

Angela Condello* in dialogue with Chiara Bottici**
Difference Feminism and Anarchafeminism.
Perspectives on Gender Justice

Angela Condello

As legal philosophers, we are interested in new critiques to legal normativity. For instance, relevant perspectives have been offered, for decades now, by Marxism or critical legal studies. Certainly, among the critiques of law and legal normativity that have questioned more decisively the order of the law as a specific order of the world reflecting a particular system of values, an order often imposed by an authority – among these critiques we can name feminism. Against this background, I find your recent work on anarchafeminism crucial for a new, disruptive, critique.

One of the reasons why I was very impressed by your work is that you have a very rich, complex, and encompassing perspective on feminism. Legal science had, indeed, contacts, interactions and even clashes with feminist points of view in various ways and for various reasons – let us think for instance about the debates on abortion rights, or about the concepts of “gender” and “gender identity” (cfr. DDL Zan¹). Traditionally, at least in Italy and Europe, difference feminism² was a stream within feminism that had various encounters/conflicts with law as a system of patriarchal domination.

If we look at those streams in feminism in comparison to current LGBTQ* or queer movements, as far as issues like gender identity, sexual identity, or family models are concerned, the critiques against the *masculine domination* (to put it in Bourdieu’s terms) are quite different. Hence for example, in debates such as that generated by the DDL Zan some years ago, there have been conflicts between the various streams. Could you please comment on it, from your point of view?

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1 <https://www.camera.it/leg18/126?tab=&leg=18&idDocumento=0569>.

2 Or *femminismo del simbolico*. This can be traced back to feminist groups and collective experiences like Diotima (Verona) and the Libreria delle donne di Milano. This groups were created in the Sixties and Seventies and are still active. Cfr. the three papers “The Mothers of Us All: Extracts, with comments, from the ‘Yellow Catalogue’ published by the Milan Women’s Bookstore” (authored by A. Condello and S. Niccolai) published on *Law and Literature* between 2023 and 2024.

Chiara Bottici

Let us go one step after the other. To begin with, there is a very general question: what can anarchafeminism³ bring to a discussion on the role of positive law in society? And we could keep this first remark as a framework for the conversation. What is “anarchafeminism” then? The Italian publisher translated *Anarchafeminism* (Bottici 2021) with a misleading title “*Nessuna sottomissione*”. Yet, the subtitle of that Italian translation (“*Il femminismo come critica dell’ordine sociale*”) is very precise and does respond to the question “what is anarchafeminism?” – the answer being that anarchafeminism implies an entire critique of the social order: feminism is not just a women issue, it is not just about adding a few women in the positions of power, it is not just about reaching equality between women and men within a patriarchal system whose structure of oppression doesn’t allow the freedom of the “second sexes” in general. That is where I see the importance of an anarchafeminist perspective to a discussion of the role of the law – both as positive law in juridical systems, and as a space where claims and struggles for a better future can take place. This is what I would respond to your first point, and this can constitute our framework before we get to more specific points.

The second point you raised is: what happens with the passage from earlier forms of feminism, such as the XIX/early XX century suffragette movement looking for equality in terms of political rights, to 1970s feminism and the current wave? Now, let me say that I don’t like the metaphor of the waves because it implies the idea that there was a first wave, aimed at political rights, followed by a second wave characterized by difference feminism. That perspective reproduces a narrative that in the best-case scenario only works for Europe and so it is technically Euro-centric. Just to give you an example, when you apply that narrative to the case of the United States, it works as a way to erase the feminist struggles of Native American women, who – when the Suffragettes were reclaiming the right to vote in so the called “first wave” – had just lost the same right through the creation of the settled colonial juridical system linked to the foundation of the United States of America. I am saying this because the metaphor of the wave already contains an implicit answer to your question “what is difference feminism doing with regard to first wave feminism or further feminisms?”. There are different waves that build on each other, and on the first very struggle for the attainment for the right to vote. Naming the “suffragette” first feminist waves means erasing the struggles that indigenous women did since 1492, the year when, through colonization and the imposition of Western patriarchy, their traditional gender systems, including the gynocratic ones, were shattered. So, let’s abandon the waves metaphor and adopt that of karstic river instead.

On the one hand, I would say that all the emancipatory movements are like karstic rivers: these are rivers that may remain invisible for a certain amount of time, but as soon as the conditions are ripe, they come up again. Hence, the metaphor of the river already presupposes a certain answer to your question – in that we could say that feminisms from the Seventies focusing on difference recovered the

3 See Bottici 2021, 2022, 2023.

same feminist current of struggle for women's emancipation, but brought it up to a different level, adding a different layer to that very same struggle.

In this sense, I think we should keep the conceptual framework of a mass of water, by giving up the naming of first, second, and third waves. But I can also see the reasons why some feminists think we should emphasize more vigorously the differences between those struggles and come to the conclusion that they were actually two different things in the same way in which we could say the battles for civil rights and the political rights of early modern times were not the same as the struggle for the workers' rights of the XIX century. In both cases, we are still talking about struggles for emancipation but maybe they are different things. Historically speaking, for instance, it is significant that a lot of the feminists from the 1970ies even rejected the label 'feminism'. I am currently in a dialogue with Luisa Passerini – we had a meeting discussing precisely the question of the feminist traditions. She explained that for her and her group the use of the term 'feminism' was misleading. They even authored a piece called "...*E continuavano a chiamarci le femministe*" with a sort of variation of the movie "...*Continuavano a chiamarlo Trinità*" – because they really wanted to break from the feminism of equality of the earlier generation. They rejected the term 'feminism' because for them the point was no longer simply reaching equality between men and women, hence opposing feminism to a supposed masculinism of society, and so they chose the expression 'women's movement'. The point was not an opposition, but the movement of women: "we want to understand who we are", to begin with, as a subject. Hence, the emphasis not just on difference, but also on creating groups between women who wanted to get to know each other, who were gathering in separate groups (not just the consciousness raising groups), in which they would get together, and dance, walk naked on the beach. Luisa Passerini and women of that generation really have beautiful stories about the attempt to not simply theorize but also discover and practice this difference.

Therefore, I think that before we move forward to the contemporary debates like the one on DDL Zan we need to unpack what happened at this disjuncture. I am saying this because we live in a moment in which there is a very large use (and perhaps abuse) of the label 'feminism' – in a way we can say that feminism, after a few decades of decay is now back on the scene. Against this background we should add, immediately, that the themes that came back to the scene are probably not exactly the same as those that went away. So, again, there is a difference: in the same way in which the feminists in the 1970ies were rejecting even the label 'feminism' to distance themselves from the earlier forms of feminism – I believe it is not by chance that most of the feminist movements today prefer other terms. In Italy, for instance, I am impressed by the recurrence of the term '*transfemminismo*'. What is this term telling us? It is telling us that instead of a form of feminism that is only focused on women's battles, it is a form of feminism that is transversal to what I have personally defined "the second sexes", with a play on Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in the plural, to emphasize that there is not just one "second sex" but there is a plurality of second sexes. In this sense, we could say that the contemporary struggles more than a "femminismo della differenza" embody a "femminismo delle differenze", in the plural.

Already in the feminism of the 1970ies, I believe, there were attempts to broaden the idea of difference in a way to include not only women, but also specific types of women. Think for example of the materialist feminists – a movement that was particularly strong in France (think e.g. of Monique Wittig’s statement that the lesbian is not a woman). Still, these were feminist positions. Thus, I think that even already within the so-called difference feminism there was a multiplicity of differences that went under the name of difference feminism.

It is very clear and evident for me that now such a transformation has reached a further level, another level of awareness. That’s also part of the reason why a lot of contemporary young feminists don’t recognize themselves in the more essentialist reading of the idea of difference. Many of them have never read Muraro, or Cavarero, they are just starting to read Carla Lonzi. For them it is a start afresh. Such a radical break with the past, perhaps, it’s a good thing, perhaps it is not. I see how for people of my generation, who were born in the 1970ies, and who were politicized in the 1990ies and early 2000, feminism was not very visible. Particularly, if you lived in the periphery, in small towns like Carrara (where I used to live) – spaces like the *Libreria delle donne di Milano*, or in general urban centers where the feminist movements were physically visible were not accessible. Whereas at the end of the 1970ies feminism was very much present on the national radio or even TV, in the 1990ies the public space was occupied by the imaginary of the Berlusconi era. There were the *veline* on public TV, not the feminist debates on abortion or pornography: that was in my view a backlash against the feminist movement of the 1970ies. So, I think that all this has left a bit of a vacuum in the transmission and that’s why I believe we must look back at the feminism of the 1970ies considering what feminism has become in the last decades. To summarize again, we could say that feminism is indeed back, but what has come back is not the same thing that went away.

Angela Condello

I would like to add a little comment, or queue, to the very interesting frame you have portrayed. Again, let me repeat that your perspective, for legal philosophy, is extremely interesting. You said at one point, commenting on the concept of difference, that targeting a certain movement as difference feminism and other movements as something else, might be misleading. You underlined that there were already differences within difference feminism. This is fundamental from the legal point of view because the philosophical concept of difference is a tool to criticize and deconstruct the concept of juridical subjectivity, usually constructed around the masculine (or in any case the dominant) subject. Feminism indeed aimed at a disruption, at the overturning of a predominant order. As a matter of fact, the metaphor often used by the feminist collectives was expressed by the sentence “*non farsi trovare al proprio posto*”: hence shifting away from a predetermined order. A similarly critical attitude can be found in Carol Smart’s claim that “law is sexist” and “law is male” (Smart 1992). That was clearly a direct critique of the legal order.

Yet, more broadly, we could say that feminism has widely and permanently fought the principle of a *main* logic, a *main* discourse, a *main* order. The very prin-

ciple, as you were rightly underlining, that there is more (more space, more possibilities, more subjects) – just more to be considered in the normative discourse and more that could contribute to build the future of humanity. Such principle – of openness and indetermination – shed a revolutionary light over a traditional way of conceptualizing legal normativity, and it was emancipatory already in itself.

I'd like to hear more about your experience as a Professor at the New School for Social Research in New York and as a public intellectual in the United States – especially as far as this disruptive attitude is concerned in relation to queer theory and movements, which amplified the concept of difference beyond duality and binarism.

Chiara Bottici

First, let us reflect on the first point you raised, i.e., the critique of the universal subject – which is the essential property of the critique of the law as sexist.

Why is the law sexist by definition? Because it operates with the idea of a certain subject of rights that is gender neutral. We experienced such dynamic since the very first building blocks of the modern legal systems – think about the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen that is built on the expression “the rights of man” assuming that every subject is gender-neutral, and thus subsumed into manhood, hence privileging one specific type of sexed body over other, because being men is implicitly assumed to be both a specific gender and a general name for humanity. The problem with the overall organization of the law – reflected in the universal attitude of documents like the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man – is that its neutrality does not recognize women subjectivity as an integral part of it. Now, the problem with the structure of the law presupposing a universal subject is precisely that: if you do not *name* the specificity of women, then (because that specificity is denied) what is being performed is already an act of domination and oppression, that takes place through an erasure. Thus, the major contribution of difference feminism of the 1970ies is precisely to have clarified that this idea of the universal subject, which is not sexed and embodied in a specifically gendered being is, indeed, fictitious. It is what it is: a juridical fiction that is at best misleading – and at worst *the* problem. It is the problem because it perpetrates the patriarchal structure of society as such.

How does this happen? It happens because, to give an example, the idea of an a-gendered individual generates gender-neutral social contract theories. The latter argued that we are all subjects giving rise to a social contract, to a political power, that in turn protects us and guarantees our rights. Since the pathbreaking work of feminists such as Carol Pateman, we know that behind this social contract – according to which the subject of political power gives rise to a political body – there is also a “sexual contract”. What is a sexual contract? It is the underlying and unspoken presupposition according to which sexual differences can be put on a second plane, as mere private affairs. By the very gesture of speaking about a “social contract” and hiding its underlying “sexual contract”, all the questions that are related to being a sexed body, to being a woman with a certain experience – whether a trans woman or a cis woman, we can leave that aspect aside for a moment – all that specificity is swept under the carpet. Among other things, such a move grounds

the very juridical distinction between public law and private, ultimately as a way to render women's issues less political and thus only relevant to "private affairs". Therefore, whatever comes to concern having a body that can menstruate, having a body that can get pregnant, having or not having marriage arrangements and sexual arrangements more in general – immediately become questions of private law which are not considered to be political per se. This is a building block of the modern structure of social order: the division between the private and the public and the fact that the sexual contract which lies behind the social contract is made invisible. It is in this sense that I think it is justified to say that "law is sexist", and it is justified to say that the major contribution of difference feminism (this is also what you show in your work *Legal Feminism*) is to argue that this universal male subject is a pernicious fiction precisely because it enables the erasure of the specificity of women's issues.

From a more general perspective, I think that what this form of 1970s feminism (though we should also differentiate within it, since Lonzi is not Muraro, Cavarero is not Wittig, and none of them is Audre Lorde or the black feminists who were active in the 1970ies) clearly shows is the importance of a critique of the universal subject, and thus that feminism is not just a limited private issue, but a revolutionary framework that implies a critique of the entire social order.

When you enter feminism from this premises, emphasizing its revolutionary potential, I think you open the door to a meeting point between different strands of feminism – on the one hand black feminism/intersectional feminism, and on the other hand queer theory and queer feminism. Hence, we come to your last point. Why black feminism? We can see it from the point of view of the concept of intersectionality. As black women, within a juridical system where you cannot file claims for discrimination *as* a black woman, you must file claims for discrimination either on the basis of race *or* on that of gender. Now, if you do it because of race, your own specificity as a woman is erased by the general experience of being a black person. So, the specific experience of being a black woman becomes invisible because the standard for oppression is considered that of black men. Viceversa, if you file a claim for discrimination based on gender, the experience that is privileged is that of white women. Why is that? Not simply because of some accidental reason, but because as white women – and within the European system in particular – we can experience gender discrimination in a way that is separate from racial and class discrimination, since most of the time white women are in marriages that are racially homogeneous. As a white woman you can perceive gender discrimination as *separate* from race discrimination because you are not subject to racial discrimination. That is the problem of "difference" when we speak of difference in the singular. The problem is that it only points to some types of experiences and is not inclusive enough of the different points of view, particularly of those who are situated at the margins.

If we decline the differences in the plural – and so the "second sexes" not just as one single sex (women) but as a multiplicity of sexes excluded from the "first" (women as well as all the LGBTQ+ people), we can allow for an expanding notion of gender discrimination. It would be an expanding notion because then gender discrimination can be at the crossroads of other forms of discrimination, whether

they are based on race (intersectional feminism), sexual orientation (queer feminism), gender embodiment (trans theory) or class inequalities (socialist feminism). Monique Wittig argues that lesbians are not women because their experience of oppression is not the same that women undergo when they are in a heterosexual relation or when they are perceived as heterosexual. That is largely true in terms of *lived experience*, and I am using here a term that I borrow from Simone De Beauvoir precisely to point to the importance of the phenomenology of discrimination. At the same time, we can say that if we have a malleable definition of second sexes that includes a plurality of phenomenologies of gender discrimination, we can still point to forms of domination that discriminate certain bodies because of their physical appearances, on the basis of their way of presenting themselves. And in this sense, I think Audre Lorde is right when she says “in the end, what is sexism? It is the idea that some bodies are superior to others. What is racism? It is the idea that some races are superior to others. What is classism? It is the idea that some ways of life are superior to others. What is heterosexism? It is the idea that some bodies, for their way of loving, are superior to others”. What all these forms of discrimination have in common is the idea that some bodies, for the way in which they present themselves and they experience themselves, are ontologically superior to others and therefore because of their ontological superiority they are entitled to dominate.

Thus, against this background, what is anarchafeminism doing? It is criticizing sexist domination in all its aspects. Sexism has in common with other forms of domination the very structure of domination – what Patricia Hill Collins calls “the matrix of domination”, what Bell Hooks calls “the politics of domination”. And what is this matrix of domination? It is the idea that some bodies are ontologically superior to others. Hence, you cannot criticize sexism without criticizing at the same time the very matrix of domination. That is what I call anarchafeminism. What is anarchafeminism? It is the idea that feminism has no single *arché*, and that to criticize one single instance of domination you must unpack the entire tangled knot of domination. You can pull one string each time, but you cannot undo the entire knot of domination unless you pull all the threads at the same time.

To conclude on this point, I think 1970s feminism already had within itself the fundamental intuitions about the necessity for an entire critique of the social order. What I think was missing yet was an emphasis on the importance of recognizing “differences” in the plural within the feminist movement itself. I would call the transition from “difference feminism” to contemporary forms of transfeminism or (as I call it) anarchafeminism as a passage from a feminism of difference to feminism of differences.

Angela Condello

Excellent, thank you so much – this is all extremely clear. I think this helps building a different critical point of view, starting from your thesis, on the role of law as an instrument of social regulation within such social order. I have another question. You perfectly explained the passage from one difference to a plurality of differences. Now, one of the issues that were questioned by difference (in the singular) feminism – also in recent debates on same sex marriage, “gender iden-

tity” (DDL Zan), etc. – was that in the de-universalization of the subject, when it becomes wide and open to pluralities and differences, something might get lost. What could get lost? That plurality could become synonymous with undifferentiation and indistinction: in adding more subjects claiming for recognition and rights, the “original” difference (between male and female) would be erased and so, again, such indistinction might produce a short circuit that could lead to the original, neutral, idea of a universal subject on which modern political theory was based. There, in the end, it would be again the female subject that would become second to other subjects. This is a short circuit that might be resolved by anarchafeminism, as far as legal conflicts are concerned. These are indeed arguments that are also recurrent in court litigations on these themes: the neutralization of the juridical subject as a new form of potential domination and a risk of excessive “masculinization” of the main subject of rights.

Chiara Bottici

This is a very important point. And that is also why I think we should insist on the fact that theorizing differences in the plural does not mean the obliteration of the difference in the singular. We can see the same logic in the debate about language. Language of course is not everything, but it is a mirror of the social relationship and of power relationships that a certain society has within itself. It is not by chance that the countries with a more gender-neutral language often have a more egalitarian organization of gender relationships. Against this background, the Italian language is extremely gendered along the binary male-female. Hence an approach inspired by difference feminism (in the singular) would claim that we have to say “*tutti e tutte*”, i.e., we would have to add the female specificity within a male-oriented symbolic imaginary that only uses the masculine (*maschile sovraesteso*) as if it were a name for all and every subject.

On the contrary, exponents of the LGBTQ+ movement often argue that, if we remain within the male-female binary, we exclude all those who do not identify with the binary, hence alternative signs such as the asterisk or the schwa make space for a more inclusive subject. In this idea of a new, more inclusive, subject I do see a risk of neutralization of differences that would then re-inscribe the logic of domination of the male over the female. And this is an experience that many of us have done within the LGBTQ+ movement itself, where, quite often, queer men manage to dominate the scene. To me, for example, it is very interesting to note (along with Julia Serano) that when it comes to discussing trans issues, and in particular gender violence against trans people, it is most often trans women who are the object of extreme visibility and thus extreme violence. Whenever there is a presence of trans people in the mainstream media it is most often trans women who are portrayed, discussed or even ridiculed (think of the use of trans women as a joke in Hollywood movies such as 1959 *Some like it hot*, or their pathologization in movies such as the 1991 *Silence of the Lambs*). There are no doubts that in terms of gender violence, trans women are much more often the object of violence if compared to trans men. Julia Serano speaks about “trans misogyny” to point out that even within the trans community there is a misogynist logic where the feminine is subject to the domination of the masculine universe.

Now, how to counteract this? I think the solution is to accept a plurality which does not give up differences. For instance, in the case of language I think that we should use both the asterisk and the feminine, experimenting freely with forms that uproot or question the underlying masculine logic of language from the inside. In other words, I don't see why we have to choose between one and the other and make it the dominant and exclusive strategy; and that is why in the case of the DDL Zan, I do not see why recognizing the existence of forms of transphobia and violence against people who do not conform the heterosexual matrix cannot go hand in hand with a recognition of the violence that is done on people who are perceived as cisgender women. The point is that in both cases we are talking about "second sexes". What does it mean? It means bodies that – because of their specific embodiment, because of their specific way of being sexed – become the object of violence, discrimination, and systematic oppression.

For me, this is a very important point because, whereas we have a lot of difficulties in understanding how all these things go together, for right-wing politicians and new macho-populists it is very clear how trans rights go along with cis-women rights. They call everything "gender ideology". Whatever questions the heteronormative patriarchal family is grouped under the heading of "gender ideology", pointing thus to the fact that it is our own position within this society that makes us "second sexes". And that is why it is absolutely crucial to build solidarity and alliances. It is exhausting, and I am exhausted: *Anarchafeminism*, 300 pages, is the result of more than ten years of research during which I went outside my own experience and outside the literature I was immediately drawn to in order to understand how we can build solidarities across different experiences. And I think we must do that: since when you are placed on the top of the mountain, in a position of privilege – as a white, middle class cis-woman – you can only see what is at the top of the mountain. That is, you can perceive gender as an independent variable because as a white woman you are not exposed to the experience of being discriminated without knowing whether you are being discriminated as a black person or as a woman. Let us say: I get fired, and I think I got fired because I noticed in my work environment a persistent attitude of marginalization and mobbing. Now, if I am a white woman, I can say "it's because I am a woman", but if I am a black woman, how do I know if I am being treated as a second-rate citizen because of my skin color or because I have a vagina? That's why it is important to descend from the top of the mountain and take the perspective of those at the margins. This is what I have learned from Bell Hooks and the other black feminists: the view from the margins gives us the most encompassing view of the global structures of power. Taking a view from the margins means not just the margins within a single society and so looking at the question of genders from the point of view of spaces where gender intersects with race and class issues. I also believe it is important to go even beyond the margins of every single society and look at the margins of the global structures of power. This is the thesis of Chandra Talpade Mohanty: i.e., the idea that to build a bottom-up epistemology we must focus on the struggles of the most marginalized communities of women struggles within global capitalism, because it is by focusing on those struggles that we can *study up* structures of power and

domination instead of *studying* them *down*. In a way, if we are at the bottom of the mountain we can see the entire structure, whereas if you are at the top you don't get to see the whole picture – so to speak. Hence the need for a decolonial and deimperial attitude, by which I mean that we must cultivate an attitude continued across space and time: it is not enough to read one book by Bell Hooks and declare oneself intersectional. You have to adopt that attitude of taking the perspective of those at the margins, reading their work, joining their struggles, in order to dismantle the structure of privilege we have internalized.

Angela Condello

Thank you very much for these remarks, which offer again extremely powerful insights for legal scholarship. Thanks for clarifying why, from your point of view, it is possible to envisage a plurality that includes differences without obliterating the singularities, as well as for sharing and commenting the metaphor of the mountain – about more or less privileged perspectives – showing the epistemological problem behind every critique of the societal order. This leads me to the final question I would like to ask you. More precisely, I would like to return on a sentence recurring in your recent works, and namely that feminism amounts to a critique of the social order. Hence, briefly, to the idea that feminism can be an instrument of social justice, in some sense.

This reminds me of feminist struggles that are not often quoted in the current debates – and also in the former debates on the 1960ies and 1970ies, struggles often neglected even among the various categorizations of the “waves” that you were mentioning at the beginning of our dialogue (emancipatory, egalitarian, etc.). Less often, in fact, we quote the works of feminist intellectuals within the Marxist and Socialist tradition, which instead did raise issues that resonate with your core thesis – i.e., with the thesis that feminism is doubly bound to social justice (there can be no social justice without a feminist critique, and there can be no feminist critique without social justice). Behind such perspective there is the idea that patriarchy is first and foremost a tool crafting social injustice. Think for instance of Clara Zetkin, who, with Rosa Luxemburg, was among the female protagonists of the Socialist International. Her writings are much less systematic than those by Luxemburg and it is hence more difficult to relate her to a specific thesis (she would publish brief comments on the feminist proletarian pamphlet *Die Gleichheit*, active between 1890 and 1923). Her theory, that she draws from Marx, is that there cannot be social justice without gender justice: a society, in other words, cannot be considered “just” – economically, socially – without a just balance between sexes. In one question: how we can hope for gender justice (in the couple, in the family, at work, etc.) if there is not yet a proper recognition of the work of social reproduction, or the care work? In other words, how can we strive for gender justice if economic policies are not oriented towards an equal treatment of the activities and expressions of all sexes, inequalities and injustices will just continue, despite all efforts of comment and analysis?

This brings us back to the reason that led you to write *Anarchafeminism*, i.e. – as you were clarifying above – that not having an *arché* allows feminism to embrace

social justice struggles at all levels (in this sense being the very opposite of a neutralizing practice): a feminism including all the possible points of view. Could you please, conclusively, develop a little more this connection between social and gender justice?

Chiara Bottici

I agree very much with your reading, except that I would qualify the point in the sense that the Marxist and the Socialist feminists (I prefer to call them Socialist, because I don't think that all of them were just Marxist) – these feminists did not take this view from Marx. In fact, Engels had a more elaborate discussion of the family, arguing, for instance, that the woman is the proletarian in the family. Marx didn't have much to say about social reproduction work – all he had to say was that capitalism requires the reproduction of the labor and the reproduction of the capitalist relation itself, therefore opening the path and providing tools for a work yet to come.

I think it is important to give credit to those that have done the actual work on social reproduction and on the need to combine struggles for social justice and equality with those of gender justice; besides Clara Zetkin, I must say I have been very much inspired by Aleksandra Kollontaj or Sylvia Pankhurst.

Yet, what is important here is not so much whether they were Marxist or not: crucially these are all revolutionary thinkers who, in a moment of extreme turmoil, in which a revolution seemed possible – were led to think about how to reorganize society. In this sense, therefore, they were anarchafeminist because they were practicing feminism as a critique of the social order from the bottom up. Their question was indeed “how do we re-organize society?” in terms of who works, for how many hours, within the household or in collective spaces, when and how do we organize the care of the children and food production and preparation? For them, these questions were part of rethinking a more just society.

The problem – and this is what difference feminists like Carla Lonzi emphasized – is that within a lot of the Marxist movements (this is what my colleague Cinzia Arruzza pointed out in her book *Dangerous Liaisons*: 2013), and within Marxist feminism, the Marxist component very often ended up exercising the same role that men do in heterosexual marriages with regard to feminism: the connubial between Marxism and feminism has often resulted in a very “unhappy marriage”, according to Heidi I. Hartmann's fortunate expression.

What is the problem, there? The problem is that gender emancipation has very often been presented as something to be resolved once the abolition of the capitalist relation of production will happen – assuming that, in a communist society, there would be no more space and no more need for gender oppression because all and everybody will be free. This attitude of putting gender issues on a second plane – in terms of theoretical analysis and immediate political goals – replicated (in the case of some strands of Marxist feminism at least) the same subordination that women suffered in heterosexual marriages. This is something that has been emphasized by the Marxist feminists themselves – a lot of my work draws from this strand of feminism (Aleksandra Kollontaj, Silvia Federici, Mariarosa Dalla Costa). These figures have been fundamental for me, not only because they were Marxists, but because they were revolutionary. And in contrast to other revolutionary

thinkers, for them the revolution really meant the *social revolution*. Revolution did not simply mean a part of the society seizing power through sheer force or violence, killing the leaders in a society, and then replacing them. By the expression “revolutionary thinkers” I mean people who re-thought the very building blocks of society, trying to imagine a more just society for everybody.

I keep insisting that patriarchy is bad for everybody in society, men included: it may give men an advantage and put them in a position of power where they may apparently take advantage of their own position of domination without paying any costs. But one of the most important points that I’ve learnt from anarchafeminism is precisely this idea that domination is bad, not only for those who are dominated but also for those who are in the position of dominating others. Think, for instance, of how men, in patriarchal societies, are pushed to take more risks than women, are prevented from showing their weaknesses, and pushed to avoid preventive medicine, just because “they are men”. How many women are told they need a regular visit to a gynecologist? All of us. How many men have led an entire life without even seeing a urologist? Most of them, and yet prostate cancer is the leading cancer in men. Even more significantly, men are the overwhelming majority of the incarcerated people, a significant price they pay for their “manhood” in patriarchal societies.

If you live in a society that is based on relationships of domination that very form, that very social structure – in one way or another – will come back to you as well. This point was crucial for He-Yin Zhen (1884-1920), a little-known Chinese anarchafeminist who has been an illuminating source of inspiration for me, precisely because she repeatedly emphasized that feminism does not mean women ruling over men, but it means neither submissive women, nor submissive men (and she said this in 1904!). This is the liberation of women not simply from the power that men exercise in patriarchal societies, but from the structure of domination itself which oppresses men, women as well as all those bodies that do not conform with the binary.

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