

Feminism and Organized Anarchism

Coordenação Anarquista Brasileira

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This document was produced by the Brazilian Anarchist Coordination [Coordenação Anarquista Brasileira] (CAB), a group of anarchist organizations working collaboratively across Brazil. It is translated and reprinted here with the permission of our sister organizations participating in CAB.

The document has also served as an anchor point in recent discussions on feminism within Black Rose / Rosa Negra. We hope that by making this text available in English for the first time, we can increase its reach and impact.

– Black Rose / Rosa Negra

Our Conception of Feminism from the Perspective of Organized Anarchism

The women that are part of the organizations that make up the Brazilian Anarchist Coordinator (CAB) see ourselves as part of a long tradition of anarchist women that have denounced and struggled radically against gender oppression; therefore, the exploitation of labor also acquires a particular form for us. We are part of the many, many anarchist women that, although they have been erased by the history of those from above, have confronted the violence we face as women head on; women who have guided new ways of loving and have problematized the bourgeois family model that is the basis of the system; women who reacted to macho violence, often coming from their own comrades; self-taught women, who promoted literacy and imagined a liberating education, who acted in the press by creating and writing in libertarian newspapers; women who took up arms! These fearless and unsubmitive women fought against an oppressive system for a dignified and free life and sowed seeds of liberation all over the world. There are many anonymous women fighters erased in the history of men. There are many who have gone before us, many who are not with us. We carry their legacy within us.

This story did not begin with us, and it will not end tomorrow. There is a lot of violence and a lot to do.

As anarchists, we believe that feminism and the anti-patriarchal struggle, as well as the anti-racist and anti-colonial struggle, are fundamental strategies to destroy this system. We understand that power relations are structured in specific ways, and it is necessary to understand them if we want to destroy the system of oppression as a whole. We believe in the development of militants that have an active participation in popular organizations; that develop action through direct action and direct democracy. In this sense, we advocate a class struggle oriented and grassroots feminism. Our feminism is a social and collective struggle. We do not believe in a specialization of feminist struggle, instead we believe that feminism must pass through all our organizations; that feminist formulations and methodologies can aim not at individual freedom, but at the conquest of the freedom of each territory and of each oppressed body.

This is our conception.

What are Our Guidelines?

Historically, anarchism has fought against the various oppressions suffered by those from below; therefore, it understood that the oppressed went beyond a restricted class category. By adopting a broad vision of class, anarchism pointed toward the idea that the oppressions to which

we are subjected are structured in the most diverse ways. Thus, the feminism that we claim as anarchists could not have as its center only the idea of class, for example. This approach would lead us to a superficial analysis, in which gender and race would not have relevance, and therefore we would not be close to the social reality that we experience. In the end, such an approach would also not be in accordance with our conception of anarchism.

It is due to analysis restricted to class only that there are, for example, spaces in the black movement where the question of gender is in the background and black women are silenced. Or, on the other hand, by not taking up class, we run the risk of elaborating an analysis separated from the material reality of the black periphery question, for example. In the same way, there are also spaces for women where neither class nor race is discussed, and working women and black women cannot meet, much less identify with the speeches and discussions that take place there. Or, there are certain spaces where class is central, issues of race and gender are in the background, and white and non-white women do not feel comfortable or identified at all.

We understand that gender oppression is correlated with the issue of race and class, and this is something that changes according to the social and material contexts in which subjects are inserted. In this sense, the idea of “intersectionality” serves us as an instrument of analysis of domination, helping us to understand certain issues. In this sense, we understand that oppressions are transversal (they cut across and are crossed by other oppressions), being present in all areas of our lives and society. However, we cannot start from there and confuse this transversal character with the idea that oppressions are totally homogeneous or that they are simply a sum of several types of oppressions. Moreover, we must see social reality as a constructor of oppression and not as a consequence. At the same time, we cannot think only of questions of theory or ideology without looking at and understanding how things happen in practice (and materially), so as not to lose sight of the fact that our feminism is far from individual liberation or behavior, but is a social and collective struggle.

Therefore, for us in the CAB, our feminism can only be the “feminism of those from below,” which considers the conditions of gender, race, class and sexual diversity, understanding that these elements and their power relations go together to structure the relations of domination that pass through us.

In short, we believe that our feminism, as especificista anarchists, must be a class struggle oriented, anti-racist, anti-capitalist, non-exclusive (and trans-inclusive) feminism with a revolutionary perspective aimed at a rupture with the state.

Critique of Eurocentric Liberal Feminism

As anarchist women who believe in fighting alongside those from below, we have disagreements with and critiques of Eurocentric liberal feminism. In the course of its development, liberal feminism has guided individual freedoms, expressing and defending a view that “we are all equal”. In this trajectory, it attempted to equate women with white, bourgeois men, claiming for them the same rights as him. Like conceptions of liberalism, this feminism ends up making claims that are limited to the level of individualism.

Thus, our critique of liberal feminism refers to its advocacy of individual liberation only, without reflection on class. In this way, it reproduces capitalist logic when it thinks of women’s emancipation only as recognition and social mobility, for example, within a society that remains

unequal. In this conception, women would have the right to be in the same jobs as men, but when they are there, the logic of inequality continues to reproduce itself. This liberal feminism has appropriated concepts and guidelines that are historically from the popular and women's struggle. It appropriates, in a distorted way, many concepts to conform to liberal and neoliberal precepts. This appropriation serves capitalism in many ways. One example is the use of the very idea of equality by the market, with its mass propaganda, which contributes to the naturalization of a supposed "equality" that already exists, naturalizing the logics of capitalism and the state, which remain intact. In this way, the market feeds the false illusion of equality, preaching as "empowerment" that women can "succeed in big companies", in State positions, etc., reaching high positions or leadership, in a meritocratic logic. However, when they are in these positions, they continue to work for and within the system, without questioning why other women have not "succeeded", without attributing this inequality to the capitalist system.

This process of distortion also occurred with the concept of "Empowerment", whose contours were shaped by the work of Freirean critical pedagogy. It is important to remember that this concept was born rooted in popular movements and was appropriated in a distorted way by liberal feminism. Therefore, when we speak of empowerment, we must take it up from its collective root. Only collective empowerment will make a difference in the struggle of women.

For liberal feminism, a simulated "equality" within the capitalist system itself is enough. For us it is necessary to overthrow capitalism and the state. And this is a condition for the construction of true freedom and equality for women. In this sense, we also note that we must go beyond the Eurocentric character of this feminism. For this, we take as a reference point the analysis that Kurdish women are building and their critique of the Eurocentric character that has influenced the construction of feminism in the world. We need to build a feminism with our feet on the ground of our own Latin American reality. And this is done through an understanding of our own history and our own construction as Latin American women, making use of our experiences and our accumulations, deconstructing and constructing concepts that are based on our concrete reality.

For a Transfeminism

For us, especificista anarchist women, it is extremely important to advance the conception of feminism that we want to build at the national level. Therefore, it is necessary to make it clear that our feminism includes trans people (men and women). For this reason, we do not identify ourselves with "radical feminism" (or with a trans-exclusive feminism) because, as anarchists, we advocate the end of all domination in society. For us it makes no sense to think of a feminism that excludes the oppressed, those who are being abused and massacred by transphobia, which permeates our society every day. We need to preserve and defend the dignity, respect and rights of all people, absolutely all human beings. Of course, we cannot fail to relate heteronormativity to machismo. This is a factor that ends up reverberating in the discussion on the construction of family and work. Therefore, it is important to consider the issue of masculinity as a gender discussion as well, since we are all affected by it and the way people see it.

Rejecting Feminism that is Exclusive to Women

We also believe that exclusive spaces are important to strengthen people of a certain social group and that we should understand and respect their needs. Therefore, we see no problem in having exclusive spaces (we also understand their strength, importance and necessity) when demands arise in the spaces we build, but we understand that the movement should not happen only in this way. In this sense, we also believe that we need to have mixed spaces, because gender is something that cuts across the reality of men and women, not only women. Men also feel various pressures from society to perform their masculinity in a way that common sense has already determined for them hundreds of years ago. So, we understand the importance of men also having their own spaces for training, discussion and debate to be able to think of new ways of acting in the political and social sphere; reviewing the attitudes and vices that the structure of machismo society makes them reproduce daily, whether in their personal, professional or political lives. We also have to understand that the inclusion of cis men is different from the inclusion of trans people. We understand then that a trans woman, for example, must be inserted in an exclusive women's space and that a trans man must be inserted in a men's space and both must be accepted in those spaces.

Advocating the Extension of Social Rights Through Popular Struggle and Direct Action

Considering that women's struggle often needs to go through the conquest of very basic programs that will remain the responsibility of the State, we think that we should not abandon these programs, since we cannot wait for the revolution to conquer basic rights. In other words, we cannot work only with a maximum program. The social revolution will be built in the daily processes of struggle and popular power, in the advances and conquests of more policies and rights, as well as their maintenance.

Women are the first to be neglected, they are the first to be laid off in a crisis, they are the ones who suffer the most from increases in the cost of food and the cost of living. As for maternity, the very spaces of reproduction of maternity end up being appropriated by the State (Pre-natal, day-care centers, etc.). We place ourselves in the struggle for these basic directives within the limits of the State because it must be required to guarantee these rights and, if the State does not provide them, we must take them away, with our own hands and our struggle. This is how we defend the struggle for housing, day care centers, humanized childbirth and better assistance in hospitals, education and health, which directly affect the lives of everyday women.

We are aware that we are making demands of the State while we long for its end. On the other hand, our position is one of confrontation and not of asking the State. We confront the State so that it can provide today what is urgent for the lives of women from below. In this sense, we have chosen to use the term "public policies" instead of "reforms". What we demand in confrontation with the State is the viability of public policies that make a difference for women. And it is always a demand for rights that come through struggle and popular organization. Along with this, we believe in and seek to sow autonomous efforts by women within their communities. While the State does not guarantee policies that can provide the minimum, we must build, support and defend, together with the communities, self-managed and autonomous efforts that aim to organize

collective outlets for women's lives. Therefore, we must build and show solidarity with the experiences of collective self-organization of childcare, the possibilities of building "cooperatives" or cooperative work, which are outlets for the maintenance of women in their communities. These experiences are processes that contribute to the construction of popular power, self-management, autonomy and empowerment of working women and women from below. These are principles that we defend; and therefore they are also our tasks and responsibility.

Thus, we stand beside women from below in this struggle for basic rights, but it must achieve revolutionary transformations. In this effort, we advocate for popular struggle and direct action in the conquest of rights and the advance for popular power, along with the strategy of Self-Defense, not only in the physical sense, but also as a collective posture, being thought through, elaborated and worked on together with our comrades. In this process, we are building daily, in the struggle, a rupture with the State, capitalism and patriarchy, and the advance towards the construction of self-organization and autonomy.

Armed with these broad principles and building a feminism based on the relationship between theory and practice, we stand in the ranks of women's struggles, as anarchists and feminists! May feminism be a reality for women from below and may women's struggles grow and spread with militancy, mutual aid and sisterhood in all corners of the world!

For people's power!

For a life of dignity, freedom and not submissiveness!

Up with those who fight!

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