An Exploration of Current Anarcha-Feminist Theory and Praxis

With an Eye for How It Manifests in the Berlin Radical Scene

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Content Notice: discussions of abuse, sexualized violence, and rape.

Anarchism is the critique of power, and anarcha-feminism is the focusing of this critique on gender-based systems of domination.

Or at least, that's what it should be. In reality, anarcha-feminism, like anarchism writ large, often relies on simplified explanations of how power functions. Praxes for countering this shadow-version of power propagate among us in part when they are effective at countering actual power, but also when they become prestigious regardless of their actual utility. They can become self-prepetuating once they achieve a hegemonic position within our movements where it becomes more important to repeat the popular praxis than to examine the world critically. We have a tendency to focus on the reproduction of our own subculture over material change instead of letting the changes themselves attract the like-minded. We pursue events, actions, and theories that have an aesthetic, a vibe, an aura of (sometimes militant, sometimes radical) anarcha-feminism rather than carefully examining and eradicating power. The anarcha-feminist systems we create themselves can be sources of power, and when they do, they have few to no checks against them. We create norms that become entrenched whether or not they continue to serve us, and attempting to undo such norms feels like an attack against (anarcha-)feminisim itself. As the saying goes, any system that can be exploited will be exploited, and we fail to notice to these problems within our ranks.

From the festering patriarchy and sexualized violence within our movement to the distant but heavy hand of powerful rapist and human trafficking politicians, our problems are many. To fight them requires understanding the systems that intersect to produce the phenomenon, and it requires us to refine our strategies and tactics. What follows is an examination of some common anarcha-feminist praxes and their theoretical backing as a means of understanding some of the trends in our movement. Through this deepened understanding, we can better change the world.

A rough heuristic for excluding the largest group of possible patriarchs and predators

Building off the ideas of the second-wave feminists and the Autonomen, one of our most common strategies is the creation of self-organized spaces free of patriarchal behaviors. To do this, we use FLINTA[1] as the inclusion/exclusion criteria. If, when splitting by gender, cis men[2] are the largest group of predators and marginalized genders are the most affected, then it follows that excluding such men from events would decrease the amount of patriarchal disposition and sexualized violence present.

Because this topic is contentious, let's first look at where and why FLINTA can be an at least partially useful organizing principle. FLINTA spaces create a sense of safety and comfort for participants which largely comes from the shared identities and background of the participants, and also from the absence of people who are perceived to be cis men. People with marginalized gen-

[1] FLINTA: Women (Frauen), lesbians, intersex, non-binary, trans, agender.

[2] I could in all instances write "cis endo men," but for two reasons I do not. First, advocates of FLINTA spaces rarely do, and I'm repeating their arguments here. Second, perceived cis maleness is a factor in granting the privileges afforded by patriarchy, and we're not doing gonad or endocrine-level checks before we decide to let someone speak, so the endo/inter distinction matters less. I could say "the primary beneficiaries of patriarchy" each time, but that too has hazy boundaries. Please pardon the inaccuracies of the language I've chosen.

ders[3] (MaGes) — even when banding together within affinity groups, collectives, house projects, or any other sort of anarchist constellation — are frequently ignored, overruled, or otherwise sidelined relative to the influence of cis men.

A friend who lived in rural Austria and shared her experiences using FLINTA as an organizing principle with me.

> I've been organised in a feminist group in the area where I grew up in. I was actually the one to introduce the term FLINTA there. They had been organised just as (cis) women before, not because they are transphobic, but simply because the state of society seems to be 30 years in the past there. There, organising without cis men is a dire necessity, since even the "leftist" men are for the biggest part raging sexist (yes, even the partners of the most radical feminists). The form of organising there just started out as a weekly Stammtisch [regular informal meetup] for women, and within a year we shifted to to public actions for visibility.
>
> At some point along the way one of us realised, that they no longer identify as a woman, but as non-binary. We didn't want to exclude them, and I had heard the term FLINTA before, so I suggested we adopt it and open our group, which worked out well. The group grew from 10 to 85 people within the last 5 years, and while it's mostly still cis women the "opening" step has really helped it prosper.
>
> If you might be wondering if it would have made sense to just be open to everyone: we were thinking about this too, so we held a meeting with some of the men in our lives present. I'm sad to report that it changed the entire vibe. They were mostly just there out of curiosity about what we had been up to, not to educate themselves. Instead of discussing politics and feminism, we were suddenly discussing the men's job situations and everyone was just trying to show off and one-up each other. After that we decided, that we want to keep our safe space and not have it spoiled by them (even if they are "loved ones").
>
> Could we try to educate them? Yes absolutely, but this takes energy and time. We can gain that energy from being amongst ourselves for a while. We can't do it with them flooding our safe space all at once.
>
> If this sounds frustrating, trust me I know. I often wanted all these amazing FLINTAs to just leave those sexist losers, but it's just not realistic. There's no "better" men available there, and not everyone can move away (as I eventually did).
>
> We allowed them to come to our public actions, and few did. They were often embarassingly backwards, but at least they showed up, and I think seeing the FLINTAs in their lives being backed by others and them recieving negative feedback for stupid comments from a strong group of FLINTAs did them good. Many of us would not have had the strength to stand up to this on our own, and being amongst ourselves helped them gain that power.

[3] I general prefer the term marginalized gender to FLINTA as the latter tends to be overly (cis-)woman-coded, though the former has its own issues as well. It also doesn't suffer the acronym problem of either leaving someone out or suffering growth the way LGBT has grown to 2SLGBTQIA+ (and that's not even the longest variation I've seen). Variations like TINFLA and FLINTAQ* exist as well, though the Q can be a source of contention when it's included.

This might sounds like categorical endorsement, but she currently lives in Vienna and also says:

> I'm the first to joke about the two genders: FLINTA and cis male. I've come to think it's kind of a transitioning stage, better then TERFs and worse than equals. A necessity if the resource are scarce, if you will.

Compare this to Berlin where FLINTA continues to be a popular organizing principle because in part there are old organizations and physical spaces that have histories of perpetuating rape culture, and there are anarchist subcultures here that have seemingly embraced patriarchal masculinities rather than reject them. Berlin, however, has a rather high baseline trans-feminist praxis within its activist and anarchist spaces, and there are many affinity groups, organizations, and events that are not FLINTA-only where patriarchal norms are minimally present.[4]

Raves, concerts, and parties in our autonomous spaces can be unsafe for MaGes from the more common offences of unwanted physical contact or sexual advances to risk of date rape from the spiking of drinks. That these issues remain under-resolved and at times under-addressed is the primary driver in the creation of these identity-based spaces, and by all accounts, doing so drastically reduces the amount of sexually domineering behavior. Living spaces, either in flatshares or house projects, are created so that if nothing else, its residents can have one safe haven from the weight of patriarchy. Discussions, workshops, and trainings are FLINTA-only to help change the overall tenor of the event, most particularly those in typically male-dominated fields like computer security trainings or martial arts courses. Not always FLINTA, but still useful, are support groups for people targeted by sexualized violence because when dealing with people who are actively traumatized the very *perception* of safety is an important factor in healing. These being for women* or trans* only is effective to these ends even if there are edge cases of inclusion/exclusion that need to be accounted for in other ways.

We must remember that the creation of identity based spaces is a stopgap to building a more idealized world. The legacy of the Autonomen is not of creating a world of refuge islands of radical politics within a roiling sea of violent conservatism. Such spaces should be temporary, ones where we can experiment with prefigurative utopian practices that we then spread elsewhere. In the case of identity based autonomous spaces, prefiguration is not always possible, and they might be reduced to just base building. Or, as one friend said: "They are most effective as very temporary autonomous zones to help with consciousness building and analysis to fuel momentum into total integration within an ideological movement, for example: breakout groups. Once you make an institution out of these spaces, they begin to replicate systems of abuse."

By using FLINTA as delineation for who to exclude, identity is used as a proxy for behavior. The chain of reasoning goes something like this: cis men are the largest group of predators or those with domineering behaviors, and while "not all men" it's certainly "too many," but since we don't know *who*, allowing *any* introduces an intolerable amount of risk or sense of discomfort. This proxy is accurate in as much as it is a heuristic that is true when applied to the general population, and while rates of sexualized violence are lower in anarchist subcultures, it's not significant enough difference yet for us to have a different disposition. Through this inclusion/exclusion, FLINTA becomes less a way for naming that the space is exclusively or primarily for

[4] There are clearly (trans-)misogynistic spaces and groups — I am aware of them — but the radical scene here is so large that one can certainly avoid such spaces and groups.

marginalized genders. It slides into meaning "free of patriarchy" which itself slides into "free of gendered hierarchies," though such hierarchies often still exist.

Failures become apparent when we apply such heuristics to individuals. One of my flatmates sublet her room to a Kurdish refugee, a cis man. Now that she's returning, I'm trying to help him find a new living situation. I've asked my circles of friends if anyone knows of an opening. More responses than not said their flats were FLINTA-only and that he would therefore not be considered. He's a refugee, a comrade, someone who fought his regime and was tortured for it. He's quiet and bookish, he doesn't ooze toxic masculinity, and he was part of a struggle that is widely praised by Berlin anarchists, yet he's immediately dismissed as a potential flatmate, maybe as a "danger," maybe for the ruining the "vibe."

Discomfort does not imply danger nor is feeling it a moral position. Those who have been traumatized and truly cannot bear to share spaces with people who remind them of their abusers should not be made to do so, but that is not the majority, not by a long shot. Voluntary association is an anarchist ideal, but not all voluntary associations are moral. It's not acceptable for white people to isolate themselves from racialized individuals, for example, that much is clear. The argument posits MaGes being sublaltern to cis mean gives the former the right to to isolate from the latter *in all instances*. The future we want isn't one of increasing borders between groups but the breaking down of power relations where they occur.

Power and privilege are fractal. The statement "cis men are in a position of dominance relative to other genders" is true of society at large, but it, like all power relations, breaks down and can be overridden by other forms of power when we are dealing with smaller scales. In the case of my flatmate, does he as a racialized refugee hold power — structural or otherwise — over the white Germans femmes who turned him down for a room?

If we again look at living spaces, one of the most celebrated bastions of anarcha-feminist living is the former squat of Liebig34 on Rigaer Straße. From 1999 until its eviction on October 9th of 2020, L34 boasted of not allowing cis men to live there, and the squat has been held up as proof that FLINTA works. The truth is a little less flattering. I know over a dozen people who lived there, and literally all of them have stories of the abuse and sexualized violence between official residents, of power abuses, and of hierarchies.[5] That, and the cis men who didn't officially live there but who were partners of residents — mostly of cis women — and who were perpetually in the space.

Another case is that of Habersaathstraße, one of very few squats to make it past the so-called Berlin Line (Berliner Linie) and survive the first 24 hours against eviction. Squatted in December of 2021, it continues to exist even now and is celebrated as being the collective effort of the homeless, racialized people, and FLINTAs.[6] One section was set aside as FLINTA-only. A main personality associated with the squat, a "FLINTA person" themself, has a history of abusing people around them like former flatmates and other squatters including driving some from the Habersaathstraße squat itself. When confronted with their abuses, the individual in question specifically used their marginalized gender and pro-FLINTA stances to shield themself from critique, and this defense *works*.

[5] For slice of what life there was like, see *Laut und dreckig* by Olivia Amon.

[6] See the zine *Wo wir wohnen, wollen bleiben: Habersaathstraße 40–48 rekommunalisieren*. Not to say that good wasn't done, and rather clearly more good was done than harm. Many homeless people were able to live with a roof over their heads, and the action did help call attention to empty properties and speculation.

In comparison, there are other squats and housing projects that exist in this city that allow all genders, and some have less of a reputation for abuse and sexualized violence. FLINTA as an organizing principle is neither a necessary nor sufficient criteria for limiting abuse and sexualized violence even if it is a strategy that has some utility in some cases.

As said before, the second place where FLINTA is most significantly applied is for raves and parties. Generally, these events are publicly advertised, and often they are fundraisers either for the space itself or as soli events for other initiatives. Anyone being able to show up, the presence of alcohol and other drugs, and things like low lighting and loud music that diminish our ability to sense the world around us makes these events low trust, relatively speaking. People have their guard down, and abusers and rapists know this.

For some events, the FLINTA descriptor is less an absolute and more a deterrent. Cis men arriving at the entrance not knowing it's a FLINTA event might receive additional scrutiny by the bouncers[7] and simply stating that an event is FLINTA is enough to send the asshole would-be attendees in to apoplectics. This can help filter for desired behavior. Some events make explicit calls to not police anyone's gender, that if someone is there, then they belong, but it still happens. However, there are two problems with advertising an event as FLINTA while not limiting it to those who fit the description. First, we are admitting that when we create spaces based on some principle of inclusion/exclusion, we don't adhere to it. Does this apply to our rules against misogynists? Racists? Transphobes? The most obvious comparison is the number of spaces that currently advertise COVID policies but then enforce them in no way whatsoever. It normalizes the idea that it's sufficient to declare something rather to enact it. Second, we are not actually making these spaces accessible to cis men with good feminist politics,[8] and it brings to light the gap between the stated intention of simply filtering for behavior and creating something closer to a women*/femme space. This isn't to say that cis men need access to all spaces, but for parties, the utility of a strict gender filter — when gender itself is so amorphous — is questionable. An unpleasant game that then has to be played is of guessing whether a space will allow a cis man in at the door or whether he'll actually be welcomed once inside. This system incentives cis (het) men to lean into and play up queerness that they otherwise don't exhibit in other situations.

Of the MaGes I know who like to attend the anarchist subcultural parties, most prefer queer and/or FLINTA parties. On friend told me "I only feel comfortable leaving my drink uncovered or unattended at queer and FLINTA parties." If we compare FLINTA-only parties hosted by radicals, all-gender parties also hosted by radicals, women*-only parties hosted by progressives, and any ol' party at all, there is a significant drop in reported sexualized violence to the point that my party-going friends can't think of a single reported case of it. This, despite what seems to be common belief, doesn't mean there's none. Berlin has a fairly weak whisper network, and public callouts against cis men abusers are far less frequent than cities with similar movements in other countries. Speculatively, abuses are happening here, but their relative infrequence plus some sort of self-enforced shame within anarcha-feminism discourages us from as readily sharing as it would show internal weakness or that FLINTA as an organizing principle isn't effective thereby delegitimizing anarcha-feminism as a whole. Many of my friends have stories of abuse

[7] Though some would be loathe to admit that their event has somethings as gauche as *bouncers* preferring to call them the Awareness Team.

[8] You might also say that MaGes might show up with the expectation that the event excludes cis men, but I don't find this to be a problem because a cis man with good queer/feminist politics is indistinguishable from a trans man or non-binary person in the ways that matter most.

by someone with an equivalently marginalized gender, so we can reasonably assume that the seeming lack of abuses happening at parties stems from an absence of information rather than genuine absence of occurrences. Case in point, between the first draft of this text and publishing it, a chat group I'm in had a message forwarded to it where a party organizer was looking for medically trained people to support their party because "In our experiences, FLINTA* parties are often targeted such that we have drink-spiking cases."[9] Even with such messages floating around, the myth of the absolute safety of such parties persists.

Parties and raves like this are low trust events. Berlin is a large city with a large radical scene, and one can move rather anonymously through both. Open events contribute positively to the movement, and they enrich our lives, however this anonymity affords cover to abusers, and filtering on gender alone does not stop it.

A retrospective wherein we examine a large anarchist gathering

To continue on about large events with low trust and anonymous participants, let's look at what might be the largest scale, lowest trust, and most anonymous anarchist event I've ever experienced. In the summer of 2023, I went to the Rencontres Internationales Antiautoritaires.[10] The RIA took place in Saint-Imier, a small village in Switzerland.

After the collapse of the Paris Commune in 1871, and following the anti-/authoritarian split at the First International in Den Haag in 1872, anarchists met in Saint-Imier to have a small congress of their own, Mikhail Bakunin and Errico Malatesta being two of the most well known names. It was a landmark event in the formal western anarchist tradition. To celebrate the 150+1 years[11] since then, anarchists from — so far as I know — Switzerland, France, Germany, and Italy organized a massive event. There was a huge bookfair; talks, discussions, and workshops both small and large; concerts; participatory events; and the most impressive soli-kitchen I've ever seen, truly astounding. The RIA was a massive event with a reported 10,000 participants over its 5 days.

Some comrades and I arrived the night before it started, and when walking from the train station to the large pastures to the south of the town center allotted as campgrounds, we saw a white signpost. It had two signs, one pointing to the all gender campground and the other pointing to the FLINTA campground. The second had said "Queer/FLINTA," but an organizer had painted over the word "Queer" with too few coats of paint, and it was visible on close inspection.

Over the next few days, bathrooms were labeled as "FLINTA-only", relabeled as "All Gender", then back and forth again. Stickers of the trans flag and the three-pronged transgender symbol were slapped up to cover FLINTA things. A discussion about FLINTA as an organizing principle was added to the open event schedule. Only four of us showed up — none of whom had put it on the schedule — presumably because everyone else was so sick of this German bullshit. The FLINTA-only showers had to be closed and inspected because someone had found a hidden camera. I never heard any official comment on this. That said, I didn't hear of any sexual assaults including at the queer cruising night held in front of the church.

[9] Translated from German.

[10] The International Anti-Authoritarian Meetings, AKA "Anarchy 2023."

[11] Plus one because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is still ongoing, ya big goofs.

There were fights two days in a row involving the same two French factions at the bookfair. The Awareness Team — a topic we'll get to later — went on strike because they couldn't guarantee the safety of participants. When the RIA organizing committee asked people to stop tagging the buildings of Saint-Imier and crossing the train tracks because they were personally liable for damages and fines, peopled tagged insults at the RIA organizers thus costing them more money. While the bookfair was closed for the night, all the coin jars for donations that had been left out by the distros and booksellers were stolen.

On the last night, a storm was coming through,[12] and people camping were told they could sleep on the basketball courts inside the Halles de gymnastique et bassin de natation. Inside, the two courts were split into FLINTA-only and all-gender, as were the two bathrooms in the hall connecting them. Hundreds of people slept inside, and the signs segregating us by gender were tagged and re-tagged as people left their commentaries trying to refine who was or ought to be included in the not-all-gender room or if such a room should exist at all.

Before we depart this event, let me pose some questions with unclear answers:

1. Were MaGes made safer or less safe by having their campground separated from everyone else? Or was there no meaningful difference?

2. Would a predator prefer to target a tent knowing there would be a "woman" inside or risk an even split on genders?

3. Would a predator target someone in a tent in a quiet pasture where 1,000 anarchists are within earshot if their target made even a peep? Or in an open gymnasium where it's not possible to hide or escape at all?

4. Did these FLINTA spaces actually make anyone safer?

5. Who was the most alienated by such spaces?

A rough heuristic for creating the broadest possible front against patriarchy

Like how we try to create such a thing as The Left to have the broadest possible front against fascism, we use FLINTA to create the broadest possible front against patriarchal domination. And like how The Left smoothes out ideological differences within its ranks in the name of coherence, so too does FLINTA ignore power differentials between the groups under its umbrella.

If our goals as altruists are to help others, we should help those most in need, and from both State and NGO statistics as well as much anec-data, trans people are exceptionally marginalized, not to mention they are facing the spearhead of fascism. FLINTA spaces should therefore *tend* to focus on trans issues or at least use them as a point of departure for addressing issues faced by the whole of the alliance of marginalized genders. Yet, trans and other non-cis/endo people often break from the FLINTA alliance to form TIN or TINA groups or to host events using such inclusion criteria. This might come across as odd, because effectively FLINTA has become a codeword

[12] It was no small thing as it felled trees, delaying trains.

for "trans-inclusionary feminism," but just as well, FLINTA has become a somewhat thought-terminating phrase where it assumed we all known what is meant by it, but *do we really?* We might all know what the 6 letters represent, but actually identifying a trans (anarcha-)feminist ethic and praxis is another matter entirely. It's undoubtedly good to announce that a space is trans inclusive, but there's often not enough follow-through to actually make it so.

In FLINTA groups and spaces, the cis women frequently outnumber everyone else, and this isn't just a quirk of statistics and their proportion in the general population. In the hierarchy of dominant culture, cis men are at the top. Remove them, as one does when creating a FLINTA space, and cis women take their place both in terms of privilege and sheer number. The most ardent advocates for FLINTA spaces I know are all cis endo women, and nearly all of the other MaGes in my life — especially trans people — have a distaste for FLINTA as an organizing principle, if not for the above stated reason, then for how FLINTA gets taken to mean "women and women-lite."[13]

FLINTA being somewhat synonymous with trans-inclusionary feminism additionally adds to the existent issue where an oppressed group is treated as a moral category, where having experienced suffering or oppression makes one morally good. This line is further blurred because FLINTA is rather tied to our queer and radical subcultures, and through this it acts as proxy for a set of (anarcha-)feminist behaviors. None of the normies/Bürgis I meet though work or friends use this term, so FLINTA tends imply an activist outlook. Because FLINTA blends these things together, critique of it feels like attacking moral goodness itself, feminism itself, or the very identity of its advocate (in multiple ways!).

Since it's (unconsciously) treated as both a moral stance and a subcultural marker, FLINTA is used as the default inclusion/exclusion criteria for events without questioning if that criteria is the most useful or whether such exclusions are pertinent *at all*. If an event is about those on the receiving end of patriarchal sexualized violence, would it not make sense to include particularly effeminate or otherwise feminized gay men? If an event is about birthing or menstruation, it does not apply to many people covered by the term FLINTA. If an event is about the shared experience of marginalized genders under patriarchy, the differences within FLINTA are incredibly diverse, and there's a significant divide between the assumed-to-be cis/het women and the rest of those covered by FLINTA. Where there should be solidarity between related struggles, we often see harsh boundaries where FLINTA ends and groupings begin.

One particularly confused application of FLINTA is when hosting events or having discussions about neglect, mistreatment, dismissal, and other abuses faced in within the medical system. While there is some similarities between what is faced by cis endo women, trans men and women, and intersex people, there are differences that might be greater than the similarities. Additionally, non-binary and agender AMAB people might face no medical discrimination other than perhaps run-of-the-mill homophobia that might be more similar to what gay men experience. If the topic is failures of the medical system, the experiences of PoC and disabled people might be more similar to those of cis women, trans people, and intersex people.

FLINTA strives to create a broad coalition, but only on a single identity axis, and it often rejects accomplices based on their gender alone. Where there might be more natural divisions for

[13] For more critique on FLINTA and where it breaks down, see *Stop FLINTA Bullshit, Destroy All Binaries!* by Vorbilder gesucht or *gleich sicher? sicher gleich? Konzeptionen (queer) feministischer Schutzräume* (translated to English as *equally safe? surely the same? conceptions of (queer) feminist safe spaces*) by Maya Joleen Kolkits and Marion Thuswald. There are also countless other posts on social media and counter-info sites. Take your pick.

alliances, FLINTA sometimes is rigorously applied beyond its utilty because it allows participants to stay within their comfort zones rather than come into conflict with other identities.

In the spring of 2023 following a callout about the problem of rape culture at Køpi,[14] one of the largest and perhaps most well-known housing projects in Berlin, there was an invite-only meeting about the problem of sexualized violence in the anarchist scene. About 30 people showed up, and — based off stereotypes — only 3 could be assumed to be cis men. One of my comrades leaned over and whispered to me "Wow, there sure are a lot of cis men here" as if cis men wanting to counter sexualized violence in alliance with MaGes was somehow suspect or a problem.

If we're trying to create coalitions against patriarchy, FLINTA as an inclusion criteria can also fail at that by explicitly excluding or at least creating mild hostility to traitors of patriarchy. The essentialism that cis men could not be allies or accomplices is surprisingly common. This creates a strange situation where cis men are supposed to reject patriarchy and step back from Men's Spaces because such a thing is good, yet when they do the good thing, they're still treated as suspect. The Christian logic of our society strikes again: born a sinner and always so. Are cis men wanted as part of the struggle or not? And if not, are we creating the kind of solidarity that is such a powerful weapon that we don't need their help?

Also in 2023, at the Take Back the Night demo on Walpurgisnacht, the evening before May Day, organizers said that the demo had been organized as FLINTA-only but — thankfully — that if someone was there, then they belonged and to not question their presence. They also said that in the event of police attacks or arrests, the entire demo would stop to ensure everyone's safety or to wait for detained comrades to be released. I walked near the back of the demo, and when police separated a couple of comrades from the demo, others nearby stopped. Once we did, we surrounded the police but were shoved back. Some people ran ahead to tell the rest of the demo to stop, and part of the demo reversed and closed the gap. However, the demo marshals (Ordner:innen) arrived and told everyone that the demo was going to keep moving and ushered our detachment back to the main body of the demo. Most left with them. Not when we passed Køpi, nor at any other point during the demo, did I hear anything said about the ongoing callout against the squat. At the largest (anarcha-)feminist demo of the year, one that is always called militant (kämpferisch) and empowering, we abandoned comrades to the police and ignored one of the worst festering wounds in our scene.

Has FLINTA helped us build a strong unified front? Or should we perhaps be organizing on ideological affinities rather than identities?

A journey across the Atlantic so that we may better examine downstream effects from our ideological progenitors

German anarchism is, ideologically speaking, rather stagnant. We have our soli-kitchens and our demos, our housing projects and our antifascist affinity groups, but we are rather poor at building community engagement or sharpening the leading edge of our offensive capabilities. Ask Germans about modern texts from the German speaking world, and it's all shrugs.[15] Maybe someone will mention classics of Gustav Landauer or Erich Mühsam or Rudolf Rocker, maybe a more modern Horst Stowasser or *bolo'bolo*, but there's a gaping void. With the exception of

[14] *Köpi Bleibt Nicht *TW Rape culture in Köpi*. knack.news.

[15] Not just the average anarchist on the street but also bookshop staff, librarians, archivists, and other zine distros.

what's been written about various forest occupations, little novel theory or contemporary analysis is being generated by German speakers, or at least nothing notable enough to attain any significant level of circulation or acclaim. Much of what we read is translated from French or Italian, and an enormous amount is (translated) from the US.[16]

Through this, ideas are removed from their local context and transplanted to Europe and Germany. In particular, racial politics from the US and Canada are applied as if they are a puzzle piece that fits neatly in to this society. To some extent, they do, yes, like how Black people's existence is criminalized, like Germany's colonialism in Africa, like the genocide of the Herero and Nama. Germans and others living in Berlin heavily use the term BIPoC, a term that like FLINTA is a catchall for people not of the dominant group. This term is rather unique to the Americas, and for all its use in Europe, seldom do people talk of the Sámi (colonized by Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia) or the Greenlandic Inuit (colonized by Denmark). Also lost are the various other ethnic and cultural groups of "white" people within Europe like the Basque, Catalan, Faroese, Kven or others whose ways of living and identities are erased by the States that govern their territories. To make it more local, despite our frequent vocal concern for the Roma and Sinti, I have only met one German who knows of the Yenish (the third largest itinerant group in Europe) and his knowledge was merely "Oh, the people who dress funny?" This isn't even getting into the racial and ethnic politics of how whiteness is defined and historically has or presently does exclude the Irish, Slavic, Balkan, or even Sicilian people.

It's real white here in Kaltland, the "classical" radical scene is even more so, and the local anarchist movement is hardly much better. Much of what makes racial politics a hot topic in US-American and Canadian anarchist spaces isn't present because sometimes everyone in a space or collective is white. Racial politics becomes an abstraction, and the focus turns to the next most apparent identity divide. Thus, we get FLINTA filling the discursive space where our counterparts in the US and Canada grapple with issues of race, even picking up the specific oddity of referring to a single person as "a BIPoC," we also do the same and call an individual "a FLINTA." FLINTA filling this discursives space as well as the weaknesses of a North American BIPoC lens seems to also hinder our ability to genuinely confront the *deep* racism and Islamophobia of German radicalism.[17] It also allows us to avoid the racial elements of gender-based marginalization, this being one reason that groups like Casa Kuà operate in the intersection of race and gender. White cis women within FLINTA can liken their struggles to those of more highly marginalized genders and make this the core of their analysis and praxis which allows them to skirt the privileges of their whiteness such that they don't have to make anti-racism as prominent a focus of their political work. FLINTA as discussed here is a topic somewhat unique to the German-speaking world, one this part of Europe seems to be actively trying to export to neighboring countries. At events where this is attempted, queer and trans people murmur in the corners about how annoying it is. If North America can export BIPoC and make it a seemingly globally recognized term in just a few short years since its first attestation in 2013, then the DACH region can in competition export FLINTA.

[16] We should blame US and English cultural hegemony for this, but we also can't disregard that comrades in the US are doing quite interesting things do deal with their huge challenges. Or, maybe it's just German cultural fascination with the US bleeding into our radicalism. Hmm…

[17] That said, a FLINTA analysis could help the Ultradeutsch be a little less transphobic as they seem to be more TERF-y (when they're even feminist at all) than other groups.

FLINTA is just identity politics, to finally pluck and use the phrase that's been floating through our minds. Much has been written about the woes of this modern understanding of identity politics,[18] even if it is a somewhat poorly defined term in within our circles. We as anarchists and feminists might want to take some of the learnings from these critiques, not just the originally proposed identity politics themselves. I'll leave this quote from *Elite Capture: How the Powerful Took Over Identity Politics (And Everything Else)* by Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò as a teaser in hopes you read the full text.

> When it comes to knowledge and information, a constructive politics would be concerned primarily with building institutions and campaign-relevant practices of information gathering, rather than centering specific groups of people or spokespeople who stand in for them. It would focus on accountability, rather than conformity. It would calibrate itself directly to the task of redistributing social resources and power, rather than to intermediary goals cashed out in pedestals or symbolism. It would focus on building and rebuilding rooms, not regulating traffic within and between them. It would be what political scientist Adom Getachew terms a "worldmaking" project, aimed at building and rebuilding actual structures of social connection and movement, rather than mere critique of the ones we already have.

The origin of our version of identity politics is over the sea, but just as well, radicals from that region have levied serious critique against it. We try to shoehorn much of Europe's tensions along ethnic lines into a North American model, and when this doesn't quite work or forces us to confront things we'd rather not, we try to use an equally broad category derived from gender.

A detour to discuss decision making heuristics and models of reality

The world in its totality is complicated beyond human understanding, and just as well, so is our own internal state. We are constantly awash in stimuli, and these impart on us urges, desires, and emotions that can drive us to action even if we're unable to articulate them.

Every day we have hundreds if not thousands of moments where we choose how to sit, the shirt we wear, or whether or not we floss in the morning even though we see the roll right there on the sink, and yet these are the most trivial decisions we make. Deeply held beliefs around what is right, good, or just. Complex emotions relating to love or rage, to pure joy or melancholia. Specialist knowledge on what materials to use to build a house or how to season your a dish. Each of these decisions could be so complex that you could write a short book about it, if you had the words for it or the time. And even *that* pales in comparison to the complexity of the decisions we make in the political realm where we're not only having to understand ourselves or the physical world but where we have to understand the motivations of others as individuals and human behavior en masse.

We often must rely on simplifications — on heuristics, on imprecise models — to understand things or to relay our points. Mostly likely all of us have experienced the friction in a meeting

[18] For some favorites, see: *Taking Sides: Revolutionary Solidarity and the Poverty of Liberalism*, edited by Cindy Milstein. *Rethinking Identity, Safety, and Appropriation, Or: Why is Tarot Banned at the Bookfair?* by Anonymous.

or while planning an action when we realize that although the words we used were the same, two people's conceptions of what was meant are miles away from each other. Simple ideas can spread quickly, and catchy slogans that themselves are devoid of nuance and can only hint at larger ideas will replicate faster that long treatises on the same subject. This is exacerbated by the fact that ideas that are deeply ingrained in society are as simplistic as they are inaccurate: "men are stronger than women," "Black people are criminals," or "the rich work hard for their money." To even move the needle on anyone's belief system seems to require replacing one simple model with another.

It's not even that simple models replicate easier or that we're forced into using them to find some order so we can make decisions. No, beyond that, people are allergic to complexity. There is cognitive burden of dealing with it, and it takes time to wrestle with these complexities: understanding them, creating a plan that incorporates them, and then actually acting upon said plan. Looking at someone's visible features, assuming identity, then applying the simple rule to sort them into "good" or "bad" is *easy*.

Even within our movement, when we can acknowledge that there *is* more complexity to the world, we still rely on simplifications or shared assumptions to make our lives navigable. There's a bewildering amount of choice and moral complexity out in the world, but when we simiplify things down and let rough heuristics guide us, we can be freed of having to enage with this complexity. It's easier for one to defend their own actions when they can align themselves with easily explainable theories or existent movements. Justifying one's own unique beliefs is a less defensible position.

One of the key struggles of radicalism is to get to the root of things, to create models of reality that explain things or allow us to make well-informed decisions. Our many different models should converge on reality, and they need to embrace complexity. We cannot change the world if we do not understand it. Fighting against the use of lazy simplifications is a key fight against fascism, and that fight begins at home.

A delegation of collective responsibility to specialists and the consequences thereof

Not exclusive to (anarcha-)feminist spaces and events, but quite prevalent at them, is the concept of Awareness. Loosely, Awareness is being aware of forms of discrimination, one's biases, and one's behavior and being mindful of how these things intersect and operate so that the space or event can be made more accessible to all, especially the most marginalized. As an idea itself, this is something everyone should do, no question. But with its implementation? As they say, the devil's in the details.

This anti-discriminatory anti-harm starting point is implemented by two complementary processes. First there is an Awareness Policy (Awareness Konzept), more commonly known in the English-speaking world as a Code of Conduct. Awareness Policies are made for collectives; spaces; and events like demos, concerts, and parties. These may be posted online, included on a collective's website, or printed and hung up around the space itself. The second is of the Awareness Team. Because of the prevalence of various bigotries and patriarchal behavior within our scene, collectives create these teams — in part — as enforcement mechanisms for their Awareness Policies. Awareness Team are hazily defined, and depending on what a given collective decides,

they share some combination of the roles of mediator, adjudicator, counsellor, demo marshal (Ordner:in), bouncer, and security. Often, people are reticent to describe the Awareness Team as fulfilling latter two roles, in part because of the history of such roles being dominated by people with excess aggression or love of violence.

Before getting to the critique, I want to say that I know many people who have needed a counsellor at events because of panic attacks or other mental health crises and have been thankful organizers set aside a safe or quiet space for them. Others have been happy that mediators have been present to help with de-escalation in certain cases. Some roles fulfilled by Awareness Teams are useful and should not be done away with entirely.

The problem with Awareness Policies and Teams is that they are the closest things within our movement to proto-State structures.

Almost always at events in Berlin, the collective or coalition putting on an event is granted total sovereignty over that event with the possible exception of the proprietors of the space being able to supersede organizers' authority. The movement at large places responsibility for the success of an event — here success meaning absence of discriminatory incidents or sexualized violence — principally on the organizers. If something happens, often the organizers are blamed for having not prevented it or for not handling it up to par, even if the organizers are only 10 of 500 participants. This pressures organizers into creating Awareness Policies and Teams, in part to actually mitigate the harms, but also in part to shield themselves from critique because then at least they've done the expected minimum. There's an *expectation* that Awareness Policies and Teams are established for events.

In 2021, I helped organize the Anarchist CSD.[19] I didn't believe in Awareness Teams then, but after arguing against it, I joined the team as I was already involved with the event and putting on an armband changed very little. People didn't show up for the shifts they'd signed up for, so we were spread quite thin. After the demo from the Märchenbrunnen to Marianenplatz, in the late afternoon, as I was helping someone who'd collapsed in the crowd, a singer on stage was harassed by someone in the audience. Later, in the evening, someone fetched me to shoo away an Otto who was filming the event, presumably to post harassing videos online. I got as aggressive with him as I thought I could without getting arrested, and when physical intervention and yelling was insufficient to get him to leave, and with only one person from the crowd backing me up, eventually the police came to all the ruckus and forced him away. We as the collective were critiqued for not handling the harassment of the performer better, but nothing was said of the audience who failed to intervene. I personally was critiqued by participants for handling the Otto with aggression, something said to be against the idea of Awareness.

The effects of responsibility being thrust onto or taken on by organizers is twofold. Firstly, because organizers provide Awareness Teams, either assembling their own or reaching out to collectives who specialize in this, responsibility to take actions against harms are lifted from the participants. Secondly, because responsibility falls on the organizers, they feel they are owed deference on how to run the event, and we as participants collectively grant it to them. However, this deference mostly only exists when it trends toward mediation and de-esclation. Awareness Teams are treated like neutral peacekeepers.

[19] Christopher Street Day, what Gay/Queer Pride is called in Germany and Switzerland, named after the street on which the Stonewall Inn was located.

Awareness Policies and Teams mimic State authority because they create a single authoritative view on truth and a single channel by which conflicts can be resolved. Like the State, one of the downsides of this singular authority is that it is more removed from the context of something that draws its attention that the other parties already involved in some sort of dispute. If X claims to be wronged by Y, unless it was some sort of drive-by harassment, chances are both X and Y have knowledge that vastly outweighs what a mediator or adjudicator stepping in could possibly have. While it is not a true monopoly on violence — anyone could show up with pepper spray — it is socially discouraged to attempt to influence the event by infringing on the roles fulfilled by the Awareness Team, especially in the realm of conflict that has escalated.

An argument for Awareness Teams is that participants need to know who they can turn to should they need help, but there's often nothing unique about the individuals comprising the Awareness Team; they might just be the collective members who got roped in to doing it. Social pressure tells us that we cannot ask for help from strangers, and that when asked for help, answers that are effectively "Not my monkeys, not my circus" are acceptable responses, and therefore we *need* a centralized authority for people to turn to.[20] This is how States form, and we know that power corrupts and attracts the already corrupt. When we look at formerly or currently existing stateless societies, we see that a commonality is that responsibility to mitigating harms falls on *everyone*.

A response to the rejection of the organizers' authority is that if one doesn't like the policy, then they shouldn't attend. There's a difference between disagreeing with the existence of formal policy and being critical of how social norms develop and are enforced. Nonetheless, a response to this intransigence is "If you want an event to be a certain way, host your own." This effectively says that a participant's agency ends where the collective's sovereignty of an event begins. Pointing this out isn't claiming that we can constantly impose our desires on others, nor that everyone should get their way all the time. It's drawing attention to how the very way we host communal events is antithetical to a world made of pluralities.

Despite how important they're made out to be and how ripe these kinds of authorities are for abuse, we have largely avoided that, in no small part through our own incompetence and abdication of duty. People don't show up for shifts or get drunk and take mushrooms because, hey, it's a party, so why not have some fun? In a sense, we're lucky that the most abusive people don't bother to use these structures to further their goals. That said, they don't even need to. Awareness Teams at times run cover for abusers and rapists by claiming a space is more safe than it actually is, even if the members of the Awareness Teams are actively opposed to rape culture. In such cases, the trust placed in Awareness Teams legitimizes events so that abuses can continue. Motivations for placing oneself in such positions varies, but an explanation I've heard before is "It's better we're here than not." I remain doubtful.

Not having a Code of Conduct or an Awareness Team gets derided as implicitly permitting harmful behaviors. However, there are events that have neither and instead have what we might call merely suggestions or guidelines. What they have is not a lack of enforcement but a call for decentralized action. They call on all participants to stand up against discrimination or to rally an affinity group to throw out abusers. One event I've seen while traveling that handled this non-CoC well was the Anarchist Bookfair Amsterdam who explicitly called out that we all were responsible for the quality of the event.

[20] Some parties are better about this, but bars and especially demos can be… rather lacking.

Conflict is not inherently harmful, and violence is not inherently immoral. We have unlearned how to directly confront bigots and predators. We've let these muscles atrophy. The only way to regain this capability is to practice it. This pairs nicely with the proposal that FLINTA spaces be based on affinity and behavior rather than assumed identity. The most common response I hear to critiques of FLINTA-only spaces is that it's the best method available for preventing patriarchal dominance from ruining spaces. This might be true but *only if* we are unable to eject problems once they enter our spaces. We need to learn intentional conflict.

A passivity through essentializing behavior as (toxically) masculine

Western anarchists look at the domineering ordering of the world and through a process of schismogenesis develop norms that are explicitly counter to what they see, sometimes regardless of positive outcomes. Rule from afar through highly indirect (un)elected representatives is replaced by a consensus process. Dominance in conversation by the powerful or privileged is replaced by a moderated stack. Violent conflict and power struggles are replaced by mediation and collaboration. Anarcha-feminists often take this process further and attempt to additionally separate themselves not just from dominant society but from the manarchist/brocialist/mantifa/macktivist contingents within the movement by looking at methods of patriarchal rule and behaviors common among cis men and eliminating them.

Feminist literature often draws attention to the fact that displays of emotion, including but not limited to raising one's voice or animatedly gesticulating, are feminized, racialized, and otherwise seen as subaltern. Such literature also discusses how a feature of patriarchal rule is the adherence to rules and protocols and that these facets of "order" are used to silence feminized people. This does not seem to be the case in anarcha-feminist circles in Berlin, and through conversations with others, it's likewise not the case in other parts of Germany and Austria.[21]

It seems the opposite is true, that loudness and the expression of emotions are seen as toxically masculine, at least principally when performed by assumed-to-be-cis men, but also often extended to trans people. During discussions either within a collective or at events open to the public, directly contesting someone's idea — even when delivered monotone — can be seen as aggressive, hostile, and unsafe leading to disinvitation to further events or gossip spreading. Breaking the stack to respond to someone, even if they're directly responding to you, can be moderated and deemed unacceptable. Displays of positive emotion can be limited to upward pointing twinkle fingers, jazz hands, or snapping, but displays of dissent or negative emotions are virtually not present. Heaven help you if you audibly scoff at someone's statement. This particular bourgeois means of communication has notable interactions with neurodivergence where anguish at being misunderstood, the push to interject corrections, or even blunt directness — often associated with autism — are overly policed. FLINTA-ness, femininity, or even just vaguely feminine vibes are assumed to be morally good, so their opposite, masculine vibes, are assumed to be morally bad.[22]

[21] Is this uniform? Certainly not. For one, there's a bias in that people I'm friends with are similar to me. For two, there are still anarchist circles where emotional outbursts and energetic behavior is dismissed as hysterical.

[22] Or, to flip the essentialism, in some lesbian circles, femininity is demonized as upholding patriarchal socialization, which is to say, perhaps the problem is essentialism itself.

Bourgeois modes of conversation being elevated is present throughout much of western anarchism,[23] and it is most notable in Berlin during meetings and discussions that have an explicitly anarcha-feminist outlook, but just as well, it happens during ones that are anarcha-feminist in spirit but might have another focus. We might not have explicit hierarchies at a meeting, and often the moderator is pulled from the participants rather than one of the organizers, but just as well, organizers of discussions will intervene over the moderator and set the tone or agenda thus bounding the space for discussion. This is collectively permitted, and directly challenging this move is seen as additionally aggressive. Being upset is not "collaborative."

There's certainly some sort of connection between the rugged individualism peddled by the powerful, with personal responsibility for all one's successes and failures, and patriarchal rule through exploiting the labor of MaGes and racialized people. The anarchist/feminist response to this is to push for collaboration. Individuals making decisions on their own can be labeled as non-collaborative and therefore patriarchal and therefore bad. This is completely tangled with how so many Germans are unquestioningly obedient to authority (obrigkeitshörig). Even as anarchists, we might not ask "did the State authorize that?", but we do ask "did a collective come to consensus on that?" Operating outside the Will of the Collective can be seen as toxic masculinity.

Where the schismogenesis between anarcha-feminists and the manarchists can be most readily felt is in its approaches to violence. The manarchists, without question, fetishize violence, both in calls to engage in it and the pursuit of fitness and martial arts training. Some anarcha-feminists also take an approach that includes preparation for violence. Slogans like "Dead men don't rape" or — a personal favorite — "Macker Nieren kollektivieren"[24] can be common, but far fewer seem to as interested with training to fight — much less use it — than the obsessed manarchists.[25]

If we go back to that spring of 2023 meeting about sexualized violence I'd previously mentioned, we can see this pattern again. The meeting started with a recounting of the recent events with particular note to what'd happened at Køpi then discussions for various forms of transformation within the movement that might prevent such things from happening again. I, as gently as possible, proposed to the room that rapists continue to rape because in part they face no meaningful consequences, that the minor censure these meetings produce or inconsistently applied bans from spaces aren't enough of a disincentive. I suggested "direct action," leaving it intentionally vague about what that meant, in some cases could be something worth pursuing. The next person in the stack spoke, then the next, and no one acknowledged what I'd said. At the end, people said they felt empowered by the meeting and that they wanted to schedule another for 3 months later. So far as I know, no such meeting happened, and the problem of sexualized violence continues.

In some ways, there's a pretty significant subcultural split between the anarcha-feminists and the mantifa. I like to think I'm quite active here, certainly more than most, but even so there are entire swaths of the (male-dominated) scene I almost never interact with. When nazis marched through Friedrichshain's Südkiez on December 14th last year, a fight broke out just as the nazis reached Frankfurter Allee, and in the chaotic mix of cops and antifa swarming, I couldn't tell if

[23] For a longer discussion of this and how it manifests in North American anarchist spaces, see *On Authenticity: Theorizing Intersections of Race and Class in Consensus Process and Beyond* by E. Lagalisse. While it doesn't completely apply in Berlin, there are clear similarities.

[24] "Collectivize macho guys' kidneys."

[25] Obviously, I'm only speaking in generalizations. Let us not forget the acts of Lina E. or Maja T.

we'd made contact with the nazis or not nor if the person yelling "Ey, du Mongo!"[26] at the cop who'd just pepper sprayed the crowd was an antifa or fash. More recently, the AfD had their Wahlkampfabschluss[27] in Hohenschönhausen. When we arrived at the S-Bahn station, I braced for a fight because I again couldn't tell if the swaggering men with buffs pulled over their faces or their gelled high-and-tight haircuts were fascists or not. Other comrades I spoke with later in the day had similar confusion. In both cases, hair cuts, attire, and disposition were uncannily similar to that of the members of fascist active clubs.

Violence, even when wielded at our enemies, gets coded as masculine. I think beyond the schismogenesis, there's something a little more sinister at play. Violence is risky, both physically and legally, and declaring it as masculine-ergo-immoral frees one from having to engage in it, but it's cowardly and unsolidary to say so, so we have to find convoluted arguments against it. One gets to avoid risk and take the moral high ground when violence is essentialized as masculine. I also think this happens within a lot of radical subcultures and within different ideological currents, just in our case we're using a feminist analysis to make this argument.

This aversion to violence breeds passivity, and it's one factor in why we are not particularly able to defend ourselves at demos or events, eject abusers from our spaces, or engage in direct action against predators.

An inability to detect forms of power that cannot be easily explained by a systemic analysis

The binding agent for what we might call The Left is the belief that there are current systems of power that dispossess and exploit and that we should supplant them with egalitarian systems. As anarchists, we are near the only ones who take a critical view to power itself, rejecting Statist solutions or social hierarchies. As feminists, through analysis of smaller scale interactions like those of the workplace or romantic relationships, we come to an understanding of how domination and abuses are expressions of power, often derived from superstructures. We can tie a partner's controlling behavior back to the seeming omnipresence of patriarchy and how this reinforces certain behaviors and allows them to go unchecked.

We are, however, all of us remarkably bad at understanding that systems of power are constantly struggling for dominance over each other at every scale, especially when those systems are not endemic or well-expressed in dominant society. But even that phrase, dominant society, is a shorthand for something tremendously complex that varies as we move through cultural regions, cross borders, or change social contexts multiple times within a day. We instead look for an ur-evil that plagues the land and reaches into and controls every aspect of human civilization.[28]

I frequently have bizarre reactions when I recount to other feminists a time that a Latina lesbian visiting Europe stayed in my flat and drugged me while we drank tea in my kitchen so she could have sex with me.[29] On one hand, I get told that this case is exceptional because

[26] "Hey, you retard!"

[27] End of election event. I don't think there's an English phrase for this.

[28] Activists and academics alike try to argue that the root of all evil whence all others spring forth is (trans-)misogyny, anti-Blackness, antisemitism, or something else entirely, and that such an ur-evil is *global* and *total* in its reach.

[29] Don't worry, I get plenty of supportive reactions too.

it doesn't carry the same weight as a man date raping a woman, something easily explained through the macro lens of patriarchy. On the other, I get told that her actions *were* manifestations of patriarchy, and when I pry into why this answer was given, the responses I get are something along the lines that she was raised in patriarchal society and therefore her behavior is a recreation of the patriarchal logic, done in the privacy of my flat.

In most structural ways, I was privileged relative to this woman, but a mistake we make as lefties, anarchists, and anarcha-feminists is that we don't see that some people are just shitty. They're selfish or don't respect the agency of others, maybe deep down they believe simply that might makes right.[30] When shitty people who share a class come together, they might create post hoc justifications for their right to do as they please, either explaining it through white supremacy or misogyny or meritocracy.

It feels like people conceive of power as some hammer that is handed to everyone in privileged group that at any time that can swing and bring crashing down on others in less privileged groups. Structural power gives incentives for behavior of those it privileges, and it gives disincentives to those it oppresses. A woman can find the man who raped her and stab him in the neck. She might be massively disincentivized from doing this knowing that the full weight of the legal system and media will be bared against her, but she can still make that choice. As anarchists who look at partisans and insurgents, we understand asymmetric warfare. As antifascists, we can use the three-way fight analysis to explain marginal right-wing insurrections against hegemonic classical conservatism. Yet, we don't understand that subaltern non-egalitarian power can exist or be wielded against those within our own contexts who benefit from relative privilege in the dominant society. In the case of the woman who drugged me, the sedative she used was an equalizer in that it erased my privileges, and in particular that I was larger and stronger than her. Her power existed irrespective of our structural positions.

We as anarchists don't talk enough about informal power, for if we did, we'd have a better understanding of how it functions. Common explanations are through fame or charisma, often also included is social machinations of surrounding oneself with a small gang or acolytes of sorts. The behaviors we focus on tend to be masculine-coded, but one of the feminine-coded behaviors that is overlooked is the manipulation of and navigation through complex social rules.

Mid January this year, Pass on Press hosted an event at the Casino for Social Medicine where Mohamed Abdou spoke about his book *Islam and Anarchism* and his proposition for an anarcha-Islam. Early on in his lecture, he said in two separate thoughts:[31]

> We are not individuals. We are networks of relations of power.
>
> …
>
> This world. The horizontal world, in which power is fluid. You don't like what I say, you can scream, and you can walk out, and you can just tune out. This is where power is fluid.

Outside, after the Q&A, I spoke with some of my acquaintances who'd also attended, curious if any of them had critiques on any of his points. None did.

Abdou and those who agreed with him completely missed the ways he held power in that space. Any lecturer who holds the mic and stands on the stage holds power over the room by

[30] For a longer discussion, see *Bad People: Irredeemable Individuals & Structural Incentives* by William Gillis.

[31] `https://www.instagram.com/pass_on_press/reel/DEsvwUdoRLn/`

virtue of their stature and ability to better project their voice. That so many would come to see anyone speak suggests that most are allied with the speaker or at least are invested in hearing them speak. Someone who wants to interject to offer a counterpoint is instantly at a disadvantage. In Abdou's case, power is not fluid as there is a fairly strict social code not just of anti-discrimination but of actively uplifting the marginalized. Any white people who would choose attempt to get on even footing would likely be censured by the rest of the room for "speaking over a person of color."[32] Maybe that's a bit of an assumption about that room in particular, but I've seen it happen in others. Further, in the following weeks during private conversations with comrades who'd gone to one of the other two lectures he gave or had seen them online, I was told by multiple people that it was unacceptable for me to be critiquing him because so few Muslim radicals are afforded a platform given the State and Ultradeutsch hate for Muslims here in Berlin. Despite being a published academic who was invited to give lectures and had rooms overflowing with interested persons, he was seen *within our spaces* as still being subaltern to me — a random white person — based on a single macro structural relation.

In anarcha-feminists spaces, we analyze behavior patterns of cis men and look at statistics about employment or sexualized violence to rightfully conclude that they hold structural power over MaGes and that this is reinforced to such a degree that it passes as near invisible in progressive society in the ways we speak or in media, both mass and social. We can even correctly identify that *taken as a whole*, The Left structurally and socially has problems of patriarchy and (trans-)misogyny and how these manifest as inequitable distribution of care work or the exaltation of the aesthetics of militancy — that is, when they don't first more obviously manifest as hierarchies, abuse, or rape culture. Structural and statistical analyses can morph into essentialized truths so that a bias that can be a useful starting point for further investigation becomes locked-in a truth of the world. Even when this doesn't happen at the individual level where one internalizes such biases as universal, there can be a prevailing belief that if a space is to be feminist, it must be demonstrably hostile to cis men. Or, it can simply be that there's a shared assumption that collectively the members of a space share that belief and that it's prestigious to do so, such that collective stance of the space might be more aggressively anti-cis-men than every individual's stance alone. No one wants to be seen as being "anti-feminist" by defending men. Some clamber for the avant-garde position of being the most aggressively feminist while some dissenters see this game of prestige and partake by holding their tongues. Cis men in these spaces who participate as genuinely complicit anarcha-feminists can see the game and know how to position themselves within it, often taking on a more demure role than they otherwise might.

The hierarchy has not been abolished. It has merely been restructured. This new hierarchy can be hard to destructure because attempts to do so face accusations of attacking the new structure in order to revert it to the original hierarchy. Identity and dedication to the restructuring as some form of radical affirmative action can hide the way individuals climb the new social ladder and abuse their newfound powers. At the top, more often than not, are cis women.

Within these restructured hierarchies, novel norms develop, new social games emerge. Manarchists don't do enough care work, so there is some prestige to be gained in highlighting how much care work one does themselves, which in some cases leads to the odd behavior as referring to one's own chores (doing one's laundry, feeding oneself) as "care work." Directness implies undeserved "mediocre white man" confidence, so couched statements padded with uncertainty

[32] Shout out to the Black comrade who had the best critiques during the Q&A, by the way.

are more well-received. The languages of non-violent communication and pseudo-therapy speak are preferred, especially in conflict. The socially adept learn to play to these new games, and predators see new avenues of exploitation and means of camouflaging their behavior in feminist language.

This isn't even unique to anarcha-feminism. Outside our bubble, after Neil Gaiman was publicly accused of rape this January and he and his estranged wife Amanda Palmer were accused of human trafficking[33] — both identify as feminists — Gaiman released a statement titled *Breaking the Silence* — a term feminists use when sharing their stories or abuse and rape — where he denied the allegations and employed the language of self-actualization in ways that minimized both his agency and harms, for example: "Like most of us, I'm learning, and I'm trying to do the work needed, and I know that that's not an overnight process. I hope that with the help of good people, I'll continue to grow." Part of why this sort of fluffed up statement elicits such disgust is that we've seen it happen in our spaces too.

Agency is often confused for control, and this happens in part because the agency of a group is measured by self-determination, and this is most easily demonstrated by the ability to exclude. As anarcha-feminists, we are not particularly capable of creating self-determination for marginalized genders by means of offering free abortions or gender affirming hormones. An organization's or collective's ideals and relevancy can be difficult to demonstrate, but an easy win is to create FLINTA spaces, though such spaces may rely more on the voluntary self-exclusion by cis men than anything else, either brocialists keeping wide of the "femi-nazis" or allies agreeing to their terms. When TERFs marched through Charlottenburg in June of 2023, the group that organized the counter-demonstration, one that included cis men, had a banner painting event that was FLINTA only where cis men who were already part of the organizing efforts self-excluded from the activity. Some organizations that host demos request medics, and fewer attend than otherwise would for want of enough medics who are or feel comfortable being labeled as FLINTA. There are many such cases, and I'm sure with enough time I could fill a small notebook with similar stories from my immediate circle of friends. One can wonder if less help made the events safer or more effective, or if the primary benefit was that organizations were able to demonstrate their power and relevancy by enforcing arbitrary social rules.

The power games and hierarchies that are formed within our anarcha-feminist spaces are resilient to critique and opposition. When critiqued, they can claim that there's not such thing as a (cis-)matriarchy because the world is patriarchal so therefore such hierarchies don't actually exist. They can defend themselves by likening FLINTA-power in these petty squabbles for control over small spaces to the Black Power of the Panthers, as genuine counter-power to established structural power.

But the critique of power must be relentless and be applied at every level.

[33] Massive content notice for *horrendous* abuse, but nonetheless the article *There Is No Safe Word: How the best-selling fantasy author Neil Gaiman hid the darkest parts of himself for decades* by Lila Shapiro is very good.

An examination of the limits of survivor autonomy as we currently conceive of it

Following a traumatic event, whatever that may be, one of the main methods to avoid long-term psychological damage and PTSD is to help the survivor[34] restore autonomy and a sense of safety to their life. When someone's autonomy has been totally violated — as it is in cases of abuse or rape — restoration of these is paramount. In radical subcultures, part of this process is not just about restoring day-to-day autonomy but also about granting the survivor decision making powers over what if anything is to be done about the predator, including whether or not the thing we perceived to be harm was even harm at all. This process is called survivor autonomy in the English-speaking world, and in German, it's called Definitionsmacht (power of definition) and Handlungsmacht (power of action).

Survivor autonomy exists to create the sense of safety and control, and in many cases it goes beyond the perception of these things; it genuinely restores autonomy and provides real safety. The power of definition helps prevent outside meddling in situations where the survivor has unique knowledge, in particular such knowledge that they may not want to share. What we perceive as abuse or harm may not actually be. The power of action exists to block supporters and allies from taking action that could otherwise further endanger the survivor, namely that attempts to eliminate the threat of supporters triggering the predator's revenge against the survivor.[35]

As a baseline, doing what the survivor wants can be the right thing, and their opinions should carry the most weight, but there are cases where strict adherence to our current norms of survivor autonomy can cause further harms. In practice (among those who actually care about feminism and support work), survivor becomes an identity to be deferred to rather than a positionality with unique insights. There's vague deference to survivors at large for any single case, but the identity of "survivor" exists only with respect to the predator(s) involved in the single incident currently being handled. Deference to the class of survivors manifests as deference to the single individual. Failing to defer in this can be met with critiques that repackage the feminist language of sexual assault whereby the individuals acting outside the survivor's wishes are said to have violated the survivor's consent or autonomy. Specifically, this can be seen as disruptive to transformative justice or accountability processes that are underway.[36]

Consider a trivial case where one man has abused two women. The first lets this information spread through a whisper network but wants nothing specific done: no bans from spaces, no public callout, no kneecap bashing. The second with knowledge of the first's wishes decides to assemble a gang and break into his flat at night to wreck both it and him. To say that the second violated the consent of the first is as absurd as saying that anarchists in a forest occupation who chose to sabotage machinery violated the consent of the pacifists. And yet in both such cases, that very accusation gets levied.

Anarchism is built on voluntary association, but survivors find themselves in an involuntary association because of their shared experience. Even if they never make formal contact, there

[34] Affected person (Betroffene), as it's known in German.

[35] Or, sometimes it's used to stop mantifas from get all white-knighty and beating the ass of someone for minor infractions (is he covering up his own transgressions by overcompensating?). Reasons vary.

[36] To see how transformative justice can be abused and an argument for direct action against predators, see *What's In A Slogan? "KYLR" and Militant Anarcha-feminism* by William Gillis.

can be an expectation that they act in unity. More often than not, there is an ideological bias that favors the less confrontational approaches. I've never heard of a case where a survivor choosing to avoid confrontation and attempting to force that strategy on others was labeled as violating others' autonomy.

Beyond that, even in cases where there it is "known" (i.e., strongly assumed) that the predator has only one survivor, protecting that survivor from possible revenge often blocks the possibility of action that would protect the unknown future survivors of his future actions. The person we know is granted protections at the expense of those we don't. We hold it simultaneously in our heads that predators who have acted out their power fantasies on others tend to do so again and that acting preemptively to protect these other people is of less importance than one survivor's current wish.

The term sexualized violence is used to capture everything from unwanted comments or sexual advances to brutal premeditated rapes. I don't mean this as repeating some definition but that I've experienced cases where callouts or whisper network stories used the term sexualized violence, but after learning details from the affected persons, the actual things that happened have been on both extremes of that spectrum. When we flatten everything in to that term, it makes it difficult to find appropriate courses of action or even know threats we're facing. Overusing "sexualized violence" to describe overly persistent advances at a party can make us overestimate the danger. Overusing "sexualized violence" to describe violent serial rapes can make us underestimate the dangers we face.

In reaction to the ways survivors are maligned, have their stories picked apart looking for falsities, and face backlash for speaking out,[37] part of survivor autonomy is an allowance for the omission of details, or as its said in more common parlance, "believe survivors." False accusations are rare, so an accusation is itself strong evidence. Moreover, the very act of recounting details, even vaguely, even when they're believed, can itself be traumatizing. Solidarity with a survivor is expected to be in near total alignment with their wishes. This plus the omission of details has complicated interplays with the agency of their support group.

In cases where survivors want to take no action, this can manifest as naming a space or collective as a reproducer of rape culture without identifying who is unsafe. Since we shouldn't make a habit of asking everyone we meet where they hang out or what groups they're part of, we're likely coming in contact with outed predators and not knowing it. It could be useful to be told to watch out for "a sporty antifa guy, about 30 years old, goes by Kröte,"[38] but even this much information moving through whisper networks can be considered too much a danger to survivors. A lack of information makes it difficult to protect ourselves and those around us.

In cases where survivors *do* want to take action, there can be an expectation that solidarity with the survivor means reflexive action from their supporters. Even when supported, survivors generally do not get all their needs met, so there is some slight competition for attention and time. Omitting details and the way that the term sexualized violence obscures what is meant can heighten the perceived urgency and importance of some cases by liking them to more severe ones. Doing so also takes away the ability for supporters to decide for themself what appropriate action is, either modulating the severity of their response up or down relative to what is requested

[37] See the classic text on the matter *Betrayal: a critical analysis of rape culture in anarchist subcultures* by Words to Fire Press, or a more recent anonymous German one: *Täterschutz und Supportarbeit* (de.indymedia.org).

[38] I made this up. Please don't beat up a random Kröte.

of them. More specifically, I might be willing to help a rapist swallow their teeth, but I might not think it's an acceptable path forward to do the same to the guy who gets drunk at parties and is too persistent with his "flirtations." Both are unacceptable behaviors that need to be prevented, but strategies for dealing with these difference cases vary because the motivations and beliefs behind them also vary.

As one example of the complexity of omissions and agency, when involved with a survivor support group, I never learned who the abusers and their defenders were. At the accountability meeting in the space, unsurprisingly none of the abusers showed up and only one of their defenders did, and the defender was only identified to me after the meeting. Weeks later, I learned that survivors and their supporters had previously been threatened multiple times with weapons including a machete in the space we'd had the accountability meeting in. When I said that I would have liked to have known that before going to the space, I was told that it wasn't information I'd needed to know at the time and all I should have needed to know to support them was that it was cases of unaddressed sexualized violence. I still don't know who the abusers are or what they did, so I can't defend myself or others.

All together, the situation is thus. There are repeated cases of sexualized violence including rape within the anarchist subculture. For those who find this sort of exertion of power good, not just tolerable, we know that stories of rapes are traded and that the lack of repercussions are known, not just by a predator for their own actions but likewise for other predators. They know this is done because the fear of revenge for speaking out is a strong motivator. They also know that collectively anarcha-feminists choose to prioritize safety of survivors over all else. Predators can then conclude that if they want to continue to abuse others, they can create a sufficient miasma of fear that will force survivors into inaction. This pressure, a part of rape culture, isn't just from current predators but would-be predators who want to create space for them to commit abuses too. Survivors are pushed back from their radical circles, and the process repeats.

It's a moral dilemma. No single survivor has the responsibility to face their abuser, yet when none do, we end up with this recurrent problem. The open question then is how do we create the climate such that every time there's a new survivor, they can reliably assemble a support group and take action? And what does that even look like?

Maybe the way forward is to realize the extent to which we've internalized myths of Left Unity, that even among anarchists, we somehow don't see rapists as being effectively on the same side of patriarchy as nazis. Maybe it means that survivors will have to pick a little more danger and sacrifice more than they must so that the movement becomes safer for everyone else. Maybe we we have to look at sustained and significant boycotts and campaigns to shut out certain spaces and collectives from radical organizing. I haven't met a single person who thinks that not taking solidary actions in support of Køpi when they face eviction is an acceptable position, so if the repeated rapes and refusal to collectively deal with it isn't grounds for breaking solidarity, then what is?

Whatever it is we're doing, it's not working, not well enough.

A summary of this convoluted tale and a means of relating it to the current anti-woke backlash

Rape culture is significant feature of the The Left and the so-called Berlin radical scene, yet both of these things are simplified terms that hide the complexity of our social interactions. There is no singular The Left nor a singular Berlin scene. Within both, there are spaces of greater and lesser patriarchy, greater and lesser sexualized violence, greater and lesser principled anarcha-feminist praxis. We make overarching statements about The Left and Berlin which could be useful for looking at broad trends, but often we completely gloss over the nuances and complexities of our social relations. Fertile soil for anarcha-feminist praxis is often left untiled, but just as well, we can trend toward a monoculture where new hierarchies and power games grow.

We often divide the world into FLINTAs and cis men, treating the former as group imbued with moral goodness and the latter with its opposite. Even if the creation of identity-based spaces has its use — and undeniably there are some — we tend to over-apply FLINTA as an organizing principle with particular detriment to the most marginalized of genders. This strategy might keep a class of predators or behaviors pushed out, but it's not enough to stop abuses, and without focusing on the origins of abuse — the origin is power — we leave ourselves vulnerable. Our ability to defend ourselves is often tempered by a passivity that favors "feminine" and "collaborative" organizational strategies. We look to authorities to sanction our actions, and structures we build to address shortcomings in our movement become replacements for the solidarity and autonomy we will need to develop if we hope to change the world. As one anarcha-hooker said after reading the first draft of this text, "There is no model of social organization we can rely on to abdicate our responsibility to confront abuses of power when they occur. We can't let systems do our thinking for us."

The right-wing anti-woke backlash is the spasmodic flailing of all abusers, power-seekers, and bigots realizing that the world has been trending more progressive and that they need to rally against empathy as a concept if they hope to retain power. They aim to destroy solidarity and make caring "cringe." Rue as I am to invoke his name, Elon Musk said on *The Joe Rogan Experience* #2281 "The fundamental weakness of Western civilization is empathy." He's not at the avant-garde of western fascism — often his ideas lag behind the actual avant-garde — but he has massive global reach and influence, and this idea does not come from him alone.

On The Left, as anarcha-feminists, we all too often engage in the complicated calculus of deserving where we carefully weigh various identities, positionalities, and life circumstances together to determine if empathy or solidarity should be meted out. This is easily observable by those within the movement and those on the outside, and it can be exceptionally alienating. It plays into right-wing narratives that the world should be divided up and that racial or gender divisions are *good* and *natural* as well as the narrative that if you're a man or white, then The Left is against you personally. But, the border between "right" and "left" is no border at all, but something quite porous. If we can meet people's needs, we can draw them into our fight, including pulling people away from conservatism. If we offer little beyond derision and elitism, would-be allies will drift further away. Morality is a choice, but we can make the choice easier.

Perhaps the greatest struggle we currently face is the fight for empathy. At its worst, here in Germany, we see that there is so little empathy for Palestinians, and the Ultradeutsch often dress this up with bastardized Marxist analyses and German guilt. But it goes beyond that. This

calculus of deserving appears in so many places. A friend of a friend used to be active in his neighborhood's antifa, but when he became disabled because of the corona virus, they abandoned him because he was no longer "useful." For all the groups speaking of care work, the only who actually takes care of him is his football club. Spaces and care are reserved for those "like us," where likeness is often some single facet of identity.

Who should we care for? Everyone. We need to expand our circles of care, and that will take significant effort. People already marginalized or burdened with too much care work will have to continue to shoulder that as we try to get more hands to lighten the load, and certainly we need more hands. This isn't a statement about how it ought to be, but a realistic view backed by other historical movements. Cis men as a class aren't going to spontaneously develop a robust sense of empathy and solidarity nor are they going to collectively abandon their class power. Some might, and when they do, we should welcome those traitors to patriarchy.

We should find affinity not in identity but in our ethics and in our praxes based around care, solidarity, and community self-defense. The feeling of not belonging and alienation are perpetual points of discussion in radical scenes, Berlin likely even more so than other places. Instead of building up arbitrary walls and essentializing behavior, we will have to embrace complexities around identity and ethics.

As for much of the specifics mentioned here, we should ask ourselves to what extent a current practice serves us and how much of its continued existence is merely habit or hegemonic scene pressure. If I could wish for one thing in this part of the struggle, it would be a more insurrectionary model against patriarchy from within anarcha-feminism, one that sees where reform has failed and where the patriarchal power cannot be convinced away. Anarchist and punk as labels mean little on their own. We continue to see individuals, collectives, and spaces as "one of us" when they demonstrate that they have no concern for liberation or even basic feminism, and our alignment with such spaces persists because of their subcultural significance or proximity to us.

"Solidarity means attack," as the saying goes. Well then, let's build real solidarity between those with ideological affinities. Let's attack knowing that doing so requires sacrifice. Beyond bold statements and symbolic actions is so much possibility, so much room for experimentation.

Hand in hand, let us venture into this unknown.

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An Exploration of Current Anarcha-Feminist Theory and Praxis
With an Eye for How It Manifests in the Berlin Radical Scene
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