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ABSTRACT: While literature on intersectionality proliferates, mention of anarchafeminism, which is a feminist tradition that focuses on the intersectional nature of female oppression, is scarce to say the least. This *feminist* strand of anarchism has largely been neglected both within feminism and the left. I argue that anarchafeminism is a particularly timely form of feminism because it is able to articulate a feminism free of essentialism. Furthermore, I argue that an ontology of the transindividual is the best possible philosophical ally for this project.

KEYWORDS: feminism; anarchism; materialism; transindividuality; ontology; coloniality of gender; state power; Spinoza, Baruch

Anarchafeminism & the Ontology of the Transindividual

CHIARA BOTTICI

WHY ANARCHA-FEMINISM?

It has become something of a commonplace to argue that in order to fight the oppression of women, it is necessary to unpack the ways in which different forms of oppression intersect with one another. No single factor, be it nature or nurture, economic exploitation or cultural domination, can be said to be the *single* cause sufficient to explain the multifaceted sources of patriarchy and sexism. Consequently, intersectionality has become the guiding principle for an increasing number of left-wing feminists from both the global north and south. As a result, most publications in gender theory today have engaged with the concept of intersectionality in one way or another — whether to promote it, to criticize it, or simply to position oneself with regards to it.

Yet, strikingly enough, in all the literature engaging with intersectionality there is barely any mention of the feminist tradition of the past that has argued for exactly the same point for a very long time: anarchist feminism or, as I prefer to call it, '*anarchAfeminism*.' This specific term was introduced by social movements who wanted to feminize the concept and, in so doing, provide more visibility to a specifically feminist strand within anarchist theory and practice. This anarchafeminist

tradition, which has largely been neglected both in academia and in public debate generally, has a particularly vital contribution to offer today.

To begin, together with queer theory's ground-breaking work aimed at dismantling the gender binary of 'men' and 'women', it is important to vindicate once again the need for a form of feminism that opposes the oppression of people who are *perceived as* women and who are discriminated precisely on that basis. Notice here that I am using the term 'woman' in a way that includes all types of women: AFAB women,¹ AMAB women, feminine women, masculine women, lesbian women, trans women, queer women, and so on and so forth. Despite the alleged equality of formal rights, women are still the object of constant discrimination, and the advancement of queer rights can be accompanied by a retrogression in regard to women's battles. The emergence of right-wing figures such as Milo Yiannopoulos showed that one can support gay and queer rights and still be a misogynist. But the most infamous data about the continued oppression of women, even in a context such as the US where we have come to expect improvements in queer rights, are the data about violence against women and bodies that are perceived as feminine: there are currently between 126 and 160 million 'missing girls' from the global population.² Trans women are more likely to be raped and suffer violence than trans men, so much so that the term 'transmisogyny' has been created in order to point to situations in which transphobia and misogyny meet and mutually reinforce each other.

Therefore, far from viewing feminism as an issue of the past, it has become more imperative than ever to connect this standpoint with

1 I am using the terms 'Assigned Female at Birth' (AFAB) and 'Assigned Male at Birth' (AMAB) to signal the fact that by speaking about 'male' and 'female' we implicitly accept the state sanctioned view according to which our gender corresponds to the sex assigned to us at birth. Notice here how the (almost always binary) gender system and the state apparatus are tightly interwoven, since it is through our state IDs and passports that a gender identity is attached to our lives.

2 The 'missing girls' are not counted in the hundreds, or thousands, but in the millions. As of today, there are somewhere between 126 to 160 million girls missing from the global population as a consequence of sex-selective abortion, infanticide, and inequalities of care (see <<https://www.unfpa.org/gender-biased-sex-selection>> and <<https://lozierinstitute.org/sex-selection-abortion-the-real-war-on-women/>> [accessed 13 May 2020]).

the oppression of all bodies perceived as ‘femina’. However, such a standpoint must be supported by an articulation of women’s liberation that does not create further hierarchies, and this is precisely where anarchafeminism is useful. While other feminists from the left have been tempted to explain the oppression of women on the basis of a single factor, anarchists have always been clear in arguing that, in order to overcome the patriarchal order, we have to fight the multifaceted ways in which diverse factors — economic, cultural, racial, political, etc. — converge to uphold it.

The neglect, if not outright historical amnesia, that the important leftist tradition of anarchism has been faced with is certainly the result of this viewpoint being banned in academia and public debates in general, where it has most often been misleadingly portrayed as little more than a call for violence and disorder. This ban has been enacted to the detriment of historical accuracy, global inclusiveness, and political efficacy.

My proposal is to remedy such a gap by formulating a specific anarchafeminist approach adapted to the challenges of our time.³ My aim is not only to make the anarchafeminist tradition more visible as an important component of past women’s struggles, and therefore re-establish a kind of historical continuity which has been missing to date, even though this would certainly be a worthwhile endeavour. Besides historical accuracy, recovering anarchafeminist insights has the crucial function of enlarging feminist strategies precisely in a moment when, as intersectional feminists have argued, different factors increasingly converge to intensify the oppression of women by creating further class, cultural, and racial divisions among them.

3 A first version of this essay was presented at the Night of Philosophy in New York City on 26 January 2018 and then at the UNESCO Night of Philosophy on 15 November 2018. An extract of the talk was published in *Liberation* on 15 November 2018 <https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2018/11/15/nuit-de-la-philosophie-pour-un-anarcha-feminisme_1692047> [accessed 12 April 2020], whereas a full version appeared on Public Seminar 7 March 2018 <<http://www.publicseminar.org/2018/03/anarchafeminism/>> [accessed 13 April 2020]. A Spanish translation of the latter by Miguel Ibáñez Aristondo appeared on 12 September 2018 in *ReporteSextoPiso* <<http://reportesp.mx/anarcafeminismo-chiara-bottici>> [accessed 13 April 2020], a French translation by Jeanne Etelain et Anaïs Nony in the journal *La Deleuziana*, 8 (2018) <<http://www.ladeleuziana.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Bottici-1.pdf>> [accessed 13 April 2020], and an Italian translation in *Per cosa lottare. Le frontiere del progressismo*, edited by Enrico Biale and Corrado Fumagalli (Milano: Fondazione Giacomo Feltrinelli, 2019).

In a time in which feminism is often accused of being mere white privilege, this task is more crucial than ever. The emancipation of women from the global north can indeed happen at the expense of women from the global south, whose reproductive labour within the household is often used to replace the labour previously performed by the now 'emancipated' women. It is precisely through the adoption of such a global perspective, which is all the more necessary today because of the increased mobility of capital and labour forces, that the chain connecting gendered labour across the globe becomes more apparent, and the timeliness of anarchafeminism as an intersectional approach along with it. To put it concisely, we need a more multifaceted approach to domination. In particular, we need an approach that is able to incorporate different factors as well as the different voices coming from all over the globe. As Chinese anarchafeminist He Zhen wrote at the dawn of the twentieth century in her *Problems of Women's Liberation*:

The majority of women are already oppressed by both the government and by men. The electoral system simply increases their oppression by introducing a third ruling group: elite women. Even if the oppression remains the same, the majority of women are still taken advantage of by the minority of women. [...] When a few women in power dominate the majority of powerless women, unequal class differentiation is brought into existence among women. If the majority of women do not want to be controlled by men, why would they want to be controlled by women? Therefore, instead of competing with men for power, women should strive for overthrowing men's rule. Once men are stripped of their privilege, they will become the equal of women. There will be no submissive women nor submissive men. This is the liberation of women.⁴

These words from 1907 show how prophetic and relevant anarchafeminism is, and they present the answer to our question: why anarchafeminism? They show that anarchafeminism is the best antidote against the possibility of feminism becoming white privilege and thus a tool in the hands of a few women who dominate the vast majority of them.

4 He Zhen, 'Women's Liberation', in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, ed. by Robert Graham, 3 vols (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005), 1, pp. 336–41 (p. 341).

In an epoch when the election of a woman president is presented as a liberation for *all* women, or when women such as Ivanka Trump can lay claim to feminist battles of the past by transforming the hashtag *#womenwhowork* into a tool to sell a fashion brand, the fundamental message of the anarchafeminists of the past is more urgent than ever: 'Feminism doesn't mean female corporate power or a woman President; it means no corporate power and no Presidents.'⁵

THE ONTOLOGY OF THE TRANSINDIVIDUAL

At this point, one may object: why insist on the concept of feminism and not just call this anarchism? Why focus on women? If the purpose is to dismantle all types of oppressive hierarchies, should we not also get rid of the gender binary which, by opposing 'women' to 'men,' imprisons us in a heteronormative matrix?

I should make it clear immediately that when I write 'women' I do not mean some supposed object, or eternal essence, or, even less so, a pre-given object. Indeed, to articulate a specifically feminist position while maintaining a multifaceted understanding of domination, we, as feminists, require a more nuanced understanding of 'womanhood'. By drawing upon insights from an ontology of the transindividual, I will argue that bodies in general, and women's bodies in particular, must be considered as processes rather than as objects that are given once and for all. We are not things, we are relations. Women's bodies, like all bodies, are bodies in plural because they are processes, processes that are constituted by mechanisms of affects and associations that occur at the *inter-*, *intra-*, and the *supra-*individual level. To give just a brief example of what I mean here, think of how our bodies come into being through an *inter-*individual encounter, how they are shaped by *supra-*individual forces, such as their geographical location, and how they are made up of *intra-*individual bodies such as the air we breathe, the food we eat, or the hormones we swallow.

There can be different roads to articulate an ontology of the transindividual. In Europe, the term has been at the centre of discussions arising from Étienne Balibar's reading of Baruch Spinoza's

5 Peggy Kornegger, 'Anarchism: The Feminist Connection', in *Quiet Rumors: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader*, ed. by Dark Star (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2012), pp. 25–35 (p. 31).

ontology as well as the result of a resurgence of interest in the philosophy of Gilbert Simondon.⁶ These two strands of the debate on the transindividual have at times unfolded separately, and at times converged, as with Balibar's philosophy, since it is from Simondon that Balibar derived the notion of transindividuality which he uses to interpret Spinoza's *Ethics*.⁷ In this article, I mainly draw inspiration from Balibar's insight that Spinoza's concept of individuality is best understood as transindividuality (1997), and from Moira Gatens's feminist readings of such an ontology, according to which the most monist of all ontologies — Spinoza's — is also the most pluralist.⁸

The starting point for Spinoza's philosophy is that there is being rather than nothing.⁹ Indeed, he writes that not to exist is to lack power, and to be able to exist is to have power. Thus, if what necessarily exists are only finite beings, then finite beings are more powerful than an absolutely infinite being, which is absurd. Therefore, he concludes that either nothing exists or an absolutely infinite being exists. But we exist, either in ourselves or in something else, which necessarily exists. Therefore, an absolutely infinite being necessarily exists.¹⁰ This is, in my view, the most beautiful lesson of Spinozism: if there are twenty people in a room, then an absolutely infinite being necessarily exists.¹¹

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- 6 Besides Étienne Balibar, *Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality* (Delft: Eburon, 1997), explored below, more recent influential views include: Balibar and Vittorio Morfino, *Il transindividuale: soggetti, relazioni, mutazioni* (Milano: Mimesis, 2014); Balibar, 'Philosophies of the Transindividual: Spinoza, Marx, Freud', trans. by Mark G. E. Kelly, *Australasian Philosophical Review*, 2.1 (2018), pp. 5–25; Jason Read, *The Politics of Transindividuality* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Daniela Voss, 'Disparate Politics: Balibar and Simondon', *Australasian Philosophical Review*, 2.1 (2018), pp. 47–53 — who expands on Gilbert Simondon's concept of transindividuality, by comparing it with Balibar's view — and Muriel Combes, *Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transindividual*, trans. by Thomas LaMarre (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), the first monograph fully devoted to Simondon and the philosophy of the transindividual.
- 7 Spinoza does not explicitly use the term transindividual or transindividuality, so for those who like to trace the origins of this ontology of the transindividual, one should follow Balibar, *Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality*, which explicitly draws inspiration from Simondon, *L'Individuation psychique et collective* (Paris: Aubier, 1989), which, in turn, coined the expression 'transindividuality'.
- 8 Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power, and Corporeality* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 56–57.
- 9 *Ethics* I, Def. 1; CWS [*The Collected Works of Spinoza*, see [abbreviations](#)], I, p. 408.
- 10 *Ethics* I, 11 Dem.; CWS I, pp. 417–18.
- 11 The argument of the twenty persons is used in *Ethics* I, 8, Schol. 2, CWS I, p. 415, where Spinoza starts adding some a posteriori elements to the a priori proof for the existence of an infinite substance developed in Propositions 1 to 7 of Part I.

But this also implies that there is an infinite unique substance that expresses itself through an infinity of 'attributes', where the latter term stands for what the intellect perceives of the substance as constituting its essence.¹² Among the infinity of such attributes, those that are accessible to humans (at least under current conditions) are thought and extension. A single thought is therefore just a mode of the attribute of thought, whereas a single body is a mode of the attribute of extension.

But, in order to avoid any possible misunderstanding, I should clarify that this does not mean that thought and extension, or ideas and things, are separate or even parallel to one another. Spinoza clearly states that '[t]he order and connection of ideas is the same [*idem*] as the order and connection of things';¹³ thought and extension are the same (*idem*), not parallel to one another, and it is even less true that they are two different substances. It is important to emphasize this because whenever we speak about mind and body, or ideas and things, our long-inherited dualistic metaphysical framework tends to surreptitiously creep in. The first step in order to get to a truly pluralistic conception of the body is to get rid of this framework, and thus of the idea that a body is something different, parallel, or opposite to a mind. When we say 'a body' we do not mean something separate or even opposed to 'a mind' or 'a soul'. 'Body' and 'mind' are just modes expressing two different attributes of the same substance.

This also leads us to the specific understanding of individuality as transindividuality which one can develop by drawing inspiration from Spinoza, particularly from the sort of compendium of his physics that he put forward in Part II of the *Ethics*, where his eccentric materialism fully emerges.¹⁴ If thought and extension are just two of the infinite attributes of the unique substance, then we cannot speak of a materialist ontology without immediately adding that it is not the brute, inanimate, static matter that is at stake here. Spinoza's materialism is an eccentric form of what we might call a 'spiritual materialism', precisely because extension and thought are just two of the infinite attributes of the same substance.

12 *Ethics* I, Def. 4; CWS I, p. 408.

13 *Ethics* II, 7; CWS I, p. 451.

14 *Ethics* II, 13–15; CWS I, pp. 457–63.

Within such an ontology, individual things (*res singulares*) exist only as a consequence of the existence of other individual things¹⁵ with which they participate in an infinite network of connections.¹⁶ Notice here that this view also implies that causality must not be understood in the sense of a linear succession of events, but rather as a multiplicity of connections linking individuals, which are themselves made up of more simple and more complex individuals that are all causally related. As a consequence, every individual is constantly composed and decomposed by other individuals with whom it enters into contact through a process of individuation, which involves *infra*-individual, *inter*-individual, and *supra*-individual levels.¹⁷ In order to render this complexity, Balibar argued, individuality must be understood as transindividuality.

In this understanding, individuals are therefore never atoms, events, let alone subjects that are given once and for all. They are processes, the result of constant movements of association and repulsion that connect more simple individuals with other simple individuals, but also with more complex ones that constantly make and unmake bodies. To get a crude but efficient sense of what I mean here, think of how animal bodies are composed and decomposed by the liquids that traverse them; we drink, but we perspire, we urinate, we are constantly processing liquids by which in turn we are being processed. Similarly, human individuals are constantly composed by the molecules that we breath in and out of our bodies through a transindividual process of association and attraction linking different forms of human, animal, and vegetative life into the same network. Notice that within this monist ontology the same holds true for thoughts; as individuals, bodies are the result of all the modes with the attribute of thought that we constantly encounter, be they the reflections you are reading or the phone conversation you had this morning. To put it even more strongly, the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things, because ideas are nothing but affirmations of the body. Again, observe here how easily one escapes the trap of metaphysical dualism. Since the body and the mind are nothing but

15 *Ethics* I, 28; *CWS* I, pp. 432–33.

16 Balibar, *Spinoza*, p. 27.

17 *Ibid.*

modes within different attributes of the unique substance, no radical separation between a subject of knowledge and its object can subsist. In fact, the very notion of a self-enclosed individual, let alone of a subject, of a Cartesian ego, does not make any sense in this ontology. Human beings do not occupy a privileged position within this ontology, being themselves nothing but more complex individuals than, say, a stone or a chair, because they result from more complex movements of attraction and repulsion between more or less complex individuals. In other words, they are not given entities, but rather processes, webs of affective and imaginal relations that are never given once and for all.

As Gatens has emphasized, this also means that in the process of individuation that generates individuals in general, and human beings in particular, complex dynamics of imaginarity identification become particularly crucial.¹⁸ We constantly meet and recognize or misrecognize ourselves in certain images of the body, which include images that we have of our bodies and of other bodies, as well as images that others have of them and which become constitutive of our own being. For Gatens, the key term for keeping together the mental and the material side of this process is 'the imaginary' and for Spinoza it is 'imagination'. The latter term, in his theory of knowledge, denotes a set of ideas produced on the basis of present or past bodily affections.¹⁹ Following Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd, we can summarize Spinoza's view of imagination by saying that it is a form of bodily awareness, which means awareness of the perceiving body as well as of the perceived bodies encountered and that, as a consequence, it is always, properly speaking, a form of collective imagining.²⁰ In order to avoid misunderstandings,

18 One of the first commentators to point to this constitutive role of imagination in Spinoza was Antonio Negri. See, in particular, his *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysic and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. 86–97. According to Caroline Williams, what is new in this book by Negri, Balibar's *Spinoza and Politics* (London: Verso, 1998), and Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 1999) is that they draw attention to Spinoza's novel, materialist rendering of imagination, without simply dismissing it as a source of errors. See Williams, 'Thinking the Political in the Wake of Spinoza: Power, Affect and Imagination in the Ethics', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 6 (2006), pp. 349–69 (p. 350). What I am trying to do here is to combine the merit of Spinoza's ontology with a theory of the imaginal that more clearly distances itself from the modern philosophy of the subject.

19 *Ethics* II, 26 Dem.; CWS I, p. 469 and *Ethics* II, 40 Schol. 2; CWS I, pp. 477–78.

20 Gatens and Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings*, p. 12.

we should recall that an idea does not only consist of mental content. Imagination has a bodily grounding, because the mind is just the body that is felt and thought. Furthermore, according to Spinoza, an idea is 'a conception of the mind.'²¹

Notice here that while Gatens's feminist interpretation of Spinoza focuses on the specifically human usage of this capacity to imagine, there is nothing within this conception that prevents us from extending Spinoza's understanding of imagination to all other forms of extension, or, in more contemporary terms, of materiality. Despite the different forms that this idea could take, there is no a priori reason in this ontology to assume that thinking and imagining would be a prerogative of the human. I also want to point out that while Spinoza uses the typically modern concept of imagination, which, in the history of western philosophy, is imbued with humanism, we can certainly reformulate his insights in terms of a theory of the imaginal. In particular, it is with regards to what Gatens called 'imaginary bodies', and what I would like to call 'imaginal bodies', that we can understand the psychological side of the process of individuation described above. Whenever a body encounters another body, which can be a simple body, like a glass of water, or a more complex one, like another animal, a change in its own constitution will occur. It is in this sense, and in order to keep together what happens at the *infra*, *inter*-, and *supra*-individual level, that the notion of transindividuality becomes particularly helpful. In sum, bodies are always necessarily bodies in plural, both social and individual at the same time, because their individuality is always and inevitably a form of transindividuality. But if bodies are always transindividual processes, then we also need a theory that is able to conceptualize our capacity to imagine without falling into the false alternative between theories of imagination as an individual faculty and theories of the imaginary as a social context. And it is precisely at this point that, as I hope I have shown, the concept of the imaginal becomes particularly useful.²²

21 Ethics II, Def. 3; CWS I, p. 447.

22 I have developed the concept of the imaginal as an alternative to theories of imagination understood as an individual faculty and theories of the imaginary understood as a social context, in Chiara Bottici, *Imaginal Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

I would like to list the benefits of such an ontological shift towards transindividuality as the prism through which individuality must be understood. Firstly, instead of elaborating a form of feminism and then having to add ecology as something different from feminism itself, here the two positions are unified from the beginning because, in an ontology of the transindividual, the environment is not something separated from us but, rather, the environment *is* us — literally something constitutive of our individuality. Secondly, imaginal collective formations such as sex, race, and class are from the beginning conceptualized as constitutive of our individuality, and thus as intimately intertwined. Thirdly, when women's bodies are theorized as processes, as sites of a process of becoming that takes place at different levels, we can speak about 'women' without incurring the charge of essentialism or culturalism. There is no place here for the opposition between sex (nature) and gender (culture) because there is no place for body-mind dualism. Lastly, by adopting this transindividual ontology, we can also use the concept of woman outside of any heteronormative framework, and thus use the term such that it includes all types of women: feminine women, masculine women, AFAB women, AMAB women, lesbian women, bisexual women, trans women, cis women, asexual women, queer women, and so on and so forth. In sum, 'women' encompasses all bodies that identify themselves and are identified through the always changing narrative of 'womanhood'.

To conclude this point, a transindividual framework allows us to answer the question 'what is a woman?' in pluralistic terms while also defending a specifically feminist form of anarchism. Developing the concept of women as a series of open processes also means going beyond the dichotomy of the individual *versus* the collective: if it is true that all bodies are transindividual processes, then the assumption that there could be such a thing as a pure individual, separate, or even opposed, to a given collective, is at best a useless abstraction and at worst a deceitful phantasy.

WHICH WOMEN? AND WHICH ANARCHAFEMINISM?

Adopting an anarchafeminist lens entails taking the entire globe as the framework for thinking about the liberation of women. This im-

plies going beyond any form of methodological nationalism, that is, privileging certain women and thus certain national or regional contexts. If fighting the oppression of women means we have to fight all forms of oppression, then statism and nationalism are no exceptions. If one begins by looking at the dynamics of exploitation by taking state boundaries as an unquestionable fact, one ends up reinforcing the very oppression one meant to question in the first place. A slogan for this proposal might look something like: 'the globe first.' Adopting anything less than the entire globe as our framework is at best naive provincialism and at worst obnoxious ethnocentrism.

Whereas several feminist theories produced in the global north have failed to understand the extent to which the emancipation of white, middle-class women happened at the expense of a renewed oppression of working-class racialized bodies, anarchafeminists have traditionally adopted a more inclusive perspective. It is no coincidence that many anarchist theorists, from Pjotr Alexejewitsch Kropotkin to Paul Reclus, have been geographers and/or anthropologists. By exploring the processes of production and reproduction of life independent of state boundaries and on a planetary scale, these authors not only were able to avoid the pitfalls of any form of methodological nationalism, but could also perceive the global interconnectedness of forms of domination, beginning with the intertwinement of capitalist exploitation and colonial domination.

A tangential remark I would like to offer here is that while one can use labels such as Latin American or Chinese anarchafeminism, I believe that those labels must be used as ladders to be abandoned as soon as we have reached the top. The vitality of the anarchafeminist tradition consists precisely in its capacity to transcend state boundaries, methodological nationalism, and even the Eurocentric biases that persist throughout most of the radical theory produced in the global north. It is very revealing, for instance, that most of the feminist tools, whether rooted in Marxist feminism, post-structuralist feminism, or radical feminism, derive from theories produced in a very small number of countries. We can actually name and count them on one hand: France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, and perhaps Italy. To combat this Eurocentric trend, and the subsequent privileging of Western Europe in building frameworks of emancipation, it is pivotal

to bring texts produced by anarchists worldwide to the centre of the discussion. This global inclusion is the only way to insure a form of feminism beyond Eurocentrism and beyond ethnocentrism.

THE COLONIALITY OF GENDER: ANOTHER WOMAN IS POSSIBLE

If we take the globe as our framework, the first striking datum to emerge is that people across the globe have not always been *doing* gender, and, moreover, even if they did *do* it, they have *done* it on very different terms depending on where they lived. It is only with the emergence of a worldwide capitalist system that the gender binary of ‘men’ versus ‘women’ gained worldwide hegemony. This does not mean that sexual difference did not exist before capitalism, nor does it imply that we should indulge in the nostalgia of a gender fluid past. It simply means taking note of the historically situated nature of the current gender regime, and, in particular, of the fact that binary gender roles were not as universally accepted as the primary criteria through which bodies were classified, as they are today. Modern capitalism made the mononuclear bourgeois family — with its binary gender roles — hegemonic, and the modern sovereign state with its bureaucratic apparatus sealed that gender binary on us through state IDs and passports.

Marxist feminists have long emphasized that capitalism needs a gendered division of labour because, as it is predicated on the endless expansion of profit, it needs both the extraction of surplus value from waged productive labour as well as unpaid reproductive labour, which is still largely performed by gendered bodies. To put it bluntly, capitalism needs ‘women’. It relies on the assumption that when women are washing their husband’s and children’s socks, they are not ‘working’ but merely performing a function ordained for them by nature.

As Maria Mies, among others, has emphasized, perceiving women’s care work as the consequence of their nature, instead of as the actual work it is, is pivotal to maintaining the division between ‘waged labour’, which is subject to exploitation, and ‘unwaged labour’, which is subject to what she, along with others, has termed ‘super-exploitation.’²³ This form of gendered exploitation is ‘super’ because,

23 Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

whereas the exploitation of waged labour takes place through the extraction of surplus value, the exploitation of women's domestic labour takes place via denying their work *the very status of work*.

By building on these types of insights, Maria Lugones put forward the very useful concept of the 'coloniality of gender'.²⁴ She uses this concept to emphasize how the 'male/female' binary and the racial classification of bodies were both systems that Europeans exported through the colonial expansion that accompanied the worldwide spread of capitalism. Within the American context, Lugones shows how gender roles were much more flexible and variegated among Native Americans before the arrival of European settlers. Different indigenous nations possess, for instance, a third gender category to positively recognize intersex and queer subjectivities, whereas others, such as the Yuma, attribute gender roles on the basis of dreams, so that a AFAB woman who dreams of weapons is considered and treated, for all practical purposes, as a man. This shows that there has been a systematic intertwinement between the expansion of the capitalist economy, the racial classification of bodies, and gender oppression.

It is manifestly true, and yet all too often forgotten, that to classify people on the basis of their skin colour or their genitalia is not an a priori of the human mind. Classifying bodies on the basis of their sex, as well as classifying them on the basis of their race, implies, among other things, a primacy of the visual register. According to Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, such a primacy is typical of the West, particularly when looked at from the perspective of the Yoruba pre-colonial cultures. As she points out in her seminal work *The Invention of Women*, the Yoruba cultures, for instance, relied much more on the oral transmission of information than on its visualization, and they valued age over all other criteria for social hegemony.²⁵ They did not even have a name to oppose men and women before colonialism: to put it bluntly, they simply did not 'do' gender.

24 Maria Lugones, 'The Coloniality of Gender', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Development: Critical Engagements in Feminist Theory and Practice*, ed. by Wendy Harcourt (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 13–33.

25 Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

Therefore, questioning the coloniality of gender also means questioning the primacy of the visual: it is by seeing bodies that we say ‘here is a woman!’ or ‘that is a man!’ But it is also within such a visual register that we have to operate in order to question hegemonic and heteronormative views of womanhood and thereby open new paths toward subverting them. To propose another slogan, we could say: ‘Another woman is possible; another woman has always already begun.’

AN ONGOING MANIFESTO

These words, ‘another woman is possible; another woman has always already begun’ could indeed be the starting point of a new anarchafeminist manifesto. In contrast to other manifestos, an anarchafeminist one would inevitably need to be open and as ongoing as the transindividual ontology upon which it rests.²⁶ Starting with Errico Malatesta’s insight that anarchism is a *method*, and thus not a *programme*²⁷ that can be given once for all, the writing of such a manifesto could begin with the following points:

FIRST: At the beginning was movement: Anarchism does not mean an absence of order but rather searching for a social order without an ‘orderer’. The main ‘orderer’ of our established ways of thinking about politics is the state. Because we are so accustomed to living in sovereign states we tend to perceive the migration of bodies across the globe as a problem. On the contrary, we should remember that sovereign states are a relatively recent historical phenomenon (for most of humanity, peoples have lived under other types of political formations) and that human beings have been migrating across the Earth since the very appearance of the so-called *Homo sapiens*. *Homo sapiens* is therefore also a *Femina migrans*, or even better, an *Esse migrans*, hence the need for an anarchafeminism beyond boundaries and beyond ethnocentrism.

*SECOND: Just do it:*²⁸ Do not aim to seize state power or wait for the state to give you power, just start exercising your power right

26 In May 2019, a collective writing project called ‘Anarchafeminist Manifesto 1.0’ began on Public Seminar. The readers who are interested are invited to follow at <<https://publicseminar.org/2020/05/anarchafeminist-manifesto-1-0/>>.

27 Errico Malatesta, *L’Anarchia* [1891] (Rome: DataneWS, 2001), p. 39.

28 ‘Just do it’ can also mean to subversively re-appropriate a corporate power logo, and thus re-appropriate what capitalism has stolen from us.

now. Aiming to seize state power, or asking for recognition from the state, means reproducing that very same power structure that needs to be questioned in the first place. This means not only 'think globally, and act locally'; it also means that a little bit of freedom is within everybody's reach and can be exercised in a number of ways that are not mutually exclusive. This could include general strikes, grassroots organizing, civil disobedience, and boycotts, but also resisting gender norms, subverting or playing with them, refusing to comply, and so on and so forth. The latter actions are not simply 'individualist strategies,' as some have labelled them; instead, they are political acts as such, which can go hand in hand with larger projects, as can be seen in the increasing number of women's strikes, communal living spaces, and *queered* families proliferating around the globe. To think about bodies as transindividual processes also means that we should escape the false alternative between individual *versus* collective strategies, and work at all different levels simultaneously. The oppression is global, and so the fight has to be global as well.

THIRD: The end is the means; the means is the end: There cannot and there should not be any fully-fledged political programme for an anarchafeminist manifesto. This does not mean that there cannot and there should not be any site-specific and time-limited political programme: it simply means that there cannot be a unique one fit for all different possible intersections of axes of oppression. If freedom is the end, freedom must also be the means to reach it. Anarchism is a method for thinking as well as for acting, because acting is thinking and thinking is acting. In the same way in which bodies are plural, their oppression is plural as well, and so the strategies of fighting it must be plural as well. As anarchists have been saying for a long time: 'multiply your associations and be free.' In other words, search for freedom in all of your social relations, not simply in electoral and institutional politics, though the latter may also be one of the levels you operate at. But if freedom is both the means and the end, then one can also envisage a world free from the very notion of gender as well as the oppressive structures it generates. Because gendered bodies are still the worldwide objects of exploitation and domination, we need an anarchafeminist manifesto right here and right now. But such a manifesto should be conceived as a ladder that we may well abandon

once we have reached the top. Indeed, it is implicit in the very process of embarking upon such an anarchafeminist project, that we should strive for a world beyond the opposition between men and women and thus, also, in a way, beyond feminism itself.

Chiara Bottici, 'Anarchafeminism & the Ontology of the Transindividual', in *Materialism and Politics*, ed. by Bernardo Bianchi, Emilie Filion-Donato, Marlon Miguel, and Ayşe Yuva, *Cultural Inquiry*, 20 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2021), pp. 215–31 <https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-20_12>

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