

Towards an Especifista Feminism in North America

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Introduction

TO BEGIN...

“We recognize that the feminist camp has made great efforts, by revealing the mechanisms that oppress women and dissidence, and by naming issues that used to be invisible. However, this does not mean that the concepts and categories, and therefore the theoretical frameworks, are all equally valid. As especificist anarchists we task ourselves with taking from these theoretical productions, the concepts and categories that are consistent with our own ideology. Referring to the guiding principles of other currents will not only lead us down a different ideological path but also have concrete effects on the militancy, on the political level as on the social level.”¹ (Federación Anarquista de Rosario, “Hacia un feminismo especificista. Elementos para el debate sobre la militancia feminista del anarquismo organizado”, June 2021)

STILL...

“[...] non-mixed spaces are an imperfect solution in an imperfect world. This is not, however, a reason to abandon them as a tactic.”² (Les dérailleuses, “On the importance of non-mixed spaces”, in *Londonderry: A cyclo-feminist zine*)

THEREFORE...

“[In] the search for our own feminism, in accordance with our current of organized anarchism and its comprehensive strategy, we always have the obligation to always reflect on which tools and practices are — and which are not — the most effective and pertinent, in this particular context in order to contribute to the construction of popular power from a feminist perspective.”³ (FAR)

FOR THIS REASON...

“[We] believe that it is necessary to find a balance between coalition building and specificity, in such a way that the feminist perspective crosses the rest of the issues in addition to the organizational practices, but without erasing or backing down from the demands, which still need to be addressed in a particular way.”⁴ (FAR)

WITHOUT THIS...

“The result is an outward-facing media presence that relies heavily on the contributions of indi-

¹ “Reconocemos que el campo feminista ha hecho grandes esfuerzos por develar los mecanismos de opresión sobre las mujeres y disidencias, y poder ponerle nombre a cuestiones que estaban invisibilizadas. Ahora bien, ello no quiere decir que los conceptos y categorías, y por lo tanto los marcos teóricos sean todos válidos por igual. Como anarquistas especificistas nos debemos la tarea de tomar de aquellas producciones teóricas, los conceptos y categorías que estén acordes a nuestra ideología. Utilizar como referencia marcos teóricos de otras corrientes no solo nos coloca en otra línea ideológica, sino que además entendemos que tiene efectos concretos que se expresan en la militancia tanto a nivel político como a nivel social.”

² “[...] les espaces non-mixtes sont une solution imparfaite dans un monde imparfait. Ce n’est pas pour autant une raison pour les abandonner.”

³ “[En] la búsqueda de un feminismo propio acorde a nuestra corriente de anarquismo organizado y a su estrategia integral es que tenemos la obligación siempre de abordar reflexivamente qué herramientas y prácticas —y cuáles no— son las más eficaces y pertinentes en este contexto para aportar a la construcción de poder popular desde una perspectiva feminista.”

⁴ “[Creemos] que es necesario buscar un equilibrio entre la transversalización y la especificidad, de forma tal que la mirada feminista atraviese el resto de las problemáticas así como las prácticas organizativas pero sin que eso signifique un borrón o desvanecimiento de las reivindicaciones propias a abordar de manera particular.”

vidual militants and re-shares of material featuring broad anti-institutional critiques.” (Thistle Writing Collective, “Every Rose Has Its Thorn”⁵)

Part 1

TAKE FOR EXAMPLE...

“[...]non-mixed spaces are an immediate solution to a systemic problem. By eliminating one of the sources of sexism — men — and by making it explicit that no one wants to exclude anyone, the atmosphere changes immediately.”⁶ (Les dérailleuses)

AND ANOTHER EXAMPLE...

“It was not until we began sharing our experiences that so many more of us realized that this was more than administrative protocols, study groups, and consciousness raising could cure and it wasn’t something that only individuals should be held accountable for. This was an organizational crisis and the entire membership needed to respond. Our shared analysis revealed that our efforts were never sustained for more than a few months and rarely went beyond a “discussion” of the issues.” (TWC)

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING...

“For many, non-mixed spaces are a jumping off point helping to acquire knowledge and self-confidence to then (re)insert themselves into mixed spaces. Non-mixed spaces should not be seen as a goal in themselves, but rather a way of raising important questions to the shop as a whole, allowing the practice of not mixing to potentially become a relic of the past.” (Les dérailleuses)

ASK FOR EXAMPLE...

“Are you engaging with new political ideas and demands emerging from these movements or are you comfortable with confining your discussions with others in your cocoon?” (TWC)

FROM AN ESPECIFISTA PERSPECTIVE...

“In this sense, we believe that each tool and space (such as women’s committees, protocols,

⁵ In order to continue theoretically exploring the relationship between feminism and especificismo, and not enter into polemic debates between members and ex-members of any particular org., included here is an excerpt from a statement, from March 2022, titled “Reflection & Reorganization: Black Rose/Rosa Negra Resumes Public Activity” which is responding to the critiques made by the Thistle Writing Collective. The following excerpt is included here, to inform while not rhetorically pairing its arguments with those presented in “Every Rose Has Its Thorn”, which dates back to March 2021. While the BRRN statement is not specifically part of this study, it does make up part of our North American context. For that reason, its inclusion is meant to add to any discussion about how to move forward:

“Eventually, this conflict led a number of members to resign from the organization, with some penning a feminist critique of BRRN after leaving. While we maintain disagreements with many of the specifics of this critique, we share its stated commitment to a revolutionary anarchist feminism.

The main authors of the statement you are now reading are feminists who chose to remain in BRRN. [...] Because we cannot resign our way out of patriarchy, we resolved to debate and struggle alongside our comrades in BRRN to address internal issues and to create a stronger organization.

[...]Moving out of our long reflection and reorganization period, we remain committed to continuously developing a working class feminist practice both inside and outside of our organization. With renewed energy, we look forward to returning to public facing activity and to carry on building the power and revolutionary potential of social movements in the U.S.” </play>

⁶ “Les espaces non-mixtes deviennent une colution immédiate à un problème systémique. En éliminant une des sources de sexisme – les hommes – et en explicitant le désir de n’exclure personne, l’ambiance change immédiatement.

conventions) should be thought of according to the sphere (level) -political or social-, the participation of the compañeras and the degree to which they appropriate feminism as their own. They cannot be used as neutral formulas. If we do not contextualize them and believe that they can be used independently of the rest of the ideological and material aspects of the organization, we would be feeding an idea of homogeneous feminism, not dissimilar from those which we clearly oppose.”⁷ (FAR)

AND YET...

“Feminism never became an official area of political work [...]” (TWC)

AND STILL...

“Building strategy should not be a controversial aim for a political organization. The inability to tackle strategy and the organizational defeatism we perpetually confronted is all too common.” (TWC)

BUT AT LEAST...

“[We] want to warn about the directions it can take and the detrimental effects it can have on our strategy social construction. This does not mean that we should abandon it, but on the contrary, we should be there attempting to be influential with our construction of a feminism from below, from the women at bottom.”⁸ (FAR)

Part 2

SPECIFICALLY...

“[We] see trends that arise from the women’s and feminist movement that permeate our militancy and that we believe can hinder the development of the methodology that we are proposing with organized anarchism.”⁹ (FAR)

SIMILAR TO...

“[...] there were points of contention about feminism within the organization.” (TWC)

AND...

“This was not interpersonal conflict. It was a difference in politics.” (TWC)

SUMMIZING THAT...

“On the Left, there is an unspoken belief that finding solutions for intra-movement violence (especially of a sexual or gendered variety) is “women’s work,” meaning that the burden is placed on those most likely to have already experienced abuse rather than those most likely to perpetuate it.” (TWC)

⁷ “En este sentido, creemos que cada herramienta y espacio (como por ejemplo, comités de mujeres, protocolos) debe ser pensada según el ámbito -político o social-, el nivel de apropiación del feminismo y de participación de las compañeras. No pueden ser usadas como fórmulas neutrales. Si no las contextualizamos y creemos que pueden ser utilizadas con independencia del resto de los componentes ideológicos y materiales de la organización, estaríamos alimentando a una idea de feminismo homogéneo y emparentado a aquellos con los que estamos claramente en disputa.”

⁸ “[Queremos] advertir sobre los rumbos que puede ir tomando y que van en detrimento de nuestra estrategia de construcción social. Ello no quiere decir que debemos abandonarlo, si no por el contrario debemos estar allí influenciando con nuestra construcción de un feminismo de las de abajo.” </play>

⁹ “[Vemos] tendencias que surgen del movimiento de mujeres y feminista que permean nuestra militancia y creemos pueden entorpecer el desarrollo de la metodología que proponemos desde el anarquismo organizado.”

TO CRITIQUE...

“The order of things were designed to reproduce women and non-binary comrades as the unpaid social, administrative, physical, and emotional laborers not the strategists.” (TWC)

TO DESCRIBE...

““women’s auxiliary” and dutifully produced attractive content while avoiding internal conflict” (TWC)

TO CONCLUDE...

“a culture that depoliticized care and glorified masculinized “productive” work to the extent that a feminist analysis of the political moment wasn’t even audible to the culture let alone understood as urgent. If the social relations within the organization were designed to reward individualized clout chasing as the productive form of militant praxis, any feminist who made a demand for more rigorous and collective political analysis was in violation of the patriarchal order of things.” (TWC)

SIMILAR TO...

“[...] political practices where women and dissidents appear as the only voices authorized to give debates on gender issues. As especificist anarchists, we must seek to participate in all the issues of the organization, especially including those that are usually masculinized. So, while we think that the gender perspective must enter into all of our analyses, at the same time, we also believe that feminism and anti-patriarchy cannot be the center of all readings,”¹⁰ (FAR)

WHICH MAY BE DIFFERENT FROM...

“[...] efforts to center feminism within the organization.” (TWC)

SINCE...

“We believe open organizational debate on political differences informed by work in our communities is crucial to building the knowledge, experience, and trust necessary to topple hetero-patriarchy and colonialism.” (TWC)

STILL...

“[An] individual’s, or an organization’s, carefully crafted political positions do not mean they know how to discuss, debate, or live them in their daily activism. We raise this point because it did not only contribute to the stifling internal culture that pushed us to leave BRRN, but we believe it is a trend in many anarchist spaces that deserves more analysis and critical reflection.” (TWC)

AND ALSO TO CRITIQUE FROM A DIFFERENT ANGLE...

“[Many] times, in the name of women’s struggle, a programmatic agenda is carried out that ignores the reality of the social sectors where we are organized. This vindictive agenda, often without a class character or a clear intention of generating popular participation — sometimes, on the contrary, even appealing to individual and spontaneous participation — ends up promoting actions that are removed from the daily reality of social organizations, only reaching a militant minority.”¹¹ (FAR)

¹⁰ “[...] prácticas políticas donde las mujeres y disidencias aparecen como las únicas voces habilitadas para dar debates en torno a la problemática de género. Como anarquistas especificistas nosotras debemos buscar participar de todos los temas de la organización, incluso y especialmente de aquellos que suelen estar masculinizados. Asimismo como pensamos que la perspectiva de género debe atravesar todos nuestros análisis también creemos que el feminismo y anti patriarcado no pueden ser el centro de todas las lecturas, entendiendo que existen situaciones en donde otras problemáticas pueden tener más peso relativo.”

¹¹ “[Muchas] veces en nombre de la lucha de las mujeres se lleve una agenda programática que desconoce la realidad de los sectores sociales donde estamos organizadas. Esta agenda reivindicativa, frecuentemente sin carácter

STILL...

“Our comrades heard our personal testimonies of patriarchy in the organization and saw no political importance in them. While we, through diligent and rigorous study and exchange, knew that they formed a pattern of patriarchal dominance and subordination. We argued that the only remedy to a political crisis is political action.” (TWC)

HENCE THE REASON FOR WRITING...

“[...] to expose these dynamics outside our small corner of the Left. We believe we are not alone in this experience, and know that we cannot create change alone.” (TWC)

Conclusion

IN CLOSING...

“Oppression, and resistance to it, is not the product of precise formulas from a lab, therefore we do not want the references of the anti-patriarchal struggle to be public figures, journalists, etc. We insist that there is no such thing as a neutral feminism in relation to the system of domination as a whole [...]”¹² (FAR)

WHAT IF...

“Within the organization, this work remained narrowly confined to small working groups and individuals.” (TWC)

FOR THIS REASON...

“[...] we consider that theoretical development must always take place alongside our militancy, we do not need compendiums of “patriarchy, feminism and gender” -or the infinite search for new terms that after a month are outdated from the new theoretical production-, if later we cannot talk to a colleague in our union, neighborhood or place of study. That is why we say that theory must go hand in hand with the development of the political organization and its insertion fronts.”¹³ (FAR)

WHAT IF...

“an influx of new membership — many of whom were oppressed by patriarchy with different experiences and expectations for what a feminist organization looks and feels like. In an organizational culture that could handle disagreement generatively, this could have led to important experiments in new ways of organizing, holding each other accountable, and practicing anarchist feminism.” (TWC)

clasista y sin intención clara de generar participación popular -que a veces por el contrario, apela a la participación individual y espontánea- termina impulsando acciones alejadas de la realidad cotidiana de las organizaciones sociales y solo tienen llegada a un sector de la militancia.”

¹² “Ni las opresiones ni sus resistencias se crean en un laboratorio o en claustro, por tanto no queremos que las referencias de la lucha anti patriarcal sean figuras públicas, periodistas, etc. Insistimos en que no existe algo como un feminismo neutral en relación al sistema de dominación como conjunto [...]”

¹³ “[...] consideramos que el desarrollo teórico siempre debe darse a la par de nuestra militancia, no necesitamos compendios de “patriarcado, feminismo y género” —o la búsqueda infinita de nuevos términos que al mes quedan desfasados de la nueva producción teórica-, si luego no podemos hablar con una compañera en nuestro sindicato, barrio o lugar de estudio. Por eso decimos que la teoría debe ir de la mano del desarrollo de la organización política y sus frentes de inserción.”

TO CAUTION...

“Today there are groups that are entirely dedicated to holding workshops, talks, training in other organizations, that drop in like paratroopers just to teach and show us how we are being oppressed. Without detracting from the work they do, we do not think this is the best approach and even less so that it should serve as the face of the women’s movement.”¹⁴ (FAR)

TO REITERATE...

“We want an organization that investigates political questions critically and rigorously. Deep and serious political inquiry does not negate our capacity for personal empathy and understanding of our fellow comrades. It does mean that we can differentiate between them and understand that successful collaborative analysis requires both.” (TWC)

¹⁴ “Hoy en día existen grupos que se dedican a realizar talleres, charlas, formaciones en otras organizaciones, que como paracaidistas llegan y se van solo para enseñarnos y mostrarnos cómo estamos siendo oprimidas. Sin desmerecer el trabajo que realizan, no creemos que sea la forma de abordarlo y mucho menos deben ser la cara del movimiento de mujeres.”

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