

Next time you think you can distract yourself
from your insecurities by victimizing,
dominating or silencing another person,

THINK AGAIN!

It could be me, and I FIGHT BACK!



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UNMARKED CATEGORIES

and the question of power

some anarcha-feminist notes



"Power is everywhere...because it comes from everywhere."

Michael Foucault

Much of this text will focus on power, as well as the connected issue of various forms of constraint on human action, with a particular focus on women.

Power itself appears in a relational way: one cannot meaningfully say that a particular person 'has power' without also specifying the role of other people in the social collective. Also power very often runs reciprocally, but usually not with equal reciprocity. To exercise power over people, one must have control over things that others desire or need, but one can rarely exercise that power without a measure of reverse control.

Of course in anarchist collectives power exists, which is not necessarily bad in itself. But we have to distinguish between the various forms of power and power as such. Unlike power, hierarchical power relations are always based on social systems of command and obedience, whatever concrete expressions these may take. Hierarchies are structures, where the dominant part enjoys a privileged and coercive position towards the subordinate part which according to this social logic must subdue their will and obey (however subtly or unconsciously).

Power may be held through social class, personal or group charisma, ascribed power (acting on perceived or assumed abilities), education (Ability, Skills), persuasion (direct or indirect), knowledge (granted or withheld, shared or kept secret), resources (financial, control of access to places), force (violence, coercion)... It could be also distinguished between 'power-over' (influence on other people) from 'power-to' (ability to perform).

The powerful comprise those people with easy access to resources, those who can exercise power without considering their actions. The unmarked category can form the identifying mark of the powerful. The unmarked category becomes the standard against which to measure everything else. One can often overlook unmarked categories. Whiteness forms an unmarked category not commonly visible to the powerful, as they often fall within this category. Anarchist collectives quite often also fall trap to this view of power to gender and disability: the able body is the neutral body; the *man* is the normal status. The able body is the neutral body. The marked body is outside what is regarded as the norm: it is too thin, it is too fat, it is crippled, it is mad, it is unpredictable.

Because anarchism is purported to oppose all usage of power and forms of oppression the term anarchy-feminism should actually be

by politicians / media ..., and homophobic hatred as well as murder for example by some right-wing groupings.

- In Mauritania, Sudan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Chechnia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the United Arab Emirates the death penalty is applied to anyone found to have committed a homosexual act.
- Extrajudicial killings of lesbians and gays continue in a number of countries.
- In many states penal laws still prohibit consenting homosexual activity.
- In most states LGBT communities face discrimination in laws dealing with inheritance, social insurance, medical insurance, housing, and immigration.

Patriarchy is a dominant reality in our world, so much that many people cannot imagine any other way of organizing human life. Gender and sexuality are major components of structured inequality and discrimination. Members of the devalued gender or sexual orientation have less power than those of the valued one. Lesbian, gay men, bisexual and transgender people all over the world suffer from persecution and violence simply for being who they are.

Calling yourself an anarchist / autonomous doesn't excuse you from responsibility over your own daily relationships with other people. How we choose to treat each other goes to the core of what we hope to accomplish. Must we always establish and follow new informal hierarchies in our collectives based on who is more popular or stronger versus who is unpopular and out of the 'scenes' mainstream? People cannot participate equally if they are not free to be and express themselves. Tolerance begins with the acknowledgement that people other than ourselves may see things differently than we do, and suspending judgment while those with whom we may disagree or whose point of view we may not understand are given a forum to explain their perspective and are actively listened to.

The unmarked/marked categories need to be acknowledged more often, as well as the silences, protections and denials surrounding privilege/power/dominance.

The true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but the piece of the oppressor or the repressed which is planted deep within each of us.

abortions or forced sterilizations are pulled through at the same time. At the expense of the right to self-determination for women.
BACKLASH IN CATHOLIC

In 1972 the Benedictine padre Paul Marx, ultra-right catholic fundamentalist, founded with the blessing of the pope a 'Human Life Center' at the St. John's University in Minnesota. From there arose Human Life International (HLI), according to their own statements the worlds largest 'Pro-Life-Organization'. Human Life International works against sex education, prevention of pregnancies, illegitimate (heterosexual) intercourse and abortion. In their ways and means Human Life International is not cautious. The 'Operation Rescue (O.R.)' which works closely with Marx and has the same goal to close down all abortion clinics, promotes the use of bombs against abortion clinics and the murder of doctors who undertake abortions as a justifiable measure. Human Life International is an organization with at least 25.000 members worldwide and 4.000 trained activists. This concept is spreading since the last years over 15 European countries. A special note needs to go to Italy: there Human Life International already works in front of at least 40 hospitals. The European office of Human Life International is of course in Poland. The German-speaking office is based in catholic Switzerland. The Pro-Life-movement works closely with racist groups such as the Ku-Klux-Klan in the US, fascist groups in Europe and militant anti-Semites. This eager hustle is internationally supported by the Roman Catholic authorities und even partly financed by clergy and church.

Every attempt, to restrict the self-determination of women is an attempt to oppress women.



LESBIAN / GAY / BISEXUAL / TRANSGENDER COMMUNITIES AND REPRESSION

Discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities continues in most parts of the world.

The climate of intolerance against LGBT communities is characterised by the banning of public events, openly homophobic language used

unnecessary. All anarchists should, if they really meant what they said about being against all forms of oppression, work against, or at least not support, the oppression of women. That's theoretically. However, our reality is that we are all products of our social surroundings. It is also a fact that those who find themselves in a hierarchical position of power have a hard time accepting that a hierarchy even exists. Men do not recognise the oppression of women to the same extent or to the same degree that women do. Those who have power and privilege are in addition, often unwilling to abandon these. Or people who claim to support equality have not actively confronted others on their dominating or harassing behaviour. Many male anarchists have not activated themselves in the struggle against the oppression of women and it has become necessary for female anarchists to signify themselves as anarcha-feminists.



If enough people accept 'common categories' based on unmarked categories learned through socialization, then these people exercises power by defining right from wrong and who, or what, is 'normal'. It is a subtle form of power: easier to overlook than power enforced by violence, hard to resist because it is all about 'normalization'.

Many people simply do not seem to have any comprehension what it means to grow up as being different from the socially constructed dominant norm in society, which is largely hostile to your own sense of self and to your very existence. Even among anarchists it takes some effort to understand the experience of those who are different in some fundamental way, just to name gender, ableness, race, class, sexual orientation and/or ethnicity. We do not grow up or live in a vacuum; we grow up and live in a particular society at a particular time. All of us are influenced in countless ways by the world in which we live. You really think you are so special not to be affected by it?

The unmarked categories of privilege known as 'normal': If you are straight, white, able-bodied, mid-twenties to mid-forties person, you are as 'normal' as it gets. It also means you overwhelmingly occupy

the main spaces, even if you are not falling in all of those unmarked categories. It also means, not always practiced active discrimination, but inactive inattention. What does it mean to speak and act as a privileged person? It means that you don't see a lot of stuff because you never experienced it or had to see it.

Often there is a 'masculinity' culture around anarchism that some people feel alienated from. Especially patriarchy teaches people, that they are entitled to other peoples bodies, to take up space and to put their ideas and thoughts out there whenever they want to, without consideration for others. These issues bring about disempowerment not only for women, but for many men who cannot or do not want to live up to this 'masculinity' stereotype. This is a very different socialization than other people experience who are told to shut up, keep it to themselves, hide who they really are, get out of the way and to never forget how lucky they are to be allowed here.

CO-OPERATION OF OPPRESSION

Yet until today a lot of different forms of oppression are left out in actions and writings. If you look at statements from various collectives, you will often find: We are in opposition to racism, sexism, homophobia and all other forms of oppression and discrimination. What are 'all other forms of oppression and discrimination'? When the anarchist movement leaves it out of its analysis, or includes it in a cursory manner as 'other forms of discrimination' this is clearly not sufficient. It kind of leads to the suspicion, that there is no real understanding of other forms of discrimination. It is time to reflect all forms of discrimination based upon gender, ethnicity, religion, language, culture, class, caste, sexual orientation, migrant or refugee status, 'disability'... as well as their social, economic and political dynamics and the powers that create and feed them.

Unfortunately here it is just possible to raise questions on some issues, which will leave other often ignored forms of discrimination/oppression untouched for now.

Identity (in part) comes from the categories we fit into and the collectives we are part of. Some taken-for-granted and unnoticed elements of social reality that typically remain unnamed and implicit should be described at the following pages.

that they take their own lives or try to do so, as for example the growing self-immolation by women in Afghanistan shows. When the U.S.-led coalition invaded Afghanistan in October 2001, one of the 'justifications' for the war was that it would liberate women from the rule of the Taliban. Over five years later the depressing reality is again masked.

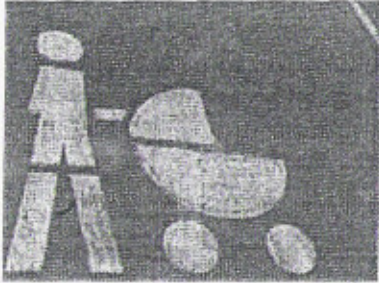
The reality of family life is quite different from the sentimental ideal. Anarchists generally do not hold with conventional marriage. It is not acceptable that it is any business of the church or the State what people do with their sexual relationships. True emotional security for both children and adults is less likely to be found in a legally enforceable and artificially 'permanent' tie between two people of either sex, than it is in a wider network of relationships that may or may not have a sexual component.

If men
were able to
become
pregnant,
abortion would
be a civil right.



RELIGION / STATE / ABORTION RIGHTS

Until today every year 20 million abortions are taking place worldwide under illegalised and insecure conditions - the result is that at least 70.000 women die every year because of such an operation. Until today population programmes exist, which forbid or force the pregnancy of certain groups of women. While abortion is forbidden in over a hundred countries of the world, population politics with forced



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE and the authoritarian family

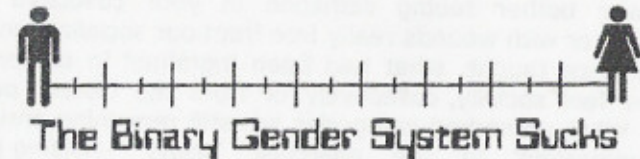
For men domestic violence is a tool to undermine the independence and self-confidence of women. Discriminating attitudes which view domestic violence as a private matter, strengthen the atmosphere which degrades and abuses women.

- Estonia: 29% of 2.315 women aged 18-24 fear domestic violence, and the share rises with age, affecting 52% of women 65 or older
- Poland: 60% of divorced women reported having been hit at least once by their ex-husbands; an additional 25% reported repeated violence
- Tajikistan: 23% of 550 women aged 18-40 reported physical abuse
- Kyrgyzstan: 89% of 1.000 women had been abused by husbands, intimate partners, children or relatives
- Romania: 29% of women reported experience of spousal physical abuse
- Lithuania: 42% of married women reported that they have been victims of physical or sexual violence by their present partner
- Russia: every 4th family in Russia experiences domestic violence, with 82% committed by husbands – each year about 14.000 women die at the hands of their husbands or intimate partners

'He beat me so hard that I lost my teeth. The beatings happened at least one time each month. He used his fists to beat me. He beat me most severely when I was pregnant...The first time he beat me, and I lost the baby. I was in the hospital. The second time was only a few days before a baby was born, and my face was covered with bruises. He beat me and I went to my parents. My father refused to take me to a doctor. He said, "What will I say, 'her husband beats her?'"

Sharofat, 38, Uzbekistan, faced violence in her home for seventeen years until her husband took a second wife

Gender-based violence evolves in part from women's subordinate status in society. Many have beliefs, norms, and social institutions that legitimize and therefore perpetuate violence against women. First women suffer at the hands of their partners, and then at the hands of the state. For some women the burden of abuse is so great



Gender is a process of social construction, a system of social stratification, and an institution that structures every aspect of our lives because of its embeddedness in the current system, as well as in dominant sexuality, language and culture.

The body is a surface marked by social and disciplinary tools such as clothing, diet, exercise, fashion, ornamentation, make-up, which signal its sexuality, social status, and subject position.

Well even in anarchist / autonomous settings it is quite difficult for a woman to stay outside the discourse of heterosexual femininity. A heterosexual female who considers herself feminine might engage in different behaviours from a lesbian who considers herself feminine. There might also be different outcomes and interpretations of these feminine behaviours. If a female autonomous dressed in tight shirt and mini-skirt, might be considered a rebellious person outside of the 'norm' from society, whereas she might be interpreted as displaying availability or submissiveness to males in an anarchist surrounding.

An inspecting / public view disciplines the body in public sites, so individuals for the most part submit to the prevailing appearance and behaviour codes. Did you ever wonder what functions some 'dress codes' have? Why are there still so many differences between female and male dressing in the anarchist 'scene'? How would a male anarchist be viewed if he chooses to wear mini-skirts? Why do some guys always have to take their shirts off, as soon as they are in public and it's not raining or full of snow? The unmarked category becomes the standard against which to measure everything else. Also of course inside the anarchist 'scene'. As anarcha-feminists we have thought things through, especially experiences which have forced us into a submissive role. Experiences where we have been taught that we are/should be weaker, that we should look a certain way, that we are just valued because of our bodies as well as sex. Yet how can we keep away how we've been taught throughout our lives and all those forces around us now from affecting us? How can we know if/when

good...' or '...why are you wearing this...? into other peoples faces? Did you ever bother seeing someone in your collective being extremely thin or with wounds really free from our socialization, from what we've been taught, what had been ingrained in us, and the pressure we feel socially, collectively or from the closest persons around us? What unmarked categories are still remaining around us - even 'unmasked' in the anarchist 'scene' -holding people back, dominating or silencing others?



(Th)inspiration -

one

of

the

unmarked

beauty

ideals

Where the appearance and shape is decisive for the social value, people learn to lay the center of gravity on their appearance, which is becoming an imperative to achieve satisfaction and social acceptance. People also learn that a good appearance is a kind of 'currency' in this world.

The most visible body parts -- your height, weight, eyes, nose, mouth, breasts, penis, ears, skin colour -- are the parts most people focus on when they look in the mirror. People with a positive body image accept themselves as they are. They see themselves as a complete package, flawed in some ways, but perfect in others.

People who have a real negative body image dislike just about everything about their looks. Their bodies make them unhappy. And

In many instances of discrimination against women it intersects with racism as well as negative perceptions of ethnicity, religion, language, culture, class, caste, sexual orientation, migrant or refugee status, or disability. This kind of intersectionality occurs when a woman from a minority group (class, caste, ethnicity, disability, age, religion, migrant, youth, displaced, refugees, asylum seekers, health status, etc.) has to deal not only with one form of oppression, but with all the forms which link together to make a double, a triple, a multiple, a many layered blanket of oppression which impacts on her life. Ethnicity, gender, or class, are often seen as separate spheres of experience which determine social, economic and political dynamics of oppression. But if we just look at racism as a simple issue of dominance of one group over another, on the grounds of ethnic and cultural superiority, then we ignore the complex dynamics of racism.

INTERNAL CONSTRAINTS

Gender-based violence evolves in part from women's subordinate status in society. Many in the anarchist spectrum actively attack the beliefs, norms, and social institutions that legitimize and therefore perpetuate violence against women. But there is a blankness of anarchist theory and / or action, when it comes to ethnic minority women who suffer at the hands of their partners / families / communities / cultures. Of course, for example Rroma women suffer at the hands of the state, but they also suffer at the hands of their partners. In parts of the Rromani communities there are also still cultural institutions, beliefs, and practices that undermine women's autonomy and contribute to gender-based violence. Patriarchal community structures, early marriages and the central role of Rromani women in the care of children, maintaining the household and upholding traditional cultural norms are dominant characteristics in the life of many Rromani women. A family's honour is often linked to the sexual 'purity' of the women until marriage. To secure the virginity, girls are taken from school as soon as they have their first menstruation and are sometimes even married as early as twelve years old. It's important to recognize, that appeals to culture are often an excuse to justify practices oppressive to women. We always need to ask some questions and stress important points: Who are the ones that represent themselves as representatives of the cultural identity of a community? Who has legitimised them in their role as spokesperson? To which extend has the involved group, like Rroma women, influences on the development of culture? Which social or economic position has the person that demands cultural integrity?

children as 'victims'. Unfortunately because of the enduring inequality between men and women, women and children are prevalent among the 'victims'. While poverty and inequality are important factors in making certain populations more vulnerable to being trafficked, they are not the only cause of trafficking. Among the many elements to take into account are also the feminization of poverty accompanied by the feminization of responsibility.

DISCRIMINATION BASED UPON GENDER AND ETHNICITY

The collapse of the former state systems and the transition to a market economy in Eastern Europe has brought particular hardship to Rromani communities. Rroma, long-term targets of discrimination in many countries of Central and Eastern Europe, suffer from high rates of unemployment and poverty as well as increasing hostility and violence from the majority population. The situation of the minority Rroma population in Eastern Europe is among the worst in all of Europe. They face discrimination in accessing health care, housing, education, the criminal justice system, and social assistance.

EXTERNAL CONSTRAINTS

Rromani women are further marginalized through the double burden of both gender and race discrimination. Just one example are the reproductive rights violations Rromani women suffer, including coerced and forced sterilization and other severe forms of discrimination in accessing reproductive health care and the sexual violence in conflicts.

'I was in terrible pain, but I was not given any pills, any injection. Later on, doctors came and brought me to the operating room (for a C-section) and there they gave me anesthesia. When I was falling asleep, a nurse came and took my hand in hers and with it she signed something. I do not know what it was. I could not check because I cannot read, I only know how to sign my name. When I was released from the hospital, I was only told that I would not have any more children I was so healthy before, but now I have pain all the time. Lots of infections'
Agáta, 28, from Svinia / Slovakia

'Together with me there were other pregnant Romani women in the room at the maternity. They were treated like pigs, waiting to have their bellies cut. One of them gave birth on the floor of the room, because nobody came to help her. When the doctor saw it, he said, 'you are a pig, so you should give birth like a pig.'
Woman from Jasov / Slovakia

even if they make changes, like colouring their hair or losing weight, there's always something else they want to 'fix'. Most people fall somewhere between these two extremes, but also feelings can change. We can feel good about our bodies until someone teases us, and suddenly, we feel bad about something that never bothered us before.

But the ideal beauty image is nothing natural or stable. It is changing in comparison with the social role of women in the society. Before the industrialization, especially during and after a war, a round and fertile woman body was the ideal. In a world where everything was rare, this was the expression of health and safety. But parallel to the industrialization in the western countries the body image changed to a thin and muscular appearance. Slimness is becoming the symbol for independence and liberty. But the beauty ideal has nothing to do with femininity. It is the expression of the patriarchal power relations together with economic interests of the cosmetic industry.

Have you ever thought how comments about other peoples appearance (if positive or negative) make them feel, especially in a world where most of us are objectified all the time? You really think you have to throw remarks like '...you really want to eat more...?', '...looking good...' or '...why are you wearing this...?' into other peoples faces? Did you ever bother seeing someone in your collective being extremely thin or with wounds really free from our socialization, from what we've been taught, what had been ingrained in us, and the pressure we feel socially, collectively or from the closest persons around us? What unmarked categories are still remaining around us - even 'unmasked' in the anarchist 'scene' -holding people back, dominating or silencing others?

from cutting themselves? Are you asking them what's up or you think it's a 'private' matter? from cutting themselves? Are you asking them what's up or you think it's a 'private' matter?

CAN YOU FUCK OFF JUST A BIT?

...thanks so much.

ARE YOU AFRAID AT NIGHT?

Because even still today, woman cannot move around as much as man can without fearing for their 'safety'. Fear brought on by stories of rape and harassments of all kinds, limits women's possibilities. They

constantly have to worry for their safety, something men can't fully understand while they are still the ones responsible for that situation.

Such a politic of fear kept upon all women brings up all kinds of privileges for men, whether they protect, threaten or aggress. Women's freedom happens to be largely limited.

Also women are aggressed daily in public spaces, their personal space violated by men who block their paths, stand too close, use a too intimate and insulting language, crude remarks by strange men, hearing men rate women's bodies like "nice ass", being groped or rubbed up against.... While all women are objects for harassment, there are special forms that it may take, for instance, women of colour, very young women, perceived lesbians and women deemed 'unattractive', just to name a few.

This behaviour is in general implicitly menacing and often becomes overtly threatening when a woman expresses her anger at these guys. It is a way in which men attempt to impose dominance and women are supposed to react with subordination.



SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICTS

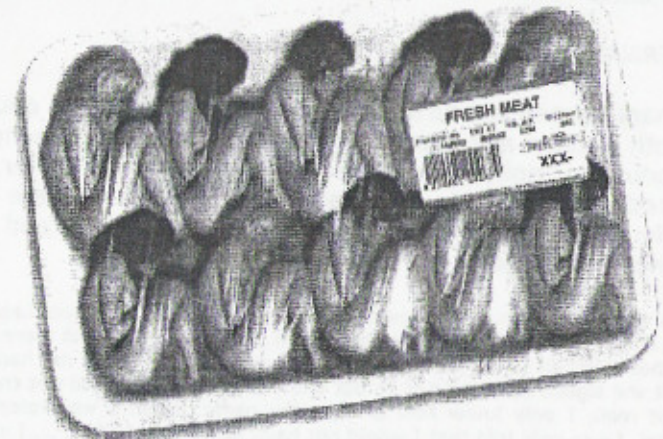
Co-operation of oppressions or the brutal intersections of gender violence and ethnicity can also be illustrated by the destiny of thousands of women and girls from minority groups subjected to sexual violence, rape, enforced pregnancy and sexual exploitation during conflicts.

Sexual violence against women is aimed as a weapon in national and ethnic conflicts. Women and girls of each age are brutally maltreated, seriously injured or mutilated as part of the war-strategy. Mass rapes and sexual torture was promoted in Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Haiti, Guatemala, Peru, Afghanistan,

Bangladesh, Myanmar, Kashmir, East-Timor and Chechenia. During the Balkan-conflict at least 20.000 women got raped. Women aged 12 to 60 were raped, penetrated with bottles and rifles, tortured and held in guarded building, where they were gang-raped every evening. In Rwanda estimates speak of 250.000 to 500.000 mass rapes during the genocide in 1994.

'I was at home with my eight-year-old son when drunken soldiers came in early February 2002. Three of them took me into a separate room while others looted the house. They tore my dress. They asked me where the men were, they asked me how long I had been without a husband. The soldiers then told me to undress, and when I fought them off they beat me with the butts of their rifles, and raped me. I don't know how many of them raped me. I lost consciousness, when it was happening. When I came to, they were pouring water on me ... then they left.'

Aset Asimova, 43, Chechenia



HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human Trafficking is often just viewed in relation to prostitution and sexual exploitation. In reality it includes all forms of forced labor and servitude, as sexual exploitation, domestic labor, farming, begging, child adoption, selling of organs Trafficking in Persons means the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability for the purpose of exploitation. Human Trafficking affects men, women and