplan, 'Spanish Anarchism', 106.

[39] For further information see *Vision on Fire: Emma Goldman on the Spanish Revolution*, David Porter (Ed) (Chico: AK Press, 2006) and Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman in Exile: From the Russian Revolution to the Spanish Civil War* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

[40] Marsh, *Anarchist Women*, 6–7.

dition to being an outspoken critic of the injustices against the so-called Haymarket martyrs, Parson's activism called attention to the connection between the exploitation of workers and racial inequality and violence. According to Carolyn Ashbaugh, Parsons was raised on a plantation in Texas by parents of mixed ancestry—most likely African-American, Native-American, and Mexican—but she had publicly denied any African ancestry, perhaps so that she and her white husband could evade anti-miscegenation laws.[41] As a multiracial woman, writes Lauren Basson, it is important to recognise that Parsons 'assumed the same authority and exercised as much power as white men in certain political contexts'.[42]

Militant class struggle was at the heart of Parsons' understanding of anarchism. (A reporter once described her as 'a veritable Louise Michel'.[43]) She had organised and led public meetings of workers while raising two children and working as a seamstress to support her family. She also co-founded *The Alarm*, the journal of the International Working People's Association, served as editor of *The Liberator* and *Freedom*, and published articles in a variety of other journals. In 1879, she was among a group of women who established Chicago's Working Women's Union. In 1905, as one of the founding members of and the only woman to speak at the founding convention of the Industrial Workers of the World, she demanded that the organisation be open to all men and women regardless of 'such differences as nationality, religion and politics' and promoted the active participation of women for they are 'the slaves of slaves … [and] are exploited more ruthlessly than men'.[44] Parsons considered the organisation of workers as important to class struggle, but she also believed in the necessity of individual action—including the use of violence, if necessary—which she applied to combating both class and racial injustices. For example, in 'To Tramps, the Unemployed, the Disinherited, and the Miserable' she proclaimed '*Learn to use explosives!*'[45] and in 'The Negro' she recommended 'As to those local, periodical, damnable massacres to which you are at all times liable, these you must revenge in your own way'.[46]

Regarding sexual freedom, although Parsons critiqued marriage as an exploitative institution, she stands out among other anarchist women for questioning the notion that free love is a viable alternative. Although she critiqued the subjugation of women in a variety of contexts that included compulsory marriage and motherhood, prostitution, and industrial labour, she believed that the practice of free love had 'nothing in common' with anarchism. Furthermore, she critiqued the practice of 'sexual varietiem' for its associated risks of pregnancy and venereal disease and, consequently, argued that monogamy without marriage was the more pragmatic approach to sexual relationships.[47] On this point, her argumentation notably differed from de Cleyre and Goldman, both of whom explicitly asserted women's sexual freedom as essential to the anarchist cause. Additionally, Parsons and Goldman were known to have a bitter political rivalry—perhaps on account of their equally strong personalities—with Goldman accusing Parsons of exploiting

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[41] Carolyn Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing, 1976), 13–14.

[42] Lauren L. Basson, *White Enough to Be American? Race Mixing, Indigenous People, and the Boundaries of State and Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 162.

[43] Cited in Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons*, 63.

[44] Lucy Parsons, 'Speech to the IWW', in *Libcom.org*: https://libcom.org/library/speech-iww-lucy-parsons

[45] Parsons, 'To Tramps, the Unemployed, the Disinherited, and the Miserable', *The Alarm* (October 4, 1884), in Chicago History Museum: http://www.chicagohistory.org/dramas/act1/fromTheArchive/wordToTramps_f.htm

[46] Parsons cited in Gale Ahrens (Ed), *Lucy Parsons: Freedom Equality and Solidarity* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing, 2004), 55–56.

[47] Cited in Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons*, 204.

her husband's notoriety for personal gain and Parsons accusing Goldman of being excessively self-centred at the expense of the greater cause.[48]

Voltairine de Cleyre: Born in rural Michigan to parents who struggled to provide for their family, Voltairine de Cleyre was transferred to a Catholic convent at a young age. Her father reportedly named her after the freethinker Voltaire, which turned out to be a fitting label to describe her education (she was largely self-educated) and her approach to anarchism (she declared herself to be an 'anarchist without adjectives').[49] Among the experiences that propelled her toward anarchism were the austerity of convent life, which she rebelled against, and the injustice of the Haymarket Square executions. Upon moving to Philadelphia in 1889, de Cleyre increased her activism and began teaching English in the Jewish immigrant community. In 1893 she met Goldman, who had heard about de Cleyre's 'exceptional ability as a lecturer' and was eager to meet her.[50] Unlike Goldman, who uncompromisingly rejected private property, de Cleyre saw the possession of property as a dimension of individual autonomy—'the true right in that which is proper to the individual'.[51] Although the two women held differing views on this matter, they shared a deep commitment to making women's liberation fundamental to the cause of anarchism and supported one another in times of need. Additionally, de Cleyre and Parsons' activism intertwined through their attendance at some of the same political rallies and meetings.[52] A trip to Britain and France in 1897 further expanded de Cleyre's intellectual circle when she met Michel, Kropotkin, and others.

In her essay 'Why I Am An Anarchist', de Cleyre defined anarchism as the only logical solution to human oppression, especially 'the subordinated cramped circle prescribed for women in daily life, whether in the field of material production, or in domestic arrangement, or in educational work'.[53] She viewed marriage, in particular, as an inherently dependent relationship that oppressed women economically, intellectually, emotionally, and physically—thus she advised 'every woman contemplating sexual union of any kind, never to live with the man you love'.[54] Over the years, de Cleyre had many lovers and came to form a close bond with a man whom she had a son with, though the boy was raised by the father and extended family—due to a combination of chronic health issues and an unwillingness to accept the responsibilities of motherhood.[55]

Another noteworthy aspect of de Cleyre's contribution to anarchism is the lucid thinking reflected in her written works—her prose is characterised by a methodical treatment of subjects 'interrupted by flashes of poetry and radical intuition'.[56] She served as both an editor and writer for *The Progressive Age* and made frequent contributions to *Mother Earth*, the journal published by Goldman. As her thinking evolved, her later works identified the competing perspectives of

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[48] Falk, *Love, Anarchy, and Emma Goldman* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984), 65–66.

[49] Ibid., 4–6.

[50] Emma Goldman, 'Voltairine de Cleyre,' in Sharon Presley and Crispin Sartwell (Eds), *Exquisite Rebel: The Essays of Voltairine de Cleyre—Anarchist, Feminist, Genius* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), 29–44.

[51] Voltairine de Cleyre, 'In Defense of Emma Goldman and the Right of Expropriation,' in Alexander Berkman (Ed), *Selected Works of Voltairine de Cleyre* (New York: Mother Earth, 1917), 217.

[52] Paul Avrich, *An American Anarchist: The Life of Voltairine de Cleyre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 152.

[53] de Cleyre, 'Why I Am An Anarchist,' in *Exquisite Rebel*, 56.

[54] de Cleyre, 'The Woman Question', in *Exquisite Rebel*, 223.

[55] Marsh, *Anarchist Women*, 131.

[56] Crispin Sartwell, 'Priestess of Pity and Vengeance', in *Exquisite Rebel*, 15.

anarchism—such as communist, individualist, and syndicalist—as an obstacle to the movement's success and encouraged greater cooperation among anarchists.

Emma Goldman: Born in Lithuania, Emma Goldman was raised in a household that abided strictly by Russian-Jewish customs. At the age of 17, she immigrated to the United States in 1886 to flee a restrictive Orthodox life that would have involved an arranged marriage. While living with her sister in Rochester, New York, and working at a textile factory, she was subject to sweatshop work conditions and exposed to the world of labour organising. In 1889, following a brief failed marriage to a fellow factory worker, she moved to New York City, where she immersed herself in the anarchist community. The combination of the injustice of the Haymarket executions and the mentoring she received from fellow activist Johann Most, whom she met at a Lower East Side café, inspired her to devote herself fulltime to lecturing and writing.[57] For much of her career, she worked alongside fellow anarchist and devoted friend Alexander Berkman, supporting him through his brushes with the law—including his attempted assassination of steel industry mogul Henry Clay Frick.[58] According to Marsh, taking into consideration the longevity of her career as an agitator and the sensational media attention that she attracted, Goldman 'personified anarchism to Americans'.[59]

As a self-proclaimed agitator determined to awaken the masses, Goldman's lecture tours had her travelling across the United States as well as Canada and Europe, speaking on various topics such as capitalism, atheism, conscription, education, marriage, free love, and modern drama. The sarcasm she directed at her audiences, whom she defined as woefully ignorant, combined with her rejection of the agenda of the socialist movement at times placed her at odds with the day-to-day reality of working-class struggle and gave the impression of elitism.[60] Vilified in the press as the 'High Priestess of Anarchy' and 'The Most Dangerous Woman in the World', she encountered ongoing free speech struggles and was repeatedly arrested and imprisoned for delivering inflammatory speeches, inciting to riot, interfering with conscription, and distributing information about birth control. One of the most publicised stories about Goldman was fuelled by false allegations that she inspired Leon Czolgosz's attempted assassination of President McKinley in 1901.[61] For her own part, she was a prolific writer and editor, as she published the anarchist journal *Mother Earth*, a variety of pamphlets, a bound collection of her selected works titled *Anarchism and Other Essays*, as well as several other books.

Goldman's approach to anarchism emphasised the economic and psychosocial necessity of emancipating women, which she believed could only be accomplished through anarchism's ability to transcend artificial differences and class divisions between women and men. She identified women's 'internal tyrants, whether they be in the form of public opinion or what mother will say, or brother, father, … busybodies, moral detectives, jailers of the human spirit' as obstacles to freedom[62]—which only women themselves could overcome by courageously exercising autonomy. She argued that free love and access to birth control were necessary to empower women to

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[57] Goldman, *Living My Life*, vol. 1 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931; New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 21–23.

[58] Ibid., 83–88.

[59] Marsh, *Anarchist Women*, 14.

[60] For a discussion of Goldman's elitism, see Lance Selfa, 'Emma Goldman: A Life of Controversy,' *International Socialist Review*, 34 (March–April 2004): http://www.isreview.org/issues/34/emmagoldman.shtml

[61] Kowal, *Tongue of Fire*, 116–118.

[62] Goldman, 'The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation', *Anarchism and Other Essays*, 3rd. rev. ed. (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1910; New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 221–222.

live productive, creative, and healthy lives. (Interestingly, Goldman's personal correspondence with longtime lover, Ben Reitman, revealed that she was filled with jealousy over his relationships with other women. Yet, Alice Wexler notes 'to her free love was not indiscriminate sex, nor Reitman's casual encounters, nor sex divorced from love'.[63]) All the same, having worked as a nurse-midwife for poor immigrant women in the 1890s, Goldman saw firsthand the painful consequences that arose when women lacked the ability to care for their reproductive health.[64] Additionally, on this matter of sexual freedom, it should be noted that Goldman extended her arguments in public defence of the rights of homosexuals (even though her published essays largely reflected heteronormative views). Some scholars also speculate that she herself had a one-time romantic relationship with a female friend, reflected in a series of vivid personal letters.[65]

After years of being tracked by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Goldman was deported to Russia in 1919 in a nationalistic political climate that targeted immigrant radicals as government threats. In 1925, despite her prior calls for the abolition of marriage, she wedded a Canadian man, which she described as a convenient relationship that enabled her to live in Toronto in close proximity to her American comrades.[66] Upon her death, she was buried along with de Cleyre, Parsons, and the Haymarket martyrs in Chicago's Waldheim Cemetery.

Although the above brief sketches of turn-of-the-century anarcha-feminists admittedly cannot do justice in capturing each activist's individual life and influence, taken together my hope is that they illustrate the diversity of women who constituted the anarcha-feminist counterpublic. In this essay, I have sought to demonstrate how anarcha-feminism emerged as a core tradition of anarchism out of the activism, lifestyle, and writings of an eclectic mix of radical women in Europe and the United States. The women discussed here—Michel, Wilson, Sánchez Saornil, Parsons, de Cleyre, and Goldman—represent some of the more prominent figures that shaped anarcha-feminism; however, there are many others who contributed to the anarcha-feminist counterpublic—Kate Austin, Milly Witkop, Florence Finch Kelly, and Mollie Steimer, to name a few. For the most part, their call to anarchism was shaped by the same sociopolitical forces that male anarchists were responding to—economic inequality, political violence, abuse of authority, censorship, and so on. Yet, their political leanings were equally motivated by the marginalisation of women within society at large and the male-dominated anarchist movement.

Unlike their male comrades, who largely lived their lives free from gender/sex discrimination, anarcha-feminists perceived the ways in which inequality was deeply rooted in social relationships and structures, especially the patriarchal family unit. That said, their beliefs were not uniform. As illustrated by the biographies of the women described above, anarcha-feminists came from different backgrounds in terms of nationality, class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, and to some extent espoused different, even competing ideas. What they had in common was a brazen rejection of feminine norms, an awareness that political enfranchisement was incapable of (or insufficient in) creating gender/sexual equality, and a feminist perspective which demanded that anarchism account for the experiences of women. Rejecting compulsory marriage and motherhood, they sought to enact their unconventional ideas of autonomous living and sexual agency.

[63] Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 155.

[64] Goldman, *Living My Life*, vol. 1, 137–138, 185–186.

[65] See Candace Falk, *Love, Anarchy, and Emma Goldman* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 169–177; Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the USA* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1976), 523–530; and Kowal, 45–51.

[66] Goldman, *Living My Life*, vol. 2 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931; New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 987.

They also joined their female and male comrades at home and abroad in rejecting the state and its functions (especially marriage) and the exploitation of the working class—a few engaging in combat or direct action. Through both their public activism and their personal relationships (whether multiple relationships outside of marriage and/or same-sex partners), they challenged the institutional structures that prevented women from realising vocational and personal fulfilment.

While we may be tempted to debate about which anarcha-feminist represents the 'true' anarchist ideal of womanhood—for example, by scrutinising their records on marriage—that intellectual exercise would miss the point. Michel, Wilson, Sánchez Saornil, Parsons, de Cleyre, and Goldman each sought to lead a nonconformist life—with the anarchist aspiration of experiencing more fully the freedom that comes with self-determination—in a sociopolitical order that defined women as inherently inferior to men and largely limited their influence to the domestic sphere. Each had to navigate the possibilities and constraints available to them in a historical moment when women's engagement in public affairs (let alone advocating anarchism) was itself disruptive behaviour. They faced imprisonment and public ridicule, and they compromised their highest ideals in order to manoeuvre through restrictive circumstances.

As Martha Hewitt has argued, anarcha-feminism 'forces us to re-think the nature of revolution as process, as transformative *praxis* of thought, feeling, and collective social activity'.[67] In the process of attempting to enact their ideas, anarchist women helped pave the way for an economically and sexually independent 'New Woman' that decades later would become foundational to second-wave and third-wave feminism. Indeed, the legacy of turn-of-the-century anarcha-feminism exists in these activists' foresight that gender/sexual equality must be lived, not granted.

[67] Marsha Hewitt, 'Emma Goldman: The Case for Anarcho-Feminism', in Dimitrios I. Roussopoulos (Ed), *The Anarchist Papers* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1986), 169–170.

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