

# **Feminism and Sexism in the Anarchist Movement**

**A Collection of Essays**

Various Authors

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# Towards an Introduction: Why Anarcha-Feminism?

Isn't anarchism essentially feminist, with its central aim of abolishing hierarchy and creating equality? While theoretically it should be, in reality anarchist organisations and people claiming to be anarchists consistently ignore (or worse, outright deny the existence of) gender oppression. The problem of gender is rarely an integral part of anti-capitalist and anti-racist discourse and struggle.

A look at history shows us that the anarchist movement has not considered feminism one of its major concerns. Although Bakunin, for example, advocated complete equality between women and men and denounced the contradiction in many male militants who fought for socio-economic equality and freedom while being tyrants at home, Proudhon, on the other hand, pillar of the libertarian movement, was a notorious misogynist. This author of sentences like "the woman is a pretty animal but an animal nonetheless. She is as eager for kisses as a goat is for salt," is still the master thinker for many. There have always been homophobic anarchists, as well; who argue that homosexuality represents a "bourgeois perversion."

Emma Goldman described the obstacles against her when she raised this issue: "Censorship came from some of my own comrades because I was treating such 'unnatural' themes as homosexuality," she related in 1912. The shell of the idea of sexual liberation has often been resuscitated but without its anti-patriarchy value. For most militants, in 1936 as in 1970, it has meant above all the sexual availability of women militants and feminists for meeting male desires.

The film and statement below by anarcha-feminist group "No Pretence" explains why a feminist analysis is as relevant to the anarchist movement today as it has ever been.

The following was presented to the Anarchist Conference in 2009:

## **MOVEMENT or why we aren't one**

No matter how much we aspire to be 'self-critical' there is a clear lack of theorising and concrete action around sexism, homophobia and racism in the anarchist movement. We do not feel that the content and structure of the conference deal with gender and we're tired of asking for space – we're taking it ourselves.

You want to talk about history? Let's stop pretending that feminism is a short blip in the history of political struggles. The feminism you know may be the one that has been dominated by white middle-class liberal politics – NOT the struggles and pockets of revolutionary resistance missing from our political pamphlets and 'independent' media. The feminism of Comandanta Yolanda, of bell hooks, of Anzaldúa, of Mbuya Nehanda, of Angela Davis, of Rote Zora, of Mujeres Libres...

## **CLASS or is anybody out there?**

We are all oppressed by the class system, but there is nobody 'out there' who isn't also oppressed by white supremacy, imperialism, hetero-sexism, patriarchy, ableism, ageism... Pretending these systems don't exist or can be subsumed into capitalist oppression, doesn't deal with the problem, it just silences those people most oppressed by them, and allows for the continuing domination of these systems over our lives.

We are tired of being told that anarchists don't need to be feminists, because 'anarchism has feminism covered'. This is just a convenient way of forgetting the reality of gender oppression, and so ignoring the specifics of the struggle against it.

## **RESISTANCE or are we futile?**

If the anarchist movement doesn't recognize the power structures it reproduces, its resistance will be futile. For as well as fighting sexism 'out there' we must fight sexism 'in here' and stop pretending that oppressive systems disappear at the door of the squat or the social centre. Only a movement that understands and fights its own contradictions can provide fertile ground for real and effective resistance.

Ask yourselves this – do you believe sexism exists within the movement? When a woman comrade says she's experienced sexual abuse or assault from a male comrade – what do you think? That it's an individual or an isolated case? Or that it can happen – and disproportionately to women – because there is a system which allows it to develop and gives it life? Can we honestly say that our own autonomous spaces do not play a part in upholding this system?

Ask yourselves this – Why do fewer women speak in meetings? Because they think less? What is the gender of the factory worker? Why do more women do the washing up and run crèches at meetings/events? What is the gender of the carer at home?

Now tell us if you believe sexism exists: tell us why men rape; why more women are battered than men; why more women are used by the state to do free and unwaged work. Tell us – are you a feminist?

We believe that in the anarchist movement, the strongest evidence of sexism lies in the choice we're told to make between 'unity' and what-they-call 'separatism', between fighting the state and fighting sexism. Fuck that! We refuse to be seen as stereotypes of 'feminists' you can consume – like fucking merchandise in the capitalist workplace.

## **IDEAS INTO REALITY and what's in between?**

There will be no future for the anarchist movement if it doesn't also identify as an anarcho-feminist movement. Anarcho-feminist organisational structures must exist within the movement to make anarcho-feminism an integral part of it. And you don't need to identify as a woman to be an anarcho-feminist – every anarchist should be able to participate in the struggle against sexism.

The state's incursion into our private lives and the relationship between sexuality and productivity from which it profits affects people of all genders. The gender binary system violently

allocates us roles on the basis of our anatomy. A refusal to accept even these basic precepts will be a great hindrance to the movement.

You ask, 'Can we find common cause despite our differences?'. We will only find common cause if we recognize that our differences are structured by numerous oppressive systems, and together fight to end each of these systems, wherever we find them.

Our feminisms must be plural; they must be anti-capitalist, anti-racist, antihomophobic. Our inspiration must come from the actions of feminists who have helped self-identified women reach revolutionary consciousness.

Our feminisms must be revolutionary.

No Pretence

# A Man's Heaven is a Woman's Hell

by Kirsten Anderberg

We all have heard women complain about subjugation while working in the civil rights movement in the 1960's and 70's. Women witnessed their participation in a movement that supposedly was based on freedom for all, yet women were relegated to secondary, submissive, objectified, and servitude status continually throughout this time of supposed "liberation" and "civil rights." Women from white suburb progressive activism, to Black Panthers, all complained of the same problem. Subjugation based on gender. So the fact that this is continuing on in the realm of anarchy today is not surprising. My assessment of anarchy in the current U.S. incarnation is a lot of white men want MORE freedoms, and those desired freedoms actually DO include sexually objectifying, and being served by, women. It is becoming more and more clear to me that just as Public Enemy correctly sings "A White Man's Heaven is a Black Man's Hell," that a "Man's Heaven is a Woman's Hell." We cannot meet both desires, it is a zero sum game the way men are playing it. If women in anarchy want to quit serving men and being reduced to our genitals and breasts, and men in anarchy really secretly want women to make their food, watch their kids, not attend school, and to be sexually available and made up in chemicals, lingerie, heels and diet aids to sexually titillate them at all times, while doing men's laundry and washing most of their dishes, we have a problem. A HUGE problem.

Men who claim to be anarchists or feminists should do their own cooking, cleaning, and childcare. That, for me, is rule # 1. Any man who claims to be an anarchist or feminist, while he has women making his food regularly, is a joke. Any male "feminist" who relegates dish washing, from pots and pans used in food preparation to dishes and utensils used in serving and eating food, to women, is a Manarchist, not an anarchist. And any man who does not do an equal share of his own childcare responsibilities cannot be an anarchist or feminist either. There is no way around it. Part of anarchy is picking up your own responsibilities. Men who leave cooking, cleaning, and childcare predominantly to women are oppressive. I hear adult men trying to justify their laziness, saying the women "want" to cook for them, or their mothers "like" to sew their buttons on for them when they are 30 years old, like one 30 year old guy I know who has a PhD in engineering, ironically. Buttons miff him, but he is an engineer. Hmmm.

This idea that women "like to" and "want to" clean up after, and serve, men is quite self-serving for men. If men only listen to or interact with women when they serve them food, for instance, then the women serve food. If most men were equally praising the women for working on their PhD's as they are women for serving men, we would be getting somewhere. It is just a sign of a woman who has low self-esteem most often, and nothing else, if she "wants" to serve men endlessly by doing their cooking, cleaning, childcare, etc. She, very often, was not given any other real options to earn respect or acceptance.

That reminds me of another guy I know who tried to relegate all diaper duties of his son onto the mom claiming he could not work velcro. He can tune his hammered dulcimer, but he can't work velcro. Hmmm. The wool diaper covers his son wore had little velcro strips to close the



leg areas. I watched him try to claim he could not “work” velcro, so his wife had to do his kid’s diaper one Thanksgiving. He wanted his wife to stop cooking, to change diapers, while he did nothing. So, I stepped in and taught this 30+ year old man how to “work” velcro, to empower him to be able to change his own son’s diaper, for god’s sake. I am sorry, but that is just plain pathetic nonsense. I took this idiot’s hands, and put one side of the velcro in it, then put the other side of velcro in his other hand, then pushed his hands together. Wow! It was that easy. I had to deal with this guy in my performing circle for years, and now he is in some activist circles in Seattle, but I lost all respect for this guy years ago. Watching how he sits around being served by women, while his male child watches that behavior, cancels out anything “radical” he may have to say. A guy who dodged doing his own kid’s diapers for a long time with some phoney selfish crap about not being able to work velcro is not a feminist, is not progressive, is not on my side. He is on the side I am working to abolish.

When I first returned to college, I was in a speech class with a woman who was in her 40’s, and was in the same women’s reentry program I was in, so I wanted to support her. She came to me freaked out, because we had to write a controversial speech for our speech class and she said she could not do that. I asked why not. She said she had done nothing but cook, clean and work for her husband and four sons for the last 20 years. She said she has no idea what is going on in the world, had not read a paper or watched TV news in years, and she simply felt incapable of writing something controversial. She could not think up one controversial topic to write about, was a complaint she had. This shocked me, as I am an endless fount of ideas for controversial speeches. But I watched her, and I was a mom of a 4 year old boy at that time, and I vowed to always keep a life going outside of serving men and my son, so that I would be whole and healthy 20 years down the road. It occurred to me that her dilemma really was not that she had not done anything or thought anything controversial in 20 years, it was that she had been beaten down to a point where she had no independence and confidence anymore. That, to me, seemed to be the issue. She was trying to learn how to think independently and that came BEFORE the speech, but the speech triggered the independent thinking. The woman finally did a speech on the controversial subject of flossing teeth. She made an argument that people did not take flossing seriously, and gave out little floss samples, and I just loved her for it. She was very brave and I say that with the utmost sincerity.

I feel when men say things like women want to clean up after them or do their dishes and cooking and childcare, that they are just oppressing the woman further, even if it is subtle, and that type of behavior does not empower her, but further beat her down, reinforcing servitude as her most prominent and useful talent. My mom was a concert pianist, then a stewardess who flew around the world to places like Russia, Cuba, Alaska, Greece, Hawaii, etc. Then, in 1959, she had to make a choice. Her career or marriage, because she was not allowed to have both. Northwest Orient Airlines, the company she worked for, made her choose one or the other. Since our society rewards women for becoming a wife and mother more than for independent careers, my mom chose wife and mother. But as she was locked up on a cul-de-sac in a suburb in Los Angeles, cooking, cleaning, doing endless childcare, chained to the house, with no intellectual stimulation, she literally went nuts. She complained that the other moms on the block wanted to talk about the latest TV show or a new store in town, when my mom wanted to talk politics and art. My dad was flying off to his exciting jobs in the aerospace program, all over the world, as a well-paid engineer, but my mom could fly no more. She had to sit at home with me getting more and more dark and depressed, dependent on my dad, who was gone a lot. My dad was still out

in the world, participating in the world, yet had a home and wife and child waiting anytime he came home, to serve him. My mom was relegated to servitude and it killed a part of her soul most certainly. And it was due to her gender. Later women sued that airline for sex discrimination so women are not forced to make such devastating choices anymore. My mom knew she got the raw end of the deal, and tried to keep things like the “I Hate To Cookbook” and other things dissing housework and cooking as crappy women’s work that should be simplified, not glorified, around to influence her daughter, me, to not follow in her steps of serving a man. I could see she wanted out, and it made me think I never wanted to step in to that mess of marriage, servitude of men, etc.

Holly Near wrote a song called “Old Time Woman,” about an older woman helping a younger woman through some of her troubles:

“She told me she’d never had a man, till she was firmly wed,  
Never understood her ma, until her pa was dead,  
Still, her man came first, and then her 13 sons,  
It wasn’t until they had all gone away  
That she started to have any kind of fun at all!

I wanted to make her young again but all I could do was cry  
She took my swollen cheek in hand,  
And made me look her in the eye,  
She said, “If I had not suffered,  
You wouldn’t be wearing those jeans,  
Bein’ an old time woman,  
Ain’t as bad as it seems.””

Emma Goldman, an anarchist that male anarchists recognize and give props to, says this issue of domestic servitude by women is a serious matter that directly affects anarchy. Yet I see most male anarchists trying to pooh pooh this issue. Or they will validate the issue, even maybe publish the issue, but in real life, women still are doing their dishes and cooking! They want to be served like kings by women, while claiming to be sensitive to hierarchies and elitism! Just like men did in the civil rights era when I was a child. But I am not buying mere words this time, based on the experience my sisters had in the 60’s. Males need to PROVE they are not using women for servitude as second class citizens by, um, NOT ALLOWING WOMEN TO SERVE THEM. This same idea was applied to feminism. Men complained of a double standard when women wanted equal rights but wanted to play dumb when it came to car mechanics and power tools. So, women learned how to do mechanics and to use power tools. It is the same thing that men need to do now. Work through the uncomfortableness to end sexist crap we inherited.

Pro-active anarchist men clean up dishes they dirty BEFORE they are asked and BEFORE A WOMAN CAN DO IT FOR THEM. (A common trick of lazy males is to wait until a woman does it for him, or to do the cleaning so ineptly that the woman takes over, or to simply feign absolute incompetence as the guy who could not “work” velcro on diapers.) Pro-active, pro-feminist men clean up more messes than they make, just like women have done forever. Pro-active anarchist men cook more food for others than they allow to be cooked for them, just like most women. Pro-active men schedule childcare in equal amounts with the mother of the child. Pro-active men participate as fully as women in childrearing, without being asked or prodded. Pro-active

anarchist men try to support as many women as men in their work, like feminist activists try to. So, pro-active anarchist men SEEK OUT new and exciting projects about, by, and for women, like they have for male projects forever. Anarchist men really have to be pro-active at this point, and anything less really should be interpreted as a desire to maintain a gender hierarchy and male elitism.

I began to refuse to cook and clean for men in 2003, and it has drastically changed my life. I am dead serious. I have spent unbelievable amounts of my time on Earth serving men as a woman's duty that was taken for granted completely. And I have become a pro-active poverty and feminist activist, which means I do not silently sit by while sexism and classism occurs just because the men have power and to confront them is scary. Women who confront anarchist men about the issues of male elitism meet all kinds of comical defensive behavior from Manarchists. I am learning how to just laugh at them when they puff their alpha male chests at me, claiming anarchy as THEIR terrain, THEIR DOMAIN, so to speak, just like they said about houses we all lived in for generations. No, women are not here to serve men dinner, nor are we going to submit to them in an anarchy power struggle. If anarchy is some male elitist fiction, we do not need it. If anarchy is what Emma Goldman was talking about, where women are freed of discriminatory servitude, then the men of anarchy need to start LIVING that reality, not just talk about it. Or if anarchist men are waiting for women to FORCE them into treating women equally, that is pretty lame too. So don't complain, men, as women become more and more aggressive and militant in our assertion of our human rights over our servitude. And let it be known, the longer men make women wait for this equality, the more hostile we will naturally become.

I want to see anarchist men LEADING the childcare equity revolution with women. I want to see anarchist men NOT ALLOWING women to serve them, and to start giving back for years of female servitude they have already benefited from. I want to see anarchist men quit rationalizing their laziness, and to start seeing anarchist men as the first in the kitchen to do dishes always, just as women have done for years for most men. I want to see male culture quit treating women like a Playboy centerfold they can just jack off on, with or without our consent. I want men to quit acting so threatened by older women, by larger women, by smarter women, by athletic women, by feminist women. "I want men to be so disciplined, that they go crazy in the name of creation, not destruction." — Rob Brezsny.

Emma Goldman was right on target when she said the domestic situation was of utmost priority for the liberation of society. And I see men, more often than not, thwarting domestic duties upon women, still. And what is worse, men often then deny they are doing that, or deny knowledge of their own passing of the buck on cleaning, cooking, childcare, etc. As if denying they are using women for free labor makes it so. No, women are still doing this free labor, while the majority of men are using women for unpaid labor. Feminism says that women need to not allow men to abuse them as second class citizens like that. But the way I interpret anarchy, I think it says that men need to not allow themselves to oppress women, not that women need to patrol and police men into proper equity behavior.

Men treating women with equity is as much about men as it is about women. Men are benefiting from women's servitude. And it is men's job to figure out how to stop having an existence that is based upon the oppression of women as unpaid laborers for their lifestyle. Much of the male freedom in the world is based on women not being free, stuck at home, taking care of the man's children, which includes cleaning, cooking, etc. The majority of women I talk to want to work outside the home, and be economically independent of men, but someone has to do the

childcare, cooking, cleaning, etc., and men are paid more in society, and are promoted more and get into grad school more, etc. And the men who create welfare moms walk free, faceless, while all the stigma is heaped on the moms, for the men not doing their part! It is painted as if men do important things so women just need to wave our pom-poms for them at home with the kids! I do not believe any man who says he is an anarchist, if a woman cooks for him more often than he does for women, if a woman cleans his dishes more often than he does others' dishes, and if someone else does more of his child's childcare than he does. Words are cheap. Action talks.

# A Message to “Anarchist” Men, and then some

by Molly Tov

So they say a women’s work is never done, and here I am writing an article that a man should be writing, and I’m starting to believe it.

Women have been looked over, talked over, pushed back, laughed at, been shut up, used, abused, and raped all by our “brothers” self titled anarchist men and proclaimed revolutionaries. All the anti-sexist men quick to jump on someone else’s sexist remark when around an anarchist crowd, but will let it slide when around his not so “P.C.” friends. The men who vocalize their aggression against rapists, but when THEIR lovers say no, coercion is simple, and its not rape, because he’s ANTI-SEXIST. There are men who use anti-sexist talk to pick up women. The men who challenge others to call them on their shit and when someone does, on goes the defense mode and he’s appalled that someone could say HE was fucking up, instead of actually thinking about the situation and to start working on it.

We already know all men are sexist, just as all white people are racist because of our society, white people still having privilege over people of colour and men still have privilege over women, and once born into this process its incredibly hard to break it, especially when you forget to look at yourself. Once men slap “REVOLUTIONARY” on themselves, they think once they know a problem exists, that they are no longer a part of that problem, which they are.

As always before and now, sexism is a second hand term. It seems everything is being laid out in order of importance, made by who? Its like “first we’ll fight racism, cos’ we already know how to beat up nazis, then maybe we’ll think about sexism, capitalism, or homophobia, whichever least affects our privilege. After that if there’s time, and no more beer, we can read about speciesism, ageism, or ableism. if we’re really cool we’ll learn a little about it all to improve our social skills for the next gathering.”

Whatever happened to fucking equality? How did some isms become more important than others you ask? Its called “How to be cool in the political scene, and keep as much privilege as possible” (look for it at your local corporate bookstore).

It’s sad when it comes to the point where we don’t want to think of anyone but ourselves or the P.C. status quo. Which brings me back to the conclusion of all these “feminist” men, who care so dearly about women (or at least fucking them), until it affects their privilege, they care. Which I challenge SELF-PROCLAIMED anti-sexist men to really think about, how far the words they speak so well, go maybe try asking your best friend or lover just how anti-sexist you are.

Has this article offended you yet? Do you use your knowledge of others oppression to make a change or to just make a good impression. Do you feel challenged when a women speaks? Ever assumed its ok to touch someone? Ever feel bothered when a women asks you to confront sexist bullshit? well fuck you, you choose the term revolutionary not me.

Unless we can start seeing ourselves as the problem, and until we can actually start talking and listening to each other about our problems and work on them, revolutionary change will always remain a distant dream.

So the last question being, how many articles does it take until men start working on their shit? Aren't you tired of hearing and reading about it (if they even took the time)?

Maybe Smith and Wesson do a better job??

At least stop considering yourselves revolutionaries, YOU'RE NOT MY COMRADE.

# **Activist Scenes are No Safe Space for Women: On Abuse of Activist Women by Activist Men**

by Tamara K. Nopper

As a woman who has experienced physical and emotional abuse from men, some of whom I had long relationships with, it is always difficult to learn from other activist women that they are being abused by activist men.

The interrelated issues of sexism, misogyny and homophobia in activist circles is rampant, so it is unsurprising that women are abused physically and emotionally by activist men with whom they work with on various projects.

I am not speaking abstractedly here. Indeed, I know of various relationships between activist men and women in which the latter is being abused if not physically, emotionally. For example, a long time ago a friend of mine showed me bruises on her arm that she told me were from another male activist. This woman certainly struggles emotionally, which is somewhat expected given that she has experienced physical abuse. What was additionally heartbreaking to see is how the woman was shunned by activist circles when she tried to talk about her abuse or have it addressed. Some told her to get over it, or to focus on “real” male assholes such as prominent political figures. Others told her to not let her “personal problems” get in the way of “doing the work.”

I struggled with my friend’s recovery too. As a survivor of abuse, it was difficult to meet a woman who in some ways was a ghost of me. I would run into this woman, and she would randomly tell me about another fight that she and her boyfriend had gotten into. I would find myself avoiding this woman because frankly, it was hard to look at a woman who reminded me too much of who I was not too long ago: a scared, embarrassed and desperate person who would babble to anyone willing to listen about what was happening to her. In other words, I, like this woman, had gone through the desperation of trying to get out of an abusive relationship and needing to finally tell people what was happening to me. And similar to how this woman was treated, most people, even those I called friends, shied away from listening to me because they did not want to be bothered or were struggling with their own emotional struggles.

The embarrassment associated with telling people that you have been abused, and like myself, stayed in an abusive relationship, is made even worse by the responses you get from people. Rather than be sympathetic, many people were disappointed in me. Many times I was told by people that they were “surprised” to find out that I had “put up with that shit” because unlike “weak women,” I was a “strong” and “political” woman. This response is downright misogynist because it denies how dominant patriarchy and hatred of women and the “feminine” is, and instead tries to place the blame on women. That is, we are to ignore that women are being abused by men and instead emphasize the character of women as the definitive reason for why some are abused and others don’t “put up with that shit.”

I can't help but think that other activist women who have been abused, whether by activist men or not, also face similar difficulties recovering from abuse. Regardless of one's politics, women can be and do get abused. Anyone who refuses to believe this either just doesn't listen to women or think about what women go through on the regular. And this is because they are just hostile to recognizing how pervasive and normalized patriarchy and misogyny are—both outside of and within activist circles.

More, a lot of us want to believe that activist men really are different from our fathers, brothers, old boyfriends, and male strangers we confront in our daily routines. We want to have some faith that the guy who writes a position paper on sexism and posts it on his website is not writing it just to make himself look good, get pussy, or cover up some of his dangerous practices towards women. We want to believe that women are being respected for their skills, energy and political commitment and are not being asked to do work because they are viewed as “exploitable” and “abuse-able” by activist men. We want to believe that if an activist male made an unwarranted advance or physically/sexually assaulted an activist woman that it would promptly and thoughtfully be dealt with by organizations and political communities—and with the input of the victim. We want to think that activist groups are not so easily enticed by the skills or “name-power” that an activist male brings to a project that they are willing to let a woman be abused or have her recovery go unaddressed in exchange. And we would like to think that “security culture” in activist circles does not only focus on issues of listserv protocol or using fake names at rallies but actually includes thinking proactively about how to deal with misogyny, patriarchy and heterosexism both outside of and within the activist scenes.

But all of these wishes, all of these dreams obviously tend to go unaddressed. Instead, I know of activist men who troll political spaces like predators looking for women that they can politically manipulate or fuck without accountability. Like abusive priests, some of these men literally move from city to city looking to recreate themselves and find fresh meat among those who are unfamiliar with their reputation. And I have seen activist women give their labor and skills to activist men (who often take the credit) in hopes that the abusive activist man will finally get his act right or appreciate her as a human being.

While romance between activists is fine, I think it is disgusting how activist men use romance to control women politically and keep women emotionally committed to helping the man out politically, even when his politics are corny or problematic. Or, in some cases, activist men get involved in politics to find women they can involve in abusive relationships and control. And given that abuse brings out the worst in the victim, I have seen where women interact with other activists (particularly women) in ways they might not normally if they were not being politically and emotionally manipulated by men. For example, I know of abused activist females who have spread rumors about other activist women or have gotten involved in political battles between her boyfriend and other activists.

What's scary is that I know activist men who were abusing and manipulating female activist and at the same time, writing position papers on sexism and competition between women. Sometimes the activist male will pen the position paper with his activist girlfriend in order to gain more legitimacy. I know of activist men who quote bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldua, or other feminist writers one minute and are harassing or spreading lies and gossip about their activist girlfriend the next. And activist men will school activist women on how to be less competitive with other women to conceal their abusive and manipulative behavior.



What is more heartbreaking is the level of support abusive activist men find from other activists, male and female but most usually other men. Not only do activist women have to confront and negotiate their abuser in activist circles, they must usually do so in a political community that talks a good game but in the end could give a shit about the victims' emotional and physical safety. On many occasions I have listened to women's stories of abuse be retold and recast by activist men in a hostile and sexist manner. And when they recast this story, they often do in that voice, the voice that is snide, accusatory and mocking.

For example, when I was sharing with an activist male my concerns about how an activist female was being treated by an activist male who held a prominent position in a political group, the man "listening" to my story said in that voice, "Oh, she's probably just mad 'cause he started dating someone else" and went on to make fun of her. He continued to tell me that while he "acknowledges" the man is wrong, the woman needs to stand up to the man if she wants the treatment to stop. Unfortunately this man's brand of misogyny disguised as male feminism is all too common in activist circles given that a lot of men in general believe that women are abused because they are weak or secretly want to be in relationships with abusive men. More, his comments revealed an attitude that assumes that if activist women take issue with activist men, they are "crying abuse" to cover up hidden sexual desires and anger over being rejected by men who "won't fuck them."

I find it disgusting that women's physical and emotional safety is of little concern to activist men in general. While activist men will pay some lip service to how they need to keep their mouths shut when women are talking or how women only spaces are necessary, all too often "critical" and "political" people do not want to confront the fact that women are being abused by male activists in our circles. When the issue is "addressed," more often than not attention will be given to "struggling with" the man (i.e., letting him stay and maybe just gossiping about him). I have even seen some situations where abusive men become adopted, so to speak, by other activists, who see rehabilitating the man as part of their project and think little about what this means for the women who are trying to recover. In some cases, the male activist abuser was adopted while the woman was shunned as "unstable," "crazy" or "too emotional." Basically, these groups would rather help a cold, calculating guy who can "keep it together" while he abuses women rather than deal with the reality that abuse can contribute to emotional and social difficulties among victims as they work to become survivors.

And in some cases, activist women will avoid going to the police because she is critical of the prison industrial complex but also because other activist men will tell her she is "contributing to the problem" by "bringing the state in." But in most cases, the activist male is not chastised for the problems he has created. Thus, women are stuck having to figure out how to insure her safety without being labeled a "sell-out" by her activist peers.

While I am a strong believer that we need to try to work towards healing rather than punishment per se, I am painfully aware that we often put more emphasis on helping men stay in activist circles than supporting women through their recoveries, which might involve the need to have the man purged from the political group. Basically, the group will usually determine that the activist abuser must be allowed to heal without asking the woman what she needs from the group to heal and be supported in her process. I know of many examples of where women are forced to put up with the groups' unwillingness to address abuse. Some will remain involved in organizations because they believe in the work and frankly, there are few spaces to go, if any, where she is not at risk of being abused by another activist or have her abuse unaddressed.

Others will simply leave the organization. I have seen how these women get treated by other activists—men and women—who treat women coldly or gossip that they are selfish or sell-outs for letting the personal get in way of “the work.”

Or, if activist women who have been abused are “supported,” it is usually because she does “good work” or that not addressing the abuse will be “bad for the group.” In this sense, the physical, emotional and spiritual health of women is still sacrificed. Instead, the woman’s abuse must be addressed because if it is not, she might not continue doing “good work” for the organization or there might be too much tension in the group for it to run efficiently. Either way, women’s safety is not viewed as worthy of concern in and of itself.

Overall, activist scenes are no safe space for women because misogynists and abusive men exist within them. More, many of these abusers use the language, tools of activism and support by other activists as means to abuse women and conceal their behavior. And unfortunately, in a lot of political circles, regardless of how much we talk about patriarchy or misogyny, women are sacrificed in order to keep up “the work” or save the organization. Perhaps it is time we actually just care that activist women are vulnerable to being manipulated and abused by activist males and consider that proactively addressing this is an integral part of the “work” that activists must do.

# Anarcho-Feminism: Two Statements

## Who we are: An Anarcho-Feminist Manifesto

We consider Anarcho-Feminism to be the ultimate and necessary radical stance at this time in world history, far more radical than any form of Marxism.

We believe that a Woman's Revolutionary Movement must not mimic, but destroy, all vestiges of the male-dominated power structure, the State itself – with its whole ancient and dismal apparatus of jails, armies, and armed robbery (taxation); with all its murder; with all of its grotesque and repressive legislation and military attempts, internal and external, to interfere with people's private lives and freely-chosen co-operative ventures.

The world obviously cannot survive many more decades of rule by gangs of armed males calling themselves governments. The situation is insane, ridiculous and even suicidal. Whatever its varying forms of justifications, the armed State is what is threatening all of our lives at present. The State, by its inherent nature, is really incapable of reform. True socialism, peace and plenty for all, can be achieved only by people themselves, not by representatives ready and able to turn guns on all who do not comply, with State directives. As to how we proceed against the pathological State structure, perhaps the best word is to outgrow rather than overthrow. This process entails, among other things, a tremendous thrust of education and communication among all peoples. The intelligence of womankind has at last been brought to bear on such oppressive male inventions as the church and the legal family; it must now be brought to re-evaluate the ultimate stronghold of male domination, the State.

While we recognise important differences in the rival systems, our analysis of the evils of the State must extend to both its communist and capitalist versions.

We intend to put to the test the concept of freedom of expression, which we trust will be incorporated in the ideology of the coming Socialist Sisterhood which is destined to play a determining role in the future of the race, if there really is to be a future.

We are all socialists. We refuse to give up this pre-Marxist term which has been used as a synonym by many anarchist thinkers. Another synonym for anarchism is libertarian socialism, as opposed to Statist and authoritarian varieties. Anarchism (from the Greek *anarchos* – without ruler) is the affirmation of human freedom and dignity expressed in a negative, cautionary term signifying that no person should rule or dominate another person by force or threat of force. Anarchism indicates what people should not do to one another. Socialism, on the other hand, means all the groovy things people can do and build together, once they are able to combine efforts and resources on the basis of common interest, rationality and creativity.

We love our Marxist sisters and all our sisters everywhere, and have no interest in disassociating ourselves from their constructive struggles. However, we reserve the right to criticise their politics when we feel that they are obsolete or irrelevant or inimical to the welfare of womankind.

As Anarcho-Feminists, we aspire to have the courage to question and challenge absolutely everything – including, when it proves necessary, our own assumptions.

## **Blood Of The Flower: An Anarchist-Feminist Statement**

We are an independent collective of women who feel that anarchism is the logically consistent expression of feminism.

We believe that each woman is the only legitimate articulator of her own oppression. Any woman, regardless of previous political involvement knows only too intimately her own oppression, and hence, can and must define what form her liberation will take.

Why are many women sick and tired of 'movements'? Our answer is that the fault lies with the nature of movements, not with the individual women. Political movements, as we have known them, have separated our political activities from our personal dreams of liberation, until either we are made to abandon our dreams as impossible or we are forced to drop out of the movement because we hold steadfastly to our dreams. As true anarchists and as true feminists, we say dare to dream the impossible, and never settle for less than total translation of the impossible into reality.

There have been two principle forms of action in the women's liberation movement. One has been the small, local, volitionally organised consciousness-raising group, which at best has been a very meaningful mode of dealing with oppression from a personal level and, at worst, never evolved beyond the level of a therapy group.

The other principle mode of participation has been large, bureaucratised groups which have focused their activities along specific policy lines, taking great pains to translate women's oppression into concrete, single-issue programmes. Women in this type of group often have been involved in formal leftist politics for some time, but could not stomach the sexism within other leftist groups. However, after reacting against the above-mentioned attitude of leftist males, many women with formal political orientations could not accept the validity of what they felt were the 'therapy groups' of their suburban sisters; yet they themselves still remained within the realm of male-originated Marxist-Leninist, Trotskyist, Maoist rhetoric, and continued to use forms of political organisation employed by the male leftist groups they were reacting against. The elitism and centralisation of the old male left thereby has found, and already poisoned parts of the women's movement with the attitude that political sophistication must mean 'building' a movement around single issue programmes, thereby implying that 'we must be patient until the masses' consciousness is raised to our level.' How condescending to assume that an oppressed person must be told that she is oppressed! How condescending to assume that her consciousness will grow only by plodding along, from single-issue to next single issue.

In the past decade or more, women of the left were consistently intimidated out of fighting for our own liberation, avoiding the obvious fact that all women are an oppressed group. We are so numerous and dispersed that we have identified ourselves erroneously as members of particular classes on the basis of the class of 'our men', our fathers or our husbands. So women of the left regarding ourselves as middle-class more than oppressed women, have been led to neglect engaging in our own struggle as our primary struggle. Instead, we have dedicated ourselves to fight on behalf of other oppressed peoples, thus alienating ourselves from our own plight. Many say that this attitude no longer exists in the women's movement, that it originated only from the guilt trip of the white middle class male, but even today women in autonomous women's movements speak of the need to organise working class women, without concentrating on the need to organise ourselves — as if we were already beyond that level. This does not mean (if we insist first and foremost on freeing ourselves) that we love our oppressed sisters any the less; on

the contrary, we feel that the best way for us to be true to all liberation struggles is to accept and deal directly with our own oppression.

Why Anarchism?

We do not believe that rejection of Marxist-Leninist analysis and strategy is by definition political naiveté. We do not believe it is politically naive to maintain the attitude that even a 'democratically centralised' group could be considered the 'vanguard' spokeswoman for us. The nature of groups concerned with 'building' movements is: 1) to water down the 'more extreme' dreams into 'realistic' demands, and 2) to eventually become an organ of tyranny itself. No thanks!

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

Anarchism is not synonymous with irresponsibility and chaos. Indeed, it offers meaningful alternatives to the out-dated organisational and policy-making practices of the rest of the left. The basic anarchist form of organisation is a small group, volitionaly organised and maintained, which must work toward defining the oppression of its members and what form their struggle for liberation must take.

Organising women, in the New Left and Marxist left, is viewed as amassing troops for the Revolution But we affirm that each woman joining in struggle is the Revolution. WE ARE THE REVOLUTION!

We must learn to act on impulse, to abandon the restrictions on behaviour that society has taught us to place on ourselves. The 'movement' has been, for most of us, a thing removed from ourselves. We must no longer think of ourselves as members of a movement, but as individual revolutionaries, co-operating. Two, three, five or ten such individual revolutionaries who know and trust each other intimately can carry out revolutionary acts and make our own policy. As members of a leaderless affinity group, each member participates on an equal level of power, thus negating the hierarchical function of power. DOWN WITH ALL BOSSES! Then we will not be lost in a movement where leadership determines for us the path the movement will take – we are our own movement, we determine our own movement's direction. We have refused to allow ourselves to be directed, spoken for, and eventually cooled off.

We do not believe, as some now affirm, that the splintering of the Women's Movement means the end to all of our revolutionary effectiveness. No! The spirit of the women is just too large to be guided and manipulated by 'a movement'. Small groups, acting on their own and deciding upon their own actions, are the logical expression of revolutionary women. This, of course, does not preclude various groups working together on various projects or conferences.

To these ends, and because we do not wish to be out of touch with other women, we have organised as an autonomous collective within the Women's Centre in Cambridge, Mass. The Women's Centre functions as a federation; that is, not as a policy-making group, but as a centre for various women's groups to meet. We will also continue to write statements like this one as we feel moved to. We would really like to hear from all and sundry!

ALL POWER TO THE IMAGINATION!

Red Rosia and Black Maria

Black Rose Anarcho-Feminists

## **A Note On The Text**

The Anarcho-Feminist Manifesto was written by Chicago Anarcho-Feminists. Blood of the Flower was written by Red Rosia and Black Maria of Black Rose Anarcho-Feminists, who in 1971 could be reached c/o The Women's Centre, 46 Pleasant Street, Cambridge Mass.

Both articles first appeared in Siren — A Journal of Anarcho-Feminism Vol 1 No 1 1971 (now defunct), published in Chicago.

They were next published together as a pamphlet by the Seattle section of the Social Revolutionary Anarchist Federation and the Revolutionary Anarchist Print Fund, c/o 4736 University Way NE, Seattle, Wn 98105.

# 'Are You a Manarchist?' Questionnaire

## General Questions:

1. Do you ascribe to either:
  - A. Passive-Aggressive Patriarchy: You often come across as: a victim/helpless/in need/dependent and you get women in your life to: be your physical and emotional care-takers? buy you things? take care of your responsibilities? pick up your slack? use guilt or manipulation to get out of your responsibilities and equal share of the work? Do you treat your female partner like a "mom" or your secretary?
  - B. Aggressive Patriarchy: Do you often take charge? Assume that a woman can't do something right so you do it for her? Believe that only you can take care of things? Think that you always have the right answer? Do you treat your female partner like she's helpless, fragile, a baby or weak? Do you put down your partner or minimize her feelings? Do you belittle her opinions?
2. How do you react when women in your life name something or someone as patriarchal or sexist? Do you think of her or call her a "PC Thug," "Feminazi," "Thin-skinned," "Overly-Sensitive," "COINTELPRO-esque" or "Un-fun?"
3. Do you see talking about patriarchy as non-heroic, a waste of time, trouble making, or divisive?
4. If a woman asks your opinion, do you assume she must not know anything about the subject?
5. Do you believe that women have "natural characteristics" which are Inherent in our sex such as "passive," "sweet," "caring," "nurturing," "considerate," "generous," "weak," or "emotional?"
6. Do you make fun of "typical" men or "frat boys" but not ever check yourself to see if you behave in the same ways?
7. Do you take on sexism and patriarchy as a personal struggle working to fight against it in yourself, in your relationships, in society, work, culture, subcultures, and institutions?
8. Do you say anything when other men make sexist or patriarchal comments? Do you help your patriarchal and sexist friends to make change and help educate them? Or do you continue friendships with patriarchal and sexist men and act like there is no problem.

## **Activism Questions :**

9. As a man, is being a feminist a priority to you? Do you see being a feminist as revolutionary or radical?
10. Do you think that you define what is radical? Do you suffer from or contribute to macho bravado” or ‘subpoena envy’? (I.e. defining a true or “cool” and respectable activist as someone who has: been arrested, done lockdowns, scaled walls, hung banners, done time for their actions argued or fought with police, done property alterations, beat up nazi boneheads, etc.)?
11. Do you take something a woman said, reword it and claim it as your own idea/opinion?
12. Are you taking on the “shit” or “grunt” work in your organizing? (I.e.: Cooking, cleaning, set up, clean up phone calls, email lists, taking notes, doing support work, sending mailings, providing childcare?) Are you aware of the fact that women often are taking on this work with no regard or for their efforts?
13. Do you take active step to make your activist groups safe and comfortable places for women?
14. If you are trying to get more women involved in your activist projects, do you try to engage them by telling them what’ to do or why they should join your group?
15. Do you ever find yourself monitoring and limiting your behavior and speech in meetings and activist settings because you don’t want’ to take up too much space or dominate the group? Are you aware of the fact that women do this all the time?
16. Do you pay attention to group process and consensus building in groups or do you tend to dominate and take charge (maybe without even realizing it)?

## **Sexual/Romantic Relationships and Issues :**

17. Do you make jokes or negative comments about the sex lives of women or sex work?
18. Can you only show affection and be loving to your partner in front of friends and family or only in private?
19. Do you discuss the responsibility for preventing contraception and getting STD screening prior to sexual contact?
20. Do you repeatedly ask or plead with women for what you want in sexual situations? Are you aware that unless this is a mutually consented upon scenario/game that this is considered a form of coercion?
21. During sex, do you pay attention to your partner’s face and body language to see if she is turned on? Engaged, or just lying there? Do you ask a woman who she wants during sex? What turns her on?



22. Do you ask for consent?
23. Do you know if your partner has a sexual abuse, rape, or physical abuse history?
24. Do you stay with your partner in a relationship for comfort and security? Sex? Financial or emotional caretaking? If you're not completely happy or "in love" with your partner anymore? Even though you don't think it will ultimately work out? Because you're afraid or unable to be alone? Do you suddenly end relationships when a "new" or "better" woman comes along?
25. Do you jump from relationship to relationship? Overlap them? Or do you take space and time for yourself in between each relationship to reflect on the relationship and your role in it? Do you know how to be alone? How to be single?
26. Do you cheat on your partners?
27. If your girlfriend gets on your case for patriarchal behavior or wants to try to work on the issues of patriarchy in your relationship, do you creak up with her or cheat on her and find another woman who will put up with your shit?
28. Do you agree to romantic commitment and responsibility and then back out of these situations?
29. Do you understand menstruation?
30. Do you make fun of women or write them off as "PMS-ING?"

### **Friendship Questions :**

31. Do you tend to set the standard and plans for fun or do you work with the others in the group, including women to see what they want to do?
32. Do you talk to your female friends about things you don't talk to your male friends about especially emotional issues?
33. Do you constantly fall in love with your female friends Are you friends with women until you find out that they are not in love with you too and then end the friendships? Are you only friends with women who are in monogamous or committed relationships with other people?
34. Do you come on to your female friends even jokingly?
35. Do you only talk to your female friends (and not your male friends) about your romantic relationships or problems in those relationships?
36. Do you find yourself only attracted to "Anarcho-Crusty Punk Barbie", Alterna-Grrrl Barbie," or Hardcore-Grrrl Barbie?" (The idea here being that the only women you are attracted to fit mainstream beauty standards but just dress and do their hair alternatively and maybe have piercings and tattoos) Do you question and challenge your internalized ideals of mainstream beauty ideals for women?

37. Have you ever heard of or discussed “sizeism” and do you think it is low on the oppression scale?
38. Are you aware of the fact that ALL WOMEN, even women in radical communities, live under the CONSTANT PRESSURE and OPPRESSION of mainstream patriarchal beauty standards?
39. Are you aware of the fact that many women in radical communities have had and are currently dealing with eating disorders?
40. Do you make fun of “model-types” or “mainstream” women for their appearance?

### **Domestic/Household Questions :**

41. When was the last time you walked into your house, noticed that something was misplaced/dirty/etc. AND did something about it (didn't just walk by it, over it, away from it or leave a nasty note about it) even if it wasn't your chore or responsibility?
42. Are you constantly amazed by the magical “food fairy” who mysteriously acquires food, brings it home, puts it away, prepares it in meal form and then cleans up afterwards?
43. Do you contribute equally to domestic life and work?
44. How many of the following activities do you contribute to in your home (this is a partial list of what it takes to run a household):
  - A. Sweep and mop floors and clean carpets
  - B. Wash and put away dishes
  - C. Clean stove, countertops, sinks and appliances if they are messy and each time after you have prepared food
  - D. Collect money, do food shopping, put away food and make meals for people you live with
  - E. Do house laundry (kitchen towels, bathroom hand towels, washable rugs, etc.)
  - F. Clean up common room spaces, even if it's not your chore
  - G. Pick up other's slack
  - H. Deal with garbage, recycling, and compost
  - I. Take care of bills, rent, utilities
  - J. Deal with the landscaping and gardening
  - K. Clean bathrooms and make sure bathroom is clean after you use it
  - L. Feed, clean up after, and take care of housepets

## **Children & Childcare :**

45. Do you spend time with kids? If you do, do you spend time with children (yours or anyone's) in a way that is gendered? (do certain things with boys and other things with girls?)
46. If you are a father, do you CO-parent your children? (Spend equal time AND energy AND effort AND money to raise them)?
47. Do you make childcare a priority? (at both activist events and in daily life)
48. Do you help make the lives of single mothers in your life and community easier by finding out if and how you can assist?
49. Have you politicized your ideas about child rearing and parenthood radical communities? Do you believe that individuals who are in the movement have children or that the movement has children?

## **Multi-Category Questions:**

50. When was the last time you showed a woman how to do a task rather than doing it for her and assuming she couldn't do it?
51. When was the last time you asked a woman to show you how to do a task?
52. Do you get emotional needs met by other women, whether or not you are in a romantic relationship with them? Or do you cultivate caring, nurturing relationships with other men in which you can discuss your feelings and get your needs met by them?
53. If a woman discusses with you or calls you out on your patriarchy, do you make an effort to be emotionally present? Listen? Not emotionally shut down? Not get defensive? Think about what she said? Admit you fucked up? Take responsibility/make reparations for the mistakes you made? Discuss your feelings and ideas with her? Apologize? Work harder on your own shit to make sure that you don't make the same mistakes again with her or other women?
54. Do you look inside yourself to find out why you fucked up in these relationships and work to both change your behavior and be a better anti-patriarchy ally in the future?
55. Do you organize regular house meetings or activist meetings to resolve conflict in the house/group?
56. Do you use intimidation, yelling, getting in someone's physical space, threats or violence to get your point across? Do you create an atmosphere or violence around women or others to threaten them (i.e.: throw things, break things, yell and scream, threaten, attack, tease or terrorize the animals or pets of women in your life)?
57. Do you physically, psychologically, or emotionally abuse women?

58. Do the women in your life (mothers, sisters, partners, housemates, friends, etc.) have to “remind” you or “nag” you or “yell” at you in order for you to get off your ass and take care of your responsibilities?
59. Do you talk to other men about patriarchy and your part in it?
60. When was the last time you thought about or talked about any of these issues other than after reading this questionnaire?

Scoring: ALL MEN need to work on issues of patriarchy, sexism and misogyny. However, this questionnaire may point out to you areas of particular focus or concentration for your own anti-patriarchal/sexist/misogynist process and development.

# Challenging Patriarchy in Political Organising

by Harsha Walia

## Examples of sexism in political organizing:

- Most political organizations and meetings are still dominated by men, and even more dominated by male speakers
- Women have to struggle a lot harder to prove their capabilities as political activists, their intelligence on political issues, and to be taken seriously as committed organizers
- Women often have to adopt socialized roles of authority and domination in order to be validated in political organizing
- Women are often sexually objectified in political circles
- Sexism is perceived as a “women’s issue” and not a collective issue
- Feminism is still not seen as central to revolutionary struggle; instead it is relegated to a “special-interest” issue
- Trivializing women’s issues, frequently by considering it as being secondary to “more important” political work
- Men are more readily perceived as experts on “hard” (versus “soft”) political issues such as war and economics
- Traditional gender roles such as secretarial work, clean up, and childcare still falls upon women
- Women are frequently tokenized by being asked to moderate or speak in public which (intentionally or not) invisibilizes the culture of male domination within the organization
- Women are more likely to challenge men on sexist comments rather than men challenging other men
- Women discussing sexism are often characterized as “divisive”
- Characterizing women, particularly when dealing with sexism, as “emotional” or “over-reactive”

- The general assumption (rather than the exception) is that women discussing sexism are “pulling the sex card” or are making false accusations, leaving women feeling guilty and/or unsafe in raising such issues
- Women often feel like they have to moderate what they (say) so that men (don’t) feel attacked
- Disrespect for women’s voices in discussing their own oppression
- Women’s issues and concerns are belittled or invalidated until validated by other men
- Many men are more likely to shut down emotionally, stop listening, or get defensive when women want to discuss specific incidents of sexism instead of first listening and understanding what is being said
- Sexism within political organizations is seen as less trivial than sexism in wider society
- Working with progressive men can have its own frustrations as male comrades feel they are not guilty of sexism (often because of the lack of intention to be sexist) without truly analyzing their actions within a framework of privilege
- Given the particular socialization of women under patriarchy, seemingly minor comments or incidents can make women feel humiliated, angry or upset; yet such comments are often dismissed as harmless and/or unintentional

## **Some Suggestions**

- Share secretarial and clean-up work and make childcare a priority
- Honor women for un-glorified community organizing – for example childcare, cooking, note-taking, providing frequent emotional support
- Respect women as activists
- Be mindful of the language being used (i.e. girls)
- Use inclusive language. Besides the obvious examples (like saying ‘spokesperson’ or instead of ‘spokesman’ [say] ‘chair’ instead of ‘chairman’), also be careful not to use ‘us’/ ‘them’ language
- Don’t place the sole responsibility for fighting oppression on the oppressed
- Take sexism on as your struggle
- Don’t trivialize women’s issues
- If it is obvious that the same few people are dominating a discussion, the facilitator should consider suggesting a go-around to get more people talking so that any decision made is truly inclusive

- The path to ensuring the full and equal participation of women in a political organization can be difficult and the process may feel tokenistic if it does not give equal consideration to women's opinions, issues, and wants in a meaningful manner
- Recruiting women into the organization is not necessarily the solution. The fact that an organization is male-dominated might merely be a symptom and not the problem itself
- Being better than "mainstream" society does not absolve responsibility for taking even seemingly minor incidents seriously
- Believing in equality does not mean that men no longer experience male privilege
- Realize that there is a difference between listening & respectful questioning and invalidating or denying that an incident of gender oppression was experienced
- Realize that just because you might not find somebody's behaviour offensive, women might have different boundaries that have been shaped by a history of socialization under patriarchy
- Realize that sexism, in various forms, runs really deep and always plays itself out
- Be proactive, not reactive
- Create an atmosphere that is dynamic, empowering, and open especially to new members
- Share skills and knowledge in a non-paternalistic manner to build the leadership of women
- Transforming gender roles and socialization is not about guilt or who is right or wrong

# **Feminism and Anarchism: Towards a Politics of Engagement**

by Krysti Guest

Thinking through the possible relationships between feminisms and anarchisms involves a commitment to analysing the similarities and differences between these two emancipatory political frameworks and identifying what insights each movement could offer the other. That task is, of course, beyond the scope of any article or book. It involves a dynamic series of dialogues where issues are debated and reformed depending upon different contexts, a process which recognises that “theory” and “practice” are not separate activities but interdependent and evolving forms of knowledge.

This paper is a contribution to that process and is specifically my response to the anarchist “Visions of Freedom” conference in Sydney 1995. That conference left me extremely angry and frustrated at the exclusion and ignorance of feminist knowledges within the general conference proceedings. This was particularly bewildering given that there were clearly many people attending the conference committed to critical political theory and feminist views. What this disparity highlights is that there is very much a dominant brand of anarchism which is never clearly articulated and which is hostile to the insights and challenges of (at least) feminist theory. During the conference’s plenary session, I delivered a condemnatory feminist critique of this dominant form of anarchism. This paper is an attempt to articulate more clearly that critique and will hopefully serve to pry open spaces for a range of political debates, which anarchism so clearly lacks and so desperately needs.

## **A Sketch of Feminist Political Theory**

Revolutionary feminism is an analytical framework and movement committed to dismantling the institutions which politically, economically, sexually and psychically oppress all women. Revolutionary feminism recognises that women are not all the same and that a uniform experience of women’s oppression is illusory. Rather, oppression on the grounds of sex operates differently according to a woman’s race, class and sexuality, and if the oppression of all women is to cease, then the interconnected structures of patriarchy, transnational capitalism and Western imperialism must be fought against equally. Feminism’s most significant contribution to political theory is the recognition that political oppression does not only operate in the so-called “public sphere” of paid work and government, but thrives within the so-called “private” sphere of pleasure, personal life and family.

Politicising the “private” has had important implications for revolutionary political theory. Issues such as personal relations, sexual violence, housework, the preparation of food and childcare have become primary sites of political struggle rather than assumed supports for “real” political work. Consequentially, political theories which see the eradication of “real” social ills occurring



primarily via the big-bang apocalypse of “the revolution” are revealed as anti-feminist. Although drastic social change through a political and economic revolution is essential, it is only one moment in a continuum of political action aimed at changing the status quo. The need to ameliorate oppressive social structures now, by providing state funded women’s refuges or community child-care for example, is not a poor relation to a revolutionary process but an essential part of that process. If microscopic and macroscopic social change do not develop equally, then most women will neither have the time, ability or even be alive to participate. Any subsequent revolutionary political structure will be steeped in sexism and the revolution against patriarchy will fail.

## **A Sketch of Anarchist Political Principles**

Feminist interest in anarchism has been aroused by the traditional principles of anarchist political theory. Of most significance is that rather than focussing on one specific authoritarian structure (such as capitalism), anarchism identifies authoritarian structures in general as the key instrument of oppression. This allows the possibility that equal recognition can be granted to the different forms of oppression which specific authoritarian systems create. Equal recognition of different oppressions avoids socialism’s premise that capitalist class relations are the ultimate form of oppression through which all other oppressive forces are filtered. It is impossible to understand, and therefore change, the complexities of women’s oppression (or racial, homosexual oppression) if class and capitalism are ultimately seen as the origins of injustice. A feminist relationship to anarchism would mean exploring authoritarian structures as fundamental to women’s oppression and an anarchist relationship to feminism would mean recognising that patriarchy is a paradigmatic example of authoritarian structures.

Anarchism’s refusal to adopt authoritarian means to achieve non-authoritarian ends recognises that revolutionary change is a continuous process. Revolutionary society has to begin being forged today if it is to benefit the majority and not merely empower the minority in a vanguardist party. This parallels feminism’s focus on politicising the “private” and “personal” spheres and opens up spaces for debate of the possibilities and limitations of both theories.

Finally, the principle of non-hierarchical organisation reflects the feminist insight that current social, political and economic hierarchies are gendered (as well as race and sexuality determined), in that they overtly and subtly reproduce patterns of domination which oppress women. Non-hierarchical and decentralised organisation creates the possibility of allowing differently oppressed social groups to engage in a productive manner. The form that an effective non-hierarchical organisation would take is extremely complex to think through. I will not attempt to do this here (Rob Sparrow’s paper in this collection provides a model with which to begin working) except insofar as to say that anarchist theory should not aim to assimilate feminist political theory. Assimilation policies only ever reduce the specificities of different oppressions to the specificities of the dominant group.

## **Some General Thoughts on Prevalent Forms of Anarchism**

Although the above sketch of the similarities between anarchism and feminism presents a very promising picture, my experiences in the past eight years have overwhelmingly been of anarchism trailing the baggage of an extremely limiting split personality. There are political activists

who claim anarchism and who are very committed to their politics, political theory and political action. On the other hand there are many people who claim anarchism, or more simply the anarchist symbol A, as a fashionable adjunct to their oh-so-alternative “counter-cultural” life. This brand of anarchism eschews collective organisation and rigorous political analysis for more freewheeling, zany and individualistic social actions or events.

Well excuse me, but I am a little weary of people presenting “anarchist” fashion statements or dope driven “anarchist” dinner parties as incisive forms of political action. Although cultural expression is clearly enmeshed within political and social change, what I have seen continually occur is that this brand of anarchist lifestyle politics does not form part of a movement but becomes the movement. Difficult political discussions and organised political activism are thereby insidiously framed as somehow “non-anarchist” or just not groovy enough. By constantly privileging cultural expression, the revolutionary possibilities of anarchism are inevitably emptied out leaving only an individualistic and ultimately conservative lifestyle choice.

## **The “Visions of Freedom” Conference**

From a feminist perspective I believe it is of the utmost importance to work through why anarchism seems to attract or produce this tendency towards individualistic lifestyle politics, as this tendency makes anarchism irrelevant to other organised social movements. At the “Visions of Freedom” conference, this tendency towards conservative individualism arose in a number of guises.

My central criticism is that within the dominant views expressed at the conference, there was web of resistance to serious political debate and engagement. This was of course not always present, but there seemed to be a dominant assumption that what anarchism “is” is somehow self-evident and does not require a great deal of explanation. There was little desire to work through what the defining concepts of traditional anarchism are and how effectively these concepts work towards lasting change in society, particularly when compared with other revolutionary theories. There was almost no discussion at all of how these concepts have been affected by the onslaught of diverse emancipatory movements such as feminism, anti-racism, environmentalism, and lesbian and gay movements.

My puzzlement over this lack of rigour was brought into sharp relief when at several points during the conference, some people seemed to be of the view that anarchism was not even a theory of larger structural change but merely a way of living one’s individual life. During one paper, a group of people were staunchly opposed to the idea that an anarchist organisation would work towards changing people’s views. The problem appeared to be that there was an inherent violence and curtailment of freedom of choice in trying to change opinions.

Teasing out this opposition is revealing. It is not a new argument that people’s beliefs are socially or ideologically constructed. Therefore, if we disagree with current, dominant ideological systems (which as anarchists should be a given) then one should be working towards changing these structures and hence people’s beliefs. What seems to have been the real difficulty is that many people believe that when one identifies as an anarchist, somehow all the shackles of ideological construction wither away and one becomes spontaneously free and equal. Hence any attempt to change this is to commit violence and to limit freedom.

It is extremely naive to view ideology as ever withering away. Values, belief systems and political theories are always determined by a particular ideological and material position and the ideology of anarchism is just as socially constructed as the ideology of capitalism. Otherwise we would see just as many anarchist men organising against violence against women (“girls stuff”) as we do against police brutality (“real politics”). The ideology which drives the view that casting off the shackles of our dominant social beliefs somehow makes us “naturally free and equal” is the ideology of eighteenth century western liberal humanism, which tells the story that we are all born as equal individuals in control of our destiny. Wrong of course, and such anti-materialist, liberal individualism is supposed to be in opposition to traditional anarchist theory and action. Despite this, the fundamental tenets of this particular view of freedom, spontaneity and individualism continually frame much anarchist thought.

## **Excluding Visions of Freedom**

The issue of “exclusion” provided a significant channel through which liberal ideology arose in conference discussions. During Rob Sparrow’s paper on anarchist organisation, there was palpable horror from many people at the idea that part of defining what anarchism “is” is to define what values and principles are not anarchist and hence would be excluded from an anarchist organisation. Again, it is a banal and obvious point that if anarchism is opposed to authoritarian structures, it should not be many things: it should not be misogynist, fascist, homophobic etc. However, this point kept getting lost by many people beneath their fiery commitment to an abstract notion of “freedom”. As I’ve said, ideology does not cease to operate by invoking the magic word “freedom”. The ideology of a freedom which claims to exclude no-one and tolerate a plurality of conflicting viewpoints is merely liberal pluralism, the status quo. Liberal pluralism ostensibly gives everyone equal rights and freedom of speech, but in fact excludes all but the dominant point of view by failing to take critical perspectives seriously, if not overtly vilifying them.

True to the repressive tolerance of liberal pluralism, particular groups were consistently excluded from the conference. There was almost no sustained discussion of race issues, particularly indigenous peoples’ issues, during the plenary sessions and very little during the seminars. In a society underpinned by blatant racism, that is appalling. Racism is not an optional extra for political analysis but must be continually woven within every single political discussion. And white groups should never expect indigenous speakers to bother interacting with them unless a real commitment to engage with the oppression indigenous people face is displayed.

As was so powerfully described during the final plenary session, queer theory was also effectively excluded during the conference, not least by the display of homophobic imagery. To defend the existence of such imagery by the ritual incantation of freedom of speech, the most fundamental of all liberal premises, fails to understand that images and speech are fundamental tools of oppression and that it makes a difference if a negative image is against an oppressed group or against a dominant social group.

Very few women spoke during plenary debates or seminars (except at the seminar on feminism). Women’s lack of confidence in public speaking is not because women are somehow naturally more passive or acquiescent, but because patriarchy teaches women to feel less confident in taking up public space and putting forward ideas. This is not an individual problem but an

institutional problem which has to be dealt with through institutional means, such as affirmative action on the speaking list. On any conference panel, there should be at least one woman, if not an equal number or more women speaking. If few women are interested in presenting papers, that simply raises the question again of why is anarchism failing to attract the feminist movement which is phenomenally more powerful, articulate and active in Australia than any anarchist movement has ever been.

## **Anarchism's Political Disengagement**

But these overt forms of silencing aside, the most infuriating and extraordinary form of exclusion was the absolute refusal of the dominant voices at the conference to engage with critical perspectives. Failing to engage with critical ideas is a refusal by the person or group criticised to take responsibility for the implications of the critique on their position. It is the essence of repressive tolerance, in that a marginalised group may speak but will have no hope of changing the power structures of the dominant group for the dominant group are refusing to engage with their demands. To make it crystal clear to anyone who has missed the basic point, women, indigenous peoples, peoples from non-English speaking backgrounds, lesbian women and gay men are all oppressed social groups, whether it be in an anarchist organisation or within a capitalist bureaucracy. The word "anarchism" is not a magic wand that suddenly makes all people equal. If anarchism wishes to become relevant to those groups and flourish as a political movement, rather than basically remaining the province of white, heterosexual men, then self scrutiny and critical engagement with analyses presented by those groups is essential.

The seminar on "Violence, Militarism and the State", a seminar ostensibly on institutionalised violence, makes these points obvious. I really would have thought that surely by now it was no longer contentious that women are by far the greatest targets for institutionalised physical violence, either in their daily lives or during military actions, with violence against indigenous women being by far the worst. Violence against women is condoned by the huge percentage of men who commit it, by the law, by the police, by the media and by social norms. A 1995 survey reveals that 30% of people in Australia still think women "cry rape". That's one third of the country. That's pretty institutionalised. The fact that violence against women, which includes terrorism, beatings, kidnapping, false imprisonment, rape and murder, is not understood as the most prevalent form of torture is merely one sign of its institutionalised acceptance.

Despite this, however, there was almost no gender specific discussion at all during the "Violence, Militarism and the State" seminar (I didn't hear any in fact, but apparently one of the speakers said something in the ten minutes I missed). This extraordinary exclusion of violence against women renders the analysis during that seminar complicit with the perpetuation of such violence. Failing to speak about the most prevalent form of institutionalised violence in this society undermines and makes invisible the centrality of violence against women and renders it merely an optional extra to discuss after "real" violence (presumably by the "State" or the "military") has been considered. As one of the seminar participants so aptly snapped at me: "[T]hat woman spoke about domestic violence yesterday. I came to hear about anarchism".

Although my comments on these issues were acknowledged by some of the seminar speakers as true, there was no attempt at all to engage their analysis with what I had said. It was simply yet another interesting point about violence. But placing violence against women in the equation

of violence, militarism and the State fundamentally changes any political analysis of these issues. For a start, one can no longer name the enemy only as a nebulous concept of the State or military institutions — one has to start pointing the finger at men. And that does not mean that men are not socially constructed and that the military industrial complex or the multifaceted State do not perpetuate the norms which permit violence against women. But it does mean that men as a group have to start taking responsibility for men's violence (including talking about it in seminars) and devising ways to stop it. Traditional anarchism's analysis of State power and the police will also be forced to shift if violence against women is seriously considered. Do anarchists support women turning to the police or State funded refuges when they are escaping violence by men? Some anarchist traditions are also committed to the principle of non-violence, within the analysis that violent means produce violent ends. Does that mean that self-defence by a woman against a violent man is "unanarchist"? All these issues could have and should have been teased out and considered for they will fundamentally affect definitions of anarchist political theory. They are not merely "interesting views" and if they continue to be seen as such, anarchism will remain basically irrelevant to half of society.

Anarchism without feminism is a partial, crippled and ultimately oppressive tradition. However, I still feel hopeful enough to say that there are many principles within both feminism and anarchism from which both theories could learn and develop. But any relationship between these two emancipatory frameworks cannot be assumed: it must be forged within concrete political struggle and rigorous political debate. Empty gestures towards nebulous concepts of individualistic freedom totally miss the point. I look forward, tentatively, to a politics of engagement.

# Feminism: A Male Anarchist's Perspective

by Pendleton Vandiver

“I myself have never been able to find out what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat”

— Rebecca West, *The Clarion* 1913

Most people in the current anarchist milieu — female or male — would disagree, at least in principle, with most of the following statements: there are two immutable and natural categories under which all humans are classified: male and female. A male human being is a man, and a female human being is a woman. Women are inherently inferior to men. Men are smarter and stronger than women; women are more emotional and delicate. Women exist for the benefit of men. If a man demands sex from his wife, it is her duty to oblige him, whether she wants to or not. A man may force a woman to have sex with him, as long as he has a very good reason for making this demand. Humans are to be conceived of, in the universal sense, as male (“man”), and only referred to as female when one is speaking of particular individuals. Women are a form of property. To demand rights for women is tantamount to demanding rights for animals and just as absurd.

As ridiculous as most of these statements may seem, every one of them has been considered obvious and natural by most of the West at one point or another, and many are still more the rule than the exception to this day. If most of them seem a little strange, jarring, or just plain wrong, that is not because they contradict some vague notion of justice or common sense that we have all been born with. To the contrary, the change in attitude that allows most of us to claim a more enlightened, seemingly natural viewpoint, is actually the concrete result of an ongoing struggle which has claimed many reputations, relationships, and lives over the last 200 years and which, like all struggles for liberation, has been discredited, slandered, and marginalized since its inception. Although this struggle has been, and still is, strategically diverse and conceptually multifarious and hence hard to define, it is not hard to name: I am, of course, referring to feminism.

Feminism has changed our culture to the point where it is at least a common idea that women are fully human. If most people today claim to agree with this idea, this is not because society is becoming more benevolent, or evolving naturally into a more egalitarian state of affairs. Those who hold power do not simply decide to grant equal status to those who do not; rather, they only yield power when they are forced to. Women, like every other oppressed group, have had to take everything they have gotten, through an arduous process of struggle. To deny this struggle is to perpetuate a myth similar to that of the happy slave. Yet this is precisely what we do when we speak of feminism as somehow perpetuating a gender divide, or hindering our progress away from identity politics. Feminism did not create the conflict between genders:

patriarchal society did. It is important not to forget that the aforementioned idea that women are fully human is not common sense but absolutely, emphatically, a feminist notion. To pay lip-service to women's liberation while denying the historical struggle of women to achieve this for themselves is paternalistic and insulting.

Not only has Western society overtly relegated women to a subhuman role throughout its history, but, until recently, most liberatory movements have as well. This has often been partially unconscious, as a reflection of the mores of the dominant culture. Just as often, however, this has been fully conscious and intentional (cf. Stokely Carmichael's famous quote that the "only position" for women in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC] was "prone"). Either way, people who purported to be working for the emancipation of all humans were really just working for the emancipation of "man," which until quite recently, is exactly how it was usually phrased. Women who complained about this state of affairs were (and are) condescendingly told to wait until the more important struggle was won before they demanded their own liberation. This has been true of abolition, civil rights, the anti-war movement, the New Left, the anti-nuke movement, radical environmentalism and, obviously, anarchism. Women have been criticized for pursuing feminist aims as if these were wrong-headed, counterrevolutionary, or unimportant. Anarchists did not simply wake up one morning with more enlightened views of women, nor did patriarchy suddenly reveal itself as "just another form of domination." Feminist theory and practice brought to light the oppression of women that often manifested itself in otherwise revolutionary milieus.

This is not to say that all feminists were/are not anarchists, or all anarchists were/are not feminists. But feminism is often criticized within the anarchist milieu, from several different angles. I will try to discuss the most common criticisms I have heard voiced, both publicly and privately, in anarchist circles. It has been suggested that feminism is essentialist. It has also been suggested that feminism, in keeping with its essentialist views, is a philosophy that asserts the superiority, in one way or another, of women to men. Finally, the charge has been made that feminism perpetuates gender categories, whereas the revolutionary task is to move beyond gender altogether. In other words, feminism is accused of being a kind of identity politics that perpetuates harmful and divisive societal roles that ultimately oppress everyone.

The one thing that all of these allegations have in common is that they posit a single, more or less univocal entity named "feminism." However, anyone who studies feminism soon learns that there has always been a fair amount of diversity within feminist theory, and this has never been more true than it is now. No single set of ideas about sex and gender represents feminism; rather, feminism is a loose category that encompasses just about all forms of thought and action which are explicitly concerned with the liberation of women.

Although feminism has often been accused of essentialism, the critique of essentialism is particularly strong within feminism, and has been for quite some time. Essentialism is the idea that there is an unchanging substance or essence that constitutes the true identity of people and things. In this view, a woman is somehow truly, deep in her core, identifiable as a woman; being a woman is not simply the result of different attributes and behaviors. This is seen as a politically backward stance by many, because it implies that people are limited to certain capabilities and behaviors that are somehow dictated by their nature.

When we examine the range of ideas that has emerged from second wave (post-1963 or so) feminism, however, a different picture comes into focus. Probably the most famous quote from *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir's seminal 1940s work, is the following: "One is not born, but

rather becomes, a woman.” The book goes on to argue that gender is a social category, which individuals can reject. The influence of *The Second Sex* was enormous, and Beauvoir wasn’t the only feminist to question the naturalness of the category of gender. Many feminist writers began to draw a distinction between sex and gender, asserting that the former describes the physical body, while the latter is a cultural category. For instance, having a penis pertains to sex, whereas how one dresses, and the social role one fills, pertains to gender.

This is a distinction that some feminists still make, but others have questioned the use of supposedly pre-cultural categories like sex altogether. Colette Guillamin has suggested that sex (as well as race) is an arbitrary system of “marks” that has no natural status at all, but simply serves the interests of those who hold power. Although various physical differences exist between people, it is politically determined which ones are chosen as important or definitive. Although people are divided into supposedly natural categories on the basis of these marks, there is nothing natural about any category; categories are purely conceptual.

Building on the work of Beauvoir and Guillamin, among others, Monique Wittig has argued that the feminist goal is to eliminate sex and/or gender as a category entirely. Like the proletariat in Marx’s philosophy, women are to constitute themselves as a class for the sake of overthrowing the system that allows classes to exist. One is not born a woman, except in the same sense that one is born a proletarian: being a woman denotes a social position, and certain social practices, rather than an essence or true identity. The ultimate political goal of a woman, for Wittig, is to not be one. More recently, Judith Butler has predicated an entire theory of gender based on the radical rejection of essence.

Of course, there have been a number of feminists who, disturbed by what they saw as an assimilationist tendency in feminism, asserted a more positive notion of femininity that was, at times, undoubtedly essentialist. Susan Brownmiller, in her important book *Against Our Wills*, suggested that men may be genetically predisposed to rape, a notion that has been echoed by Andrea Dworkin. Marxist feminists like Shulamite Firestone sought the material basis of gender oppression in the female reproductive role, and several feminist theorists – Nancy Chodorow, Sherry Ortner, and Juliet Mitchell among others – have examined the role of motherhood in creating oppressive gender roles. “Woman-identified” feminists like Mary Daly embraced certain traditional notions of femininity and sought to give them a positive spin. Although woman-identified feminists have, at times, taken essentialist positions, this brand of feminism has redressed some of the imbalances of that strain of feminist thought that rejects femininity altogether as a slave-identity. This has always been the dichotomy that has troubled feminist thinkers: either to assert a strong feminine identity and risk legitimizing traditional roles and providing fodder to those who employ the idea of a natural difference in order to oppress women, or to reject the role and the identity women have been given, and risk eliminating the very ground of a feminist critique. The task of contemporary feminism is to find a balance between viewpoints that risk, on the one hand, essentialism, and on the other the elimination of women as the subject of political struggle altogether.

The goal of feminism, then, is the liberation of women, but what that exactly means is open to dispute. For some feminists, this means that women and men will coexist equally; for others, that we will no longer see people as women and men. Feminism provides a rich panorama of views on gender problems. One thing all feminists can agree on, though, is that gender problems exist. Whether as a result of natural differences or cultural construction, people are oppressed on the basis of gender. To go beyond gender, this situation needs to be redressed; gender cannot



simply be declared defunct. Feminism can perhaps be best defined as the attempt to get beyond the state of affairs where people are oppressed because of gender. Thus, it is not possible to go beyond gender without feminism; the charge that feminism itself perpetuates gender categories is patently absurd.

Since anarchy is opposed to all forms of domination, anarchy without feminism is not anarchy at all. Since anarchy declares itself opposed to all archy, all rulership, true anarchy is by definition opposed to patriarchy, i.e. it is, by definition, feminist. But it is not enough to declare oneself opposed to all domination; one needs to try to understand domination in order to oppose it. Feminist authors should be read by all anarchists who consider themselves opposed to patriarchy. Feminist critiques are certainly just as relevant as books about government oppression. Ward Churchill's excellent *Agents of Repression* is considered essential reading by many anarchists, even though Churchill is not an anarchist. Many feminist works, on the other hand, are neglected, even by those who pay lip service to feminism. Yet, while FBI repression is a real threat to anarchists, the way we inhabit our gender-roles must be dealt with every day of our lives. Thus, feminist literature is more relevant to the daily fight against oppression than much of the literature that anarchists read regularly.

If anarchism needs feminism, feminism certainly needs anarchism as well. The failure of some radical feminist theorists to address domination beyond the narrow framework of women being victimized by men has prevented them from developing an adequate critique of oppression. As a prominent anarchist writer has correctly pointed out, a political agenda based on asking men to give up their privilege (as if that were even possible) is absurd. Feminists like Irigaray, MacKinnon and Dworkin advocate legislative reforms, without criticizing the oppressive nature of the state. Female separatism (particularly as enunciated by Marilyn Frye) is a practical, and perhaps necessary, strategy, but only within the framework of a larger society that is assumed to be stratified on the basis of gender. Feminism is truly radical when it seeks to eliminate the conditions that make gender oppression inevitable.

Anarchism and feminism clearly need one another. It is all well and good to say that once the primary source of oppression (whatever that is) is removed, all other oppressions will wither away, but what evidence is there for that? And how does that keep us from oppressing one another now, while we're waiting for this great revolution? Conversely, it is important to recognize that the oppression of women is not the only oppression. Arguments about which forms of oppression are more important, or more primary, are unresolvable and silly. The value, and the danger, of anarchism is this; it seeks to eliminate all forms of domination. This goal is valuable because it does not lose sight of the forest for the trees, getting caught up in distracting reformist battles and forgetting its trajectory toward total liberation. But it is also dangerous because anarchism continually runs the risk of ignoring real-life situations in favor of abstractions, and underemphasizing or dismissing movements that seek to address specific issues. Let's have an anarchist feminism and a feminist anarchism!

# Going To Places That Scare Me: Personal Reflections On Challenging Male Supremacy

by Chris Crass

## Part I: “How can I be sexist? I’m an anarchist!”

“What do you mean I’m sexist?” I was shocked. I wasn’t a jock, I didn’t hate women, I wasn’t an evil person. “But how can I be a sexist, I’m an anarchist?” I was anxious, nervous, and my defenses were up. I believed in liberation, for fighting against capitalism and the state. There were those who defended and benefited from injustice and then there’s us, right? I was 19 and it was 1993, four year after I got into politics.

Nilou, holding my hand, patiently explained, “I’m not saying you’re an evil person, I’m saying that you’re sexist and sexism happens in a lot of subtle and blatant ways. You cut me off when I’m talking. You pay more attention to what men say. The other day when I was sitting at the coffee shop with you and Mike, it was like the two of you were having a conversation and I was just there to watch. I tried to jump in and say something, but you both just looked at me and then went back to your conversation. Men in the group make eye contact with each other and act like women aren’t even there. The study group has become a forum for men in the group to go on and on about this book and that book, like they know everything and just need to teach the rest of us. For a long time I thought maybe it was just me, maybe what I had to say wasn’t as useful or exciting. Maybe I needed to change my approach, maybe I was just overreacting, maybe it’s just in my head and I need to get over it. But then I saw how the same thing was happening to other women in the group, over and over again. I’m not blaming you for all of this, but you’re a big part of this group and you’re part of this dynamic.” This conversation changed my life and it’s challenge is one I continue to struggle with in this essay.

This is an essay for other white, middle class, raised male who identify themselves as male, left/anarchist organizers struggling to build movements for liberation. I want to focus on my own experience of dealing with issues of sexism and anti-sexism from an emotional and psychological centered perspective. I’m choosing this focus because it is personally challenging, it has proved effective in working with men against sexism and because of consistent feedback from women who I organize with not to ignore these aspects of the work. Rona Fernandez of the Youth Empowerment Center in Oakland writes, “Encourage men/gender privileged folks to examine the role of emotions (or lack thereof) in their experience of privilege. I’m saying this because I think men/gender privileged folks also suffer under the system of patriarchy and one of the most dehumanizing ways they suffer is in their inability/difficulty in expressing feelings.” Clare Bayard of Anti-Racism for Global Justice puts it pointedly in addressing gender privileged activist men, “It took years of study and hard work to develop your political analysis, why do you think emotional understanding should just come to you, it requires work as well.”

This essay looks to the leadership of women, women of color in particular, who write about and organize against patriarchy in society and sexism in the movement. The work of Barbara Smith, Gloria Anzaldua, Ella Baker, Patricia Hill Collins, Elizabeth 'Betita' Martinez, bell hooks and so many others who provide the political foundations, visions and strategies for the work gender privileged white men need to do. Additionally, there are more and more gender privileged men in the movement working to challenge male supremacy. There are thousands of us who recognize that patriarchy exists, that we have privileges as a result, that sexism undermines movement, that women, transgendered folks and genderqueer people have explained it over and over again and said "you all need to talk with each other, challenge each other and figure out what you're all going to do." And yet there are far more white men in the movement who agree sexism exists in society, perhaps in the movement, but deny their personal involvement in it.

Lisa Sousa, who is part of the San Francisco Independent Media Center and AK Press, told me that in recent discussions she's had in groups about sexism and gender, she's heard the following responses from men: "we are all oppressed", "we should be talking about class", "you are just using gender as a way to attack such and such". When she raised the issue that women leave the majority male group soon after joining, the responses included: "men leave our group too, women are not leaving more, people leave its a fact in volunteer organizations", "we just need to recruit more women, if women leave, there's more where they came from".

These comments are so familiar and while it is tempting to distance myself from the men who made them, it's important that I remember when I made those comments. As a person who believes in movement building and collective liberation, it's important for me to connect with the people I'm organizing with. As a person with privilege organizing others with privilege, that means learning to love myself enough to be able to see myself in people who I would much rather denounce and distance myself from. It also means being honest about my own experiences.

When I think back to that conversation with Nilou and her explaining how sexism operated. I remember trying not to shutdown and I tried to listen.

The word "But" repeated over and over again in my mind, followed by "it was a misunderstanding, I didn't mean it that way, I didn't know you felt like that, I wasn't trying to do that, I would love to see you participate more, I don't understand, no one said they didn't want to hear what you have to say, we all believe in equality, I love you and would never do anything to hurt you, it was circumstances not sexism, I don't know what to do." Looking back ten years later, it's amazing to me how often that same list of "buts" comes running to mind. I'm more like those 'other' men that I'd like to admit.

Nilou spent hours and hours talking with me about sexism. It was tremendously difficult. My politics were shaped by a clearly defined dualistic framework of good and bad. If it was true that I was sexist, then my previous sense of self was in question and my framework needed to shift. Looking back, this was a profoundly important moment in my growth, at the time it felt like shit.

Two weeks later, at our anarchist study group meeting, Nilou raised her hand. "Sexism is happening in this group." She listed the examples she had told me. The defensive reaction that I experienced was now amplified by the 5 other men in the room. Other women started speaking up. They too had experienced these dynamics and they were tired of taking it. The men were shocked and defensive; we began listing all the reasons why claims of sexism were simply misunderstandings, misperceptions. With genuine sincerity we said, "But we all want revolution."

After the meeting, the woman who had been in the group the longest sat me down. April had been part of the United Anarchist Front for well over a year and she too gave me example

after example of sexist behavior. Men in the group didn't trust her to handle responsibilities, even if they were newer. She wasn't looked to for information about the group, nor were her opinions asked for on political questions. Others joined our conversation and men continued to challenge the assertion of sexism. April put forward an example that she had just clearly explained to me and men denied it as a misunderstanding. A few minutes later, I restated the exact same example given by April and this time it was met with begrudging agreement from other men that perhaps in this case it was sexist. April called it out immediately, I hadn't even fully realized what happened. I looked at April as she broke it down. April's words coming from my mouth were heard and taken seriously. There it is. I didn't really want to believe that sexism was happening, but now I saw it. I felt horrible, like a kick to the stomach. Nilou and April desperately trying to get us to agree that there was a problem. How could this be happening when I hadn't intended it to? I was scared to say anything.

Two months later, I was sitting in a men's caucus silently. We didn't know what to talk about. More specifically, we were scared, nervous, dismissive and didn't put energy into creating a useful discussion about sexism. Nilou and April had suggested we spend a day talking about sexism and we'd start with caucuses. "What are the women talking about", we asked ourselves. When the group re-united the discussion quickly turned into women defending themselves, defending their understandings of their own experiences. I felt horrible and struggled to believe what I was hearing. I felt completely clueless about how to move in a useful way.

Several people of all genders left early in tears, disillusioned and overwhelmed by powerlessness. My Mom had observed part of our discussion and asked to speak. "You're all taking on enormous issues and these issues are hard. It makes me happy to see you all at such young ages seriously talk about it. It shows that you really believe in what you're fighting for and it's a conversation that doesn't happen in one day." I could feel the heaviness in the room as we looked at each other, many with tears in their eyes. It was clear that challenging sexism was far more than learning how to make eye contact with women in group discussions, it was challenging a system of power that operates on the political, economic, social, cultural, psychological level and my internalized superiority was but the tip of an iceberg built on exploitation and oppression.

## **Part II: "What historical class am I in?"**

"Do you know what class you're in?" Being a white, middle class, male taking Women's Studies and Ethnic Studies classes for all seven years that I was in school, I was asked that question a lot. In a Black Women's history class, someone offered to help me figure out where I needed to go.

I understood why people asked me and I understood that the question wasn't just about class as in a room, but class as in a social category in a white supremacist, patriarchal, heterosexist, capitalist society hell bent on maintaining control. I knew what class I was coming from and I knew that my relationship to Women's Studies and Ethnic Studies was complicated. I knew some people didn't want me in those classes and I knew that my very presence made others feel uncomfortable. And many of the teachers and some of the students told me that they were glad I was there. It helped me see how complex these struggles are and that there aren't easy answers.

I went to community college for four years and then San Francisco State for three. The majority of my teachers were women and people of color. I had grown up in a generally segregated

community and had few role models, authority figures, mentors or teachers who were people of color.

What I read and studied in college – women of color feminism, Black liberation struggle, Chican/a history, colonialism from the perspective of American Indian history, labor history and organizing, queer theory, anti-racism from the perspective of immigrant and refugee women – had a profound impact on me. However, having people of color and women of color in particular grade me, instruct me and guide me was incredibly important to my development on psychological levels that I wasn't necessarily aware of at the time. Having people of color and women with progressive/left/radical politics leading my educational development was a subversive shifting of the power relationships that wasn't mentioned on the syllabus but was central to my studies.

Learning in majority women and people of color settings also had a deep impact, because it was the first time that I had ever been in situations where I was a numerical minority on the basis of race or gender. Suddenly race and gender weren't just issues amongst many, they were central aspects of how others experienced, viewed and understood the world. The question I sometimes thought silently to myself, "why do you always have to talk about race and gender", was flipped on it's head; "how can you not think about race and gender all the time?"

Over time I developed a strategy for school. I'd stay pretty quiet for the first month or so of class, pushing myself to really listen. In the first week of class I'd say something to clearly identify myself as opposed to white supremacy and patriarchy (sometimes capitalism) as systems of oppressions that I benefit from, so people knew where I was coming from. This was generally met with shock, excitement and a sign of relief. I participated in dialogue more as I tried to develop trust through listening and being open to the information, histories and stories. While this strategy incorporated anti-sexist goals, it was also about presenting myself in a certain way.

The other part of the strategy was to participate and raise questions and other perspectives in my Western Civics, Political Science and other white, male dominated classes. People of color and women I worked with were clear that this was something they felt I had a responsibility to do. "They expect it from us and dismiss us as angry, emotional, stuck in victim mode. You need to use your privilege to get heard by white people and men." The goal wasn't to necessarily change the perspective of the Professor but to open up space for critical dialogue about race, class and gender with the other students who were mostly white and often mostly male. This was extremely useful learning as well, because frequently I came across as cold, angry, self-righteous or unsure of myself, none of which were particularly helpful. If my goal is to yell at men and white people to alleviate my own guilt and shame for being white and male, then perhaps that's a useful tactic. If my goal is to actually work with folks to embrace anti-racism and feminism, then I needed to be more complex and real with myself.

I grew up believing that I was a lone individual on a linear path of progression with no past. History was a set of dates and events that, while interesting to learn, had little or no relationship to my life. I was just a person, doing my own thing. Then I started to learn that being white, male, middle class, able-bodied, mostly heterosexual and a citizen of the United States meant that not only did I have privileges, but that I was rooted in history. I was a part of social categories – white, male, hetero, middle class. These are all groups that have history and are shaped by history. Part of being in those groups means being deemed normal, the standard which all others are judged. My images of just being "my own person" were now joined by images of slave ships, indigenous communities burned to the ground, families destroyed, violence against women, white ruling class men using white poor men to colonize white women, peoples of color and the Earth.

I remember sitting in an African American women's history class, one of two white people, one of two men, the other 15 people Black women and I'm the only white man. We were studying slavery, Ida B. Wells' anti-lynching campaign and the systematic raping of enslaved African women by white male slave owners – millions of rapes, sanctioned and protected by law. Simultaneously hundreds of Black men were lynched by white men who claimed to be protecting white women from Black male rapists. I sat there with my head down and I could feel history in my nauseated stomach and in my eyes filling with tears. Who were those white men and how did they feel about themselves? I was scared to look into the faces of the Black women in that room. "While there is mixing of races because of love," the Professor said, "our people are so many shades of Black because of generation after generation of institutionalized rape." Who am I and how do I feel about myself?

### **Part III: "this struggle is my struggle"**

"I haven't the faintest notion what possible revolutionary role white heterosexual men could fulfill, since they are the very embodiment of reactionary-vested-interest-power." – Robin Morgan from the introduction of *Sisterhood is Powerful*

"Face your fear/ the fear is you/ you cannot run/ you cannot hide/ the fear is you/ in the end, what have you done/ can it be true that the damage you bring is greater than the good you make/ face your fear/ embrace your fear/ the pain inside is the truth inside/ let it out/ let it out/ when the socialization is gone/ what is left/ the fear is more real than the hope you create/ where will you go/ what will you do/ let it all go cuz it's already you/ can I move forward/ can I move forward/ open it all up/ you know it's all true/ the hope is you" -white boy emo-hardcore

I have and do go through periods of hating myself, feeling guilty, afraid. I know in my heart that I had a role in liberation struggle and I know through practice that there was useful work that I could do, but still the question haunts me, "Am I just fooling myself?" That is, am I fooling myself to believe that I am more useful than problematic. To be clear, I think Robin Morgan's quote is useful to struggle with, but not to get stuck on. I grew up believing that I was entitled to everything. I could go anywhere and do anything and wherever I went I would be wanted/ needed.

Patriarchy and heterosexism also taught me, in subtle and blatant ways, that I was entitled to women's bodies, that I was entitled to take up space and put my ideas and thoughts out there whenever I wanted to, without consideration for others. This is a very different process of socialization than most other people in this society who are told to shut up, keep it to themselves, hide who they really are, get out of the way and to never forget how lucky they are to be allowed here to begin with. I think it's healthy to not assume you're always needed, to learn to share space and power and to work with others to realize the role that you in fact can and should play. What is unhealthy is how rare it is for gender privileged men to talk with each other about these issues and support each other through the process.

Laura Close, an organizer with Students for Unity in Portland, discussed this in her essay, "Men in the Movement". She writes, "Every day young men wake up and decide to get involved in activism. Often they encounter language and discussions about their male privilege that alienate

and silence them without anyone actually supporting them to decolonize their minds. Consider what it would be like for ally men to take our younger/newer guys out to coffee and talk about his own experiences as a guy in the movement. Talk about what you've learned! Consider what it would mean for men to cheer on other men who are making progress towards becoming allies." She put out a challenge for men to mentor other men engaging in anti-sexist work.

I knew she was right, but the idea of really doing it made me nervous. Sure, I had plenty of close gender privileged friends, but to make a political commitment to develop relationships with other men and open up with them about my own struggles with sexism seemed terrifying. Terrifying because I could handle denouncing patriarchy and calling out other men from time to time, but to be honest about my own sexism, to connect political analysis/practice to my own emotional/psychological process, to be vulnerable?

Pause. Vulnerable to what? Remember when I said that in Women's Studies classes I would identify myself as opposed to patriarchy, white supremacy and sometimes capitalism? The level of consciousness of feminism, let alone political commitment to it amongst most gender privileged men in college was so low that just reading one feminist book and saying "I recognize that sexism exists" meant I was way advanced. While the level of consciousness and commitment is generally higher in activist circles, it's not that much higher. I have had two major struggles going on most of my political life – genuinely wanting to be down for the cause and feeling a deep level of fear that I wasn't coming anywhere close to that commitment. It's far easier for me to make declarations against patriarchy in classrooms, political meetings and in writing than it is to practice feminist politics in my personal relationships with friends, family and partners. This is particularly difficult when political men, like myself, make so little time to talk with each other about this.

What am I afraid to admit? That I struggle everyday to really listen to voices I identify as women's. I know my mind wanders quicker. I know that my instant reaction is take men's opinions more seriously. I know that when I walk into rooms full of activists I instantly scan the room and divide people into hierarchies of status (how long they've been active, what groups they've been part of, what they've written and where it's been published, who are their friends). I position myself against them and feel the most competitive with men. With those I identify as women, the same status hierarchies are tallied, but sexual desirability enters my hetero mindset. What is healthy sexual attraction and desire and how does it relate to and survive my training to systematically sexualize women around me? This gets amplified by the day-to-day reality that this society presents women as voiceless bodies to serve hetero-male desire, we know that. But what does it mean for how I communicate with my partners who are women and who I organize with? How does it translate into how I make love, want love, express love, conceptualize love? I'm not talking about whether or not I go down on my partner or say I love you, I'm talking about whether or not I truly value equality in our relationships over getting off on a regular basis.

The fact that my partners have provided far more emotional and financial support than I have for them. I'm talking about having almost never zoned out on what a gender privileged man is saying because I thought about him sexually.

I've repeatedly found myself zoned out thinking about sex while listening to women speak who are organizers, leaders, visionaries, my friends, my comrades. I'm all about crushes, healthy sexual desire and pro-sex politics, that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about power, entitlement and women's leadership marginalized by hetero male desire. I wish I didn't get defensive on a regular basis, but I do. I get frustrated and shut down conversations about how

power operates between my partner and I. I get defensive about how the world interacts with us and how that influences our dynamics. I know that there are times when I say, “ok, I’ll think more about it” when really I’m thinking, “leave me alone”.

This isn’t a confessional so that I will be forgiven. This is an on-going struggle to be honest about how deeply shaped I am by patriarchy and these systems of oppression. Patriarchy tears me up. I have so many fears about whether or not I’m capable of being in healthy loving relationships. Fears about whether or not I can be genuinely honest and connected with myself so that I can then open up and share with others. Fears about organizing to genuinely build and share power with others. The scars of patriarchy are on every single person I interact with and when I push myself to see it, to really look and take the time to think about it, I’m filled with sadness and rage. bell hooks, in her book *All About Love*, writes that love is impossible where the will to dominate exists. Can I genuinely love? I want to believe. I want to believe in a political practice for gendered privileged men forged in opposition to patriarchy.

I do believe that as we struggle against oppression, as we practice our commitments, we actualize and express our humanity. There are moments, experiences and events when I see patriarchy challenged by all genders and it shows what we can do. I believe that this is our lives’ work and that at its core it’s a fight for our lives. And in this fight we realize that even in the face of these systems of oppression, our love, beauty, creativity, passion, dignity and power grows. We can do this.

## **Post script: “we must walk to make the struggle real”**

While it’s necessary to get into the hard emotional and psychological issues, there is also an endless supply of concrete steps we can take to challenge male supremacy.

An organizer working on Palestinian Liberation wrote me saying, “some things gender privileged people can do: offer to take notes in meetings, make phone calls, find meeting locations, do childcare, make copies and other less glamorous work. Encourage women and gender oppressed people in the group to take on roles men often dominate (e.g. tactical, mc-ing and event, media spokesperson). Ask specific women if they want to do it and explain why you think they would be good (don’t tokenize). Pay attention to who you listen to and check yourself on power-tripping.”

She is one of hundreds of thousands of women and gender oppressed people who has outlined clear, concrete action steps that people with gender privilege can take to challenge sexism and work for liberation. There is an abundant supply of work to be done. The larger issue for me has been, “what will it take for me to actually do that work, to actually prioritize it and follow through on it?” In addition to men talking with each other as discussed above, we also need to hold each other accountable to follow through. There are a lot of heavy emotional issues that come up in doing this work and it’s critical that we help keep each other from getting lost and help each other take concrete steps forward. Asking ourselves, “how does our work support the leadership of women?” “How am I working to share power in my organizing?” “How am I making myself open to hearing feedback from gender oppressed people about my work?” Each of these questions generates next steps to make it happen. Examining and challenging privilege is a necessary aspect of our work, but it’s not enough. Men working with other men to challenge male supremacy is just one of many, many strategies needed to develop women-led, multiracial, anti-racist, feminist, queer and trans liberationist, working class based, anti-capitalist movements



for collective liberation. We know that sexism will work to undermine movement building. The question is, what work will we do to help build movement and in the process expand our ability to love ourselves and others.

*Much love to the editorial crew on this essay: Clare Bayard, Rachel Luft, J.C. Callender, Nilou Mostoufi, April Sullivan, Michelle O'Brien, Elizabeth 'Betita' Martinez, Sharon Martinas, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Rahula Janowski and Chris Dixon.*

## **Further Reading**

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*

bell hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*

Paul Kivel, *Men's Work: How to Stop the Violence that Tears Our Lives Apart*

Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: women in the international division of labour*

Barbara Smith, *The Truth that Never Hurts: writings on race, gender and freedom*

# Listen Anarchist! Sexism in the Movement

by Miriam & Ali

At the anarchist conference, the Wellington @fem group held a workshop on sexism in the movement. Two hours were set aside to discuss the subject, but the womyn involved felt that issues were only addressed superficially.

Towards the end of the conference, a womyn's-only discussion was held, in which womyn sat down and came up with a list of critiques of the sexism workshop. We feel that the issues raised during this discussion reflect some of the wider sexism present in the movement. Here is a condensed version of the list:

- Womyn didn't feel safe to talk about their experiences – especially around sexual abuse and sexuality.
- Womyn felt like they had to moderate what they said so that men didn't feel attacked. Some people resorted to talking about issues very hypothetically instead of personalising their experiences.
- The emphasis was taken off womyn. There was a failure to recognise that sexism affects us more.
- Men did not respect that womyn are the experts in their own oppression and talk about the issues on our terms.
- Men only acknowledged superficial aspects of sexism, eg. womyn being relegated to kitchen jobs.
- Womyn didn't feel that they were being listened to.
- Men attempted to rationalise womyn's experiences, instead of acknowledging that there aren't always logical reasons for the way people feel.
- Womyn felt that their feelings and experiences were being trivialised.
- There was a failure to discuss sexism in the anarchist movement and not just in wider society.
- Men weren't familiar with feminist ideas.
- Many men didn't seem interested, eg. At the childcare discussion.
- Womyn want men to come to us about solving oppression HOWEVER men need to understand that there are not always simple solutions and simply acknowledging that there is a problem is an integral part of the process.

Any discussion of sexism should start with men acknowledging that womyn are the experts on our own oppression. It's important that men take responsibility for addressing sexism but this has to be done with a reverence for womyn's experiences. Men should never assume that they know better than womyn how sexism should be fought. If men are serious about ending male privilege they need to begin asking womyn how we want to be supported in our struggle and listening.

We have separated this article into several sections dealing with some of the different facets of sexism and oppression womyn face in the movement.

## **Meetings**

Meetings take up a huge chunk of most activists' lives, so it's important we make them sexism-free.

One important issue is that our meetings are often dominated by male speakers. Womyn don't speak up because it doesn't feel safe to do so. Often we are scared of being personally attacked for voicing an opinion, or feel unconfident and uneducated around other more involved men. Meetings with a competitive atmosphere are worse. To be heard, you have to be aggressive and determined, and many womyn feel that the conflict is not worth it. We have been raised by a society that values womyn who are friendly, accommodating, pretty and outgoing – but not assertive.

Meetings need to have a welcoming atmosphere, with people listening to each other and being free to speak their mind, instead of the majority of men talking while the womyn listen nicely. I have heard men treat the fact that men usually “speak first, last, and longest,” as a joke, or as a coincidence. It isn't. At two meetings recently, an activist kept time of how long men and womyn spoke. Her results confirmed the gender imbalance we are speaking of.

The activist found that during a meeting held to talk about creating a policy for the group which had equal numbers of men and womyn attending, five womyn spoke, and ten men. The men also spoke longer and more frequently than the womyn. She compared this to another meeting held by the same group a few weeks later, where they discussed whether using certain photographs were exploitative. All the womyn spoke, as well as the men who had not voiced their opinion before.

At the first meeting, the focus had been more on right versus wrong decision making. At the second meeting, the focus was more on how people felt. The activist who reported this also mentioned that the men who didn't speak at the discussion did not have a university education, while those that did speak generally did.

This illustrates how womyn aren't the only group marginalised at meetings; ethnic minorities and people with less formal education are also likely to feel uncomfortable or unsafe participating when the structures are run for and by dominant and privileged groups.

## **Childcare**

Childcare is another important issue that is often overlooked. It is seen as the parents' responsibility to look after their child/ren, so many mothers (as well as fathers and other guardians)

are excluded from meetings and events. Mothers of young children in particular find it difficult juggling other commitments while needing to care for their child/ren.

It is difficult for us (the authors) to write too much on childcare since we don't have children ourselves. We do, however, recognise that not many events are child-friendly, or make specific arrangements for children. Meetings usually take place late at night, and babysitting is expensive. Who will put the kids to bed, and look after the younger ones? One Wellington group dealt with this by always holding meetings at the house at one parent – but it is also important not to assume that that will always be the solution. We need to work with and listen to parents to ensure we are doing all we can.

Another issue is that childcare isn't seen as important in activist groups. Can you imagine meetings where people who volunteer to stay at home with the children during demos are valued just as much as those who speak to the media? Can you imagine men being the ones to stay at home for a change? If we are serious about making anarchism a reality, then perhaps we should, because raising children is the responsibility of the whole community.

## **Sexual Oppression**

Sexual abuse and sexual harassment are huge and extremely urgent issues that the anarchist community have failed to deal with appropriately. You would have thought that this shouldn't even be an issue in a community dedicated to liberation and equality, but unfortunately it is, and we should all be furious about it. One of the main problems is that there is a lack of understanding of just what constitutes abuse and harassment and how it should be dealt with. Another problem is nobody is talking about these issues, or working out ways to resolve and prevent them in the first place.

## **Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment is essentially any form of sexual attention that is unwelcome and offensive. This includes unwanted touching (such as kissing, hugging, pinching, etc) and sexual innuendo. It is often dismissed as a harmless joke, or as part of somebody's personality, but it is actually very serious. Sexual harassment can be the result of deliberate actions to maintain power-over, or alternatively of well-meaning but unexamined actions by some men. It can make women feel stressed, humiliated, angry, upset, helpless, frightened, or simply so fed up that they want to drop out of the movement and/or avoid certain activists.

Sexual harassment is unacceptable, and should not be trivialised or dismissed. Keep in mind that just because you don't find somebody's behaviour offensive, it doesn't mean that others will also be comfortable with it too. Spaces need to be created within our movement for women to speak up if they are being sexually harassed. People need to know that they will be taken seriously when voicing concerns about sexual harassment. If complaints are made, they need to be dealt with straight away – and the person who is making the complaint should not be dismissed as over sensitive or repressed. People have different boundaries, respect that! Just because you enjoy forming 20 person snuggle pits doesn't mean that everyone else feels safe snuggling complete strangers. Likewise, there are some people who will feel extremely uncomfortable when you start talking about your penis.

When was the last time you sat down and talked about sexual harassment? Which of your friends have been sexually harassed? How would the groups you are part of respond to a womyn who complained about being sexually harassed by your actions?

## **Rape and Sexual Abuse**

We are incredibly angry that womyn have to be dealing with rape and sexual abuse in our movement. These issues, more than any other, have not been talked about and they are not going to go away. Two situations have surfaced in anarchist circles last year, and while this article is not going to discuss the individual incidents, they brought up a number of points that seem to be obvious, but apparently aren't.

The most important thing is to support (and believe!) the survivors of rape and sexual abuse. There seems to be the impression that false accusations are common. They aren't. In fact, 95% of men who have been convicted of rape in a court of law, where all evidence undeniably points to rape, still deny responsibility for their actions. In cases of acquaintance rape, the situation gets even messier. We would like to point out that by assuming the rapist is innocent until proven guilty is essentially assuming that the survivor is guilty (of lying) until proven innocent, and this is at the very stage where the survivor will be needing the most support. Disbelief from other activists can/will cause secondary wounding, which is often as bad as, if not worse than, the original trauma. If we want a movement that is safe for womyn, supporting the survivors of rape is the least we can do.

We can't fit a discussion on the processes that need to be implemented to fight the rape and sexual abuse into this article; we simply do not have the space. Hopefully new writing will address this in future. Until then, please TALK about these issues, support survivors and educate yourself.

## **Challenges for the Future**

- Listen to womyn
- Become more aware of the gender balance (of lack thereof)
- Pay attention to who talks in meetings
- Ask parents what support they would like from you
- Talk about sexual abuse and support survivors
- Read up on feminism (some suggested resources are below)
- Pay attention to your own behaviour. How are you contributing to sexism?

## **Resources and Suggested Reading**

It is important to become familiar with feminism and anarcho-feminist ideas. We suggest you start by checking out [www.anarcha.org](http://www.anarcha.org).

For those without internet access, we suggest you read 'Untying the knot,' 'Anarchism and Feminism,' 'Quiet Rumours,' and other @fem booklets. There are also a lot of feminist journals and books in public libraries – it's a good idea to get acquainted with feminist theory.

# **Women and Revolutionary Politics, or... Make Your Own Tea: Women's Realm and other Recipes and Patterns**

by the Class War Federation

This piece is written for all revolutionaries. This is not the token 'women's bit' that's stuck in for the sake of appearances. This is an attempt to look at how and why the Left, and Class War in particular, has not just failed to attract women, but alienated, patronised and looked upon them as a minority group. How can half the working class be treated as a minority? We're not claiming that we have solutions for the gender imbalance but we are saying that it's time to stop ignoring the problem. Any revolutionary movement which doesn't address why there are so few women in its ranks isn't a true revolutionary movement, just a complacent reflection of the status quo.

## **DAZED AND CONFUSED**

In the early years of Class War, the attitude was that feminist demands did not go far enough. We said why call for equal pay? Equal rights under capitalism was putting out a begging bowl for equal gender exploitation and was spectacularly unambitious. Class War were calling not for equal pay packets but for the abolition of money. The feminist fixation with voting rights was another half measure. Why choose between two evils when there's so much more to be had? Class War tried to support the principle of gender equality while disagreeing with the reformist tendencies of established feminism.

In the mid-1980s the Left was in its victim stage. 'All men are bad, all women are good' arguments were being waged by feminists who wanted the moral advantage and brownie points. Class War wasn't about pushing the politics of middle class guilt. By showing images of women who were taking control of their lives and fighting back, Class War thought it was supporting working class women. Whether it was or not is up for discussion, but the paper's intentions were honourable. The approach was simplistic, but at least it wasn't as confused as other sections of the Left — who were dancing round Goddess-based 'alternative' religions and calling them politics.

Class War's early issues show that there was a commitment to talking to all the working class as opposed to just young white males. Cervical cancer information sat on the same page as 'Battered Bobby'. Articles about sexism (admittedly basic and often moralistic as opposed to libertarian) made regular appearances. The politics were often misguided, with one article offering instructions to working class men to support women's struggles by offering physical protection. This paternalistic attitude reflected society's but it didn't make it right.

But to put Class War in context, other lefty groups and papers had even worse attitudes. Militant and the SWP's politics were so entrenched in old-fashioned rhetoric that women only featured in their papers when they slotted in to the traditional 'worker' slot. Grunwick was their finest hour: workers who were women and Asian to boot. Women Against Pit Closures and 'miners' wives' were the only other photos of a woman they'd use. Those pictures from 1977 and 1984 had to see them through almost 20 years of papers.

In 1987 a Brixton woman wrote to Class War questioning our coverage of the Brixton riots. She said that living in a police no-go area had ended not in Utopia, but in women suffering intimidation, physical and sexual violence. To Class War's credit, the paper responded with an article about the dangers of romanticising violence, and started up a debate about communities providing their own policing.

However, a lot of women who agree with Class War's aims and principles, think the organisation is too Boy's Own to become involved with. Class War's attitude to violence is alienating for women — no amount of wishful thinking will alter the fact that working class men and women have very different attitudes to violence. Class War's hard image, its music and boots are meant to attract young, white males. It's questionable whether concentrating on attracting one area of the working class (and alienating other sections of it) is worth the price, but even on its own terms this tactic fails.

## **WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR, MUM?**

Looking at Class War in isolation won't tell us much about why the Left has put gender politics on the back-burner. Class War came in to being at a time when the women's movement was in crisis. Without sketching a rough run-down of some of the events that preceded that crisis, it's impossible to challenge the cliché that feminism is merely the plaything of the middle classes.

In lefty circles all you have to do to discredit a movement or an idea is call it middle class. It's become a non-specific term of abuse. The feminist movement did have a lot of middle class women in it, but that doesn't mean that all of them opposed the interests of working class women. Nor does it mean that feminist ideas aren't useful to working class women. In the early seventies feminist ideas began to permeate through society. The media (as always) looked for leaders and personalities. Rather than talk about the anger, the ideas and the needs that were propelling feminism forward, the emphasis was on individuals. Germaine Greer and Co. fitted the media bill.

But this didn't stop women seizing the idea of liberation. Suddenly there were theories which explained why life was so miserable for the majority of women. The middle classes were the first to catch them because they had more access to education, but many working class women weren't all that far behind. The only solution to women's troubles was to change society, which was the last thing that the right wanted.

Women got down to the serious job of showing we'd no longer tolerate male domination and violence. In 1972 the first refuge for battered women opened. In 1976 the first Rape Crisis Centre opened, run on feminist lines. It mushroomed and by the mid-1980s there were centres in almost every city. The Reclaim The Night marches started in Soho in protest against the exploitation of the sex industry. The women's movement was making it up as it went along — and at that point it hadn't had to take account of the views of women actually working in the industry. In



Leeds and York the Reclaim The Night marches took on a different significance. Peter Sutcliffe, the so-called ‘Yorkshire Ripper’, was still on the loose in Northern industrial towns. We were sick of living in a climate of fear, of being told that the only way to stay safe was to stay indoors or under male protection. Last but not least we’d had enough of the state and media distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ girls; between the prostitute women who the media implied deserved to be murdered, and the good, asexual, family-type women who didn’t. Feminism provided the framework for women to realise that we had a right to be sexual and safe. We were angrily rejecting the hypocritical morality of the times as well as celebrating our presence on the streets.

## **WOMEN: THEY ALL LOOK THE SAME TO ME**

The women’s liberation movement had its own internal problems. The rhetoric of ‘sisterhood’ above all else meant that class and race, other great defining aspects of our lives, were in danger of being buried under the ‘all girls together’ mentality. Working class and non-white women fought the fallacy that class and race were less important than gender. They said that middle class women were fighting for their independence from patriarchy, while keeping the perks of their class. Working class women weren’t trying to destroy sisterhood; they were insisting that it be made more substantial. Some working class women said that sisterhood had to start with income sharing.

Black women refused to let the reality of having to live in a racist society be obscured by an umbrella of sisterhood. The women’s liberation movement was predominantly white and middle class, but to say that the white middle class women constantly held sway is to under-value black and working class women’s contributions. They forced the women’s liberation movement to take account of them – whether it wanted to or not. In 1978 The Working Class Women’s Liberation Newsletter was launched. To go along with the myth that working class women played no part in changing society, is to repeat the lie that we were too thick to read the writing on the wall, and add our own quotes.

Separatism helped create more schisms and split feminism into non-complementary strands. The main bugbear was whether women working or having relationships with men were letting the side down by fraternising with ‘the enemy’. In retrospect separatism looks like just more Stalinist power-play. Arguments about desire and free choice were put down to women trying to hang on their ‘heterosexual privilege’. Capitalism’s privileges weren’t given much attention. No wonder the women’s movement split. Despite internal sex wars, the women’s movement continued to have a positive influence on society. The one good thing about radical feminism was that it taught women to recognise the full extent of male domination. Women who chose not to live or work apart from men finally picked up on the way that trade unions/political groups/partners made few concessions to women. The revolutionary movement was found wanting.

## **THE ENEMY WITHIN**

The women’s movement would have survived and still politically progressed if the right hadn’t intervened. The American Weyrich was the first of many new right leaders to declare feminist women a threat to state power: “There are people who want a different political order. Symbolised by the women’s liberation movement, they believe the future for their political power lies

in the restructuring of the traditional family, and in down-grading the male or the father role in the traditional family.”

Thatcher and her followers had their own think-tanks which drew the same conclusions. By the mid-1980s equality seemed like a sensible proposition to most women, so the media responded by declaring that feminism was outdated, a 1970s thing like flares. ‘Post-feminism’ was the new thing. It came complete with a younger generation who hated the women’s movement. ‘Post-feminist’ was anti-feminist and it was set off not by women achieving their demands but by the fact that they looked in danger of getting too stropky, too much of a threat.

The old feminist ‘leadership’ were now part of the media establishment. Greer and Co. happily went back on their past calls for equality and independence. The new, revisionist line was that feminism had robbed us of our right to be mothers and home bodies. Greer declared that the model woman was the old-fashioned peasant wife up to her neck in onions and kids. One after another the old guard trundled out to tell us that women were at their most fulfilled when their influence was restricted to the home-front. Unsurprisingly, the media loved this U-turn and printed every word of it. It was the worst sort of careerism, but the right has always diffused subversive ideas by rewarding changes of opinion. Post-feminist theory smelled a lot like old-fashioned servitude.

## **YOU’LL ALWAYS FIND ME IN THE KITCHEN AT PARTIES**

Class War was formed at the height of this period of post-feminism. The entire Left was confused by the infighting and the right’s full-scale assault. Class War didn’t stand back and look at what was happening, but neither did anybody else. It was a time when one after another all the women’s papers collapsed under the weight of the onslaught. Feminism was too old hat to be bought, so most of the radical women’s papers folded. The only voices we were hearing were the new right and its lackeys telling us to get back into the kitchen.

It’s an elaborate confidence trick. The new right wants us in the traditional wifey mode, but it also wants our wage labour. The post-feminist line is that the modern women can have freedom through work, and still have the ‘fulfilment’ of running a home.

Capitalism needs women to work. The far right’s shift to economic ‘rationalism’ and the expansion of the low-paid service industries mean that cheap labour is always in demand. And as far as capital is concerned, nothing comes cheaper than women. Capitalism’s motto is: if you want to shell out less money and make more profits, employ women — they’re worth less.

Nine out of ten single parents are women, and even in two parent households many women are the main bread-winner; yet capitalism still pretends that women’s wages are ‘pin money.’ Women don’t need a living wage, because we don’t actually have to live off it. Despite a wealth of evidence to the contrary, men are still seen as the main ‘providers’. Our wages pay for the little extras: food, shelter and warmth. And as we get older, in a society which judges women on appearance, we become worthless.

Single mothers on benefit are the group who have borne the worst of the post-feminism backlash. Capitalism has outlawed all non-monetary relations. In a capitalist society to have no money is to have no identity. We’re not what we eat, but where we work and what we earn. Single mothers have been targeted because their existence threatens the right’s social, political

and economic aims. Hence the constant media attacks and housing and benefit cuts. 'Back to Basics' blamed everything from loose morals to the rising crime rate on single mothers.

Work and wages — no matter how menial and low — are often cited as proof that we've achieved our objectives and no longer need feminism. Try telling the woman who gets up at six to clean offices, that if she worked harder she too could have two homes and inter-continental air travel. The role models post-feminism holds up as 'successful' women (scum like Anita Roddick) get to the top by promoting ruthless capitalism. Gender plays no part in their story — other than their having to prove that their killer instincts are twice as sharp as men's.

One of capitalism's strategies for reducing wages is to take what has traditionally been 'men's work' — manufacturing etc — automate the plant and then bring in 'unskilled' women at a lower rate of pay. Then it is women, rather than capitalism's sharp practice, who are blamed for men being chucked out of the workforce.

Post-feminism also makes a big fuss about women's nurturing natures — we're supposed to like being dogsbodies. In 81 per cent of (two adult) homes where a woman works full-time, she's still responsible for the washing and ironing and the bulk of the domestic jobs. Maybe 'we've made it' means the beds. We're still acting as unpaid domestic servants; the only real change is that many men think they do more. There's a million excuses for why not, but men rarely take an equal share of cooking and household chores. Revolutionary groups seldom address the day-to-day inequalities in their own kitchens. Issues around housework are seen as trivial. Twenty years ago the expression for it was 'women's work'. Lefty 'man' may claim to be fighting for the freedom of mankind, but that doesn't mean he wants his girlfriend to stop doing his washing.

Part of the problem is that housework has been tagged 'personal politics'. 'Personal' like 'middle class' is just another way of saying irrelevant to the overall struggle. Class War has always understood that 'politics' is about improving the day-to-day realities of our lives. Unfortunately, that understanding doesn't seem to extend to women. Too often issues are prioritised on the grounds of whether or not they make men feel heroic. Rioting does; shopping doesn't. Washing up just doesn't get the adrenalin going: ask any woman.

## **GET YOUR TITS OUT FOR THE LASSES**

Post-feminism has a cute chorus-line of girls flashing their knickers as a sign of liberation. We've got the Girlie Show, The Pyjama Party and the Spice Girls sticking their tits and their tongues out on prime-time TV. All three were put together by blokes. We're supposed to see them as symbols of the new 'sassy' woman, but all are a bloke's idea of the perfect feminist. They make a lot of noise but never say anything which actually threatens the status quo. They're Stepford Wives with better thighs, and a carefully programmed attitude. They're go-go dancing for equality.

At the same time there's a constant media crusade to show us what a dangerous place the world is for women. Less than eight per cent of all violent crimes are sexual attacks on women (the highest mortality rate is among young working class men), but the media loves to highlight our rapes and murders by deranged strangers. The message is that we need the security of male protection. The sub-text is: 'your relationship might be crap and abusive but look how much worse off you'd be without him'. The irony is that at least a third of all women killed in Britain are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends — the majority just after they declare their independence by breaking off the relationship.

## WILL THIS MOVEMENT MOVE ME?

We don't live in an equal world. We need a feminist analysis as much as we ever did. All around us the gains of the last thirty years are under attack. The Left bowed out of women's struggles years ago, and since there isn't really a women's movement to speak of, individual women are left to slug it out alone. The whole point in joining a movement is to fight alongside people who share the same ideals and dreams. There's not much incentive for women to join revolutionary groups when the general ethos is: you can fight our battles but we're not interested in yours.

Women join revolutionary organisations because they want to change the whole of society not just the sexist bit. But to survive within them we end up having to 'put up and shut up'. Just because we've prioritised class and capitalism as major oppressions doesn't mean that we don't give a shit about gender.

The old chestnut about 'single issues' distracting the focus of the struggle has been dragged out too many times when women's struggles come up. The anti-JSA campaign or prisoner support are 'single issues'; race, class and gender aren't. We can't pick up and put down our class, our skin colour or our sex. Whatever comes after Class War needs to take a less one-dimensional approach. We don't know what will make a unified movement, but we do know what won't: ignorance.

No one is 'just' working class, 'just' a woman, 'just' black. Our politics are a mesh of different experiences, and half the time there's no cosy alliance between our different oppressions. A woman's experiences under patriarchy help shape her perceptions of class. We've been guilty of pretending that working class men and women would all live happily ever after once we've banished capitalism. Not if we still have one half serving the other half. Life isn't simple. Those who are our comrades in one area may well turn out to be against us in another. When conflict comes up we're forced to say what matters most; sometimes it's our class and sometimes it isn't. We have to acknowledge difficulties before we can start to deal with them. We don't know if we can resolve these dilemmas but we're certainly willing to try.

# Sexism in the Anarchist Movement

by Angela Beallor

This article is an attempt to add to the discourse that is (or should be) occurring around sexism within the very movements that purport to be fighting it. It was a hard process to distinguish between sexism within the anarchist movement and the general sexism within society because so many of the criticisms that can be leveled against the anarchist movement are criticisms of the greater society. There is a void where critical anarchist feminist/anti-sexist critiques should be which has led to a lack of dialogue and concrete action around sexism. This critique will be based upon many of the weaknesses within the Anarchist movement, which are often compounded around issues of sexism (and other forms of oppression). There is a continuum of thought and concrete action which anarchists must address or take up in order to combat our own sexism and sexism in the greater society.

## Challenging Ideas and Behaviors

The continuum begins with our personal thoughts and behavior. Growing up in a sexist society imbues within us the idea that women are inferior to men. Unless these ideas are thoroughly challenged, in every aspect of our lives, every waking minute, then these ideas are allowed to flourish in our behavior. Many may feel this is an obvious point, but as Kevin Powell wrote in a recent Ms. article, “Everyday I struggle within myself not to use the language of gender oppression, to see the sexism inherent in every aspect of America, to challenge all injustices, not just those that are convenient for me.”

Anti-sexism is not just about fighting overt forms of sexism — violent rape, domestic violence, overtly sexist words — it is also about challenging our relationships, the ideas that create a rape culture, the way people are socialized, etc. These are not convenient issues to struggle around for they involve digging deep within ourselves, traveling back in our development, and dedicating time to the difficult process of self-change. We must challenge the ideas and behaviors that promote sexism to other men and alienate women—both in personal relationships and in organizations.

Recognizing that anti-sexist work is a deep, hard process is very important but a point many miss. All too often men who are genuinely against sexism fail to acknowledge and challenge the sexism that lies within themselves. “I AM an anti-sexist,” they proclaim. But it is said so loudly that they fail to hear the voices of women. It becomes a label to proudly sport instead of a serious and difficult process. Don’t get me wrong, if a man is indeed anti-sexist, he needs to display it, but this is accomplished through his actions and in his explanations of our current reality—especially to other men. Men must become examples to challenge the mainstream notions of masculinity and that takes more than a simple label.

Often complexities arise, however, when women challenge “anti-sexist” men. Men get defensive when women critique their oppressive and sexist behaviors. Rather than listening and

benefiting from criticism, a defensive stance is taken and women's voices are ignored once again. No one is above being questioned, as there should be no unnecessary hierarchy. The lack of principled criticism and self-criticism within the anarchist movement is the first problem that is then compounded when applied to issues of sexism and other forms of oppression. Women must be genuinely listened to and, if the criticisms are valid, men should seek to change their thoughts and their actions.

## **Political Study**

Understanding sexism is important to all within the anarchist movement. However, as a woman, it is not my duty to always answer questions and educate men on how sexism affects my life. Many anarchist groups already have a program or project in place that could be utilized to gain a better understanding of sexism without burdening women with the task of explaining our lives: the political study group. When was the last time you or your group read something on women, sexism, feminism, or women's liberation?

Many times, and I have been guilty of this, we feel that readings on women's issues are not as important as readings on capitalism or anarchism or anti-colonial struggle, etc. We have to stop considering women's liberation as a side project or issue and view it as an integral part of the liberation struggle. These writings do not have to be specifically Anarchist or even revolutionary to give us good insights. When was the last time you read something by Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Barbara Smith, Angela Davis, Patricia Hill Collins, or Emma Goldman? We must take the initiative to read that which women have placed before us.

## **Encouraging Women**

Since I was a little girl, I was socialized to feel inferior to men. I was socialized to recognize where my "place" was in society and it was not participating in an equal dialogue with men, certainly not in any type of politics, and it was definitely not on any kind of front line of revolutionary struggle. I often look around at meetings and events (that are not women-centric) and see that I am one of a handful of women in attendance or worse yet, the only woman there. Alternately, even when there are a lot of women in the room, I find that I am the only woman contributing to the dialogue.

When examining women's involvement in political struggle, we have to examine the root causes. Women are socialized to look at politics as outside of our realm. When the politics are radical or revolutionary, the level of intimidation increases. Because of this reality, we have to exert a lot of time and energy into creating a more anti-sexist/pro-woman movement. We have to start by involving more women within our organizations and movements. This first involves putting sexism as one of the main points of organization alongside the other issues affecting women (and all humans): racism, heterosexism, ableism, colonialism, and class oppression. While we cannot place all of our energy into all of these problems at once, we must ensure we are dealing holistically with all of these issues within our focus. Second, we must actively recruit women into our organizations. This takes various forms such as tabling at women's events, consistent outreach to women and participating in women-centric struggles.

Once women are in our organizations, we must look at the level of participation of women within the organization. I have been involved with politics for 7+ years. It has only been within the past year and a half that I have fully participated in politics. This is because I have had to learn that I could speak in meetings, that I could contribute in meaningful and positive ways, and that it is my place to contribute and participate. I have had to overcome the intimidation I felt when I was working with men who I looked up to and respected. I had to overcome the mental chains that were holding me back.

A couple factors contributed to this change. A dear comrade helped me realize that I am fully capable of participating and that no one can say different. For him, it was crucial that I participate on an equal level and he put a great deal of time and energy in encouraging me. I would love to see more men take up this task. Then, my level of commitment, seriousness, and sense of responsibility to liberatory politics forced me to put my level of involvement above my sense of comfort. This was not an easy task at all and one that I still struggle with to this day. This is something that we all have to battle within ourselves; men can help women get to this point by treating women equally and respectfully. We also must analyze our organizational behaviors. Are we consistently encouraging women to take up leadership positions? Is it mostly men or women who are taking up speaking engagements? Who talks at meetings? Who facilitates meetings? Who does the work of the organization, and then, who gets credit for it? We have to be very perceptive of men talking over women, invalidating and/or ignoring a woman's words and contributions.

We all must make an extra effort to look at the gender dynamics of our functions and meetings. Without the direct leadership of women in any movement, our important voices are left out of the dialogue and the fight against sexism.

## **Anarchist Organizational Structures**

One of the biggest challenges to the anarchist movement is creating viable anti-authoritarian structures for our organizations. We are struggling to create new ideas of organization from the examples we have had and through new ideas and innovations. Not only are we trying to organize our movement in an anarchist fashion but it is also a testing ground for a future society.

Anarchism seeks to create a society based on a great sense of personal responsibility and accountability to ourselves and each other. We want a society based on mutual aid and communalism. This cannot happen out of spontaneous activity; it must result out of a highly organized society based on democratic, decentralized structures. I hope the anarchist movement realizes the need to work out new structural ideas for our organizations and a new society. I know many feel creating structure inherently runs counter to the ideas and principles of Anarchism. I would argue that not sitting down and forming democratic structures is counter to the ideas and principles of anarchism.

Jo Freeman wrote in *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* that “The idea of structurelessness does not prevent the formation of informal structures, only formal ones. A ‘laissez-faire’ ideal for group structure becomes a smoke screen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over others. Thus structurelessness becomes a way of masking power. As long as the structure of the group is informal, the rules of how decisions are made are known only to the few, and awareness of power is limited to those who know the rules.”

Structurelessness is often a means to perpetuate sexism, racism and class stratification. If men are socialized to be leaders and women are not, then it is not hard to imagine who would develop into leaders in a non-structured organization. A lack of structure provides no means of balancing those with certain privileges with those who are oppressed. We must create organizational structures that inherently guard against these forms of power imbalance.

In forming Anarchist organizational structures, we must also form structures to specifically deal with sexism in our organizations. One very sensitive issue that we have to address is sexual assault (and domestic violence). I have heard of many situations where a politically active male has sexually assaulted a fellow activist. It would be impossible to plan out all of the steps of dealing with this type of situation-especially since the survivor of sexual assault should largely control what happens-but we need a skeleton of steps to help handle this type of situation. Members of any organization should all have political education on both rape and sexual assault and how to deal when you or someone you know has been raped. Organizations should have a framework so that they are not fumbling around when sexual assault happens. Not having a framework could leave a survivor with little to no support from those whom should be providing as much support as she or he needs.

What can anarchist organizations do in these situations? What do we do if one amongst us is sexually assaulted? What do we do if one amongst us has sexually assaulted someone else? What do we do when both parties are in our organization? I challenge all organizations to consider how to prevent sexual assault from occurring in the first place, how to deal with it if it does, and how to support survivors of sexual assault to the fullest extent possible.

## **Taking up Womens' Struggle**

The struggle against sexism is everyone's struggle. It affects everyone: men, women and transgendered peoples. It is especially important that anti-sexist men, who benefit from sexism, take up the struggle for womens' liberation. Just as it is especially important for white people to dedicate themselves to anti-racist struggle and straight people to dedicate themselves to anti-homophobia/heterosexism work, men must dedicate an intense amount of time to anti-sexist work.

For anarchist men, the question is, are you involved with struggles spontaneously taken up by women, led and organized by women, and primarily aimed at other women? If not, why? I have heard the claim that many of the struggles are "too reformist." In some cases this is my critique as well but I do not see a revolutionary struggle in the United States that is able to aid women in the ways these movements do. The answer is not to ignore these movements but to build new movements within or without that which already exists. Are anarchists creating alternate structures for survivors of sexual assault? Are we able to aid abused women in a revolutionary fashion at this point in time?

Others brush anti-sexist struggle off as "women's work." Others do not see anti-sexist struggle as central to the struggle for liberation. Others believe we can wait to challenge sexism when revolutionary change occurs. These analyses must change. If we truly want an egalitarian society then we must begin creating a more equitable movement-along lines of race, class, gender, and sexuality. We must make the anarchist movement a women's movement. If we want an end to sexism, our work should have began yesterday.



## **Forward Always, Backwards Never**

Anarchists often have a good analysis of the way sexism is “a mesh of practices, institutions, and ideas which have an overall effect of giving more power to men than to women.” Beginning with an institutional analysis is correct, however, we must also translate this into our own thoughts and actions. Only then can all anarchists work together most effectively (at least along gender lines but we must also deal with homophobia, racism and class issues). To create an egalitarian society, our movement must be egalitarian and presently it is not. Working to create revolutionary change must begin today by challenging our sexist, racist, and heterosexist capitalist society. It means challenging that which is in ourselves, our families, our neighborhoods, our communities and our movements. As Kevin Powell said, “Just as I feel it is whites who need to be more vociferous about racism in their communities, I feel it is men who need to speak long and loud about sexism among each other.”

The Anarchist movement needs to be more vocal and active in the struggle against sexism. All our lives depend on it.

# Shut the Fuck Up or, How to act better in meetings

by Dan Spalding

*“Even with my mask I often spoke the tyranny of power. My first duty was to cultivate a revolutionary silence.”*

-Subcomandante Marcos

## Introduction

Being an activist these days means fighting for a thousand different things — indigenous rights, rainforests, corporate accountability, etc. Despite this diversity of campaigns, there seems to be some agreement on the kind of society we want to create. It’s a society that isn’t based on white supremacy, class exploitation, or patriarchy.

This essay is about how men act in meetings. Mostly it’s about how we act badly, but it includes suggestions on how we can do better. Men in the movement reproduce patriarchy within the movement and benefit from it. By patriarchy I mean a system of values, behaviors, and relationships that keeps men in power. It relies on domination, claiming authority, and belligerence. By the movement I mean the anti-corporate globalization movement in the US I am a part of.

I think people organizing for affordable housing, against police brutality, for the rights of immigrants (for example) are also fighting the same system that’s wringing the blood out of the bottom 99 percent of the world’s population and the environment they live in. However, I don’t know from my experience if the men who organize around those issues act the way the men in the movement do.

Just to be clear, those men are almost always white and from middle-class or wealthier backgrounds. In my experience, as someone who identifies as a man of color, men of color dominate meetings in basically the exact same way. But I find that men who do not speak English fluently tend not to do so as much. I wish I could think of more exceptions.

## Who cares about meetings?

Good question. Most meetings of large-ish organizations (of more than 30 people or so) I’ve been to don’t amount to too much. The real work — doing research, getting people involved, organizing protests and actions, fundraising, media stuff — gets done by working groups or individuals. Meetings are just about a lot of talking, right?

Well, yes and no. At worst meetings force a lot of people to get together and generally discuss everything that’s been done, everything that’s going on, and everything that needs to be done.

These meetings tend to wander a lot. Responsibility is not clearly delegated, decisions aren't made overtly, and the organization isn't more focused afterwards than before. At the same time, there's heated arguments over seemingly trivial things, or hurtful criticism of individuals. But those arguments and criticisms don't amount to too much in the end.

But a good meeting is a different animal altogether. With good self-facilitation and a good facilitator (or two, or three...), everyone contributes to the meeting, without anyone taking control over it. People make constructive criticism, and try to incorporate concerns raised into their proposals. And since everyone gets to contribute their ideas into the decision-making process, the decisions are not only the best possible ones — but also the ones people are most invested in. Since everyone feels ownership over the decisions, people are more likely to take on responsibility for projects.

If you're serious about using consensus, you have to care about meetings. That's the only place a group can democratically decide what to do and how to do it. The alternative is an informal group of the most influential and forceful members (who dominate discussion) making the big decisions.

## **It's not just how often you talk, but how and when**

Consensus decision making is a model of the society we want to live in, and a tool we use to get there. Men often dominate consensus at the expense of everyone else. Think about the man who...

- Speaks for a long, loud, first and often
- Offers his opinion immediately whenever someone makes a proposal, asks a question, or if there's a lull in discussion
- Speaks with too much authority: "Actually, it's like this..."
- Can't amend a proposal or idea he disagrees with, but trashes it instead
- Makes faces every time someone says something he disagrees with
- Rephrases everything a woman says, as in, "I think what Mary was trying to say is..."
- Makes a proposal, then responds to each and every question and criticism of it — thus speaking as often as everyone else put together (Note: This man often ends up being the facilitator)

And don't get me started about the bad male facilitator who...:

- Always puts himself first on stack, because he can
- Somehow never sees the women with their hands up, and never encourages people who haven't spoken

It's rarely just one man who exhibits every problem trait. Instead it's two or three competing to do all the above. But the result is the same: everyone who can't (or won't) compete on these terms — talking long, loud, first and often — gets drowned out.

This is a result of society's programming. Almost no men can actually live up to our culture's fucked up standards of masculinity. And our society has standards for women that are equally ridiculous. In one way, we both suffer equally. That's why we all yearn and strive for a world where these standards — which serve to divide us and reduce us and prop up those in control — are destroyed.

In another way these standards serve those who come closest to living up to them. Sure, we all lose when a few men dominate a meeting. But it's those men who get to make decisions, take credit for the work everyone does, and come out feeling more inspired and confident.

## **But I can't be sexist — I'm a hippie**

Oh, but you can. The irony is that you can basically do all the things listed above, even if you don't fit the stereotype of the big strapping man. I've seen hippies, men who would be described as feminine, queer men, and others who in many ways go against the grain not go against the grain at all when it comes to dominating discussion. A hippie might speak slowly and use hippie slang, but still speak as the voice of authority, and cut off the woman who was speaking before him. A man who some might call feminine can still make a face like he smelled something when someone he doesn't respect says something he disagrees with, thus telling her to shut up; he may also politely but consistently put himself on stack every time someone criticizes his proposal.

## **So shut the fuck up already**

What's to be done? I've come up with a little idea I like to call, "Shut the fuck up." It goes as follows: Every time someone...

- Says something you think is irrelevant,
- Asks a (seemingly) obvious question,
- Criticizes your proposal or makes a contradictory observation,
- Makes a proposal
- Asks a question, or
- Asks for more input because there's a brief lull in the discussion...

Shut the fuck up. It's a radical process, but I think you'll like it.

Since my childhood, I was raised by my parents and by every teacher I ever had in school to demand as much attention as possible. In class I spoke more often than almost anyone else I knew. Surprisingly enough, some of my teachers were annoyed with me. But while they may have counseled me to raise my hand first, they never asked me to speak less or listen more. As

a result I probably got twice as much attention from my teachers, measured in time spent with me, than most of the other kids I went to school with.

But a mere 15 years after I started learning to exhibit almost all the dominating male behavior I list above, something happened. I was in a class with a friend of mine. Let's call her Anne, because that's her name. Anne and I were in the same study group, and the night before she had gone over the exact question the professor was now asking. However, Anne wasn't answering, even though the rest of the class was silent.

I don't know what struck me to actually stop and think instead of answering the question myself, as I was wont to do. That incident got me thinking about who spoke most often in class, why, and what I could do. The answers to the first two questions I've basically given already. The third is a little trickier.

## **What else can we do?**

Lucky for us, being a man gives us a lot of authority. I mean that in a good way, too. Much like people of color are always assumed to be selfish or paranoid when they speak out against racial profiling, women are often assumed to be bitchy when they call out patriarchal behavior.

What does that mean for us? First, we shut the fuck up. This was easy for me in school — I just made a rule that I never spoke more than twice in a 50 minute class. Surprise! Almost every time I would have spoken, someone else eventually said the exact same thing, or something smarter. It was frustrating when it was another obnoxious man doing the answering, but a lot of times it wasn't one of the two guys in class who spoke most often.

The problem is that the classroom is designed to have one person in charge, and it ain't the student. While you could point out problem behavior in class, there's not a lot of 'space' for it — it's not expected or encouraged, and would probably be dismissed by the professor.

The beauty of consensus is the facilitation. Not only can we facilitate ourselves — and we should — but we can facilitate each other. This is mainly the job of the person chosen to be the facilitator. But when the facilitator is ignoring problem behavior — or exhibiting it — it's easy for other people in the group to guerrilla facilitate.'

Sometimes it's as easy as pointing out the people who have their hands up, but are somehow missed by the facilitator, or by suggesting straw polls or go 'rounds or other tools that get everyone involved. But it's usually not that easy. The worse the pattern of behavior in the group, the more natural the fucked-upedness will seem. And you'll often be given the evil eye by the people you're calling out, if not a verbal backlash. And finally, it's obviously not the job of the people most trampled on by patriarchal behavior to always be calling it out. That's where we come in. We are, at least at first, given the most respect when we call out bad behavior.

The problem is doing the calling out in a constructive way. It's all too easy to call people out in a hurtful and authoritarian fashion — thus entertaining everyone with your unintended irony, but also acting the exact way you don't want others to. When you call people out in a way that's hurtful instead of constructive, it still tends to keep the quietest people at a meeting from participating.

## The solution

So call people out, but try not to be too personal about it. Unless it's outrageous, wait until the person is finished, and then make your process point about how people should stick to stack, or consider not talking if they've just spoken, or whatever. And if it seems someone's pissed off at your calling them out (and white men make it real easy for you to tell if they're pissed off), make the effort to talk to him after the meeting is over. It usually doesn't take much to smooth ruffled feathers.

Unfortunately, it also doesn't take much for those same people to do the exact same thing the next meeting. So while part of the answer is self-facilitation and facilitating others, another part is also giving everyone the skills and confidence they need to assert their place in the meeting. This means having regular workshops, for new and experienced activists, on how consensus is supposed to work. It also means going through the formal process of consensus and explaining it during meetings. You can do it quickly, especially after the first few times. But when people assume that everyone is familiar with the process, those who are least confident (but still have good ideas) will be the first to drop out of discussions. Meanwhile, other people who think they know the process but don't tend to hold things up. I'll let you guess what I think the gender breakdown of those groups is.

Another key ingredient is talking to individuals outside of meetings. Talking honestly — “I know you care about the group, but in meetings it seems like you talk down to anyone who disagrees with you, and you cut people off a lot, and that makes it really hard for other people to participate” — is a big part of it. And as with any interaction, you have to keep an open mind to hear their perspective. Ideally, you could resolve things at this level and not have to bring things up before the group.

But it's still a good idea to come up with a structure to address the way people act badly in meetings, for people to regularly “check in” with how they feel the process is going. It also makes it easier for people who wouldn't normally criticize others to do so constructively. The structure could mean that once every two months the group has a “process” meeting, where the focus is on how people act in meetings, working groups, etc. It's often easier and ‘safer’ for people to call out problem behavior, and easier and ‘safer’ for the culprits to own up to it and ask for constructive criticism.

Finally, it means constantly thinking about how we, as men, tend to dominate and control the world around us. To me this is most apparent (at least in other people) in meetings. To me, that's also where it's easiest to address. This is a continuous process. We have to always read about this, talk about it, inquire into how others address it, come up with creative and successful solutions, and apply them. But no matter where we take it, I think this struggle always starts with shutting the fuck up.

As men, we're encouraged to dominate conversation without even thinking about it. It's too easy for us to do really good work — fighting genetic engineering, tearing down the prison industrial complex, freeing Mumia — and still act exactly like the frat boy next door. We have to confront each other and ourselves so that domination stops seeming natural, and so we can start doing something about it. So the next time you don't think about how you're talking, please think about how you're talking.

*And the bonus section.....*

## **But I can't let a girl do this -I mean, I'm the only one who knows how**

Shut the heck up! Sharing responsibility for projects is fundamental for ensuring that everyone in the group develops skills and confidence. I'll give credit where it's due: We men are pretty good at letting women bottomline work like child care, note taking, food prep... But we rarely have structures to let women take on our responsibilities.

In your meetings, are women taking on projects in proportion to their numbers? If you're not paying attention, you should be. Along with consensus, sharing work is one of the hallmarks of democratic organizing. In my experience the most prestigious, challenging, and rewarding work belongs to men. Often, it belongs to the same men who dominate the meetings where these tasks are ostensibly delegated.

One way men make work theirs (in the worst way) is by hoarding information around it. What work has been done? What's left to do? What are the priorities? The deadlines? If the work is done informally, not only is there no accountability for it getting done, but there are also no records and no regular updates. This makes it almost impossible to pass on responsibility for the project to someone else — unless you're setting them up for failure.

Another problem is contacts. Somehow it seems that long time organizers tend to all know each other. If there's a problem they can just call each other up. This isn't just intimidating for people lower on the activist totem pole; it makes it that much harder for them to get the same work done. If we pretend our contacts are just friends, instead of people we rely on to get work done, the group at the top will stay there. And I think that group is almost all male.

Finally, there's language. Experts in the capitalist world tend to mystify their work. Whether it's "move to demur," "updating the HTML," or "within the confines of this narrative," professionals have a vested interest in making their work sound as obscure and difficult as possible. Professionals in our society own the little part of the world they have "expertise" over. They make decisions that affect everyone, and get more control and authority as time goes on.

Sound familiar? All these factors — hoarding information, exclusive contacts, mystifying language — get even worse during a crisis. In the middle of an action it's easy to say, "There's no time to teach anyone new, men or women, how to work the radios." First, that's usually a group of men speaking. Second, that's why you have start before the action. If the problem is just a few big egos and a lot of people's complicity, then you can delegate immediately. If there's more at work, you have to set up a structure so folks outside the de facto leadership meaningfully take on projects. That structure can include documenting steps and information, helping new people develop working relationships with other organizers, using everyday language instead of bullshit acronyms, and so on. But without a process it's much more difficult to pass on that responsibility.

And who do you think you'll be passing it on to?

(freely inspired by Jo Freeman's "The Tyranny of Structurelessness.")

## **Epilogue**

This essay came out of my frustration with the male domination in meetings in this movement and the absence of men's efforts to change it. It also came out of my need for self-reflection. This

will ideally lead not just to all men acting exactly like I think they should, but also a lasting dialog on how we behave in meetings and what we can do about it. If you have any thoughts on what I've written, please contact me and tell me what you think [dan@midnightspecial.net](mailto:dan@midnightspecial.net). This isn't a declaration of war; it's just a starting point.

Time for me to shut the fuck up.



# Smash Patriarchy!: Leaflet from Thessaloniki

<em>Anti-sexist leaflet of the mixed plena, 19<sup>th</sup> of June including the anti-sexist manifesto from 17<sup>th</sup> of June on the campus of the University of Thessaloniki in context with the protest against the EU summit.

The anti-sexist leaflet with both declarations, Smash Patriarchy and the anti-sexist manifesto were distributed in numbers of 400 copies in English and Greek.

Already Tuesday evening, the 17<sup>th</sup> of June, women had decided after a women's meeting, because of sexual encroachment and violations of personal border as well as because of the partly aggressive atmosphere on the Campus, to enter the stage of a rock gig on the campus to read out the anti-sexist manifesto in Greek and English.

Both declarations are available in English and Greek, translation into other languages is appreciated.</em>

## ANTI-SEXIST MANIFESTO

of women Squatting the Stage at Thessaloniki anti-authoritarian camp (diese Version, veraendert am 19.Juni, ist eine leicht modifizierte Fassung der Ursprungserklaerung vom 17.Juni)

We are here today because we all feel uncomfortable as women and men in this space

There have been cases of sexual harassment and also, women have been suppressed or not taken seriously because of their gender.

There have been violent muggings and fist fights

In this camp men have sexually insulted women and reduced them to sexual objects — all this continues

Additionally, women have not been listened to, not taken seriously and not treated as equal persons — even when we tried to point it out from this stage two nights ago, the response was insulting and disrespectful

Altogether, the atmosphere in the camp is very masculine-dominated

To our knowledge, this camp is supposed to be anti-authoritarian and anti-hierarchical, but in this camp, the sexism, that exists in society, is being reproduced

Sexism is a form of oppression, as is racism and homophobia

We will not tolerate masculine oppression within this camp anymore

Smash capitalism — Smash Patriarchy !

## SMASH PATRIARCHY

What has happened so far ?

The campus of the university Thessaloniki is a place where people organize their resistance to protest against the EU-summit.

The atmosphere on the campus is at times very aggressive. This is not only in regards to sexist behavior but also there is a general atmosphere that is not always but frequently extremely violent. Political conflicts and arguments among us, whether it is between individuals or groups, are taken out in physical confrontations. People scream and shout at each other, threaten violence or actually beat each other up. This dominates the atmosphere and creates a certain way of dealing and working with each other. Also the way discussions take place is very disrespectful. People interrupt others while they are talking, do not let others finish what they want to say, shout and do not focus on what has just been said.

In addition the general atmosphere is dominated by machismo. In discussions men dominate and women are often not taken seriously or are just ignored. Sexual harassment has taken place. Boundaries and the privacy of women have not been respected. In this patriarchal reality women can not often find a safe and protected atmosphere or a place to share and exchange their experiences of violence and harassment. We also believe that violence and harassment is happening at the campus here. Other sexual attacks may have happened but are not made public, so we don't know about them yet.

We also consider the atmosphere at the camp to be very heterosexual and homophobic.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are a part of the movement but do not feel fully respected and accepted here.

These are all reasons why women called, on Tuesday, 17.6, for a meeting of women to discuss and deal with this situation. It was decided to write a manifesto and to organize a spontaneous action which would express what we think and feel.

Therefore some women took over the stage during the concert on Tuesday night to read the manifesto.

This direct action was directed towards the men, who take part in creating a sexist atmosphere, as well as to all people who came here, to the camp, to participate in the protest against the EU summit. We wanted to name and point out the sexist atmosphere in the camp, explain that sexual harassment and attacks have occurred and we want to make it very clear to everybody that we, as women, will not accept or take this anymore.

Enough is enough!!!

The reaction of the mainly male audience at the concert was quite diverse: there were positive reactions such as applause but on the other hand there were rude and sexist comments. Some people didn't take it seriously at all. All in all it was a very empowering experience for us. Despite negative responses, what was most important for us was to become active, raise our voices and make people aware that sexism exists in the camp.

Our direct action was also recorded and posted on several indymedia sites where it can be heard.

It has caused a lot of discussions .

A positive outcome of our action was that many people attended our next mixed meeting of men and women the following day. We had called for a meeting of men and women because we thought it was tremendously important that men take part in dealing with sexism. We should work together to develop a sensitivity and awareness for all kinds of discrimination against women and others.

We decided to become active in different ways and create four groups:

- A direct action group.

- A anti-harassment — and support point. This will be a place where people can ask for support and where you can come to if you feel discriminated against in any way and problems can be addressed. Open daily from 12–2 pm and in the evening in front of the bar of the theological faculty.
- Banner and poster group to make patriarchal structures visible
- A media group

We hope that through our actions and discussions we can create a more comfortable atmosphere for everyone.

Real change starts within ourselves!!!!

You can not smash capitalism without smashing patriarchy!!!!

Fight back

# There is only so much Sexism an Anarchist can take

by Tracey Fletcher

*When I saw that the Anarchist Movement Conference 2009 is being promoted with the image of a woman, I couldn't help thinking of the irony. As with national states, the female body is again used as the symbol of some desired unity. However, what that image has made me think of is the persistence and entrenchment of sexist practices among anarchists, an important contributing factor to their actual lack of unity.*

Some time ago I joined a few long-term active anarchists during a specific campaign, a couple of them probably now involved in the organisation of this conference. My experience left me wondering how much some of those active in the anarchist movement have actually learnt from years of feminist thought and experience. These are just a few examples: I was constantly talked to and reminded of my lack of experience, without anyone ever questioning what my experience actually was and whether I might have something to teach them too. I was just approached for some humorous comment but never to have a serious adult conversation. When with my partner, a man, some of them would only address him while I was left in the background wondering if I had suddenly become invisible – even though I was the one doing the politics with them. On a couple of painful occasions, I was even shouted at after making some naïve comments (I knew he would have never dared to do the same to another man). And then, of course, their class essentialism: they never realised that I don't actually need to come from a working class background to know how it feels to be discriminated against, ignored, talked down, patronised and treated like a little child with no mind of her own. I know it just too well. I had to giggle to myself when one of my co-campaigners accused another group of just paying lip service to anti-authoritarianism. It seems the connection between patriarchy and authority had been completely lost on him (an otherwise rather intelligent person).

Probably my middle-classness and university education, as well as years of self-reflection after coming into contact with feminist theory, meant my self-esteem came out from this experience with just a few bruises. I just wonder how many women from less privilege backgrounds have been left to believe in their own inferiority after having their opinions dismissed and their hard work appropriated without recognition by men who call themselves anarchists. The low self-esteem that results from it means these women, their abilities and passion, are lost to the anti-authoritarian movement, some of it, I'm afraid, anti-authoritarian just in name. There is a lesson I learnt some time ago that could be perfectly applicable to this situation: you don't suddenly stop being racist just because you've decided to. It has taken me years of active learning and self-reflection to reduce the racism engrained in me. A great deal of it involved identifying and deconstructing the category of 'whiteness'. I don't see that active learning and self-reflection is actually happening among men who consider themselves prominent in the anarchist movement. The will is just not there (and I'm talking racism as well as sexism here). Contemporary feminist

analysis seems to have identified the reason why sexism is still so engrained among most men: 'masculinity', what it means, how it is expressed and how it relates to the category of 'femininity', is almost never on the table for discussion among men. They are just too busy talking about capitalism or the end of it. In the meantime, women like myself who have a strong desire to be politically active, find themselves questioning whether there is any hope for positive change when people who are supposed to be caring, compassionate and respectful insist on treating others as some kind of second class type of human being.

# What it is to be a Girl in an Anarchist Boys Club

From *Alphabet Threat*

- You act as if you think nothing will get done if you don't do it.
- I don't trust physicality that you initiate BUT at the same time I want all of us to be more physical-playful-affectionate with each other.
- I can and do defend myself against all sorts of verbal attacks until it is something sexual from someone I know and like and trust and then sometimes I pretend I'm amused or like it or don't mind or something. I'm confused by my inability to deal when I've practised and want to, and by your inability to recognize your behavior as sexual oppression.
- O.K. I'm way intimidated by lots of loud boys in a group.
- Everything I say out loud in a group is pre-planned, composed. I'm not spontaneous 'cuz yeah I'm shy but mostly I don't trust you to listen without interrupting, treat what I say as valued if I'm not rehearsed.
- I don't want to be squashed.
- I'm out-numbered. My allies are silent around you.
- You are approached to answer questions for our group, make decisions and announcements. You even think it is okay to define our group to visitors, strangers. Somehow you aren't ever questioned by the group for this behavior.
- I've stopped believing that you are "sorry" or are "working on it."
- I'm putting less and less energy, at age 25, into heated discussions and reacting to/educating people with stupid behavior. I'm tired of correcting sexism. There are other things I need to put my energy into –my creativity, my search for meaning, personal relationships. Men (and all people with a sub/consciousness who say women are less able) need to feel how sexism limits them. Men need to stop feeling self righteous and defensive (classic reactions to even a third person comment about gender inequity) and look honestly at their ways. How does sexism limit a man?
- Why do I hafta be the bitch?
- Yeah. I'm pissed off.
- Maybe a "group" discussion dominated by two or three people ISN'T.

- D.I.Y. or do it all by yourself?
- Why don't you wonder about girls not getting involved, or leaving, or sitting in silence?
- A body count is not gender balance.
- I don't fucking want the responsibility of policing for sexism. Get over it because it sucks, not just because I'm in the room right now.
- Feminist perspective is not just for women or special occasions.
- You are not the boss. Get over yourself.
- When I assert myself you get to think that it is as easy for me as for you, as easy for all women as for me. Wrong.
- Prob'ly you think that THIS group (yeah this one) doesn't have any gender issues or sexism.
- Sometimes I think that feminist issues, women's groups and projects exist both to pacify and occupy and distract me.
- Just shut the fuck up a little. Once in a while.
- I'm so fed up with the games and bullshit that I'm ready to work with mainstream groups or alone or somewhere else or not at all.
- Its like you think that calling yourself an anarchist makes you clean and pure and no longer subject to self examination or criticism. You've make the term repulsive to me.
- Why am I the only one who knows how to nurture?
- You prob'ly think this song is about you, don't you? Don't you? Don't you?
- I get the feeling that you are threatened. And scared. Good.
- When the women in our group decide to get together you hafta know why and how and what gets said. None of your beeswax.
- You complain that you feel left out when the women get together. So. I feel surrounded in a "mixed" group right now.
- I just don't wanna tolerate this shit anymore.
- Why, when you confront sexism, is it cause for celebration?
- It is time for me to be with women. I've spent my life in a world defined by men, learning from men, relating to men, reading men, trying to write and talk like men, being around men.
- If you feel threatened 'cuz me and my sistahs are pissed off and together maybe you gots a good reason to run. That's right.

FOR RIOTEOUS LAUGHS TRY SUBSTITUTING "QUEER" OR "NON-WHITE" FOR GIRL, HET OR WHITE FOR BOYS

# What's New under the Black Flag?: Some Thoughts on Anti-Sexism in the Libertarian Movement

By Klito, a women-only feminist collective.

There's still a lot to do if we are really going to fight against patriarchy within libertarian groups. Klito, a women-only collective, sees some problems and wants to suggest some courses of action. We, as libertarian feminists, want to sound an alarm. We denounce the double workday of women workers who, once they get home, get stuck with household chores, but also among libertarians, there is the double struggle of women. The struggle against patriarchy requires two times as much energy as other battles because we must fight not only on the social front but also within the political groups in which we work as activists. Who puts the labels on the envelopes? Sweeps the meeting rooms? The women, usually. Who coordinates the demos? Who speaks louder at the meetings? The men, usually.

In the libertarian groups of France, women's issues are certainly taken into consideration but not in a very satisfactory way. When groups mobilize for International Women's Day or against the "right-to-lifers," we can ask ourselves what the real place is of the anti-patriarchy struggle in the practices and thought of libertarian groups in France. We have no false illusions about this—libertarians reproduce gender and sexual domination like everyone else. Since we claim to be fighting this domination, it would be a good idea to focus on its presence amongst ourselves. Ignoring this phenomenon is the best way to make it worse.

## A little history

A look at history shows us that the anarchist movement has not considered feminism one of its major concerns. Although Bakunin, for example, advocated complete equality between woman and men and denounced the contradiction in many male militants who fought for socio-economic equality and freedom while being tyrants at home, Proudhon, on the other hand, pillar of the libertarian movement, was a notorious misogynist. This author of a sentences like "the woman is a pretty animal but an animal nonetheless. She is as eager for kisses as a goat is for salt," is still the master thinker for many. There have always been homophobic anarchists, as well, who argue that homosexuality represents a "bourgeois perversion." Emma Goldman described the obstacles against her when she raised this issue: "Censorship came from some of my own comrades because I was treating such 'unnatural' themes as homosexuality," she related in 1912. The shell of the idea of sexual liberation has often been resuscitated but without its anti-patriarchy value. For most militants, in 1936 as in 1970, it has meant above all the sexual availability of women militants and feminists for meeting male desires.



## **Invisible women**

The problem of gender is rarely an integral part of anti-capitalist and anti-racist discourse and struggle. Starting with the good old sexist principle that the male supersedes the female, the unemployed are defended without their defenders realizing that they are WOMEN unemployed workers, above all, and that women are twice as exploited as men on the job. The same thing is true in the movement to defend undocumented immigrants (sans-papiers)—women are invisible despite the fact that their situation is always worse than men's. Sometimes this absence is justified by the fact that the issue of gender comes out of a bourgeois theory praising inter-classism. We need an exacting analytical method to comprehend the inequalities between men and women, between heterosexuals and others. The misunderstanding of this issue is produced in several ways. This invisibility of women's oppression, in particular, comes primarily from the fact that many libertarians (men and women) have a compartmentalized vision of struggles as if women's issues could be reduced to one area of struggle.

Although in the struggles against the bosses, against poverty and economic instability, or for freedom of movement and immigrant rights, women are the first effected, it is rarely mentioned in political literature, for example, to what they are subjected because of their sex. The issue of gender runs through ALL struggles! To believe as many do that gender issues are reserved for women only (while saying to women, at best, that they "support them in their struggle") allows them to clear themselves of any charges of not participating in the fight against patriarchy. The "women's commissions" of some libertarian groups, like the social-democrat parties, indeed reveal the implicit disengagement of men. The Mujeres Libres (Free Women) movement during the Spanish civil war was a unique example of massive struggle by anarchist women. But let's remember that this group of 20,000 proletarian feminists encountered resistance from their male counterparts, who thought that the women workers were stealing their place as men and did not accept, in particular, that the Free Women critiqued the glorification of motherhood. You say there's no hierarchy of struggle?

## **Patriarchy and capitalism**

Paradoxically, another, more subtle way of excluding feminism from struggles in progress is to include the patriarchy theme as a "natural" part of the class struggle. For some, being an anarchist automatically makes you a feminist. To consider patriarchy an avatar or a consequence of capitalism alone is to refuse to see the specificity of this gender-based system. We must remember that when we struggle against the class system, we are struggling against ALL domination! Capitalism is not the sum total of oppression (our fight for a better world would much easier if it were). The struggle against patriarchy is a struggle in its own right. Although patriarchy and capitalism are interwoven and reinforced by each other, we must admit that they are two autonomous systems (some patriarchal systems are built on non-capitalist economies). There are thereby two struggles, at least, which we must carry out in parallel.

Few libertarian feminists denounce these weaknesses, without doubt because they have internalized the same invisibility all women have under patriarchy. There are certainly more men than women in anarchist groups, and while the fact that women investing little time in politics is a social phenomenon, the violent and warlike image associated with those who brandish the

black flag comes from somewhere, no doubt. Does keeping this masculine “folklore” alive really make any sense? Besides, it is difficult for many women to see themselves as part of a group of women because they are persuaded that they are living a social reality identical to men’s, which allows the building of cohesive militant groups. Women who attempt to point out these oppression issues within the group are labelled “feminist,” which means for many “habitual pain-in-the-ass.” This scorn for the issue of patriarchy illustrates how difficult it is to confront the myths upon which political groups depend, such as “power issues do not exist in this group,” “there’s no domination of some members by others,” etc. It is time to recognize that a militant group is not immune from the ills of society.

## **Gender? Don’t know...**

It’s a shame that the analysis of some libertarians is limited to the status of women without taking into account the social construction of gender. Most libertarians do not get beyond essentialist theories based on biological behavioural differences that seem to explain (without justifying, of course) male domination. However, nature alone could not have created the categories of men and women as they exist. We are not born as men or women; we become one or the other. From our infancy, family, school and society in general inculcate us with our roles according to our biological sex. Girls are taught the value of sweetness, understanding, submission and passivity and boys those of violence, bravery, self-affirmation. Taking this conditioning into account allows us to reject biological determinism and “natural” feminine and masculine qualities. The construction of gender that feminism has widely appropriated, including the reformists, has not been accepted by libertarians. It is easier to unite based on a common exterior enemy (religion, fascists who scoff at laws protecting women, and the bosses who exploit women) than challenge each other individually by grappling with the power relations that exist within libertarian organizations. Not only do most libertarian groups not challenge patriarchy—they feed it.

## **Sexuality is political**

This deficiency in libertarian practice in regard to feminism produces, in addition to discrimination against women, a negation of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans-sexuals (LGBT). Do they even exist in libertarian circles? Of course they do, just like everywhere else in society. Nevertheless, we ask such a question because they are invisible. Under cover of respect for individual freedom, some people declare that the private is not political and impose a taboo on discussions about sexuality. They refuse to consider that sexuality is culturally constructed, an essential fact today thanks to the struggles of the Seventies. Refusing to talk about issues around some sexual behaviours reveals a prudishness sometimes bordering on puritanism. Some people decree that we can all do what we want in our own beds, but they’d rather not talk about it because it has nothing to do with politics.

However, raunchy songs, sexist jokes and lesbo-gay-bi-transphobia are still rampant among some anarchists, reinforcing the reigning hetero-centrism. They denigrate some sexual behaviours and keep alive the lesbo-gay-bi-transphobic atmosphere that depends on the idea that heterosexuality is the only model. Today, to declare oneself lesbian, trans, bi or gay in a libertarian organization has a risk (as much as at work or in our families) that many don’t dare

to take. This is nothing new in the history of libertarian struggles. Feminist movements, lesbian, homo and queer struggles have moved things forward a little, but it is necessary to keep fighting. Nothing will evolve without putting in place effective methods—in particular, the creation of non-mixed groups of women and men as spaces for political reflection on power over/under relations, in particular men/women and heteros/LGBT.

It is not enough to want to destroy capitalism and patriarchy as represented by the bosses and moral order, but we must change behaviours right here and now. In the libertarian movement and elsewhere, nothing will change without the mobilization of the interested parties: women, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, the trans-gendered; and the involvement of men and heteros is imperative if the latter want to be consistent in their libertarian thought.

## **You want to know why I don't go to your fucking meetings anymore?!**

Some women (maybe a lot of women) get this feeling that if they don't do something, no one will do it, so therefore they must do it. For example, "If I don't cook for this conference then nobody will cook for this conference and then all of the people will not be fed, so I must cook for this conference even if it means that I miss a good portion of it." [That, by the way, is a real story and I did actually miss what I consider to be the best part of the conference because I was in the kitchen.]

I don't know what motivates most (privileged) activists to do what they do. I know what used to motivate me. It was that feeling that a better world was possible, and if I didn't make my vital contributions to the collective 'we', then no one else would. So, while that "if I don't no one else will" caused me to be complacent and complicit in some pretty fucked up sexist situations (how the fuck are you gonna shut me up in a kitchen while you rock out at some conference? fuck you!), it was also my driving force. It was the reason I commuted 40 minutes every day from Wilmington, Delaware, to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and then spent another 20 minutes trying to find parking so that I could attend 6 or so hours of meetings just to go home to sleep a few hours and wake up for school in Delaware the next morning. I was needed, my contributions were appreciated, so I felt an obligation to be there. And I loved it.

Then I moved to Washington, DC.

The anarchist elite of Washington, DC, made it very clear to me that my participation was not needed and it was not welcome. The fact that I had to fight (unsuccessfully) to get into a pre-action meeting (to save their sorry asses by giving them a vital piece of info from the legal office – the new phone number) screamed at me that I was not welcome. [All in the name of security culture. Fuck security culture.] The fact that I was invited to one secret anarchist meeting (which was secret for no reason other than to stroke the cocks of the people involved) but not the other one or two other secret anarchist meetings of the same group tells me that my contribution is obviously not necessary or welcome (because it was kept a secret from me).

When I speak at a meeting (I should say "spoke", as I am not welcome at their meetings and therefore don't go) and one of three things always happens (no one responds and the subject is changed, my point is shot down, or the meeting is adjourned as soon as my last word is out of my mouth) then it is obvious that my contributions are neither necessary nor important nor welcome.

When their ignorance and refusal to listen and process what I say causes me to repeat myself (often over and over until I just quit), it is very obvious that they do not want to hear and process what I am saying, and that they would rather that I not speak at all.

And you wonder why there aren't more people in "your" movement. Why do people only come to one meeting and then never come back? Probably because they have better things to

do that put up with your not-so-subtle hints that they're morons and have absolutely nothing to contribute to your white boy revolution.

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Various Authors  
Feminism and Sexism in the Anarchist Movement  
A Collection of Essays  
8<sup>th</sup> March 2011

Retrieved on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2021 from [awarenetz.ch](http://awarenetz.ch)  
The collection of texts that make up this pamphlet were found on the website of the No  
Pretence anarcha-feminist group found at [nopretence.wordpress.com](http://nopretence.wordpress.com).

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