

*Words
from imprisoned anarchist
comrade Anna Beniamino*

*Degenerations – Between pride
and gender victimhood*



Women's prison of Rebibbia
October 2018
Italy

Anna

Degenerations – Between pride and gender victimhood

(An article Degenerazioni – Tra orgoglio e vittimismo di genere published in issue 3 of the anarchist paper Vetriolo)

I am anarchist, I am not feminist because I see feminism as a sectorial and victimist withdrawal, I have never made any gender discrimination although I don't use gender-friendly linguistic conventions, on the contrary I often use dirty politically incorrect language. I think that the annulment of gender privilege and similar oppression is already contained in the search for anarchy, that is to say in the practice of antiauthoritarian relations, and should be cultivated there. Ah, I forgot, I loathe consciousness-raising in public meetings and I also consider assemblies to be blunt instruments. I understand and also have the will to meet. But I see how all too often the assembly degenerates into sterile self-representation.

You see nowadays you risk having to start off with such a preamble in order to enter the thicket of clichés on gender and feminism, disentangling yourself in the intricate incapacity to relate to the anarchist galaxy, with a range of behaviours going from hyper-emotiveness to the bureaucratic calculation of what stand (and degree of negotiable compromise) to take in a struggle. I don't think that authoritarian and sexist behaviour can be fought by trying to spread new linguistic conventions or by cooking up shreds of mainstream indignant rhetoric (among which #nonunadimeno [enough is enough], the feminicide count on TV, pride, red shoes and rainbow ribbons) in an alternative sauce.

Rather these should be recognized as signs of yet another operation of the deconstruction of real meaning and recuperation in act. Convinced that one is opposing them, in actual fact one is adapting to the very behavioural and normative codes conceded by dominion as ways of releasing tension.

It's nothing new that economic and political power is tending to swal-

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[1] Violenza di genere in ambienti antiautoritari ed in spazi liberati [Gender violence in antiauthoritarian milieus and in liberated spaces], Italian edition translated from Spanish in 2017

[2] Critica all'aborto [Critique of abortion], Jauria – Trans-feminist publication for animal liberation, issue 1, Summer/Autumn 2015

[3] Rote Zora – guerriglia urbana femminista [Rote Zora – Feminist urban guerrilla], Autoproduzione Femminista, 2018

[4] From the introduction to the same book

[5] Which the Rote Zora women themselves didn't think relevant. From a 1984 interview with Rote Zora: 'Some of us have children, many others don't. Some are lesbian, others love men', page 51, ibidem

[6] Donne contro [Women against], Isabella Lorusso, ed. CSA editrice, 2013

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Translated by Act for freedom now!
via: parolealvento.

low up and redigest everything, faster and faster; consider for example the pearls of anti-sexist, antiracist or whatever it might be neo-conservatism and conformism that are being dispensed by the media every day.

I believe that the first misunderstanding is the inability to put certain kinds of behaviour into context, within what should be a wider critique of relations and communication and interaction between individuals in the antiauthoritarian sense, reducing them to the level of questions of gender.

Gender categorization, in LGBTI (XYZ...) style, should be left to those who need to feel themselves a protected category, in pigeonholes more suited to a Linnaean categorization of individuals than free bodies and minds. Instead, we find such pigeonholes in antiauthoritarian milieus, which should already have internalized their refusal.

By the way I'm far from believing that so-called liberated spaces really are such, in fact they often become parking lots for various forms of malaise and instead of enhancing the quality of life and relationships they risk lowering it even more.

For example it's not possible to see every inability to interact in a meeting as sexism, authoritarian imposition or gender violence: I read in a pamphlet [1] that was around last year stigmatizing the latent violence in relations between comrades 'the oldest exercises power over the youngest, those with more experience impose themselves on those who have less, whoever is stronger on the not so strong, mirroring the relations of the existent we say we want subvert.'

This is supposed to be a critique of authoritarian attitudes in antiauthoritarian milieus and it would be valid, were it not that it banalises and flattens everything: there is a fundamental difference between imposition of strength and the expression of experience. The inability to express oneself or to act is neither authoritarian nor antiauthoritarian, and can only be solved individually... otherwise we come to the idiocy of praising inability and inaction.

The concept of emotive violence or the violation of emotional integrity is even more ephemeral, because it promotes this analytical junk amongst anti-authoritarian individuals who should have far sharper critical weapons and practical capacity of intervention. As well as emptying of meaning the inflicted and brutal violence it is being compared to.

How can we claim to engage in an unrelenting struggle against authority and dissertate on revolutionary and liberatory violence if we cannot even react individually to some ‘undesired comment in the street’ (by taking it for what it is, and dealing with it accordingly with the person who spat it out) or keep up an animated discussion during a meeting without having recourse to the shield of violated sensitivity? Why do we find ourselves reading the disarming and obvious idiocy that advises making love with a woman in order to avoid an unwanted abortion? [2] Why codify, even in the field of gender, only for “female gangs”, like conquest, self-defence from aggression and harassment? Isn’t this a problem common to all genders among liberated beings?

Why should we revisit the most outworn products in the wardrobe of 1970s feminism, such as separatist meetings... maybe calling them workshops (a really ugly term that combines work and shop, borrowed from business conventions and unworthy of free discussions)?

I read the spectre of the same reductive and banalising mechanism in another recent publication, the Italian edition of the Rote Zora claims [3], i.e. the intention to sensitize only a female audience about a group of women who carried out armed struggle in the 1980s and 90s in Germany, insisting on the choice of gender, of very great interest on some feminist topics, as a privileged discriminating factor for taking them out of oblivion... given that one doesn’t want it ‘to belong to official history. It is written by men’ [4]... What?!? Is it not that official historiography tends to not talk about them because they were angry, not angry feminists? Just as it doesn’t deal with – or distorts – the history, actions and writings of so many other angry men and women? The partial vision is not that of Rote Zora who experimented their own path of individual and collective struggle and liberation in the context of wider anti-imperialist and anti-capitalistic action, but of those who try to make a flag out

of it in order to give more credibility and specific weight to their own theorizing, to then reduce themselves to looking for ‘paths of self-defence’.

Why entrench oneself in a ‘feminist and lesbian’ discourse [5]? Why yet another protective cage, rather than develop the beauty and infinity of more advanced ideas of the critique of domination (not only gender), put forward and tested?

‘Sisterhood’ has always seemed to me to be a form of allusive alienation of transversal political alliances between oppressed and oppressors, between ‘inter-classist’ as it has become fashionable to say again... adverse parties. I also happened to see a booklet [6] recently containing an Italian feminist’s interviews of some female veterans of the Spanish revolution in 1936, aimed at finding a questionable ‘sisterhood’ between women anarchists engaged on the frontline (and in the background with Mujeres Libres), the POUM and stalinist women.

It was quite significant that almost centenarian anarchist revolutionary women were far more lucid and open in their critique about the limitations of feminism than their interviewer imbued with 1970s’ clichés was: in the extreme calm of a life lived to the full, they were able to explain simply the equal relations between male and female comrades, and how they managed to ridicule and neutralize the machismos that emerged among the most retrograde and stupid of their comrades. In short the practices and theoretical contribution of these women are far more advanced along the path of liberation of the individual and the negation of authoritarian dynamics than those of feminists who glean from their experiences, defending simulacra of struggle instead of the struggle itself.

The need for auto-da-fé, the ‘deconstruction of one’s male privileges’, the search for separate places for discussions, self-awareness and self-analysis in public seem a little too much like signs of these times of over-exposition and woolly thinking, parading ‘struggles’ by category and interior struggles, to end up not struggling at all.