

Anarchism and Feminism

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Introduction

The conjunction of anarchism and feminism can be understood in multiple ways and in anarchist movement politics the intended meaning is neither fixed nor always specified. Anarchist feminists might be anarchists sympathetic to feminism or feminists for whom anarchism is a necessary corollary of their politics. They might equally regard anarchism as a vehicle for feminism or reject feminism as antithetical to anarchism, a commitment to the “first women’s bank in New York, and a lot of things within the system.”¹ Some anarchist feminists argue that anarchist feminism is only one of a multitude of anarchisms with adjectives. Unusually, however, the prefix takes a number of different forms—*anarcho-feminist*, *anarcha-feminist*, *anarchafeminist*. Questions of meaning are further complicated by the association of anarchist feminism with other descriptors. The introduction on the anarchalibrary site argues that the “emphasis is on gender,” adding that *anarcha-feminism* “is not a sect of anarchism like *anarcho-syndicalism* or *anarcho-primitivism*, for an *anarchafeminist* can have affinity with these and other sects.”²

It is sometimes argued that the meaning of anarchism is grasped instinctively—“you know it when you see it,” Uri Gordon says.³ Anarchist feminists often work in a similarly intuitive way, linking anarchist feminism to the commitments of those who self-identify and/or to individual practice perhaps more than is usual, even in the case in anarchism, where sub-divisional tagging is customary.⁴ One response to the “what is” question is:

That’s a good fucking question, and one I’m not sure how to answer exactly. All I can tell you is what it means to me. *Anarcha-feminism* is diy, anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-sexist, sex-positive, anti-homophobic, trans-positive, queer, anti-ageist, pro-woman, pro-kid, powerful, anti-police, anti-prison, revolutionary, transformative, lots of cake, lots of fun, direct action, confrontational, personal, political, collective, zine-loving, free, grass-roots.⁵

The advantage of this approach is that avoids representative claims and the attribution of labels. An activist interviewed by Judy Greenway in the 1970s expressed the thrust towards anti-representational practice as “an equal right to express herself but no one else can speak for them.”⁶ In the same vein, the eighties Montreal magazine *BOA* (*Bevy of Anarchafeminists*) removed the tag from its cover in order to avoid co-opting “the women who contributed to the magazine by attaching a label to them that they didn’t choose for themselves.”⁷ Intuitive understandings also defend practice over theory-based approaches to politics. Lynne Farrow’s “disinterest in theoretical speculation”⁸ reflects a deep-seated anarchist suspicion of elitism and the rejection of policy-focused or programmatic approaches to social change. Writing in the 1970s, Farrow

¹ Greenway and Alderson, “Anarchism and Feminism.”

² sallydarity, “What is Anarcha-Feminism?,” available online at anarchalibrary.blogspot.co.uk.

³ U. Gordon, *Anarchy Alive! Anti-Authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* (London: Pluto, 2008), 3.

⁴ sallydarity, “What is Anarcha-Feminism?”

⁵ London anarcha-feminist kolektiv, *What the Fuck is Anarcha-feminism Anyway?* (London, 2009), available online at anarchalibrary.blogspot.co.uk.

⁶ J. Greenway and L. Alderson, “Anarchism and Feminism: Voices from the Seventies,” available online at www.judygreenway.org.uk.

⁷ K. Jackson, “BOA,” in *Only a Beginning, An Anarchist Anthology*, ed. A. Antliff (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2004), 22–24: 22.

⁸ L. Farrow, “Feminism as Anarchism,” in Dark Star, *Quiet Rumors*, 19–24: 23.

packaged a three-pronged rejection of Juliet Mitchell's "totalizing" Marxism, the aspiration to construct a women's liberation movement and the effort to apply social theory to the analysis of oppression as markers of anarchist feminism. Denying that the lack of "comprehensive theory" reduced anarchist feminism to the venting of "a lot of little gripes," Farrow argued that anarchist feminism was linked to a new way of theorizing that was distinctively "individualist" and "situationist": rooted in the situations from which perceived problems stemmed.⁹ Elaine Leeder later pressed this critique to question the nature of theoretical reasoning and advocate processes which balanced conventional linear reasoning with experimental mosaic patterning.¹⁰

The disadvantage of the intuitive approach is that it does not quite capture the range of influences active on anarchist feminism. Practice-based activism has exercised a profound influence on anarchist feminism, but academic feminism has also played a significant role in shaping contemporary anarchist feminist politics and, particularly, anarcha-queer thought.¹¹ The identification of anarchist feminism with movement norms also risks exaggerating the extent to which anarchist practice reinforces feminist commitments. Sandra Jeppesen's and Holly Nazar observe that "the majority of anarchist men are (pro)feminist, anti-heteronormative, perhaps queer or trans men themselves".¹² Yet the negative experiences of anarchist movement organizing suggest that a greater number of anarchists misunderstand anarchism's pro-feminist politics and/or that anarchist principles lack clear articulation.

Anarchist literatures abound with accounts of manarchism. This describes everything from a self-obsessed reflection on the burdens of anarchist commitment¹³ to the adoption of aggressively cis-gendered male predatory behaviors, uninvited protectionism premised on norms of dependency, sexual violence and the casual dismissal of gender politics.¹⁴ Bob Black's "Anarchy: A Fable" captures manarchism's nasty spirit.¹⁵ Even if activists disagree in their diagnoses of the causes of anti-feminist anarchism and the complicity of women in oppression, the widespread existence of domineering, violent and misogynist practices in anarchist movements is widely acknowledged.¹⁶ Indeed, the claim that anarchist feminism is a tautology has become an important point of departure for anarchist feminist critics of anarchism. Unconvinced by this claim, Pendleton Vandiver explains the logic: "[s]ince anarchy is opposed to all forms of domination, anarchy without feminism is not anarchy at all. Since anarchy declares itself opposed to all archy, all rulership, true anarchy is by definition opposed to patriarchy, i.e. it is, by definition, feminist."¹⁷

⁹ Ibid., 21.

¹⁰ E. Leeder, "Feminism as an Anarchist Process: The Practice of Anarcha-Feminism" (c. 1978?), available online at anarchalibrary.blogspot.co.uk.

¹¹ S. Jeppesen and H. Nazar, "Genders and Sexualities in Anarchist Movements," in *Continuum Companion to Anarchism*, ed. R. Kinna, (New York: Continuum, 2012), 162–191: 172

¹² Jeppesen and Nazar, "Genders and Sexualities in Anarchist Movements," 167.

¹³ For an introduction see "Shit MANarchists Say," available online at www.anarcha.org.

¹⁴ See, for example, Down There Health Collective, *Let's Talk About Consent, Baby* (Down There Health Collective, n.d.); *Queering Protest Sites* (n.d.); M. Kolárová, *Gender in Czech Anarchist Movement* (Prague: Subverze, 2004); Widezma, *Anarchism Meets Feminism: The Importance of Putting Theory into Practice*, (2007), available online at anarchalibrary.blogspot.co.uk; *Why She Doesn't Give a Fuck About Your Insurrection* (New York, 2009), available online at www.scribd.com; Sisters of Resistance, "A Letter to Male Activists," in *Affinity* (Black Iris Press, n.d.), 49–52, available online at network23.org.

¹⁵ B. Black, "Anarchy: A Fable," in *Friendly Fire* (New York: Autonomedia, 1992), 151–153.

¹⁶ Claudia, *Love Lies Bleeding* (London: Class Whore, n.d.).

¹⁷ P. Vandiver, "Feminism: A Male Anarchist's Perspective," available online at theanarchistlibrary.org.

The recognition of anarchism's shortcomings have stimulated a number of important reflections about the nature of anarchist feminism. Flick Ruby's response to the solipsistic reasoning that Vandiver outlines was to call for the adoption of a solid feminist consciousness to disrupt the "comforting cushion" that anarchist men reached for when advancing their well-rehearsed critiques of patriarchy and capitalism. Anarchist feminism described a gendered behavioral program which encouraged men to "take responsibility for the masculinity of the future" and required women to rise above the oppressions of the past.¹⁸ In 1980 Kytha Kurin also argued for the absorption of feminist sensibilities in anarchism but called for struggle against the structural causes of women's oppression, linked anarchist feminism to anarchist-communism and anarcho-syndicalism.¹⁹ A third view has prioritized organizational practice and linked anarchist feminism to the creation of separate spaces. Writing in *Open Road* in 1979, Elaine Leeder observed that mixed groups of anarchist men and women lacked the "unique flavor and style" of women-only feminist groups and that the principles espoused in anarchist politics were profoundly compromised by the anti-feminist behaviors of men who professed them.²⁰ A fourth response, centering on failure of anarchist principles, encourages theoretical revision. Discomforted by the suggestion that anarchism is somehow auto-feminist, Emily Gaarder argues for the injection of feminist ideas into anarchism, links anarchist failures to address the practical concerns of women to the under-theorization of gender and patriarchy.²¹ Stacy/sallydarity similarly looks to Judith Butler, Christine Delphy, Monique Wittig, and Collette Guillaumin to center gender theory in anarchist studies and fill out anarchism's anti-authoritarian, anti-hierarchical spirit.²² Acknowledging anarchism's principled opposition to "all hierarchy and oppression," she sets out a "newer woman question" to fill the gaps in anarchism's default rejection of sexism by the adoption of "principles specific to its emphasis on feminism" and by the drawing attention to the "still necessary" task of making "gendered concerns... central."²³

These critiques of anarchism highlight some important tensions in anarchist feminist thinking. Gaarder's proposal to theorize anarchism through feminism is particularly controversial because it appears to play down the concerns that some anarchists have expressed about the value of "the intellectual arts," to use Farrow's term. This chapter probes these tensions to examine anarchist feminism as a politics that has emerged through critical engagements with both anarchism and non-anarchist feminisms. As a current within anarchism, anarchist feminism is rightly linked to the writing of leading anarchist women, typically neglected in anarchist canons.²⁴ In different historical moments anarchist feminism has also emerged simultaneously as a critique of feminism and as a feminist-inspired revision of anarchism.

¹⁸ Flick Ruby, *Anarcha-Feminism*, available online at www.spunk.org.

¹⁹ K. Kurin, "Anarcha-feminism: Why the hyphen," in Antliff, *Only a Beginning*, 257–263: 261.

²⁰ E. Leeder, "Anarcha-Feminism: Moving Together," in Antliff, *Only a Beginning*, 255–256: 255.

²¹ E. Gaarder, "Addressing Violence Against Women," in *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy*, ed. R. Amster, et al. (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), 46–56: 46.

²² Stacy/sallydarity, "Anarcha-Feminism and the Newer 'Woman Question,'" in *Quiet Rumors. An AnarchaFeminist Reader*, ed. Dark Star Collective. 3rd edition (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2012), 37–42: 38.

²³ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁴ CrimethInc. Ex-Workers' Collective, "Anarcha-Feminism, Part I: Introduction and Herstory" (podcast), available online at www.crimethinc.com. Kathy Ferguson's "Emma Goldman's Women," an online archive of neglected feminists, is one of the historical projects referred to. See www.political.science.hawaii.edu/emmagoldman/index.html.

The argument presented here is that contemporary anarchist feminism is contextualized by a powerful historical narrative which has both marginalized anarchism within feminism and described feminism's intersection with anarchism as a transformative moment. These narratives are described by wave theory. The first section gives an account of feminist wave theory, to show how the boundaries of feminism have been constructed in ways that are neglectful of, if not antithetical to, anarchism. It then sketches two anarchist responses to wave theory, showing how activists have sought to find tools within anarchism to develop anarchist feminism or, alternatively, turned to feminism for anarchism's re-invention as an anarchist feminist politics. The final two sections examine the impact of wave narratives on contemporary anarchist feminisms and consider what the writings of prominent anarchist women contribute to anarchist feminist thinking.

Feminism: Wave Theory and the Exclusion of Anarchism

In 1971 Sheila Rowbotham described the "rediscovery of our own history" as an essential task of the British women's liberation movement.²⁵ The neglect of history was symptomatic of the disregard of women's "specific interests" and its rediscovery and retelling was an important part of women's empowerment, contributing to the advancement of those interests. More recently Clare Hemmings has re-defined the task. The challenge she sets is not to recover a lost history, as if it is possible to "tell a full story about the past"²⁶ but to reflect on the ways in which western feminists have accounted for feminism's past.

Hemmings' analysis is focused on feminism's three, sometimes four phases or waves. Waves are often located in time and place and described in terms of their political character. Accordingly, first wave feminism is usually said to have its roots in eighteenth century radicalism; in America linked to rights discourses, fueled by abolitionist campaigns, and in Britain, to demands for women's education and employment and for the liberalization of marriage laws. Both movements provided a platform and rhetoric for women's emancipation which galvanized the turn of the century suffrage campaigns.²⁷ Sally Scholz's introduction to feminism dates the emergence of the second wave "somewhere between 1948 and 1960" and the peak of the movement "from 1960 until the early 1990s." Second wave feminism is an American and European movement which shifted "the scope of analysis to include aspects of women's physical existence or experience" and "sought solidarity among all women in the experience of oppression." Its watch word was "sisterhood." Scholz treats each subsequent wave as a generational shift:

By the late 1960s—spurred by civil rights activism as well as union and student uprisings—feminist activity burgeoned in new directions and with heightened vigor. Feminists seeing these developments as a "next generation" of activism, called it the "second wave". On this generation model, "third wave" is generally understood to begin in the 1990s.²⁸

²⁵ S. Rowbotham, Introduction to A. Kollontai, *Women Workers Struggle for their Rights*, trans. C. Britton (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1971), ix.

²⁶ C. Hemmings, "What is a Feminist Theorist Responsible For? Response to Rachel Torr," *Feminist Theory* 8 (2007), 69–76: 72.

²⁷ M. Walters, *Feminism. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²⁸ S.J. Scholz, *Feminism: A Beginner's Guide*, (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010), 5.

While Scholz's description assumes an identity of generational change and activism, such that the public manifestation of women's activism indicates the surfacing of a new wave, the distinctive feature of third-wave feminism is that it is associated with a theory-led break with the past. In Scholz's account the third wave is "characterized by a rejection of the project of sisterhood in favor of diversity not only in identity but in subjectivity and thought itself". Equally, in the third wave feminists jettisoned the attempt to apply "traditional political theory" to women and instead worked on the elaboration of "women-centered political theory."²⁹

Fourth wave feminism appears to be the most difficult to pin down. Scholz labels it "postfeminism," and defines it by an awareness of, and resistance to, women's objectification in global media and markets.³⁰ In Kira Cochrane's potted wave history fourth wave feminism is linked to virtual networking.

This movement follows the first-wave campaign for votes for women, which reached its height 100 years ago, the second wave women's liberation movement that blazed through the 1970s and 80s, and the third wave declared by Rebecca Walker, Alice Walker's daughter, and others, in the early 1990s. That shift from second to third wave took many important forms, but often felt broadly generational, with women defining their work as distinct from their mothers'. What's happening now feels like something new again. It's defined by technology: tools that are allowing women to build a strong, popular, reactive movement online.³¹

Wave theory is, of course, a convenient shorthand for a complex history and it captures major changes in the complexion of feminism. But it is not just that. It has also become a dominant frame for feminist thinking, importantly structuring feminist theoretical debate. Nancy Fraser's account of feminisms waves shows how. Feminist theory, Fraser argues, "tends to follow the zeitgeist." In its second wave, feminism emerged from the New Left and "reflected the still-potent influence of Marxism." It located "gender relations on the terrain of political economy, reproduction, and sexuality." There followed a move towards identity and sexual difference. By the 1990s, "the New Left was only a memory" and "most feminist theorists took 'the cultural turn.'" No longer focused on "labor and violence," feminist theory was increasingly taken up with issues of identity and representation. Choosing to ignore the explicitly anti-neoliberal activism of feminist anti-globalizers,³² Fraser argues that social struggles were subordinated to cultural struggles: "the politics of redistribution" gave way to the "politics of recognition." As a result, feminism fell "prey to the zeitgeist" defined by neoliberalism.³³ Wave theory is integral to Fraser's efforts to revive "the sort of socialist-feminist theorizing" that she links with the second wave.

For Hemmings these narratives of change are "motivated accounts" which reflect the interests and investments of the writers.³⁴ By relating the story of feminism in discrete waves, feminist

²⁹ Ibid., 7.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ K. Cochrane, "The Fourth Wave of Feminism: Meet the Rebel Women," *The Guardian* (December 10, 2013), available online at www.theguardian.com.

³² C. Eschle and B. Maiguashca, "Reclaiming Feminist Futures: Co-opted and Progressive Politics in a Neoliberal Age," *Political Studies* 62 (2013), 634–651.

³³ N. Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (London: Verso, 2013), 159–60.

³⁴ Hemmings, "What is a Feminist Theorist Responsible For?" 72.

histories have divided the past “into clear decades to provide a narrative of relentless progress or loss, proliferation or homogenization.”³⁵ Focusing on the representation of theoretical currents within feminist thought, Hemmings notes that western feminism

tells its own story as a developmental narrative, where we move from a preoccupation with unity and sameness, through identity and diversity, and on to difference and fragmentation. These shifts are broadly conceived of as corresponding to the decades of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s respectively, and to a move from liberal, socialist and radical feminist thought to post-modern gender theory.³⁶

The theoretical divisions that Hemmings highlights are precisely those that Scholz and Fraser formalize, descriptively in Scholz’s case, normatively in Fraser’s. Seeking to challenge their dichotomous approach, Hemmings notes that the change from the 70s is treated either as a shift from “naïve” essentialism, “through the black feminist critiques and ‘sex wars’ of the eighties to ‘difference’ in the nineties and beyond,” or as a regression “from the politicized, unified early second wave.” Feminists in this latter camp (which might include Fraser) plot the history of western feminism as a “loss of commitment to social and political change” marked by “an entry into the academy in the eighties, and thence a fragmentation into multiple feminisms and individual careers.”³⁷

Hemmings is interested in exposing the distorting effects of wave theory and in showing how political theories are made rigid and how their authors emerge as representatives of particular wave transformations. In the realm of political theory, the effect of wave theory is to promote the invention of what Kathy Ferguson refers to as taxonomies of positions which fix the boundaries between schools of thought, ignoring their continuities and intersections and the dynamic, creative tension that emerges from the alternative strategies that feminists have adopted in argument. From this perspective, the problem of wave theory is not that it simplifies histories or ideas by their reduction since, as Ferguson argues, reduction can be used to aid reflection and analysis. Instead it introduces “stubborn and persistent” oppositions into “thinking, writing, and acting.”³⁸

Hemmings’ misgivings about the characterisation of post second wave feminist political theory raise broader questions about the ways in which these oppositions have operated in movement histories and in accounts of women’s activism. Perhaps inevitably, given Hemmings’ caution about the possibilities of historical reconstruction, wave theory bundles ideas, movements and practices together to produce short-hand descriptors of “feminism” which are oppositional because they are also exclusionary. Activists self-consciously riding the crest of each new wave emphasize the novelty of their politics by locating themselves in a history in which the memory of earlier radical campaigns has been sunk. In 1978, reflecting on second wave feminism, Eva Figs wrote, “we knew our message was radically different in style and content from anything that had gone before — that women’s liberation would mean men’s liberation and a whole new

³⁵ C. Hemmings, “Telling Feminist Stories,” *Feminist Theory* 6 (2005), 115–139: 116.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ K. Ferguson, *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in the Feminist Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 9.

set of social and cultural values.”³⁹ The possibility of finding any continuity with earlier feminist visions was flatly denied.

While Hemmings warns against treating the discussion of waves (in academic feminist theory journals) as evidence of their reality, it seems that the political and conceptual debates that wave theory historicizes have contributed to the writing of feminist histories, just as they have contributed to the framing of feminist theory. According to Laura Lee Downs, feminist historians active in the period of the second wave embarked on the process of historical recovery by using frameworks and approaches inspired by it. “Moved by and often engaged in contemporary struggles around equal pay or abortion,” she argues, activist scholars writing in the 1960s and 70s “searched the past in those fields that seemed the most immediately relevant: the struggle for the vote and for access to higher education, the history of women’s industrial and agricultural labor, women’s struggle to attain control over their own bodies and sexuality, the history of prostitution.”⁴⁰ The politics of the second wave was similarly historicized. The two dominant approaches to feminist history, Downs notes, were socialist and radical. Socialist-feminists placed “understanding the articulation of class and gender” at the forefront of analysis, “adapting terms and categories of Marxist analysis—‘sex-class,’ ‘sex struggle,’ and ‘patriarchal mode of production.’”⁴¹ Radical feminist historians “foregrounded patriarchy” and argued that “all human societies divide social space into dichotomous and gendered realms of public and private.”⁴² This approach, which Downs believes dominated in the U.S., “imported into ... research the fundamental political premise of second-wave feminism, namely, that ‘gender is the primary source of oppression in society and ... the model for all other forms of oppression,’” including race and class.⁴³

Jeska Rees’s research into the British Women’s Liberation Movement reinforces Downs point: the construction of feminist history, Rees argues, reflects the dominance of trends active within movements. Whereas Downs identifies the imprint of a political division within the feminist second wave between American and British feminist scholars, Rees focuses on the battle for the soul of the British women’s movement. Her contention is that “socialist feminism” has been “privileged” and “radical/revolutionary feminisms denied feminist currency.” For Rees the “trajectory of this historiography mirrors that of academic women’s history as it has developed in Britain since the 1970s” and that this “has been heavily influenced by socialist theory” and “produced a skewed historiography in which radical and revolutionary feminists are not represented in their own words, and where their ideas and practices are often dismissed.”⁴⁴

Echoing Hemmings’ concerns about the oppositions that wave theory encourages in feminist theory Sally Haslanger and Nancy Tuana argue that the exclusions associated with feminist wave histories are distorting. Minority streams active within designated periods of waves are sidelined in subsequent histories. In the U.S. case, they note, “the emphasis on ‘First’ and ‘Second’ Wave feminism ignores the ongoing resistance to male domination between the 1920s and 1960s and the resistance outside mainstream politics, particularly by women of color and working class

³⁹ E. Figs, “Why the Euphoria Had to Stop,” in *Women of the Revolution: Forty Years of Feminism*, ed. K. Cochran (London: guardianbooks, 2012), 55–58: 57.

⁴⁰ L. Downs, *Writing Gender History*, 2nd edition (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 21–22.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴⁴ J. Rees, “A Look Back at Anger: the Women’s Liberation Movement in 1978,” *Women’s History Review* 19 (2010), 337–356: 338.

women.” The representative status given to movements that dominated in the UK and U.S. in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries shores up a conception of feminism that is deeply Anglocentric. The identification of waves “eclipses the fact that there has been resistance to male domination that should be considered ‘feminist’ throughout history and across cultures: i.e., feminism is not confined to a few (White) women in the West over the past century or so.”⁴⁵ Failing to recognize the cultural biases implicit in the modeling of feminism, wave theory simultaneously underplays the international aspect of women’s activism, the biases of the movements it privileges and, not least, the degree to which “Western women and their organizations were embedded in colonial and imperial projects.”⁴⁶ The analysis of Chinese feminism provides another example of the problems that Haslanger and Tuana bring to light. Important currents within Chinese feminist movements—pioneered by women, some of whom identified as anarchist—were lost in histories that searched for movements that followed the Western pattern.⁴⁷ The association of first wave feminism with liberalism not only resulted in the capricious dating of Chinese feminism’s origins but also in the misattribution of its “systematic textual articulation” to the two male translators of J.S. Mill and Herbert Spencer.⁴⁸

The purpose of setting out the problems of wave theory is not to argue that waves have no foundation in social movement history. It would be difficult to argue that suffragettes did not capture the political ground in at the turn of the twentieth century and that feminists critical of the suffrage campaigns did not recognize this. The indifference of socialist party leaders to women’s movement activism, Alexandra Kollontai observed, was derived from a dubious assumption that the denial of rights meant that women were deemed far less valuable than men as potential propagandists of proletarian liberation. She added that the “success of the Suffragettes among women workers” was instrumental in feeding this prejudice.⁴⁹ Nor would it be easy to deny that the struggle for the vote in the late nineteenth century created divisions within women’s movements that would have lasting effects on feminist politics and the ways in which feminism was subsequently articulated. In the late nineteenth century, bell hooks observes, the advantages that some white women won in the course of suffrage campaigns shaped the politics of feminism in the U.S. in significant ways. Black women in America were caught in “a double bind.” The choice was either to “support women’s suffrage ... allying themselves with white women activists who had publicly revealed their racism” or to “support only black male suffrage” and thereby “endorse a patriarchal social order that would grant them no political voice.”⁵⁰

However, in wave theory shifts in movement activism generate reductive approaches to feminism that are not illuminating. Used as a frame to tell a story about feminism’s history, wave theory not only elicits an account of theoretical oppositions, constructed in ways that reflect the interests and positions of authors, as Hemmings observes, but also historicizes feminism in ways that elevate particular currents within movements as definitive.

⁴⁵ S. Haslanger and N. Tuana, “Introduction to Feminism,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2002), available online at www.mit.edu.

⁴⁶ F. de Haan et al., eds., *Women’s Activism: Global Perspectives From the 1890s to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2013), 3.

⁴⁷ L.H. Liu, et al., eds., *The Birth of Chinese Feminism: Essential Texts in Transnational Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁹ Kollontai, *Women Workers Struggle for their Rights*, 31.

⁵⁰ bell hooks, *Ain’t I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, (London: Pluto, 1982), 3.

Anarchism is not the only casualty of wave theory. Conventional accounts of first wave feminism typically airbrush Marxist feminisms from debates, too, along with the extensive debates about androgyny, sex slavery, varietism, and class-priority that the “woman question” provoked in socialist circles in the 1880s and beyond.⁵¹ But the exclusion of anarchism from wave histories of feminism has left a mark on anarchist feminist thinking. The impact of wave theory on the emergence of anarchist feminism, as a contested politics within anarchism, is evident both in the apparent neglect of anarchism during the period of feminism’s second wave and by the convergence of feminist wave theory with a corresponding second wave of anarchism. The result of this convergence is that the politics of anarchist feminism pulls in opposite directions, replicating major cleavages encapsulated by the shift from second to third wave feminisms.

Anarchism, Wave Theory and the Emergence of Anarchist Feminism

The impact of wave theory on anarchist feminism is detectable in two very different approaches to the conceptualization of anarchist feminism. The first calls for the re-discovery of anarchism for feminism and the second uses feminism as a lens for anarchist critique.

For many activists involved in campaigns organized during the period of feminism’s second wave, the issue of anarchism’s exclusion from narratives of feminism was not just about the narrowness of feminism’s construction, but also about the eclipse of anarchism in socialism and the drift of socialists towards forms of Marxism which anarchists understood to be at odds with their own politics. In 1971, the same year that Rowbotham counseled socialist feminists to interrogate feminism’s past, a Chicago anarcho-feminist group vented its frustration with the post-Soviet era domination of Marxism in socialist circles. The problem of anarchism’s exclusion in feminism, the group argued, reflected the general narrowing of socialism and the removal of anarchism from accounts of its history. The group’s view, later articulated by Melbourne anarchist feminists, was that “libertarian ideology” was alone “capable of embracing a feminist world view.”⁵² The Chicago manifesto called for the rediscovery of anarchist histories to support the necessary anarchizing of feminism:

There is another entire radical tradition which has run counter to Marxist-Leninist theory and practice through all of modern radical history—from Bakunin to Kropotkin to Sophie Perovskaya to Emma Goldman to Errico Malatesta to Murray Bookchin—and that is anarchism. It is a tradition less familiar to most radicals because it has consistently been distorted and misrepresented by the more highly organized State organization and Marxist-Leninist organization.⁵³

During the same period, Peggy Kornegger similarly argued that the disregard and distortion of anarchist politics explained anarchism’s exclusion from feminism. The starting point for her celebrated essay, reprinted in the seminal anarcho-feminist anthology *Quiet Rumors*, was the

⁵¹ L. Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London: Tauris, 2002); S. Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 2010).

⁵² “Anarchism and Feminism,” Victoria Pre-conference Statement, 1974, available online at anarchalibrary.blogspot.co.uk.

⁵³ Chicago Anarcho-Feminists, “An Anarcho-Feminist Manifesto,” in Dark Star, *Quiet Rumors*, 15–17.

realization that a “whole chunk of the past (and thus possibilities for the future) had been kept from me.” Anarchism was not a ready-made politics for feminists, but Kornegger observed an instinctive anarchism in the grass roots associations, consciousness-raising and affinity groups, workshops and networks⁵⁴ that anarchist feminists championed and argued that feminists had something to gain from the conscious awareness of feminism’s “connections” with a politics that “has been so maligned and misinterpreted.”⁵⁵ Carol Ehrlich made a similar case. Noting that “anarchism has veered between a bad press and none at all,” she reiterated Kornegger’s point about anarchism’s general invisibility, and used the subdivision of feminism into radical and socialist wings to situate anarchist feminism as a horizontal, anti-authoritarian alternative. “Unlike some radical feminists” anarchist feminists “do not believe that power in the hands of women could possibly lead to a non-coercive society” and “unlike most socialist feminists, they do not believe that anything good can come out of a mass movement with a leadership elite.”⁵⁶

A second approach to anarchist feminism questioned the premises on which this project was based. This current within anarchism has looked to feminism rather than anarchism to conceptualize an anarchist feminist politics. The deployment of a wave history of anarchism, corresponding to feminist wave theory, significantly shaped this conceptualization.

In this current of ideas anarchism’s waves correspond to feminism’s waves but they are described in particular ways. Specifically, whereas feminist wave theory narrates a series of disruptions and political revisions driven by feminist critique, the equivalent history in anarchism tells a story of death and rebirth explained by political failure. In contrast to the triumphant end of first wave feminism, symbolized by the introduction of voting rights in Britain and America, first wave anarchism finishes disastrously, eclipsed by the Bolshevik revolution and subsequent dominance of Marxism, and defeated in revolutions in Germany and Spain. The crushing of the Spanish anarchists in 1939 not only signals anarchism’s first wave crash but also the collapse of an ideology that was outworn. The highs and lows of anarchism are tied tightly to the fortunes of western movements, just as they are in feminism, and the theoretical shifts are presented as starkly as they are in feminist histories. But the movements within anarchism describe fundamental transformations. Above all, the rebirth of anarchism in the late 1960s is explained by the revitalizing power of external forces and not by the development of oppositional critique, as is the case in feminism’s waves.

In this convergence the emergence of second wave feminism is a defining moment for contemporary anarchism. For Cindy Milstein, 60s activism “increasingly broadened” anarchism’s “lens of critique.” First wave “classical anarchists” were “concerned with phenomena besides capitalism and the state, whether that was militarism, sexuality, or organized religion.” They also introduced analytical “categories such as hierarchy” used widely in contemporary anarchist politics. But “such articulations were still generally subservient to a focus on capitalism and the state—much as Marxists made, and often still do, all phenomena subservient (or ‘superstructural’) to the economy (‘base’).”⁵⁷ Milstein identifies Bookchin’s *Ecology of Freedom* as the exemplary expression of “a more all-encompassing horizontal libertarianism.” Published in 1982, at the peak of the second wave by Scholz’s assessment, Bookchin’s “re-thinking of anarchism” points to the

⁵⁴ bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (London: Pluto, 2000), 7–8; M. Acklesberg, *Resisting Citizenship: Feminist Essays on Politics, Community, and Democracy* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 13–25.

⁵⁵ P. Kornegger, “Anarchism: The Feminist Connection,” in Dark Star, *Quiet Rumors*, 25–36: 25, 26, 30.

⁵⁶ C. Ehrlich, “Socialism, Anarchism and Feminism,” in *ibid.*, 55–56: 57–58.

⁵⁷ C. Milstein, *Anarchism and Its Aspirations*, (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2010), 37.

uniform entrenchment of the principle of class-priority across socialist doctrines. While Milstein attributes the change in anarchism to the influence of the “counterculture, New Left and autonomist movements of the long 1960s,” not especially to feminism, she credits these movements with bringing “ecology and technology... alienation and cultural production... sex, sexuality, gender and kinship... white supremacy and antiracism... ableism and ageism... physical and mental health” to the “matrix of anarchism’s critique.”⁵⁸ The story Milstein tells is that anarchists were unable to fully embrace feminism because they were as hamstrung by their commitment to class and consequently unable to account adequately for non-class oppressions.

Other observers are less generous in their assessment of first wave anarchism than Milstein. Indeed, a strong current of post second-wave analysis suggests that twentieth-century anarchist feminists would find very little to help them develop a pro-feminist anarchist politics in historical anarchism, because first wave anarchism was defined by an anti-feminist malestream. The essence of the argument is that prior to the attention that second-wave pro-feminists devoted to it, anarchism was an anti-feminist doctrine.

This is Peter Marshall’s view. His standard reference on anarchism acknowledges that the anarchist movement attracted some important women activists⁵⁹ but argues that anarchist intolerance of feminism undermined their influence. The impact of the ideas of the radical women within the movement—Emma Goldman, Louise Michel, Charlotte Wilson and Voltairine de Cleyre—was belatedly felt; second wave archaeology was responsible for the transformation of anarchism.⁶⁰ Goldman might now be the most celebrated historical activist, rivaled only by de Cleyre, but not even she found an audience during her lifetime. At the end of her career, Marshall argues, Goldman knew that she was “hopelessly out of tune with her contemporaries.”⁶¹

Sharif Gemie’s criticism of anarchism’s anti-feminism similarly spotlights the anti-feminism of historical anarchism, focusing on the shortcomings of the anarchist canon. In an influential analysis of anarchism and feminism he argues, “of the four best known political theorists” of anarchism, “only one addressed questions of sexual politics at any length.”⁶² This was P.-J. Proudhon, a notorious anti-feminist and misogynist. However, anarchism’s failure to consider explicitly the oppression of women is not derived from the power of Proudhon’s venomous pen, or indeed, the apparent insensitivity of anarchism’s other canonical thinkers to questions of sexual politics and interpersonal relations. Gemie pinpoints anarchism’s weakness in the failure to articulate a full-blooded or distinctive feminist politics and the vacillating support given to women’s struggles, made conditional on the reinforcement of “the counter-community’s potential.”⁶³ Anarchists endorsed feminism for as long as women anarchists did not seek to disrupt the patriarchal relations that structured oppressions in those communities.

The extent to which nineteenth century anarchist movements were resistant to feminist perspectives is a matter of debate. Gemie’s critique is based on a textual analysis of nineteenth-century anarchist writing, but his findings have been challenged.⁶⁴ However, the significance of his feminist critique of anarchism does not rest on an argument about the proper characteriza-

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 38–9.

⁵⁹ M. Marsh, *Anarchist Women 1870–1920* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1981).

⁶⁰ P. Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*, (London: Harpercollins, 1992), 556.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 408.

⁶² S. Gemie, “Anarchism and Feminism: A Historical Survey,” *Women’s History Review* 5 (1996), 417–444: 422.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 435.

⁶⁴ R. Cleminson, “Anarchism and Feminism,” *Women’s History Review* 7 (1998), 135–38. See also K. Shaeffer, *Anarchism and Countercultural Politics in Early Twentieth Century Cuba* (Gainesville, FL.: University Press of Florida,

tion of historical anarchist movements. Its force lies instead in his identification of a gap between nineteenth-century anarchist practice and second wave feminist theory: anarchists, Gemie argues, might have been expected to push their critique of bureaucracy and defense of community to espouse “the type of re-evaluation of private and public worlds that feminists such as [Jean Bethke] Elshtain have evoked.”⁶⁵ The inability or unwillingness of leading anarchists to do so was indicative of a pervasive belief that feminism occupied a place “outside of the normal concerns of the anarchist movement.”⁶⁶

Contemporary anarchist feminism has been molded by both these approaches, rightly linked to the formative writing of leading women and fleshed out through an account of wave development that emphasizes the apparently restorative role that second wave activism had on anarchism.⁶⁷ But these approaches have not had the same sway, notwithstanding the publication of important histories since the 1970s that support the kinds of anarchizing projects that Kornegger and Ehrlich advocated. The next section considers how these narratives of anarchism and feminism continue to resonate in contemporary anarchist feminisms.

Theorizing Contemporary Anarchist Feminisms

As means of understanding the dynamics of contemporary anarchist feminist movements, Caroline Kalterfleiter contends, wave theory is a faulty guide. It blunts the analysis of movement activism and the dynamic contexts in which activists operate and is ill-equipped to imagine the histories which inform activism and the extent to which “ongoing initiatives ... may actually be rooted in a conflation of experiences of days, months, years, or even a decade ago.”⁶⁸ Nevertheless, wave theory continues to serve as a touchstone for anarchist feminist thinking and important divisions in contemporary anarchist feminism can be explained with reference to it. Arguments about class and gender, rehearsed in discussions about organizing and strategy and replicating cleavages within non-anarchist feminisms, underpin these divisions.

The discussion of waves in contemporary anarchist feminism is frequently tied to the description of movement activism and these often assume a particular complexion, linked to local anarchist politics. However, one of the strong currents in anarchist feminism is the idea that anarchist feminism has tended to follow the trajectory plotted by the waves described by other feminisms since anarchism’s second wave feminist revitalization.

Describing adjustments in Slovene movements, Ida Hiršenfelder connects second wave activism with the “aggressive ... and very violent” militancy epitomized by Valerie Solanas’s *Scum Manifesto*, not the ecological, plural anti-oppression movements that Milstein depicts. Third wave feminism, Hiršenfelder contends, started from “the need to reflect” on second wave ideas, and led to the incorporation of identity politics into activism. The third wave revisions were made

2005); and K. Shaeffer, *Black Flag Boriculas: Anarchism, Antiauthoritarianism, and the Left in Puerto Rico, 1897–1921* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2013), chapter 6.

⁶⁵ Gemie, “Anarchism and Feminism,” 422.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 432.

⁶⁷ CrimethInc. Ex-Workers’ Collective, “Anarcha-Feminism, Part I: Introduction and Herstory” (podcast); Ferguson, “Emma Goldman’s Women.”

⁶⁸ C. Kaltefleiter, “Anarchy Girl Style Now: Riot Grrrl Actions and Practices,” in Amster, et al., *Contemporary Anarchist Studies*, 224–235: 233.

in the light of queer theory.⁶⁹ Jeppesen and Nazar tie third wave anarchist feminism to movements within anarchism, notably anarchapunk/Riot Grrrl, to changes in global politics, especially the emergence of the transnational protest movements in the late 1990s and, beyond anarchism, to the theoretical foregrounding of “the intersectionality of identities and issues.”⁷⁰ This alignment also structures Richard Day’s narrative of feminism. Invoking a novel distinction in feminism’s second wave, between anti-capitalist socialist feminism and anti-state anarchy-feminism, he maps the third and fourth waves to changes in feminist theory: the third wave to black and postcolonial feminisms and the fourth to postmodern feminisms.⁷¹ A similar theoretical dynamic is embedded in the grass roots activism of the Romanian anarchy-feminist project, the LoveKills Collective, which defines its aims as a rejection of second wave feminism, as “something that reinforces the gender binary and domination.”⁷²

This reading of convergence has not dented the radical edge of anarchist feminism or caused it to become bland or featureless. One of the concepts central to anarchist feminist praxis—intersectionalism—is adapted from mainstream feminism, but it assumes a particular spirit when used as a tool for self-organizing. Uri Gordon deploys it to describe processes of movement building and the generation of theory from below.⁷³ Sandra Jeppesen uses intersectionalist critique to stimulate the adoption and development of pro-feminist ethics. These ethics, which are not specifically anti-capitalist, describe the meta-principles of anarchist feminist organizing. They supplement the anti-authoritarian and non-hierarchical practices that Jo Freeman described pejoratively as structureless,⁷⁴ with a prefigurative commitment to non-oppression politics and social transformation. Pro-feminist ethics favor “cooperation over competition, listening over speaking, gift or barter economics over profit, and linguistic inclusivity.” Norms include the outlawing of dominating behaviors that exhibit

sexism, racism, heterosexism, colonialism, ableisms or other forms of oppression; taking turns and being respectful when others are speaking, raising one’s hand to the on a speakers list which prioritizes marginalized and first-time speakers, twinkling or making jazz hands rather than interrupting when one likes what someone is saying; self-facilitating by being aware of how much space one is taking up and limiting interventions if speaking too often; and doing go-around check-ins where everyone in a workshop introduces themselves, says what pronoun they go by, and speaks about how they are feeling, their organizing work, and/or what they expect from the meeting or workshop; and explicitly processes for addressing dominating behaviors.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ T. Hvala, “An Interview with Ida Hiršenfelder, Editor of Sektor Ž, Feminist Radio Show on Radio Študent, Ljubljana, Slovenia” (2011), available online at anarchalibrary.blogspot.co.uk.

⁷⁰ Jeppesen and Nazar, “Genders and Sexualities in Anarchist Movements,” 170.

⁷¹ R. Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (London: Pluto, 2005), 87.

⁷² R. Chidgey and E. Zobl, “Love is a Perverted Feeling...’ An Email Interview with the Anarchy-Feminist LoveKills Collective, From Romania” (2009), available online at anarchalibrary.blogspot.co.uk.

⁷³ U. Gordon, “Utopia in Contemporary Anarchism,” in *Anarchism and Utopianism*, ed. L. Davis and R. Kinna (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 260–275: 262.

⁷⁴ J. Freeman, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness,” in Dark Star, *Quiet Rumors*, 68–75.

⁷⁵ S. Jeppesen, et al., “The Anarchist Commons,” *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization* 14 (2014), 879–900: 880, 884.

To the extent that the conceptual tools used by some anarchist feminists in contemporary activism and critique are rooted in a narrative about anarchism's waves, they also serve as sites for the same kind of oppositional thinking that besets feminist theorizing. Not un-coincidentally, one of the principal splits in contemporary anarchist feminist politics runs along one of feminism's major fault lines. This is the dispute between those who defend class analysis and those who understand class approaches as reductive. This division is central to anarchist feminist critique of first wave anarchism, of post-second wave analysis of second wave feminism and implicit in the anarchist feminist embrace of third wave identity politics. Responding to Traci Harris's call to radical feminists to "recognize the system of domination as white, capitalist and masculine,"⁷⁶ Red Sonja argues, defensively, against the characterization of class-politics associated with the thesis of post-second wave convergence:

There is a triple oppression and we cannot view patriarchy and white supremacy as mere contradictions, or secondary afterthought to the class analysis. They do function as "divisive mechanisms of capital" yet are independent of that. Nor are white supremacy, colonialism, and racism footnotes to women's oppression. We have to consistently challenge this creeping idea among white leftists or run the played out mistake of a doomed revolutionary analysis. But to discard the class lens with which we view these oppressions is to imitate multicultural liberalism which does no one any favors.⁷⁷

This tension within anarchist feminism plays out in treatments of privilege and domination, where disputants alternatively explain oppression as unearned privilege accruing to all members of socially advantaged groups or as the result of inequalities rooted in uneven property ownership and wealth. It is also evident in arguments about safer spaces policies, which might be defended as instruments that combat domination or criticized as ineffective and politically divisive. And it can be found in the analysis of intersectionalism, which is represented both as a practice compatible with labor-oriented organization and as a corrective to the assumptions about the universalizing capability of the white, male working class.⁷⁸ It is also felt in arguments about the status of theory and practice, in debates about the character of anarchist feminist theorizing, the construction of the anarchist canon and the nature of hierarchical knowledge-production.⁷⁹

The existence of tensions within movements might be seen as an indicator of their vitality. Yet there is also a danger that parties to the debates become locked in oppositional positions. To adapt Kathy Ferguson's analysis of the role that metatheoretical questions play in shaping political arguments, protagonists to debate operate "within a certain frame" and the "frame makes claims upon our questioning that we have trouble hearing." Reading the same wave narrative in different ways, disputants to anarchist feminist debates risk becoming enframed, "seeing only the battles each practice names as worthy and missing the ways in which contending interpretations or rival

⁷⁶ T. Harris, "Redefining Radical Feminism," *Northeastern Anarchist* 4 (2002); T. Harris, "Radical Feminist Politics and the Ruckus," available online at www.bringtheruckus.org.

⁷⁷ Red Sonja, "The Precarious Union of Anarchism and Feminism", available online at theanarchistlibrary.org.

⁷⁸ Dysophia, "Anarchist Debates on Privilege," *Dysophia* 4 (2013).

⁷⁹ J. Greenway, "The Gender Politics of Anarchist History: re/membering women, re/minding men" (2010), available online at www.judygreenway.org.uk; Jeppesen and Nazar, "Genders and Sexualities in Anarchist Movements," 165–166. For a contrary view, see M. Campbell, "Voltairine de Cleyre and the Anarchist Canon," in *Blasting the Canon*, ed. S. Evren and R. Kinna (New York: Punctum Books, 2013), 64–81.

deconstructions cooperate... to articulate some possibilities and silence others.”⁸⁰ Noticing that debates about intersectionalism are couched in terms of a choice, either class or identity politics, bell hooks argues for an approach that “allows us to focus on what is most important at a given point in time”:

if we move away from either/or thinking, and if we think, okay, every day of my life that I walk out of my house I am a combination of race, gender, class, sexual preference and religion or what have you, what gets foregrounded? I think it’s crazy for us to think that people don’t understand what’s being foregrounded in their lives at a given point in time. Like right now, for many Americans, class is being foregrounded like never before because of the economic situation. It doesn’t mean that race doesn’t matter, or gender doesn’t matter, but it means that... people are losing their jobs, insurance.⁸¹

This appeal speaks to the entrenchment of oppositional thinking, even while it proposing a way of addressing it. How would the generation of women active in the period of feminism’s first wave attempted to analyze women’s oppression as anarchists? In the final section, I sketch an approach to anarchist feminism that was not predicated on the existence of waves and outline a critique that focuses on three concepts: slavery, rights, and power.

Slavery, Rights and Power

The critique of slavery was neither original to anarchism nor developed exclusively by anarchists. It emerged from republican discourses and it was taken up widely by a variety of socialists in the late nineteenth-century in order to emphasize the moral bankruptcy of regimes based on class exploitation.⁸² The critique of slavery, Selma James argues, was integral to Marx’s theory of exploitation.⁸³ In anarchist writing slavery was not just deployed as a rhetorical device to demonize capitalism or expose the dependencies of workers on the masters who employed them. Anarchists used slavery as an analytical tool to dissect state oppression and they pressed arguments about the transformation of chattel to wage slavery following the formal abolition of serfdom in Russia and slavery in America, in order to investigate the different ways that domination affected groups within states.

The massive appropriation of land from rural workers and the crushing tenancy arrangements that followed the 1861 Emancipation Act helped convince Peter Kropotkin and Leo Tolstoy that exploitation and oppression were best thought of as systems of slavery, driven by capitalism and maintained by state violence. Elisée Reclus took a similar lesson from his observations of American abolition. After the so-called “emancipation,” Reclus described the exploitation of the “freed labor power of former slaves” as “slavery, minus the obligation to care for the children and the elderly.” The continued existence of supremacist cultures meant that ex-slaves were

⁸⁰ Ferguson, *The Man Question*, 7.

⁸¹ R. Lowens, “How Do You Practice Intersectionalism? An Interview with bell hooks,” available online at commonstruggle.org.

⁸² S. Clark, *Living Without Domination: The Possibility of an Anarchist Utopia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 106.

⁸³ S. James, *Sex, Race, and Class—The Perspective of Winning: A Selection of Writings, 1952–2011* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 143–60.

not merely exploited as workers, but in special ways as black workers through the operation of segregation policies and the differential rights that freed slaves were accorded as citizens.⁸⁴

The language of enslavement was also used to explore women's oppression and to probe the particular ways that women were oppressed and exploited in capitalism and the state. In this context, too, anarchists borrowed from earlier generations of feminists. As Eugenia Delamotte argues, Voltairine de Cleyre was profoundly influenced by Mary Wollstonecraft. Disrupting the liberal feminist narrative that binds Wollstonecraft narrowly to liberal feminism and first wave suffrage campaigns, de Cleyre borrowed her "core analogy between political tyranny and men's domination of women"⁸⁵ to link slavery to authority and exploitation without suggesting that it was synonymous with either. Authority, particularly vested in the Church, and exploitation, rooted in property ownership, structured the unequal power relations and systems of organization that controlled and oppressed women as subjects and workers; slavery described the condition that undermined women's ability to disobey or resist.

Authority and exploitation shaped the spheres of women's actions, regulating women's relationships with those who claimed authority and/or with property owners. And these political and economic relationships were infused by a complex set of cultural norms and philosophical traditions that patterned women's relationships with men and sealed women's dependent status as slaves. Charlotte Wilson advanced a similar view. Women were enslaved by laws governing property ownership and labor, but also by social practices that reduced them to pliant subjection. Thus while she called for the abolition of class rule and an end to individual monopoly of the means of production, she also advocated a minimal program of remedial change that included the introduction of "special training for girls in independence of thought, and courage in action and in acts of self-defense, to counteract the cowardice and weakness engendered in women by ages of suppression and slavery."⁸⁶ Victor Yarros used the same framework to explain women's enslavement. Acknowledging that the "yoke of capitalism" fell upon women "with more crushing effect" than it did on men, women were "slaves of capital" in precisely the same way. And for both men and women, slavery was regulated by law and enforced by the state. In addition, women were also "subjected to the misery of being the property, tool and plaything of man, and have neither power to protest against the use, nor remedies against the abuse, of their persons by their male masters." This form of slavery, he argued, "is sanctioned by custom, prejudice, tradition, and prevailing notions of morality and purity."⁸⁷

De Cleyre's critique of slavery was underpinned what Susan Brown refers to as anarchist feminism's voluntarism and commitment to individual autonomy.⁸⁸ This translated into a particular

⁸⁴ J. Clark and C. Martin, eds., *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity: Selected Writings of Elisée Reclus*, (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2013), 89–90.

⁸⁵ E. Delamotte, *Gates of Freedom: Voltairine de Cleyre and the Revolution of the Mind. With Selections from Her Writing* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 212.

⁸⁶ Charlotte Wilson, "The Criminal Law Amendment Act" [1885], in *Charlotte Wilson: Anarchist Essays*, ed. N. Walter (London: Freedom, 2000), 31–36: 36.

⁸⁷ Victor Yarros, "The Exchange (Partial) Between Victor and Zelm on 'The Woman Question'" [1888], in *Individualist Feminism of the Nineteenth Century. Collected Writings and Biographical Profiles*, ed. W. McElroy, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2001), 143–146: 144.

⁸⁸ L. Susan Brown, *The Politics of Individualism. Liberalism, Liberal Feminism, Anarchism* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1993), 107. For a reading of de Cleyre's concept of autonomy, see S. Presley, "No Authority But Oneself: The Anarchist Feminist Philosophy of Autonomy and Freedom," *Social Anarchism* 27 (2000), available online at library.nothingness.org.

understanding of liberty. Rhetorically, de Cleyre described liberty as the remedy for slavery.⁸⁹ Strategically, she argued for the extension of freedom by the struggle for rights. For de Cleyre, rights were powers: claims or demands advanced by direct action and decoupled from law or what she called “the vagaries of license.”⁹⁰ The essence of de Cleyre’s idea was captured in the distinction Dora Marsden drew between a “bondwoman” and a “freewoman.” Bondwomen sought permission for their freedom. They “cry that a woman is an individual, and that because she is an individual she must be set free.” The freewoman, in contrast was an individual: “she is free, and will act like those who are free.”⁹¹ De Cleyre’s version of this concept was: “They have rights who dare maintain them.”⁹² Women were told that they lacked the capacity to enjoy freedom: her response was that women “are not *worth* it, until we *take* it.”⁹³

Rights could be realized proactively, or reactively. The suffrage campaign was an example a of proactive rights struggle. While anarchists bemoaned as futile the aims of campaigners, they applauded their direct actions. Rebecca Edelsohn expressed a widely held view when she wrote in *Mother Earth* of her admiration for the English suffragettes and endorsed their “methods of warfare.”⁹⁴ *Freedom* similarly set aside its skepticism about the value of the vote to congratulate the women who struggled for it. Their tactics demonstrated that “nothing is squeezed out of the politician unless you have a vigorous and uncompromising agitation outside Parliament.”⁹⁵ Reactive rights campaigns targeted individuals or groups responsible for repression, typically by violence. For de Cleyre, Sophia Petrovskaya, the assassin of Tsar Alexander II, modeled the kind of skill and dexterity that women possessed—and needed to cultivate—to protest the systematic and serious denial of their rights.⁹⁶ In current activism, a similar spirit animates insurrectionist anarchist feminist resistance to male violence. One group call on women to “Kick the shit out of your rapists ... become an autonomous force that will destroy everything in its wake.”⁹⁷

The struggle against slavery placed enormous burdens on women as deliverers of their own freedom. But it also opened up a broad field for action, which extended from involvement in global anti-colonial campaigns to micro-political actions that challenged everyday sexism. It also included extra-legal campaigning for legal reforms. Resisting slavery meant fighting for changes outside the framework of the legislative system, sometimes in order to bring changes in the law but on terms that the state and capitalism would struggle to accommodate. By asserting their rights, women might secure custody of their children and exclusive decision-making power to determine arrangements for their upbringing; full access to education and employment to release them from the servitude of domestic labor; changes in work patterns that enabled women to support themselves independently; control of their bodies, to determine their reproduction and, for Sarah Holmes, the latitude to undertake sex work. Many of these demands were advanced equally by non-anarchist women. The distinctively anarchist feature of this program was that women pressed rights as part of a commitment to continuous political change or as de Cleyre put it, borrowing Proudhon’s language, a progressive struggle for justice: I insist on this point

⁸⁹ Voltairine de Cleyre, “Sex Slavery” [1890], Delamotte, *Gates of Freedom*, 222–234: 232.

⁹⁰ Voltairine de Cleyre, “New and Strange Ideas: Letter to Her Mother, December 18, 1887,” in *ibid.*, 165–167: 165.

⁹¹ Dora Marsden, “Bondwomen,” *The Freewoman* 1 (November 23, 1911), available online at i-studies.com.

⁹² Voltairine de Cleyre, “The Gates of Freedom” [1891], in Delamotte, *Gates of Freedom*, 235–250: 235.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁹⁴ R. Edelsohn, “Hunger Striking in America,” *Mother Earth* 9:7 (September 1914).

⁹⁵ “A Victory for Women,” *Freedom* (March 1908).

⁹⁶ Voltairine de Cleyre, “The Gates of Freedom,” in Delamotte, *Gates of Freedom*, 246.

⁹⁷ “A Modest Proposal From Some Crazy Bitches” (2010), available online at anarchibrary.blogspot.co.uk.

of the progressiveness of justice, first because I do not wish you to think me a metaphysical dreamer, holding to the exploded theory that “rights” are positive, unalterable, indefinite some-things passed down from one generation to another after the fashion of an entailed estate, and come into existence in some mysterious manner at the exact moment that humanity emerges from apedom. It would be quite too difficult a matter to settle on the emerging point.

I insist on the progressiveness of justice, because, however fierce my denunciation of present injustice may be, I none the less recognize it to have been the justice of the past, the highest possible condition so long as the aspiration of the general mind rose no farther... I need the admission of the progressiveness of justice in order to ... prove my assertion that, however necessary the slavery of woman might have been, it is no longer in accord with the ideals of our present civilization.⁹⁸

De Cleyre recognized that this kind of activism was centered on practices, even at one point decrying the “clouds of theory” that formed when “conditions made it impossible” to act. Nevertheless, her conception of rights pointed to a comprehensive anarchist ideal. Her critique of the “theory-rotted” who refused to think about “what can be accomplished now” was a rejection of “theory-spinning about future society,”⁹⁹ not a critique of utopianism. Indeed, her call to activism was directed towards the construction of alternative futures. Depicting a world populated by groups of zombie-like guardians of order and living souls determined on its subversion, de Cleyre argued:

For these are dead who walk about with vengeance ... and scorn for things dark and lowly, in the odor of self-righteousness, with self-vaunting wisdom in their souls, and pride of race, and iron-shod order, and the preservation of Things that Are; walking stones are these, that cannot hear. But the living are those who seek to know, who wot not of things lowly or things high, but only of things wonderful; and who turn sorrowfully from Things that Are, hoping for Things that Maybe. If these should hear the Chain Gang chorus, seize it, make all the living hear it, see it!¹⁰⁰

The analysis of slavery explained why women’s oppression extended so comprehensively in manners, dress codes, or what de Cleyre called fashion-slavery,¹⁰¹ and was still felt so imperfectly. It also explained why women were subject to oppression as keenly in socialist circles as they were in bourgeois society at large. Even while calling for world revolution, de Cleyre noted, anarchist men told their womenfolk to “[s]tay at home ... Be patient, obedient, submissive! Darn our socks, mend our shirts, wash our dishes, get our meals, wait on us and *mind the children!*” As Gemie notes, anarchist men were no better in applying their principles than other socialists and radicals. Indeed, the theoretical tools were sometimes used to close down feminist critique. In his debates with Sarah Holmes in the anarchist periodical *Liberty*, Yarros was quite open about the limits of the theory: women lacked the capacity to overcome their enslavement,

⁹⁸ Ibid., 240–1.

⁹⁹ Voltairine de Cleyre, “Report of the Work of the Chicago Mexican Defense League” [1912], in Delamotte, *Gates of Freedom*, 189–191: 191.

¹⁰⁰ Voltairine de Cleyre, “The Chain Gang” [1907], in *ibid.*, 201–204: 204.

¹⁰¹ Voltairine de Cleyre, “Sex Slavery,” in *ibid.*, 230.

even with the benefit of the sort of education Charlotte Wilson outlined. While he regarded Proudhon's refusal to exclude domestic relationships from anarchist analysis as "arbitrary, illogical, and contradictory of his whole philosophy," Yarros combined free love principles with Stirnerism to argue that women necessarily entered into dependant relationships with men in order to fulfill themselves sexually. Responsibility for childcare was the price women paid for this voluntary subordination.¹⁰² Domestic enslavement followed.

What was the proper response to Yarros and his ilk? Rather than ignore or ditch the theory, de Cleyre opted to read it through feminist eyes and even dared invoke Proudhon, the arch-misogynist, to inspire her radicalism.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored wave theories of feminism and anarchism to show how contemporary anarchist feminism has been influenced by activist concerns to find tools within anarchism to develop anarchist feminism or, alternatively, apply feminist theory to address serious shortcomings in anarchist politics. The analysis explains why anarchist feminism is so hard to define and why it is at least partially fractured by debates about class and identity. The critique of slavery, developed by anarchists active during the period of feminism's first wave and marginalized in historical narratives about feminism and anarchism, offers a different way of theorizing anarchist feminism, of diagnosing the causes of women's oppression and the range of actions that might be taken to combat it. This approach resonates with contemporary anarchist feminism, but theorizes practice in ways that some contemporary activists are reluctant to do. Moreover, it provides an outline idea of domination as a systematic structural hindrance which affects all social groups, while advantaging or disadvantaging members of particular groups in different ways. This conception differs from class analysis. It also diverges from intersectional approaches which treat domination more narrowly as a social power accruing from group membership and which seek to combat it by the development of non-dominating behaviors within particular organizational frameworks. Anti-slavery doctrines are compatible with intersectional approaches, but extend the repertoires of action in novel ways.

¹⁰² McElroy, *Individualist Feminism of the Nineteenth Century*, 137.

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