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Elaine Leeder

For the last four years I have called myself an Anarcha-Feminist. I have participated in Anarcha-feminist groups, meetings and conferences and have taught courses in small group process. Through my experience I have come to realize that the interaction in an all womens' groups has a unique flavor and style and that this is particularly true of feminist groups. This style has been called the "mosaic" process.[1] It contrasts vith traditional "linear" thinking that has pervaded human interactions in this society. The characteristics of competition and hierarchy are integral to a Capitalist system. Linear, logical arguments are used in discussions to perpetuate the values of this system. Linear thinking is done to substantiate or to argue a hypothesis. Womens' values of cooperation, emotion, and intuition have been given little credence in this type of thinking. The mosaic pattern that women use includes a supportive structure

[1] Cooper, Babette, Kaxine Ethelchild and Lucy White. "The Feminist Process: Developing a non-competitive process with work groups," August, 1974, Unpublished.

with considerably less competition.[2] This style uses anecdotal material, encourages the interjection of comments into conversation, accepts emotional data as a legitimate part of intellectual discussions, uses narratives, paraphrases, shifts directions and moves the group together toward a mutual search for understanding. It is an organic process, non-hierarchical and non-competitive. It could in fact be called Anarchist because the values of leaderlessness, lack of hierarchy, non-competition and spontaneity have historically been associated with the term Anarchism. They are also Feminist values. From what I have seen, this style exists less frequently in mixed groups of men and women. In fact, it rarely even exists in mixed groups of Anarchist men and women. Anarchist literature is full of documentation of the exploitation by Anarchist men of the women in their lives.[3] My own recent experience among old-time Anarchists, and even among the new breed, substantiates this statement.

Anarchism's principles and its current practice conflict. There is sexism within Anarchism. It is important for Anarchists to incorporate this "Feminist Process" into their practice so that ultimately the principles and the practice of Anarchism can become one.

There are a number of Feminists including myself who have realized the inherent Anarchism in our process and have begun working in groups to study and grow together as Anarcha-feminists. This hybrid developed out of the late sixties when many of us were involved in male-dominated, competitive, hierarchical mass organizations. At that time (and to this day in Anarchist literature) women were told to work for the larger movement. Instead many of us formed small consciousness-raising groups that dealt with personal issues of our lives. These were spontaneous direct action groups organized for ourselves. They were much like groups or-

[2] Ibid.

[3] Goldman, Emmma and Alexander Berkman. *Nowhere at Home*. Richard Drennon, Ed. Shocken Books. New York. 1975. pp. 185–107.

ganized in Spain prior to 1936 and could be called affinity groups. These affinity groups were based on similarities of interests and had an internal democracy in which women would share information and knowledge. These groups generally consisted of white middle-class women who often for the first time were placed in a situation in which they were not in competition with one another. Third world and working-class women were generally not involved in consciousness raising groups, which is also the case today in A-F groups.

Out of these early beginnings a Feminist theory slowly evolved. Some of us began to study political theories in these small groups and discovered the inherent Anarchism in our Feminism. We began to use an Anarchist analysis to aid in our development of theory and strategy for social change. Some of us believed that patriarchy was a male-dominated hierarchy and that the nuclear family perpetuated that hierarchy. The family, we discovered, teaches us to obey Father, God, Teachers, Bosses said whoever else is above us.[4] It teaches us competition, consumerism and isolation as well as the treatment of each other in a subject-object relationship. I have seen this clearly in the family therapy work that I do. Nuclear families, I know now, are the basis of all hierarchical, authoritarian systems. As a result, if one fights patriarchy one fights all hierarchies. If we change the nature of the nuclear family we may begin to change all forms of leadership, domination and governments.

As a result of this form of thinking, some of us now place value on other ways of looking at things. No longer must we see the world through only linear thought patterns; rational vs. sensual, mind vs. body, logic vs. intuition. We have begun to look at things on a continuum rather than in dualistic, competitive terms.[5] We have come to see that there needs to be a place for both the linear

[4] Kornegger, Peggy. "Anarchism the Feminist Connection." *Second Wave*, 4: 1. Spring, 1975. p. 31

[5] Ibid. p. 32.

and the mosaic patterns and that both are valid methods of thinking and functioning.

If one continues to look at the world in these terms, it follows that Anarcha-feminists do not say that women should get an equal share of the power. Instead we say that there should be an abolition of all power relationships. We do not want a woman president. We want no presidents at all. To us equal wages for equal work is not the crucial issue. Hierarchies and power distribution is.

Feminist groups often follow Anarchist principles. Some of us have articulated the connection. Others of us have not, but the form is still there, whether it is conscious or not. Our groups are generally small, and sometimes these groups form alliances to act together with others on certain issues. This is similar to the Anarchist concept of Federations. Within the groups there is an attempt at rotation of tasks and skill sharing so that power never resides with the same person. According to Anarchist principles there is equal access to all information, and these groups are voluntary and intentional. The groups are nön-hierarchical, and self-discipline is crucial. The unskilled are urged to take leadership positions, and the indigenous leaders translates their skills to those not as knowledgeable in certain areas. We work in these groups on practicing the revolution now in our daily lives. We discuss the Immediate experience of oppression of power among us and those with whom, we live. We work on the everyday issues that oppress us, not just on the theoretical, abstract ideas of revolution.

As a practitioner I have found the issue of conflict resolution crucial in the development of cohesion in these small groups. When conflicts arise among us attempts are made to use self-discipline and to put ourselves in the other person's position. I have rarely seen coercion used in A-F small groups. Dissension is accepted, listened to and learned from. Sometimes there is a point that is objected to, and then a debate ensues. It is often heard and understood, because many of us realize that our conflicts come from different life experiences. Generally by the end of a session there has

Tiamat and the Anarcha-Feminist Conference are just two examples of the Anarcha-femlnist process. Often groups embody these principles without realizing the Anarchism within. Recently I have been teaching small group process at the college level. Within these classes I try to convey to white, middle class mainly female students all of the principles I've discussed above by running the sessions much like an Anarcha-feminist meeting. Here the students are treated with respect and interest. They slowly begin to share themselves intellectually and personally. By the end of the semester they realize that they can learn from each other and by looking within themselves instead of looking to an outside expert in the hierarchy to impart knowledge to them. Through the process they gain power over their own lives and eventually dissolve power relationships within the class. I have had the experience here in which these privileged students have gone directly in consciousness from fervent Capitalists to budding collectivists without having gone through the revolutionary left. It is possible to come to these Anarchist conclusions through experiences such as these.

It is clear to me from my experience with women in varying groups that the time has come for Feminists to make clear and articulate the Anarchism in our Feminism. We need to call it by name and begin to create it as a viable and acceptable alternative. No longer does the word "Anarchism" have to be whispered. We are living it now in our small groups. The next step is to let ourselves and others know who we are, and what our vision is for now and for the future.

all present. There were numerous workshops including Anarcha-feminism and ecology, Anarcha-feminist theory, unions, future visions, Third World women, working with men and building an Anarcha-feminist network, to name just a few. The setting was idyllic. We met at a nature preserve overlooking Lake Cayuga. The rustic lodge, the healthy and tasty food and the perfect warm sunny weather made the weekend ideal. During the day we met in groups and in the evenings we played music, shared poetry, and danced to women's music. One woman, Kathy Fire sang songs from her album "Songs from a Lesbian Anarchist."

In the discussion groups we discovered the need to keep our numbers small. Groups of more than ten inhibited conversation. It also seemed that designated leadership was important. The role of leader could have been rotated but it was important that there be someone to recognize speakers, highlight the discussion, summarize and move the group on to new areas. We discovered though, that leadership functioned best when it did not rest in the hands of a few. At one point in the conference the participants decided that the schedule of workshops was too hectic and through the use of consensual decision making a new scheme was implemented. We struggled, tensions built, end we moved to a new level together. There were no positions of power, decisions were made by all, sharing was spontaneous, painful, but open and leadership rotated. This was an example of Anarchism at work. Later, at the closing circle, after a weekend of sitting naked in the sun, 85 women held hands and gained strength in our numbers. We were bonded together in our vision of a new society and what we had experienced together. We had made contacts for our future work. We were no longer an isolated individuals or groups. We were part of a larger network of women who could meet anywhere in the world and have kindred ideas and hopes. We set up rotating journals, planned to continue our journal *Anarcha-Feminist Notes* and many of us planned to meet at Seabrook and other anti-nuke demonstrations.

been conflict resolution. If not, we return next time having thought the issue through further. We then discuss it or leave it as need be. There is room for dissension because there is a mutual trust and respect that has grown. This trust is a difficult quality to develop in larger groups, which might explain why we continually gravitate to smaller ones. We have learned that communication is crucial, and that through it we can work out our differences. Conflicts can and does occur regularly because we have seen ourselves work it through.

Because we see the need to confront sexism in our daily lives some of us have seen the need to confront men (Anarchist or otherwise) who do not live in their personal lives what they preach in their political lives. It has been said that women often practice Anarchism and do not know it, while some men call themselves Anarchists and do not practice it. Some of us have worked on restructuring mixed political organizations so that intuition, emotion, and spontaneity can be experienced by people other than Feminists. In some of these mixed groups we have tried to introduce the consensual decision-making process that is usually part of women's groups. For the most part these efforts have had only limited success. Generally competition, aggressiveness and dominating leadership have taken over even in mixed groups that have tried to be anarchistic. Conflicts are not as easily resolved as they are in all women's groups.

Anarcha-feminist groups are now to be found world wide. One such group was Tiamat, an Anarcha-feminist affinity group that existed in Ithaca, New York from August, 1975 to August, 1978. I was a member of that group and I think that Tiamat is an excellent example of Anarcha-feminism in action. We took the name Tiamat from the Z. Budapest book which described this myth: "When Tiamat created the world she created it whole and without divisions so that life flowed spontaneously between dark and light, season and season, birth and death and all the faces of the moon and sun shone upon the thinking people, the humans, without being sepa-

rated, put in categories, analysed, owned. Then Tiamat's son grew in power and overthrew his mother, cut her into many small pieces and scattered them everywhere. From her pieces he made his new world, where everything had its place, Its number. From this men called him *the creator*. Tiamat's name was still known, and she was worshipped by women, but men feared her now as a godess of Chaos, of destruction, — of anarchy.[6]

Our purpose began as study, and for the first year and a half we read Anarchist theory together. Later each of us presented ideas and theories that we had researched. Still later we put out a newsletter (*Anarcha-Feminist Notes*), sponsored an Anarcha-Feminist Conference and got involved in local political issues. For example we protested the building of a local shopping mall, raised money for a day care center for political dissidents in Chile. We wanted political growth, re-education, criticism, discussion and action, and all this was accomplished.

Our process was of interest. We used a procedure called check-in in which we each spoke of our lives at that moment, issues we were personally dealing with and how tuned in we felt to what we were going to discuss that evening. Sometimes we spent the whole session checking in, or discussing one person's check-in, or perhaps an issue that evolved out of check-in. Other times we would deal with intellectual material. Through check-in we became responsible to each other and began to know each other quite well. Often there would be devil's advocate positions taken so that we could delve deeply into a political conflict. All this was done with an air of trust that developed over time. Because of the differences in our perceptions and life styles, we were able to learn much from each other. These differences were also the source of much conflict. Half the group was heterosexual and the

[6] Jenny Reece as taken from Budapest, Z. and the Feminist Book of Lights and Shadow Collective. *The Feminist Book of Lights and Shadow.* The Feminist Wicca, Lincoln Boulevard, Venice, California. 90291. 1975. Reprinted from Anarcha-Feminist notes. Spring 1977, Volume 1, no. 2.

other half lesbian. Because of this our personal lives were often a source of tension but our similarities in outlook and agreement on politics and work often helped us to work through the differences. We were a woman-centered group that was intellectual yet action-oriented. Sometimes we were quite linear and logical in our studies, yet there was still a place for emotion and support. We all felt that there was an inexplicable something that held us together through our differences for three years. Our studies included Russian Anarchism, Spanish Anarchism, Anarcho-syndicalism and anarcho-communism. We looked at China, earlier American Anarchists and how we as anarchists could live these principles in cur lives. We discussed living with men, being married and having children. We discussed separatism and its effects on the women's movement. We looked at wages for housework, and nuclear power as it relates to women. We had birthday parties, picnics and anti 4th of July celebrations. We marched together in demonstrations, we tried to help other A-F groups get started and we provided each other with readings and support. We deeply cared for each other and when we saw each other at other places there were strong feelings of unity and comradery.

At the end of three years two out of the nine members moved out of the area. Another member withdrew slowly, feeling the need at that time for more involvement in the lesbian community. As a result the six of us left felt it would not be appropriate to reconstruct a group that had been such a unique entity. Instead we dealt with the demise creatively, feeling that it was now time for each of us to spin off in new directions. Some of us joined a women's anti-nuke affinity group, others joined the Lesbian Alliance, others worked with a mixed group on ecology issues.

Prior to the group's dissolution we sponsored an Anarcha-Feminist Conference that brought together eighty-five women from as far away as Italy, Toronto, Boston, New York, Baltimore and Philadelphia. Although Tiamat and friends were the organizers, once the participants arrived responsibility was shared by