

# Feminisms at the Heart of Contemporary Anarchism in Quebec

## Grassroots Practices of Intersectionality

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*Composés de collectifs, groupes et réseaux actifs sur des enjeux de lutte divers, le mouvement antiautoritaire qui s'est consolidé au Québec dans la foulée des mobilisations altermondialistes est guidé par des valeurs qui s'inspirent d'une «boussole éthique» commune. Cette dernière est fondée sur une vision de l'anarchisme en tant que processus qui se réalise par la préfiguration, ici et maintenant, d'une société fondée sur l'autonomie collective. En ce sens, ce chapitre documente le travail des militant.es impliqué.es au sein de trois micro-cohortes du mouvement dans le développement de pratiques en faveur de l'autodétermination et de l'auto-organisation. Les micro-cohortes des féministes radicales et (pro) féministes, des radical queers et enfin des féministes et (pro) féministes impliqué.es dans la lutte anticoloniale et antiraciste contribuent à l'atteinte de cet objectif par le biais d'une démarche de pollinisation qui permet la diffusion de ces pratiques dans différents espaces. Cette analyse est le fruit d'un travail de recherche réalisé au sein du Collectif de recherche sur l'autonomie collective (CRAC). Le CRAC est un groupe d'affinité (pro)féministe et antiautoritaire qui documente son propre mouvement par le biais d'une méthodologie de recherche-action participative.*

*Composed of collectives, groups and*

*networks active in various struggles, the antiauthoritarian movement, which was consolidated in Quebec in the wake of the Global justice movement is guided by values that are based on a common ethical compass. The latter is based on a vision of anarchism as a process that prefigures, in the here and now, a society based on collective autonomy. This chapter documents the work of activists involved in three micro-cohorts of the anti-authoritarian movement, and who are the forefront of the development of practices for self-determination and self-organization. These micro-cohorts, composed of radical feminists and (pro) feminists, radical queers, and feminists and (pro) feminists involved in struggles against racism and colonialism, contribute to achieving this goal through a process of pollination that enables the dissemination of practices in different spaces. This analysis is the result of research carried out within the Research Group on Collective Autonomy (CRAC). CRAC is a (pro) feminist and anti-authoritarian affinity group that has been documenting its own movement using a participatory action research methodology.*

At the turn of the century in Quebec, we witnessed a resurgence of anarchist-style organizing that, ten years later, has burgeoned into a nebula of antiauthoritarian groups

and networks. This phenomenon, common to many countries in both the Global North and the Global South, emerged out of the uprisings against global capitalism's newest configuration, neo-liberalism, which came onto the public radar in North America in 1999 with the mass street protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle. Since then, antiauthoritarian activists organizing in Quebec have been at most local, regional, national and even some international street protests: the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in 2001, the protest against the G8 (held in Kananaskis) in Ottawa in 2002, the Summit on the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America in Montebello in 2007, the Olympics in Vancouver in 2010, the G20 in Toronto the same year, and the anti-IMF protests in Washington in 2000 (among others). These counter-globalization protests have garnered widespread mainstream media attention globally, some of it more positive than others. Less documented, however, is the grassroots organizing that the same groups and networks engage in on a daily basis in their hometowns, outside the media spotlight. Even less visible is the work of feminists and pro-feminists<sup>2</sup> working within these networks, be it in radical feminist collectives, radical

queer groups, or anti-racist and anti-colonialist organizations.

Nancy Whittier argues that social movements can be understood through these loose groupings which she calls “micro-cohorts.” “Micro-cohorts are clusters of participants who enter a social movement within a year or two of each other and are shaped by distinct transformative experiences that differ because of subtle shifts in the political context” (762). In this paper, we would like to argue that there are three important micro-cohorts of antiauthoritarian activists engaged in self-organization at the grassroots level in Quebec today who have been radicalized by different political contexts: (1) radical feminists and pro-feminists, (2) radical queers including queer people of colour collectives, and (3) feminists and pro-feminists organizing in anti-racist and anti-colonial groups and networks. Whittier also argues that “[a]lthough the micro-cohorts that make up a single political generation differ from each other, their perspectives overlap as a result of basic commonalities in their movement experiences” (762), in this case, experiences within the antiauthoritarian milieu. Furthermore, these micro-cohorts have played a role in developing radical feminist analysis, strategy, and organizational modes in a variety of spaces inside,

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### **Methodology: Antiauthoritarian Participatory Action Research**

Our use of they/we indicates two positions. First, “we” indicates that the authors are making this contribution as participants in the antiauthoritarian movement, and within this movement, as members of a feminist research collective called the Research Group on Collective Autonomy (*Collectif de recherche sur l'autonomie collective* or CRAC) that is both documenting and analyzing the movement. Second, ‘they’ indicates that the authors are not necessarily representative of every group, collective or subject position of our research participants. We have also defined, for the purposes of our research, “antiauthoritarian” to refer to individuals or groups who refuse all authority deemed to be illegitimate, who use direct action tactics, and who prefigure organizational forms characterized by spontaneity, autonomy, direct democracy, and the decentralization of power (Rosanvallon, Pucciarelli, among others). Using an antiauthoritarian prefigurative participatory action research (PAR) methodology (Breton et al. 2010; Breton et al. 2011), we have interviewed 125 activists since 2005, in nine different groups and networks, each of which has participated or is participating in the production of a monograph, from writing to validation to layout and public launch. We chose groups and networks according to the interests and desires of CRAC members,<sup>3</sup> in order to document initiatives that often fall outside the scope of academic and/or social movement research. Our research collective engages with participants in ways that are explicitly antiauthoritarian, prefiguring the type of society—and research—we would like to see in an anarchist ‘utopian’ future. Moreover, given our feminist stance, we wanted to pay particular

attention to gendered, racialized and heteronormative power dynamics within the movement, particularly the ways in which these dynamics are deconstructed and transformed. We, therefore, chose to focus our research on antiauthoritarians who self-identify and organize as radical feminist, pro-feminist, radical queer, anti-racist and/or anti-colonialist (the “and/or” indicates that many of our research participants identify with more than one of these terms). In this text we will use the term (*pro*) *feminists* in italics as a short-form to include all of these collectivities.

For this paper, we are drawing on several sources of data. The main source is the individual and collective interview data collected for the monographs on the three micro-cohorts. Firstly, the radical feminist networks (n=15) and the Quebec City-based feminist radio show *Ainsi-Squattent-Elles* (n=7); secondly, the radical queer groups *les Panthères Roses* (n=6), *Q-Team* (n=6) and the *Ste-Emilie Skillshare* (n=7); and thirdly, the network of feminists and pro-feminists involved in anti-racist and anti-colonial organizing (n=20). We have also used interview material collected for other monographs—including the eco-radical collective *Liberterre*, two collective gardens, and the anti-capitalist convergence (CLAC)—because (*pro*) *feminists* are also involved in these initiatives. As we are moving ahead with a transversal analysis of data across all of our researched groups and networks, we are engaging in moments of collective interpretation as well, which is another important source of data. These moments include: informal focus groups with CRAC members; formal focus groups with members of the groups and networks under study; and formal focus groups with a range of antiauthoritarian activists. In this last category, we draw on data acquired in February 2011, when 60 antiauthoritarian activists participated in a weekend long series of workshops to validate and deepen the preliminary findings of our transversal analysis (CRAC 2011a, b, c). This paper is

therefore part of a work-in-progress that aims to produce movement-relevant knowledge *by, for, and with* those who are directly involved (cf. Breton et al. 2007; Kruzynski and Sarrasin; Lambert-Pilotte et al., among others).

### **Theoretical Framework: Prefigurative Self-Organization and Self-Governance**

The antiauthoritarian movement which we belong to and seek to document is inspired in many ways by anarchist ideas and practices. Although some groups and networks in the movement don't hesitate to state their allegiance to anarchism, a good number do not make this claim in their public discourse or in particular organizing spaces.<sup>4</sup> However, despite this resistance to pigeon-holing, and although the issues addressed by the different groups and networks within the movement may differ—ranging from the environment, to indigenous solidarity, to feminist issues, to police brutality, among others—they/we share a set of values and practices derived from a shared antiauthoritarian ethic (CRAC 2011a) related to an anarchist ethical compass (Milstein 47-50).

For the most part, antiauthoritarians first position them/ourselves against all forms of illegitimate authority, all forms of oppression and domination which are considered to be interconnected and mutually reinforcing: capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and sometimes anthropocentrism and ableism. Although most participants said that they don't have a clearly laid out vision of the kind of society they would like to see replace the current one, they do for the most part believe that humanity has the potential to meet the needs and desires of all. On this basis, the antiauthoritarian ethic enacted by these activists is characterized by a number of values that influence their analysis, their practice and their vision of what a better society may look like: freedom, solidarity, collective autonomy, social justice, respect,

spontaneity and mutual aid, among many others.

Concretely, this means promoting organizational forms and modes of action that are consistent with this antiauthoritarian ethic, based on fundamental principles of self-governance and self-organization. Since most antiauthoritarian activists would argue that the State is an authoritarian body which aims to maintain and reproduce relations of domination, they therefore seek to abolish it. They participate and organize convergences or fluid coalitions to engage in street protest that aims to interfere with the normal functioning of hegemonic institutions and norms, whether it be capitalism, the state, gay consumerism, patriarchy, racism, the police, the immigration system, national security, borders, or prisons. This is perhaps the better-known aspect of antiauthoritarian organizing and the most documented part of the movement, but for most activists, it is only a small part of what we do. The tactic of confrontation is accompanied by the long-term strategy of the prefigurative construction of a better world in the here and now.

Although there is no explicit common political platform to the movement or single programme to follow, it appears that for most research participants revolution is not a linear process that ends with a big bang! Some suggest we can visualize it instead as a continuous, open-ended process (CRAC 2011c) that attempts to create, expand and multiply what John Holloway calls "cracks" in the systems of domination: "A crack is the perfectly ordinary creation of a space or moment in which we assert a different type of doing" (21) or "other-doing" (29). Following Holloway, these cracks are created whenever people refuse the logic of alienation, abstraction and stratification by engaging in "other-doing" or enacting daily refusals to submit to capitalism's constant need to reproduce itself by instead doing contradictory things that are different than and often explicitly against this

logic (70). This is consistent with the general antiauthoritarian preference for what Richard Day calls the "politics of the act" (15) which is the idea that people take action on issues that affect them, rather than "the politics of demand," (15) which is a dependence on intermediaries (social services, the government, authorities, the culture industry, etc.) to satisfy people's needs or desires. Participants tended to agree that it is through the everyday activities of ordinary people that social change happens, in two different ways: when people have a direct say in decisions that affect their lives (self-governance) and when they/we are the main participants in the application of these decisions (self-organization). In accordance with these beliefs is the widely held sentiment that a better society is produced by the activities that people carry out in the here and now, a notion sometimes called prefigurative politics (Gordon, Milstein, among others).

Antiauthoritarian groups and networks have therefore developed organizational forms based on these values, which allow for experimentation with different ways of "doing" and "being." In keeping with the idea that decision-making should be done by those directly concerned, antiauthoritarians create small "affinity groups" (Dolgoft, among others) of five to twenty people who come

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together based on some form of affinity or like-mindedness—be it neighbourhood commitments, friendship, a specific common political interest, an ideological affiliation, a common identity or identities, among others. Affinity groups tend to organize locally around a particular issue, and the same groups may also come together in coalitions to organize campaigns or mass convergences at protests such as those discussed earlier. Throughout most of the activities of this decentralized and fluid organizational form, similar practices may be used: consensus-based decision-making, task sharing, skill sharing, resource sharing, horizontal organizing without leaders, mutual emotional care-taking, no official membership lists or fees, join by doing, and so on—all facilitated by a number of mechanisms that aim to reconstruct social relationships to achieve equality in the here and now, both within the affinity group and in its participation in campaigns and convergences.

Prefigurative politics are taken further still by antiauthoritarians who consciously attempt to set up counter-institutional initiatives that break with the logic of systems of domination, in an attempt to render existing hegemonic institutions and norms redundant. The more cracks there are, the logic goes, the greater the chances of transforming the system at its root (Holloway 84). These initiatives—be they self-managed organic farms, independent media, alternative bookstores or libraries, free schools, day cares, show spaces, safer spaces, or bike repair shops—are resources upon which the movement can depend, and seedlings of another society in the making. For many activists who invest time and energy in these little utopias, the hope for fundamental social change lies in their ability to show by example that self-governance and self-organization are not just desirable but also enjoyable and achievable in the present moment. The articulation of this goal, at the heart of the antiauthoritarian movement today, is

shaped in many ways by the work of (*pro*)feminist activists involved in different groups and networks of the broader antiauthoritarian movement over the last 15 years.

### **Findings: The Three (Pro) Feminist Micro-Cohorts**

#### *Micro-cohort #1. Radical Feminist Groups, Spaces, Actions and Gatherings.*

In Quebec, there is a strong tendency for radical feminist groups to organize in non-mixed women-only spaces (Leblanc). Some feminists have experienced sexism within left-wing student organizing and/or anti-capitalist networks, or they might perceive a lack of a feminist analysis of globalization among anti-globalization activists. These experiences among others can be the impetus for the creation of autonomous women-only spaces. During the first part of the decade 2000–2010, there was a proliferation of collectives and affinity groups in Quebec, including: Les Sorcières, Némésis, Les Amères Noëles, les Insoumises, les Amazones, Rebelles sans frontières, Les femmes ont faim, Cyprine, les Féministes Radicales de l'UQAM (FRUes), les Fallopes, Groupe FEMMES Sororitaires, les Lilithantes, La Riposte, and Ainsi Squattent-elles! (cf. CRAC & Pirotte). Since 2003, these various grassroots groups have been organizing sporadic radical feminist gatherings that create space for networking and mutual support, and consolidating their organizing efforts, drawing between 50 and 100 women. They define themselves as follows:

The radical feminist movement is multiple and takes different forms. As a foundation, radical feminists act daily to eliminate all forms of patriarchy and domination without being content with legislative or social changes that do not question the fundamental forms of oppression including patriarchy, capitalism, imperialism, and all forms of authority

and hierarchy. In addition, radical feminists put forward the right of women to organize on an autonomous and non-mixed basis. (Les Sorcières)

Radical feminists form “purple”<sup>5</sup> blocs or contingents at street protests against the institutions and instruments of capitalism, under the slogan: “Nous refusons d’être soumises, pendant que les mâles capitalisent! (Coalition féministe radicale contre le G20; loosely translated—we refuse to submit, while males capitalize). They organize demonstrations, blockades, street theatre, occupations and other direct actions against various instruments of patriarchy. For example, in March 2000, the Collectif Les Sorcières “decorated” a Catholic church with metal hangers, tampons, condoms and burning crosses in an effort to “dénoncer l’appropriation du corps des femmes et de leurs fonctions reproductrices par les institutions patriarcales telles que les religions” (Les Sorcières; loosely translated—to denounce the appropriation of women’s bodies and their reproductive functions by patriarchal institutions such as religion). They are best known for their actions opposing violence against women, for their pro-choice actions against pro-life advocates attempting to criminalize abortion, and for actions standing up to anti-feminist men’s organizations. They organize workshops and publish opinion pieces on these and other women’s issues, such as the gynecological and pharmaceutical industries, sex work, the gendered division of labour, and the socialization of children.

#### *Micro-Cohort #2. Radical Queer Groups and Actions.*

At about the same time that this explosion of radical feminist groups took place, other activists also struggling against patriarchy decided to form radical queer groups in an effort to increase the visibility of LGBTpeople and issues across the province. In interviews, they have

expressed that they wanted to “queer” the anti-capitalist and anarchist milieu, which can tend to be heteronormative, and at the same time, to radicalize the mainstream “gaypride” movement, bringing an analysis of capitalism, racism, and able-bodiedness to the fore. Among the first of these affinity groups to emerge in Quebec were Les Panthères roses and the Anti-capitalist Ass-pirates, both of which had a basis of unity that included a principled stance against all categorizations, especially the binaries woman/man and homo/heterosexual. On their website, Les Panthères roses explains how they understand the importance of intersectionality<sup>6</sup> in radical activism:

It is in going back to the roots of homophobia and heterosexism that we discover the interdependence of these and other problems in our society, for example sexism and racism.... A radical strategy against heterosexism must therefore seek to abolish savage capitalism, patriarchy, and other systems of alienation, in order to create spaces for self-determination, better intercultural relations, more non-commercial art, and in short, all the best parts of ourselves.

Radical queer groups organize “pink blocs”<sup>7</sup> in many of the anti-capitalist street protests and also form radical anti-capitalist contingents in mainstream LGBT events like the pride parade during Divers/Cité in Montreal or organize in the counter-festival called Pervers/Cité. Using direct-action in-your-face tactics Les Panthères roses raised a range of issues, including: the exploitation of pink capitalism, by vomiting on the doorsteps of Montreal’s Gay Village shops on Valentine’s Day (Operation Pepto Bismol); the institution of marriage, by staging a divorce during the first Gay and Lesbian Bridal Show; violence and discrimination within the gay community via a die-in in the streets of the Gay Village during Gay Pride;

and the increasingly homophobic positions of the federal government by welcoming Stephen Harper with the Sodomobile, a car upon which an effigy of the Prime Minister was being sodomized by a papier-mâché pink panther (Les Panthères roses, cf. CRAC 2010). Their creative forces are also used to promote their own radical queer parties and film screenings, which create “safer spaces” for those who do not feel comfortable at mainstream LGBT events and venues due to the homonormativity<sup>8</sup> of the white-cisgendered<sup>9</sup> and male-dominated gay scene.

By the mid-2000s, critical of the white-dominated aspect of some radical feminist and radical queer groups, and some straight-male-dominated anarchist groups, queer people of colour and supporters set up a space called the Ste-Emilie Skillshare, an autonomous silk-screening and artist workshop in Saint-Henri, Montreal:

The Ste-Emilie SkillShare is a group of artists and activists, primarily people of colour and queer people, committed to promoting artistic expression and self-representation in our communities. The Skillshare collective runs an art studio for people to learn new skills, share their skills, and create art in the spirit of revolution and anti-oppression (anti-racism/sexism/ classism/ homophobia/transphobia/ ableism/ sizeism/ etc). Our space is open to all. Long live skill-sharing! (Ste-Emilie SkillShare)

Another group called Qteam formed out of the death of the Anti-capitalist Ass-pirates. According to their website:

Qteam is a Montreal-based radical queer collective committed to anti-imperialism, anti-racism, short shorts, queering activist spaces and politicizing queer spaces, the downfall of single-issue politics, raging pervy queer dance parties, destroying

all prisons, opening all borders, burning pink dollar\$, and keeping on keeping on.

Committed to working on front-line struggles,<sup>10</sup> these two groups have developed an anti-oppressive or intersectional analysis and practice based on the understanding that all systems of oppression are interlocking, as is clear in both of these self-descriptions. This perspective informs their active involvement with groups struggling against racism, colonialism and imperialism, on issues as wide ranging as: police brutality and impunity; racial profiling by police; immigrant detentions and deportations; Canadian military and economic imperialism overseas; indigenous self-determination; justice for migrant workers, non-workers and illegalized individuals and families; Israeli apartheid and Palestinian rights; and LGBT prisoners’ rights.

### *Micro-cohort #3. Feminists and Pro-Feminists in Anti-Racist and Anti-Colonial Organizing.*

Clearly some of the newer radical queer groups engage on issues of racism and imperialism (Eslami and Maynard). Understanding capitalist globalisation as a form of colonisation, many (*pro*)feminists organize within the two active (im)migrant justice groups No One is Illegal Montreal, and Solidarity Across Borders, organizing direct actions such as the Status for All march from Montreal to Ottawa (2005), facilitating popular education initiatives such as the Migrant Justice Caravan bringing information to different neighbourhoods, and engaging in direct-action case-work including organizing sanctuaries to prevent deportation of refugees. Another anti-racist antiauthoritarian group called *Tadamon!* focuses its attention on Canada’s imperialism abroad, particularly around Lebanon and Israel, organizing demonstrations, pickets, and artistic events. A fourth group called The Peoples’ Commission Network works to counter the racist discourse around “national security”

by organizing “public hearings” to shed light on the impacts of the “War on Terror” on targeted populations, and by mounting public education campaigns that aim to inform people of their rights vis-à-vis the State and its attempts at racial profiling. Moreover they work with people directly affected by Canada’s national security program to reverse their security certificates, get them out of jail, and have their names removed from “no-fly” lists. These and other groups are also involved in countering racial profiling and police violence faced by people of colour and immigrants by organizing “cop watches,” solidarity campaigns with families who have lost loved ones at the hands of police, and events like the Montreal Forum Against Police Violence and Impunity (2010).

### ***(Pro)feminists in the Current Moment***

Currently in 2011, there are but a few organized Montreal groups that identify explicitly as radical feminist, most notably the longstanding collective Les Sorcières. Radical feminists, however, are still active in Quebec. They/we continue to come together for the yearly Ya Basta! gatherings, organize feminist contingents when street protests are called by other antiauthoritarian groups, and create ad-hoc organizing coalitions on an

as-needed basis. Moreover, a good number of radical feminists from Quebec are involved in a burgeoning Canada-wide coalition of young feminists (14–35 years of age) called the RebELLES movement, initiated originally by the Federation des femmes du Québec (FFQ), but who organize with a great degree of autonomy. There are also newly emerging radical queer groups, like PolitiQ, who work on issues related to trans identities and other health-related concerns for trans people. In addition to the groups and networks mentioned above, which are explicitly feminist and/or queer and/or anti-racist anti-colonialist—our three micro-cohorts—most antiauthoritarian groups have strong feminist organizers within them, although the issues around which they may be organizing, such as the environment, community housing, or poverty, might not be explicitly feminist. Indeed there are many anarcho-feminists or antiauthoritarian feminists who do not organize in women-only groups, and this has historically been the case since the beginning of the anarchist movement.

### **Transversal Analysis: Revolution by Cross-Pollination.**

As we have seen, *(pro)feminists* organize in identity-based affinity groups around issues directly related to their realities, but they are also active in other kinds of antiauthoritarian groups based on other types of affinity. As individuals and as groups their analyses and practices have an influence at many levels, but because of the fluid and informal nature of their organizing, this influence cannot be pinpointed within the borders of one group or network; nor are we suggesting that *(pro)feminists* are the only groups and individuals influencing the antiauthoritarian movement. But in our research we do see evidence emerging of cross-pollination among groups in the development of analysis and actions.

A metaphor may help to illustrate our argument. Let’s imagine a *(pro)*

*feminist* bee, collecting ideas and practices (pollen) from a diversity of spaces (flowers). This bee then transports these ideas and practices from one part of the antiauthoritarian movement (field) to another, or even to another movement (field) through their daily interactions with other activist individuals and groups, and non-activist friends, family members and neighbours. As the bees move from one area or field to another, they pick up different kinds of pollen that mix and meld as they stick to their hind legs, and drop off pollen they had earlier collected. Different flowers (movement spaces) thereby become pollinated with a diversity of ideas and practices that, if the (weather) conditions are right, will allow them to reproduce and eventually produce more pollen. This is the process of cross-pollination. We would now like to explore how *(pro)feminist* bees may have contributed to ideas and practices in different, yet interrelated and interlocking spaces: within themselves/ourselves and within their/our closest affinity groups and spaces; within the broader antiauthoritarian movement; and within more mainstream community and social movements.

### **Within Ourselves and Our Affinity Groups: Anti-Oppression Strategies for Power Sharing.**

For many *(pro)feminists*, the process of cross-pollination begins with the self and one’s immediate proximate environment, that is, with those who share affinity in organizing together on a daily or very frequent basis, perhaps even living together. Part of this proximate organizing involves self-governance and self-organization, which are *processes* full of moments of excitement and pleasure, interspersed with moments of struggle, challenge and tension. For many of our research participants there is a recognition that in all human groupings there will be differences, which means that there is a constant challenge posed by the potential for these differences to become stratified and hierarchical.

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This tension plays out in two related ways. First, there is the simple fact that people have different ways of thinking, being and doing, and these differences can cause misunderstanding or conflict that must be addressed in order to facilitate collective self-governance and self-organization. Second, there is the analysis developed within an anti-oppressive framework, that in our society different people have differing levels of privilege, and thus, more or less access to power over others. Power-over, according to “Nathalie and Tasha’s Fantastical Anti-Oppression Workshop,” is:

the exercise of privilege with the intention and/or effect of keeping those privileges and maintaining the overall pattern of distribution of those privileges (intention may be explicit or not; but good intention is not relevant)—we are all responsible for recognizing our own privilege and for making sure that we are not oppressing others.

The starting point for an anti-oppression framework is therefore an understanding of ourselves as implicated in the many roles we may play in different relations of oppression and privilege. These roles stem from those often-invisible privileges that all members of a dominant group are granted *de facto* because of their social location or membership in that group. As we come to recognize these positions of power, the anti-oppression framework allows us to identify the privileges from which we may benefit and how they mutually reinforce each other (that is, how different positions cumulate, overlay each other, and therefore confer more power). This implies becoming aware of and naming the mechanisms of power that are active at the junction points of different systems of oppression, to better combat them (CRAC 2011b).

Given this understanding of the mechanisms of privilege (and not just oppression), we have found that many (*pro*)feminists have developed

critiques of the idea that it is possible or even desirable to create movement spaces that are free of all structure or hierarchy. They have emphasized, following Jo Freeman, that a movement that claims to be without any structure can easily become tyrannical, as informal hierarchies develop and often people who do the most work or speak the most at meetings will gain a certain amount of power-over within a group, even though there is no official group leader. To counter this, some groups and networks regularly use mechanisms or tools in meetings that help people to reflect upon their social position and the behaviours that might facilitate or impede egalitarian social relations. Some of these mechanisms include: a power-line activity where people move forward or backward based on a list of axes of power, to help group members see their relative power and privilege; anti-racist workshops to build a better understanding of white supremacy and white privilege; trans 101 workshops to develop a deeper understanding of queer and trans identities and struggles; workshops on the language of domination that aim to facilitate the development of more respectful and inclusive communication skills; “check-ins” at the beginning of a meeting and “check-outs” at the end to name, and respect each other’s emotional states and processes; a “vibe checker” who is responsible for identifying tensions and mediating if the need arises; speakers’ list strategies that aim to ensure everyone who wants to speak gets their turn; task-sharing to promote skill-sharing and reduce specialization which may lead to power-over; and so on. These mechanisms, and many more, allow for the naming of problematic behaviours, but they are often not enough when it comes to changing them. For instance, through these mechanisms a group may identify that one member has significantly more influence related to her position of relative privilege. Perhaps she has acquired more knowledge because she does many tasks, perhaps she has

more time to participate than others given her well-paid part-time job, or perhaps she has no children or other demanding responsibilities. In relation to privilege and oppression, perhaps she is more confident or feels more entitled to speak because of white or heterosexual privilege, she may come from a middle-class background and not be so worried about her economic survival as others in the group, she may have a higher level of education which intimidates others or causes them inadvertently to defer to her, and so on. For these and other reasons, such as being fluently bilingual or multilingual, a person may take on many of the more high-profile tasks like public speaking or publishing, facilitating workshops or meetings, writing press releases, or doing outreach with the public. This is a self-perpetuating problem, because the more one takes on high-profile tasks, the greater their confidence becomes and the more others will expect her to continue to do those tasks. The problem of relative privilege, as we can see, is a complex and recurrent one that plagues many antiauthoritarian groups because it offers no easy solutions.

Some groups have dealt with this by organizing moments and spaces for skill-sharing or sharing knowledge and skills so that everyone may

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**For many (*pro*)feminists, the process of cross-pollination begins with the self and one’s immediate proximate environment, that is, with those who share affinity in organizing together on a daily or very frequent basis, perhaps even living together. Part of this proximate organizing involves self-governance and self-organization.**

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fully participate both in the self-organizing and self-governance of the group, and within their own personal lives as well. It is based on the recognition that skills do not need to come from formal education or experts. Skill-sharing may take the form of a workshop for group members given by an activist who is skilled in the particular area, or it may involve teaming-up a more experienced with a less experienced group member for a specific task. To facilitate this process *(pro)feminists* in Montreal have set-up permanent skill-sharing spaces, like the Ste-Emilie Skillshare mentioned above, as well as virtual spaces like Drupal websites. *(Pro)feminists* also benefit from the work of organizations like QPIRG Concordia and the 2110 Center for Gender Advocacy, explicitly anti-oppressive spaces that provide access to many organizing tools, materials and skill-sharing. Processes such as skill-sharing provide opportunities for micro re-distributions of power after anti-oppression workshops or meeting mechanisms, such as the line of power, have identified informal power hierarchies. Skill-sharing, of course, is just one such mechanism that can account for differences in power based on education and skill levels. There are other equalizing mechanisms that have worked to varying degrees of success, the goal of which is to create real-time lived equal social relations within affinity groups.

The challenge, however, is to create these equalized social relations that account for inherent yet fluid and dynamic differences in privilege and power-over, particularly as they relate to identity markers that may be more fixed than education or skills such as race, (dis)ability, age, social class, and the like. Nonetheless the process of cross-pollination of ideas, skills, anti-oppression trainings, and so on among *(pro)feminists* continues to provide spaces for our/themselves and our/their closest affinity groups and spaces to challenge unequal power dynamics, and share a wide range of political analyses and actions.

### **Within the Broader Antiauthoritarian Milieu: Power Dynamics and Allies.**

Experimenting with real-time lived equal social relations becomes an even greater challenge within the broader antiauthoritarian milieu, as there are many flowers to be cross-pollinated with the ideas and practices discussed above! *(Pro)feminists* often bring these ideas and practices into the organizing picture when they participate in groups, networks, activities, or convergences that, although antiauthoritarian, are not necessarily working through these ideas on a regular basis and may sometimes be unreceptive or even hostile to them. More specifically, *(pro)feminists* are working to bring a feminist, queer, anti-racist and anti-colonialist analysis to the broader antiauthoritarian movement, drawing attention to the intersections of capitalism, class, poverty, the state and globalization (issues many antiauthoritarians tend to be active on already) with patriarchy, race, sex, (dis)ability, and gendered power relations (issues that may be considered secondary to capital and the state by some).

In terms of organizational process, it happens regularly that an activist with an anti-oppressive sensibility will recognize unequal power dynamics arising in a large meeting, and take it upon themselves to name underlying tensions related to privilege and power (e.g. offering a critique of ableist language, such as “I feel paralyzed” or “this is crazy”; or naming a [straight/white/male/cis-gender] person’s tendency to monopolize the speaking space). They are also the ones who will most often suggest incorporating mechanisms that may facilitate better lived equalized social relations, as discussed above. There is a risk associated with this task, which is that the person making these critiques or suggestions—often already struggling to be heard within the group—will be seen as disruptive or have their concerns otherwise dismissed by the group as a whole, specifically by the powerful member(s) unwilling to

examine their privilege. This is yet another ongoing challenge.

In addition to challenging power dynamics in the antiauthoritarian milieu, *(pro)feminists* are also building on a long-standing tradition—particularly strong in Quebec—of feminist and community organizing. This tradition includes developing a practice based on the understanding that those who are directly affected by a situation should be at the forefront of a struggle. To different degrees, they/we bring this understanding to the broader movement as it relates to relationships among different affinity groups within the antiauthoritarian nebula, as well as to relationships with other grassroots groups and movements on the margins.

Some radical feminists, for example, after several difficult attempts at working in coalition with pro-feminist cis-gendered men on issues related to women’s bodies, have worked to define the role of an ally or supporter that men can take on. But it is those *(pro)feminists* who engage intentionally in support of those struggling on the frontlines on issues related to racism, imperialism, and colonialism, particularly women of colour, who have really developed this notion and put it into practice. Being an ally or supporter, in this sense, means choosing to use (or not to abuse) one’s position of power and privilege to support the struggles of those who are directly affected by a problem. For example, QTeam has explicitly chosen to support groups working on anti-racist, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles based on their analysis of the current political context, the requests for support they have received, and the social locations of their members. They have joined the Queers Against Israeli Apartheid contingent in the Pride Parade to bring an anti-imperialist voice to the LGBT movement, while also participating in Israeli Apartheid Week to bring a queer analysis to the apartheid movement. Similarly, PolitiQ, struggling against heteronormativity and homonormativity, engages in support work with

transsexuals and transgender folks and Les Panthères roses engaged in solidarity work with sex workers such as the peer sex-worker harm reduction group Stella. Concretely, this support may take the form of engaging in behind-the-scenes organizing or providing access to scarce resources instead of taking on more visible, more externally validated roles like media spokesperson or outreach.

The position of ally or supporter implies venturing out of one's comfort zone: it means taking a step outside of the zone or space within which we live in conformity with the privileges of the social group to which we belong. This also means organizing closer to those directly concerned by meeting in their communities and neighbourhoods, and in spaces more accessible than university classrooms and ones they are used to going to—be it church basements or community-halls. As much as possible, these events are rendered accessible in other ways, depending on the group: food provided may be adapted to the traditions of the concerned community (rather than an insistence on all-vegan food, for example), translation including sign language services are provided when necessary, wheelchair accessibility is considered, and non-gendered or “neutral” toilets are made available. Resources should be available to facilitate everyone's participation, such as free child-care, transportation, or any other needs identified by the group.

The roles played by many *(pro) feminists*—whether playing a watchdog role regarding social relations, always ensuring that an antiauthoritarian analysis goes beyond a simple naming of systems of oppression or working through the role of an ally or supporter—are uncomfortable ones. Because all persons have internalised to some extent ways of being and doing that are contrary to an antiauthoritarian ethic, the moments during which behaviours are named, critiqued and reconstructed can easily become tension-filled. It is common that people feel attacked or guilty or both; they become nervous because

they don't really know how to change things; they become afraid to talk or to do anything constructive. This space of discomfort is, however, also a potential zone for transformation. It is in these moments that learning occurs and that different social relations emerge, ripen and spread. These processes are part and parcel of a vision of social change based on revolutionary processes of collective self-governance and self-determination (CRAC 2011c). In fact, 15 years ago when the contemporary antiauthoritarian movement first emerged in Quebec, there was little understanding among young activists of how internal group dynamics are related to privilege and power. There is no doubt that it is the busy work of *(pro)feminists* from both this and earlier generations that has allowed for a shift in organizational culture that today is more coherent with an antiauthoritarian ethic.

### **Within Mainstream Community and Social Movements.**

Many *(pro)feminist* bees venture beyond the flowers and fields that they feel most comfortable with to engage both formally and informally with more mainstream community and social movements. For example, radical feminist groups have facilitated workshops on direct democracy and direct action in women's centers during the mobilizing activities for the World March of Women; radical queers work with Stella, a community organization working on issues related to sex work; *(pro)feminists* involved in antiracist/anticolonial groups like No One is Illegal will work closely with the Immigrant Workers' Center on issues related to migrant justice; and so on. Less formal moments of junction are also very common. For example, many *(pro)feminists* will come out to book launches, music shows, street protests and the like, organized by more mainstream feminist or LGBT organizations, having friends and comrades who work or are involved in them. In fact, it is interesting to note how many antiauthoritarians

choose to work for pay within these community and social movement organizations, be they the Fédération des femmes du Québec, le Regroupement des Centres des femmes du Québec (Network of Quebec Women's Centres), women's spaces such as women's centers, gender advocacy spaces, or shelters, the Immigrant Workers' Center, Head and Hands (a volunteer peer sex education group that works in high schools), Project X (a queer youth advocacy group), grassroots housing groups, as well as the FRAPRU (the housing political federation) and environmental groups like the Regroupement Québécois des Groupes Écologistes (Quebec Network of Environmental Groups) and many others. The organizations that attract *(pro)feminists* are most often themselves at the margins of the mainstream; they tend to share a conflict-over-power analysis that leads to an oppositional stance toward power-over (versus a collaborative stance) (Hanley et al.), they have remained true to their direct-democracy organizational form and to the process of political popular education, and they are more open to antiauthoritarian ideas and practices.

In taking a position against all systems of exploitation, *(pro)feminists* tend to shy away from state-funded community-based service organizations that are caught up in daily management of the consequences of the systems of exploitation. Because of professionalization and institutionalization, many of these organizations have lost much of their once “alternative flavour” or radicalism, and are oftentimes indistinguishable in approach from public health and social services. *(Pro)feminists'* thirst for self-determination also explains their hesitation to get involved in top-down formal social movement federations or coalitions that require official membership, limit participation of members because leaders do the bulk of the work, or require fees. Moreover, given that they/we do not believe that emancipation is possible within a system that is managed by the State and its institutions, they/we are

critical of those organizations whose politics is one of demand rather than of the act. Generally, *(pro)feminists* do not demand rights or changes from the State as do many more mainstream community and social movements. For most antiauthoritarians, these kinds of demands for reforms end up legitimizing the State, reinforcing its power while leaving the root causes of exploitation intact. That said, many *(pro)feminists* will support or work on organizing campaigns to win concrete measures that improve living conditions in the short-term or that ensure peoples' survival. This is often the type of campaign that the community and social movement organizations named above tend to engage in, putting forward demands such as: more housing; de-criminalization of sex work; status for refugees; simpler processes for name changes for trans people; protection of forests from clear-cutting, etc. At first glance, this may seem to contradict the politics of act that is at the heart of antiauthoritarian organizing. However, a nuanced analysis allows us to see that these kinds of reforms are of a different nature than those that supposedly protect rights or liberties. Here, people benefit immediately from the gains, gains that are in fact contrary to the interests of those in power, gains that are won by struggle, and that produce a balance of forces (Kruzynski and Sévigny). The intention behind the politics of act, we would argue, thus remains intact.

The formal and informal presence of *(pro)feminists* in these and many other organizations has allowed for a rapprochement between the milieus. On the one hand, the daily contact with oftentimes long-time organizers and with people struggling on the frontlines helps ground an antiauthoritarian analysis and practice that is sometimes disconnected from movement history and from peoples' real lived situations. On the other hand, this contact has also opened up a space for dialogue about antiauthoritarian organizational forms and conflict strategies. The mainstream feminist movement in Quebec, which has

been struggling with lack of renewed membership, is an excellent example. The FFQ supported the birth and flowering of the young feminist movement called ReBELLES, while respecting its autonomy. Antiauthoritarians have been involved from its inception and have greatly influenced the emergence, alongside the FFQ, of a Canada-wide loosely-organized non-hierarchical coalition of local feminist groups and networks that share a radical manifesto and engage in street actions on a regular basis. Moreover, the radical queer critique of cis-gendered women-only organizing as exclusionary for woman-identified trans and as organizational criteria that reinforce the male/female binary (see Fortier et al.) is beginning to make its way into the debates within mainstream feminist movements.

*(Pro)feminists* have also had an influence on mainstream movements' strategy and choice of tactics. Frustrated with their inability to successfully carry out issue campaigns in recent years, there was a call within the context of the World March of Women 2010 to bring conflict back into strategy and, more specifically, to use disruptive and confrontational tactics vis-à-vis state targets (what has been coined "*actions dérangeantes*" by the movement). Several mainstream groups and networks organized direct-action training workshops for their members facilitated by antiauthoritarian feminists. In the same vein, mainstream community and social movements have recently demonstrated their burgeoning solidarity with antiauthoritarian groups and networks that choose to use confrontational tactics during street protests against systems of domination. This has not always been the case. In 2001, following the tearing down of the fence that separated protesters from the economic and political leaders at the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City, representatives of mainstream organizations (including the FFQ) denounced the black bloc fence tear-down during a press conference, and thereby contributed to the construction of a negative

and misinformed public image of anarchists as vandals lacking a coherent political analysis. Ten years later, after the arrest of several hundred protesters during the G20 in Toronto, mainstream organizations including the FFQ, community organizations and trade unions came together for a press conference alongside antiauthoritarian organizers to denounce police repression with one voice. This solidarity is at least in part the result of the work of busy antiauthoritarian bees pollinating different flowers and different fields.

### **Conclusion: Relevance to Feminism Today**

*(Pro)feminists* have cross-pollinated our/their analysis, strategy, and organizational forms among ourselves and our affinity groups, within the broader antiauthoritarian movement, and within more mainstream community and social movements, including liberal and radical feminist movements. This cross-pollination work, intentional or not, has taken different forms, both formal and informal, through discussing and debating in regular meetings and activities, taking risks to name social relations that reproduce power-over, circulating organizing materials and tools, facilitating workshops and skill-shares, and/or supporting the struggles of people on the frontlines. This work has contributed to the growth and deepening of an organizational culture that, similar to some radical feminist organizing, is grounded in an antiauthoritarian ethic based on fundamental principles and strategies of collective self-governance and self-organization. More specifically, through self-organization and self-governance, *(pro)feminists* are helping to translate the specific values of freedom, solidarity, collective autonomy, social justice, respect, spontaneity and mutual aid into practice in various fields (organizations, movements, etc.), thereby contributing to the refigurative process that is at the core of contemporary anarchist

or antiauthoritarian organizing. This prefigurative process is about creating spaces for the practice of self-governance and self-organization—spaces of action, encounter, conflict, learning, politicization, deconstruction and reconstruction of social relations. These processes have cross-pollinated with other feminist, community and/or social movement organizations; there is a growing renewed interest in anti-authoritarian ideas and practices, and some organizations are even loosening their formal top-down organizational structures to make space for DIY activists with feminist, queer, anti-racist and anti-colonialist commitments, as well as opening their doors to discussion and debate about conflict-over-power analyses and strategies. These are some of the baby steps towards increased collective self-governance and self-determination in society as a whole, a profoundly important goal that many feminists share with antiauthoritarians. The more people who are exposed to these ideas and practices, who get to experiment with them and feel empowered in their experience, the greater the chances that a widespread mass movement will grow out of these three radical feminist micro-cohorts that are active at the grassroots.

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<sup>2</sup>We use the term pro-feminist to indicate men who are feminist allies.

<sup>3</sup>One collective member is responsible for carrying out production of the monograph of a group or network that they are involved in or supporters of; from developing questions, doing interviews, transcribing and encoding the data, to working with the group or network in producing the monograph, validating it and organizing a public launch and discussion.

<sup>4</sup>Several reasons were given by activists to explain their refusal to take on the anarchist label: because they don't really feel the need to identify an ideological belonging; they fear outside judgment, they don't want to scare people away from their organizing work, or they don't want to take on ideological labels that they feel may be dogmatic on the one hand, or on the other hand, somehow predetermined by others

<sup>5</sup>Anarcha-feminist colours: purple and black

<sup>6</sup>Intersectionality is the concept that people experience a range of systemic oppressions and privileges in their daily lives, and that they are not categories or unrelated 'silos' but rather axes that intersect, whereby one form of oppression/privilege takes place in the context of others (e.g., heterosexism or homophobia may take place in the context of white male privilege for a gay white man, etc.). Sirma Bilge, for example,

suggests that intersectionality “reflects a transdisciplinary theory aimed at apprehending the complexity of social identities and inequalities through an integrated approach” (58).

<sup>7</sup>Queer anarchism colors : pink and black

<sup>8</sup>Homonormativity is the notion that mainstream representations of ‘gays’ and ‘lesbians’ have become stereotypical and normative, influencing what is accepted as ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ behaviour in the gay village, i.e. typically white, middle-class, affluent, able-bodied, gender normative, and conforming to a particular body and beauty image. Radical queers challenge these norms, pointing to the intersectionality of other identities with queer—particularly gender queers, trans-gendered and trans-sexual bodies, anti-racist queers and queer people of colour, queers who live in poverty, etc.

<sup>9</sup>Cis-gender refers to a person who lives in and identifies with their birth-assigned gender designation; cis-sex refers to a person who lives in and identifies with their birth-assigned sex designation.

<sup>10</sup>Research participants generally understood frontline struggles to be struggles of people who are directly affected by capitalist globalization and who are involved, day to day, in incremental struggles to survive and to better their living conditions (see also Prashad 2003: 194).

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## KAY R. EGINTON

### Early Morning, and the Sun

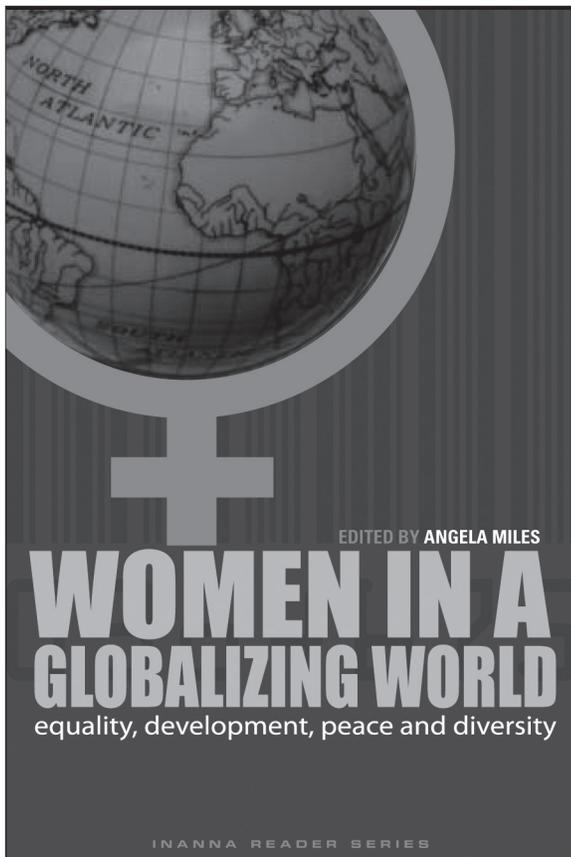
Another time, another place  
The window bleary  
Like early morning here  
Sunlight struggling for recognition

As we do now, we've aged.  
It's three years down the road  
We've traveled on the old dirt road  
Found a home here

But not the end of the beginning  
We've just come to the end  
and an old stop sign  
Bent by an errant driver.

We're no wiser than before  
Only illuminated  
By an aging sun.

*Kay R. Eginton's poetry appears earlier in this volume.*



## FALL 2012 INANNA PUBLICATIONS

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