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Inciting Liberation

“No God, No Boss, No Husband”

Mona Eltahawy

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Sixty-eight years before the date that the United States of America celebrates as its “Independence Day,” an enslaved Black woman in New York City led a revolt for her independence. The woman along with other enslaved people in farmhouses nearby, decided to kill their slavers one night in 1708. She and a man called “Indian Sam” killed their slaver, his pregnant wife, and their five offspring. They were arrested the next morning.

Historian Rebecca Hall unearthed this woman-led revolt while researching her dissertation which she has turned into the graphic novel *Wake: The Hidden History of Women-Led Slave Revolts*.

“This story was almost completely silenced in the history of slave revolts, though seven white people were killed and four slaves were executed,” Hall writes.

“And I am certain that the reason this was never classified as a revolt was because it was a woman who led it. And historians teach that women don’t do this kind of thing. They might kill their masters in some feminine fit of pique, but that’s different from participating in, or even planning, a revolt.

“Historians would have seen ‘woman’ and ‘murdered her master’ and immediately dismissed it as some kind of individual household violence. Coordinated acts of violent resistance were exclusively planned by men, conventional wisdom held,” writes Hall.

In other words, patriarchy is the reason that this freedom fighter has been erased.

Known in court records only as the “Negro wench” and “Negro fiend,” the woman was executed along with three enslaved men. They were hanged and she was burnt at the stake. Why? Again patriarchy.

“Way back in 1352, King Edward III created a statute that said if a woman killed her husband or master, the killing is ‘treason’ and the required punishment was to be burnt at the stake,” Hall writes. “In such cases, the killing was not ‘murder’ but ‘treason’ against the state because a woman’s husband or master was considered ‘her natural lord,’ and killing him was like killing the monarch. It was a crime against The State.”

Fuck the State. Fuck the monarchy. And fuck the patriarchy.

And Fuck the Fourth of July and any holiday that celebrates the liberation of only a few from any of those oppressors. I am not here to celebrate the “independence” of a group of white men from a white monarch. I am here to incite for the liberation of all. I am not here to celebrate “independence” overseen by slavers: 10 of the United States’ first 12 presidents owned slaves. I am not here to celebrate “Founding Fathers” aka white slave-owning patriarchy.

Who deserves freedom? And from whom is our liberation?

“No God, No Boss, No Husband,” answered an Argentinian anarchist feminist in a letter to *La Voz de la Mujer*, the first anarchist-feminist newspaper which was published by the world’s first explicitly anarchist-feminist group in 1896, more than 180 years after the “Negro fiend” led a revolt against slavers in New York City.

In its first issue, *La Voz de la Mujer* warned misogynist anarchist comrades “You had better understand once and for all that our mission is not reducible to raising your children and washing

I am not interested in dick swinging contests. The revolution anywhere, be it in the United States in 1776 or Spain in the 1930s or Egypt in 2011, will fail unless the liberation of us all is at its heart. Women are always told to wait. I am an anarchist because I am fed up with waiting and because I want to end all forms of hierarchies; to end the oppression that is a result of those hierarchies.

I do not believe that ending capitalism and class structures alone will liberate us all. Capitalism and class structures are not the only forms of oppression we must end. I want to end the oppression also of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, ageism, and other forms of bigotry. I am an anarchist feminist who fights for freedom for all. And there is no freedom without women's freedom, queer freedom, and sexual freedom.

I have risked my life. I'll be fucking damned if I risk it again for a group of swinging dicks whose aim is to get more slices of a cake that they devour and leave only crumbs for the rest of us. Fuck your crumbs. Fuck your cake. Fuck your penis contests. I want to be free. I will be free.

And toward that liberation, it is my right to fight using all the ways I can. When I say that, I am accused of inciting violence.

I am inciting liberation! I am inciting true independence. Today and every day!

your clothes and that we also have a right to emancipate ourselves and to be free from all kinds of tutelage, whether economic or marital.”

And in case it was not clear, the fourth edition of *La Voz de la Mujer* put it thus: “We hate authority because we aspire to be human beings and not machines directed by the will of ‘another,’ be this authority, religion, or any other name.”

What fucking world is this?

Ask that question, during a pandemic or at any other time, and the immediate response is “Well, what’s your alternative?” We are tasked with both surviving the oppressions we are subjected to and coming up with ways to end them.

At least 3.98 million people around the world have died so far from COVID19. In the United States, more than 620,000 people have died, most of them elders, Black and Indigenous people, people of colour, the disabled, and those most marginalized by and left vulnerable to that fucking world we are tasked to both survive and fix.

What is my alternative to this fucking world?

My feminism tells me it is anarchism and anarchism tells me it is feminism.

Anarchism is often misunderstood as inciting violence. I understand anarchism as inciting liberation.

To me, as that feminist and anarchist, any talk of freedom is impossible without a reckoning with power.

The Black bisexual poet and feminist activist June Jordan reminds us of the centrality of imagination to power and freedom; it is the engine that drives them.

“Like a lot of Black women, I have always had to invent the power my freedom requires,” she wrote in an essay in the anthology *On Call: Political Essays*, 1985, “All my life I’ve been studying revolution. I’ve been looking for it, pushing at the possibilities and waiting for that moment, when there’s no room for rhetoric, for research or reason: when there’s only my life or death to act upon.”

So what is the power that my freedom requires? For starters, it is a reckoning with all those oppressions that are exactly what led us to the inequalities that the pandemic has exacerbated. Those oppressions are like multiple beating hearts that have kept those inequalities alive.

In “Rethinking Anarchy,” the Spanish social theorist Carlos Taibo reminds us that “anarchists have frequently defined themselves first on the basis of what they reject — the state, capitalism, inequality, patriarchal society, war, militarism, repression in all its forms, authority.”

And I believe that anarchist feminism is the solution to dismantling those inequalities.

Almost 200 years after the “Negro fiend” led a revolt in New York City, anarchist feminist Kanno Sugako understood the path to liberation for all when she declared in 1906 Japan “Rise up, women wake up! As in the struggle workers are engaged in against capitalists to break down the class system, our demands for freedom and equality with men will not be won easily just because we will it. They will not be won if we do not raise our voices, if no blood is shed.”

Sugako was executed by hanging on January 25, 1911, along with 11 other anarchists charged with treason against the emperor, whom they were charged with conspiring to assassinate. She was 29 years old and the first female political prisoner to be executed in the history of modern Japan.

We need nothing short of a revolution to dismantle the systems of oppression and injustices which the pandemic has exacerbated. I am focusing on anarchist feminists because my experience with the Egyptian revolution and those in the Middle East and North Africa, often known as the “Arab Spring,” has taught me to always ask “Who is the revolution for?” and always find the anarchist feminists telling the cis men to fuck off with their dick swinging contests. Male comrades, including leftist ones, must be held accountable too.

As Maxine Molyneux points out in her study of Argentinian anarchist feminists, “It is not difficult to see why feminists were attracted to Anarchism and why they were so rightly opposed to male anarchist hypocrisy. Its key ideas stress the struggle against authority, including the power exercised over women in marriage and the family. All anarchists should be seeking freedom within relationships. The Anarchist emphasis on oppression and on power relations opened up a space within which women could be seen simultaneously as the victims of class society and as the victims of male authority.”

Too many cis men, including those who are not white, are moved only by the fight for liberation from the State. “None of us are free!” they say. If the State oppresses men and women, then the State, Street, and Home together oppress women. Cis men refuse to make those connections that make them complicit in what I call the Triangle of Patriarchy. It is why the Argentine anarchafeminist declared “No God, No Boss, No Husband.” It is why anarchist Lola Iturbe declared in 1935 Spain, “All these compañeros, however radical they may be in cafes, unions, even (Anarchist) groups, seem to drop their costumes as lovers of female liberation at the doors of their homes.”

There have been moments when revolutionaries disentangled a better world from the fuckery of injustice, inequality, and dehumanization that are the tik tok of the world as we usually know it. And just as steady is the misogyny that systematically erases women from those flashes of light that continue to serve as flares for our imagination.

To ask “what fucking world is this?” is a reminder of how over and over and over again women are erased from the “history” we are taught. Fuck this world and fuck the patriarchy.

Who is the revolution for?

So often, too often, we are all called to join the revolution, to risk all for the revolution, and the revolution turns out to be a cisgender dick swinging contest.