

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7189>



Sexual politics

Marxism and the oppression of trans people

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Publication date: Monday 28 June 2021

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The following text comes from notes for an educational for Anticapitalistas that I have reworked. The aim was to look back at the “polemics” posed by the new transphobic currents in feminism, from a theoretical and strategic point of view and in the context of the debates on the “Trans law”. It is not, therefore, a text that goes into the issues explored in depth or that claims to be exhaustive, but rather an introduction to the theoretical and strategic problematization of trans oppression from a Marxist perspective.

1-Trans oppression: fantasy or material reality?

A-Essentialism/materialism/Marxism

1.A.1. The debate here is about “a woman doesn’t have a penis”, etc. The idea is not to go too far into the theoretical debate, but rather to draw out some general elements. Let’s just say that from De Beauvoir to Butler, it is quite easy to trace the thread of materialist thought on the question of sex and gender. When De Beauvoir said “one is not born a woman, one becomes one”, it was to highlight that “being a woman” is socially constructed by the cultural and ideological domination of men. For her, men and women are originally equal and biological differences are only specificities until the moment when relations of domination started to be put in place. These relationships are justified by the need of some humans to dominate other humans and to find a justification for this. This justification is the biological difference in the capacity to give birth: thus, those who do not give birth will dominate and subdue those who can. Otherness will be created from this domination.

1.A.2. Butler takes an even more dynamic dimension to the construction of gender, the heart of which is everyday practical experience. There is an active participation in the construction of gender roles: it is we who “perform” gender, that is, who produce our gender according to what we do. But as with De Beauvoir, it is not ideal (only ideas): there is a cultural, ideological, social basis to what we perform, it is part of systems of power. She uses the term “reiteration” of gender. That is to say that what we perform, what we produce as a gender of ourselves, is in fact a daily repetition of what society shows us as to what our gender should be: it’s all the pressure, all the expectations that are put on a person, etc. And of course, saying all this doesn’t mean that we don’t have a gender.

And of course, saying all this does not mean that there is no attachment to biological sex in the construction of gender. Even in Butler’s example of the doctor who genders the child according to the biological sex he sees, she doesn’t say that it’s fantasy, just an empty idea. Generally speaking, there are strong tendencies to assign a gendered role according to the sex of the individual and no one questions this a priori.

Afterwards, making proposals for the future, saying that this should no longer be the case, that individuals should be free to become whoever they want, is something else. And it should also be noted that everyone in the feminist movement seems to agree on these perspectives: it seems that in a very general way feminists demand the abolition of the system of assigning gender roles, binary categorization, etc. This gives an absurd dimension to the debate: why the opposition to so many people who question this today if the final objective is to put an end to all relations of domination, hierarchization and classification? There are parallels to be drawn with certain authoritarian currents on the left that call for communism but are radically opposed to all experiments in self-management today, or constantly denigrate squats, occupations, alternative spaces, on the pretext that they don’t help to bring down capitalism. Of course, in itself, creating an alternative here and now is not enough to collectively destroy the state and capitalism.

But isn't there also something at stake on the side of counter-hegemony in demonstrating that we can do things differently?

1.A.3 If Butler's theory can help us to think about the construction of gender in everyday life, in its banality, and allows us to highlight the social dynamics at play, it seems to us that placing the oppression of trans people within the Marxist feminist theorization of social reproduction allows us to grasp its totality and to place it more generally within the power relations that govern capitalism. The theory of social reproduction was developed in the 1980s by Lise Vogel to provide a framework for Marxist feminist analysis of the oppression of women.

Broadly speaking, it considers that the set of human activities that allow the species to perpetuate itself – which we will call work – is organized by the ruling class in a given system of domination – in this case, capitalism – in order to maintain its power. In this case, under capitalism, it is a matter of the bourgeoisie maximizing its profits. To do this, workers must spend as much time as possible producing wealth, being paid as little as possible and being fit enough to produce. For workers to be fit enough to produce, they need to eat, sleep, wash, have rest activities, etc. The wage buys the goods needed for these activities, but it is not enough. Other work must take place to transform these goods – or to “care” for the workers: the work of reproducing labour power (cooking, cleaning, tending, caring, etc.). On the other hand, other activities are included in the work of social reproduction, those that allow the reproduction of the species (giving birth, educating, etc.).

In order to maximize profits, a division between productive and reproductive labour is organized: the aim is to ensure that the latter is not taken on by the bourgeoisie and is either unpaid or poorly paid so that it does not impact on the rate of profit. To do this, it is assigned to a part of the population and what makes it possible to subject a part of the population to this division of labour between productive and reproductive is macho violence – ideological, cultural, psychological, and physical violence.

Once again, this is a very quick and crude presentation, but it seemed important to us in order to situate the framework of the debate. Let us note, however, that this is a theoretical framework. In practice, another element must be considered which really determines how human activities are organized: the class struggle. Thus, the level of wages for productive work, but also the fact that reproductive work is done for free in the home or paid, that it is taken care of by public services, or that collective forms of organization from below exist, all depend on the balance of power between those who have nothing but their own strength but are billions, and those who have billions, are very few but have a political, ideological, economic, and military arsenal.

1.A.4. The interest in presenting the theory of social reproduction is also to re-situate Butler's elaborations in order to clarify them. We could say, for example, that the construction of gender involves the assignment of specific roles in the system of commodity production / social reproduction of labour power. That what women will be asked to perform is, on the one hand, the capacity to participate in the social reproduction of labour power – that is, to take care of others, to educate, etc. – but also, increasingly, to integrate into the production system as labour power to be sold – and therefore, to have the capacity to multi-task, to combine their “two jobs”, etc.

Of course, the separation is not so clear-cut since many jobs held by women are paid social reproduction jobs: teacher, cleaner, nurse, cashier, etc.

1.A.5 So far, we have presented a framework for analysing the oppression of women. We feel it is necessary to situate the oppression of trans people (and not only trans women) within it, because we see this oppression as a form of macho violence to impose the imperatives of the capitalist mode of production, which cannot survive without the assignment of women to reproductive labour. Indeed, trans-identity functions as a “radical” transgression of the assignment of tasks specifically imposed on subaltern class individuals under capitalism and male domination. The very existence of trans people demonstrates that there is no “destiny”, that if we are subjugated and certain tasks and

roles are imposed on us, it is because this is in the interest for some. This makes it possible to unveil the macho ideology that sustains the organization of production and capitalist reproduction.

1.A.6. By the way, there should also be studies to find out how many trans people (men, women, or non-binary) do something else with their lives than work of social reproduction – paid or not. If we situate the oppression of trans people within the framework of Marxist feminist analysis, it is not only because it allows us to “unveil”, to de-naturalize the system. It is mainly because “materially” trans people have a particular place in the capitalist system – which happens to be the same as women.

So, when transphobic feminists declare that a woman has no penis, in order to declare the existence of trans women invalid, they are arguing the wrong thing. The real question, in a society based on material experience and not metaphysical questioning, would be: what is it to be a trans woman, to live as a trans woman?

When transphobic feminists say that trans women are men who want to infiltrate the feminist movement, do they think about the social, economic, and physical cost of being a trans woman? We must really question this. When you see the unemployment figures for trans people, the rates of murder or attempted murder, rape, exclusion, discrimination, suicide...is this all a price worth paying just to be able to “go into gender neutral spaces”?

Not all trans people are stars in Hollywood: the daily life of trans people is exclusion, precariousness, marginalization. And above all, it's the fear of being assaulted in the street, of going home alone at night; in a heterosexual relationship, of being raped or attempted murder; at work, of being harassed; it's a constant calculation of how to behave so as not to risk being excluded, it's wondering if, depending on how you dress or how you present yourself in such and such a place, you'll be OK... In fact, it's experiencing sexism and misogyny, in addition to transphobia.

And this is one of the blind spots of neo-essentialist theory: by focusing on biological sex, transphobic feminists “forget” that we build an autonomous feminist movement because there is a need to unite against a common oppression, against violence experienced in common. If that's not why we unite and fight, then yes, we can very well imagine movements based on genitals. But these movements that would seek to build themselves around the similarity of biology or the strict common experience (if you believe that you can experience exactly the same thing as another person) will also have to divide themselves between lesbians and heteros, between women who want children and those who don't. Between those who work and those who don't. Between those who have children and those who don't, between those who work and those who don't... because if the basis of a political struggle for emancipation is not what you are fighting against, what you want to emancipate yourself from, it is no longer a political struggle for emancipation, it is a “categorical”, depoliticized identity struggle.

B-Identities and neoliberalism

1.B.1. It also seemed important for the discussion to come back to neoliberalism, because one of the arguments often put forward by some feminists to oppose the rights of trans people is that there is a “trans lobby” which is the “Trojan horse” of neoliberalism. In fact, this is a recurrent issue that goes beyond the trans issue. If we change the focus, for example, and go to the traditional left, what in France is called “the traditional workers' movement”, we find the same type of attack against the feminist movement, the collectives of racialized or queer people. In fact, since the 1970s, the argument of the conspiracy of a pressure group that comes to divide the class struggle has been used all the time, whether it's the “gay lobby”, “extremist feminism”, “Islam-leftism”... These imaginary figures, often constructed by the extreme right, are sometimes or have been, used even on the left, to oppose all those who try to integrate into their analysis and strategy something other than the white, heterosexual, male working class.

The idea is that anything that doesn't allow for the construction of a “traditional class identity” (basically, the image of

the working-class hero, a straight white man who works in a factory) works against the class struggle by dividing, diverting the struggle, etc. We are caricaturing, but that's what it's all about, including when we say that we want women, racialized people or LGBTQI people, but only to strike in the workplace. The idea here is not to say that workplaces should be abandoned: but as oppressions have their own dynamics, the political subjectivation of the oppressed cannot occur only through the union for example. It has never worked like that. And after 50 years of neoliberalism, of breaking the legal right to strike in the workplace and of the crisis of trade unionism, it's a good thing that it can work differently: otherwise, we would be condemned to defeat.

1.B.2. To try to put it in a nutshell, the "trans lobby Trojan horse of neoliberalism" is the idea that consumer society and individualism (apparently the main characteristics of neoliberalism) would produce a multitude of identities that could be freely chosen, and that this would go against women's rights because it would mean diverting the feminist struggle towards these desires for recognition of identity.

To put it another way, the "trans lobby" is the fact that people think they are free thanks to the free market and advocate that feminist struggles allow this liberation instead of defending equality, the end of violence, etc. There would be a de facto antagonism between identity recognition and feminist struggle.

1.B.3. Let's be clear: this definition of neoliberalism, which is widely shared by transphobic feminists – and a significant part of the mainstream left – is false. Neoliberalism as a project is not a broad programme of liberalization of individuals through consumerism and self-fulfilment.

Neoliberalism is a project for the sustainable restoration of capital's profits, initiated in the 1970s in response to rising labour and social protest, some of whose main features are the individualization and casualization of working conditions and privatization to restore profit rates at a time when it is becoming difficult to find new markets.

Let us not forget that neoliberalism as a political project was first established in Pinochet's Chile, or under Reagan and Thatcher: regimes that could not be accused of celebrating the proliferation of identities or promoting social freedom and fulfilment!

Generally speaking, the only freedoms that neoliberalism advocates are those of enterprise, free markets and free exploitation. The rest is a myth. The myth of personal fulfilment, for example, is a veneer that neoliberalism appears to offer, but the millions of proletarians who are crammed into dilapidated buildings, who are unemployed, who work at Amazon or are self-employed, who suffer burnouts in hospitals, schools, or supermarkets, are very far from being "fulfilled". That these myths are taken up by the "left-boomer" in crisis who can't redeploy for fear of leaving their comfort zone is a pretty serious problem but it doesn't take away the fact that it's a myth. [\[1\]](#)

1.B.4. And this is an important point in the debate. Identity politics were not born "in the market". They began to emerge on a massive scale in the 1960s and 1970s thanks to feminist, LGBTQI, anti-racist and decolonial struggles. And if neoliberalism can still sometimes take on a progressive guise, it is only in reaction to the politicization of identity issues. Precisely to annihilate the revolutionary potential that can emerge from these politicizations, to prevent them from allowing a rise in the generality of anger, from allowing strategies to take shape, from allowing the subalterns to ally themselves. In other words, to avoid reliving the convergences between social, gender, race, and sexuality issues of the late 1960s and risking a period of revolutionary unrest. As we said, "in the last instance", it is the class struggle that rules the world: and it is the action of the oppressed and exploited that forces the dominant to reposition themselves.

1.B.5. We won't go into more detail here, the idea being to grasp that these questions of identity emerge from the struggles, resistances, and movements of our class. And if they started to become predominant in the 1990s, it's not

because they challenged class identity: it's because after 20 years of neoliberalism, the fall of the USSR, the crisis of the communist parties and the unions, class identity collapsed, and people found possibilities elsewhere to motivate themselves politically and collectively.

So, of course, the system tries to appropriate these struggles and identities, and it's not a question of saying that every identity question is in itself a potential for revolutionary transformation of society. What we need to understand, above all, is that these questions are dynamic, subject to relations of forces. Above all, in the age of atomization, they are sometimes the last places of collectives, resistance and struggle... And therefore, the first places from which revolts start again.

On the other hand, should we give up because the system tries to recuperate these issues? Is there anything immaculate, chemically pure, non-alienable under capitalism? The system that dominates the planet will always try to reclaim what we do until we take over and destroy it. But does that condemn us to doing nothing? In the last instance – as in the first – what is interesting, rather than looking for the “best possible ground” for revolution, is to start from reality and try to transform it. It is to deploy strategic questions wherever we can, precisely in order not to get caught up in the traps of neoliberalism.

1.B.6. And similarly, at a time when 15% of millenials declare themselves non-binary, it is no longer possible to treat this “issue” as if it were a fad of a few intellectuals. Instead of an “issue” or a “fad”, we believe that everything that touches on the identity of individuals must be considered as such and taken seriously, at the risk of cutting ourselves off from an ever-larger part of our class. Because, like it or not, when more than half of generation Z in the US define themselves as “non-straight”, this necessarily cuts across our class (unless we consider that there can be a majority of bourgeois in a national space).

Based on these two observations, if the feminist movement and, more generally, the left of social movements, do not manage to consider all this seriously, there will be fractures that will necessarily deepen. We insist on the “necessarily”: because we are talking here about what touches “the most intimate part” of individuals, and not only about what could be choices, tastes, political ideas. We can, for example, discuss what strategies to put in place based on identity issues – which we will do in the second part. Do we think that we should develop trans movements that are autonomous from the feminist movement? Is the goal of our activism to achieve formal equal rights or inclusive businesses? Should we stop talking about social classes and trying to unite different sectors, different identities, to build globality, and instead campaign for the simple recognition of plurality? Should we abandon the perspective of a social revolution and advocate individual self-realization by integrating fully into the capitalist system? All these are strategies, orientations, which can and should be criticized, and to which other orientations and strategies should be opposed. But to do this, there is a prerequisite: taking identities and the individuals who identify with them seriously.

Because if identities are not “revolutionary in themselves” – and the people who claim that they are often promoting the commodification of our struggles – what is certain is that if we condemn individuals from the outset, if we reject them, it seems more complicated to be able to make politics “based on” identities. For if, as we have said, neoliberalism is a system that tries to integrate part of the critique in order to neutralize it – and therefore to appear “open” to a whole range of questions – it should not be surprising if people who are rejected by the left prefer to try to integrate themselves into the system.

We are not playing on equal terms with capitalism: to keep our class under its yoke, the system has a whole economic, ideological, political, and cultural arsenal. An ambitious policy to build a new class consciousness and culture, to develop it on a mass scale, to propose a counter-hegemony, cannot be done without integrating and respecting all the “sectors” and struggles of our class. This presupposes that the radical left accepts and takes seriously all the struggles, that the feminist movement that wants a revolutionary transformation of society does the

same, and that we can debate and democratize the debates around strategic questions – without which we will never be able to go beyond the day-to-day management of the banality allowed by the bosses

2- Strategies

A-Strategic thinking about inclusiveness

2.A.1. Beyond the theory, the idea is also to think strategically around the issues related to trans people – and thus, more specifically today, exclusion/inclusion in the feminist movement.

We emphasize the strategic issue: because if we consider the place of trans people in the feminist movement to be an important issue, it is not because of moral considerations, because “it’s right”, because “we have to” be inclusive. It’s important to point this out, because there have always been moralist positions in the labour movement, and sometimes the debate in the feminist movement about inclusivity can come from there, from this bourgeois/moral charity position.

But we don’t think it’s interesting to be an activist out of charity, out of a divine mission. As revolutionary Marxist activists, we think, for example, that it is the “working” class¹ that is the revolutionary subject, not because we care about the “fate” of the “poor proletarians”, but because it is the class that holds the keys to the power of the bourgeoisie: without its labour – productive or reproductive – it is impossible to make profits.

This is how we integrate feminism into our revolutionary strategy: we think that feminism can be a movement for revolutionary transformations of society, not because it is morally right to defend women’s rights – for example, by opportunism, hoping that as they represent 50% of the population, they will want to participate in the proletarian revolution if we take care of their fate – but because it can be a particular space of political subjectivation given the role that women occupy in the system of production-reproduction, and because it can be a vector of radical transformations via the feminist strike notably. We’ll come back to this.

Let’s be clear: we are not saying that we should think of inclusivity as opportunism, that we fight for women’s rights, trans rights, racialized people’s rights, etc. just because it’s strategic. What we are trying to say is that we have an ultimate goal, which is the establishment of a society free from oppression and exploitation, from all relations of domination and authority. That to achieve this objective, we propose to develop the “conscious struggle for the conquest of power”, as Bensaid said, and that this requires the unity of the oppressed and the exploited, that is of the people who suffer from capitalism and the relations of oppression.

And it is in this sense that we propose a critique of moral inclusiveness or opportunism: That is to say, we don’t think that we should say that such and such a movement should include everyone because it’s good, but rather that we should ask ourselves “why” we want to include all the oppressed and exploited, and above all, that the whole of the oppressed and exploited should come to ask themselves “why” it is in their interest to fight in a movement for the revolutionary transformation of society, to unite in order to collectively take power from the hands of the bourgeoisie. Without knowing why we do things, we rarely ask ourselves “how to get there”, we don’t talk about strategy, we do things by habit. We end up “resisting” and locking ourselves into the posture of “resistance” and “rebellion”. We celebrate the riot, we incite a day of strike here and there, we let off steam in demonstrations, we yell at everything that’s wrong, before going back home, sharing a few memes, maybe writing something, we have a drink, before going back to work, to college or waiting at home for the return of the good weather.

But what we are proposing is not to “play” a little while waiting for the end of the world. The romanticization of the end of the world is a class privilege for those who will be able to escape to some place where it’s always 25 degrees, near a lake, a 30-year supply of alcohol and a few servants who have already been hired so they don’t have to cook. For the vast majority of our class, however, it will be agony. What we want is to turn the table upside down, destroy the chessboard and start believing in ourselves in earnest.

2.A.2. It seemed important to us to dwell a little on this, because it also avoids being disarmed and falling into the trap of pinkwashing. Because, let’s be clear, the tendency to consider inclusiveness not as a tool but as an end in itself is a bias to cancel out the revolutionary potential of our movements and to submit them to the agenda of the “progressive” tendencies of neoliberalism. It is, in fact, about women, trans people, racialized people, LGB people, etc. of the bourgeoisie being “included”, “equal”, in the ruling class, having the same chances to exploit the rest of the population. We will come back to this, but this “progressive” tendency of neoliberal feminism is in fact the twin of the “conservative” tendency of the same neoliberal feminism. That is, both – TERF as well as LGBTQI-friendly – have the same basic goals: equal opportunities to exploit others. We need to keep this in mind: while our discussion here is only minimally about pinkwashing, that doesn’t mean that Kamala Harris’ feminism is any more our ally than JK Rowling’s. Trans people dying in migrant camps in the US don’t care about the appointment of Rachel Levine to the Department of Health.

2.A.3. As we said, trans people are overwhelmingly proletarians, so there is a major interest in thinking strategically about the inclusivity of trans people in movements that believe that to make revolution, the proletariat must become aware of its strength and confident in its abilities.

It’s in this framework that we should pose the inclusion of trans people... and inclusivity in general: because we want a revolutionary feminist movement of the masses and that cannot do without including the plural totality of the conditions of being women and of proletarian gender minorities. And so the question of whether or not to include trans people, beyond theoretical considerations, is a question of strategy and direction for the feminist movement. Is feminism to be a movement for formal equal rights, and thus, for equal opportunities in the capitalist system, or is it a movement that can participate in a revolutionary transformation of society?

B-Feminism for the 99% or feminism for some

2.B.1-Let’s go back to the thread of the conversation. There are transphobic movements within the feminist movement. It is not a question here of essentializing the positions, and undoubtedly what we are going to say is a little caricatural, for the sake of concision. When we look at the details, it often seems that those who are against trans rights are also against Muslim rights and have a very strong opinion on prostitution in favour of repressive abolitionism.

It is an alliance between bourgeois feminism and institutional feminism, between currents that think that the objective of feminism is to break the glass ceiling and that women can become company directors, between part of neo-liberal feminism (the “conservative” tendency that we mentioned) and what has become institutionalized feminism of the 1970s. It is a social-liberal state feminism, which can be found, for example, in the struggle against pension reform in France because it will penalize women, but which at the same time demands a hardening of the law of separation. It is a feminism that positions itself directly within the framework of the state and does not leave it: hence, for example, the very authoritarian turn of neo-abolitionism, which defends laws that give all power to the police, or the inability to think of the fight against gender violence outside the strengthening of the police state. It is a feminism that has not taken stock of 50 years of neo-liberalism or the impasse of reformism and thinks that progress can only be achieved within the framework of the state. Who thinks that women have everything to gain from ‘compromise’, even if the compromise in question no longer exists?

Who doesn't think that strategies can be redeployed from the real conditions of existence of the female proletariat and that these strategies can lead to something a bit more ambitious than the equalization of the chances to be exploited?

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that the same tendencies not to take stock of the last fifty years also exist on the left – including the radical left. Let's think of all those organizations that are no longer able to get out of their relationship with the state – what Bensaid called the “state culture” of the left – and lock themselves up in the day-to-day management of the struggle or comment on the situation without understanding how to really act on it.

2.B.2. Once again, this is quickly said and caricatured. There are also trends in bourgeois feminism that are trans-inclusive: here again, pinkwashing should not be ignored. The Biden administration comes to mind in a crude way. In a more subtle way, the policies of Disney and THQ, two companies that produce “inclusive” cultural goods and that to a certain extent allow a whole bunch of people to identify and build themselves up in a positive way, but that at the same time harass their employees and drive them to burn-out, underpay, dismiss, etc. And finally, there are those who militate for feminist “entrepreneurship”, open start-ups to support women victims of violence or target LGBTQI people in their recruitment.

We must see this as the other side of bourgeois feminism – in fact, the other side of neo-liberalism. There are progressive and conservative tendencies in neo-liberalism, they oppose each other but have the same end: maximizing profits. And like neo-conservative bourgeois feminism, progressive bourgeois feminism has only one perspective: equal opportunities to exploit others for the 1%, equal opportunities to be exploited in the same way for the remaining 99%.

2.B.3. By analysing both the economic and social situation of women all over the world and the feminist movements that have developed over the last ten years, we hypothesize that the feminist movement can be a lever for revolution: because women occupy a particular role in the social reproduction of labour power, because they are often the ones who manage and defend territories, because they are at the forefront of the struggles against privatization, the destruction of the planet and, more generally, against neo-liberalism, because feminist struggles are the bearers of transversality, direct and renewed democracy, mass self-organization, because the various national, regional and international coordinations that are developing are all spaces that can allow for the debate of collective strategies, etc. etc.

This hypothesis is embodied in a strategy – the feminist mass strike. And to develop this strategy, we advocate that the feminist movement should develop its own agenda, in total independence from the state, the unions and the political organizations. That it should be made up of as many self-organizing structures as possible – in every town, village, neighbourhood, workplace, university. That these structures allow for self-activity and are productive of other things – in this case, that they allow for a feminist and collective management of social reproduction to be opposed to the capitalist and individual management of social reproduction, to create the basis for spaces of dualities of power.

In other words, we believe that with an autonomous and self-organized feminist mesh that is both sufficiently localized and necessarily coordinated, the conditions can be realized for the feminist movement to be a mass vanguard movement that can carry along other sectors of our class, as was the case in October 2019 in Chile.

2.B.4. It is within this strategic framework that we pose the self-organization of trans people. The point of this paper is to argue that trans people need to be integrated as such into the revolutionary subject of feminism – and thus into the self-organizing frameworks of the feminist movement – but this does not exclude separate forms of organization that can fit precisely into the global feminist mesh.

Marxism and the oppression of trans people

There are at least two reasons for organizing in separate frameworks. Firstly, because society's violence against trans people requires a certain capacity for self-organization to build solidarity and defend itself.

We talk a lot about transphobic feminists, but we should not forget that this is not only part of a left that is generally equally transphobic, but that there are also more pressing attacks from the far right and neo-fascist governments around the world. As has been said, neoliberalism is not a joyous celebration of political liberalism and our identities. That there are tendencies towards a return to liberalism in neoliberal parties should not make us forget this.

Around the world – including in northern countries – trans people's rights are constantly under attack – when we have rights at all! From the murders of trans people in Brazil – claimed politically by the far right, to the attacks on trans people's rights in the UK and Australia, to the fact that in France we have very few rights, and that the few rights we do have are constantly being questioned and debated by a whole bunch of people who have no "stake" in the issue.

So there is a need to organize to fight against these attacks and to try to win new rights. And this is even more necessary because too often the "scientific" and political discourse on trans issues comes from non-trans people. How many books on trans people have been written by trans people? How many laws? Who is proposing the "care" "pathways"? It is still doctors, psychoanalysts, white bourgeois men who saturate the official discourse – serious and recognized – on the existence of trans people.

Moreover, in many places, this self-organization is made necessary by marginalization. It is no longer a question of organizing to fight, but also to live and survive. Squats, trans TDS collectives, self-help networks, etc., come to mind. In many countries – and especially for racialized trans people – self-organization is a vital issue.

And all this, of course, is not in conflict with the feminist movement. On the contrary, it is about inserting these frameworks into the general mesh of feminist self-organization, making them "parts", spaces that combine, reinforce, respect and coordinate each other.

So the challenge of integrating trans people, as well as racialized women, the most precarious, working women, etc., is of course that of the protagonism, active role, of a feminism for the mass 99%, of a class feminism – in the broad sense of class, of course. This is the issue of the leadership of the feminist movement: is it a revolutionary movement or is it a movement to integrate demands into the agenda of institutional political parties?

2.B.5. In this perspective, we no longer put things in the same way. In this perspective, it's not a question of knowing what we want – or at least, not only that – but why we want it, and above all, how we get there. It's time, here too, to get out of the immediate demands/maximum programme for socialism dichotomy and to start thinking again in terms of transitional demands: all those measures, paths, proposals which, to be achieved, require putting our class in motion and on the road to revolution. Notably by developing self-organization and self-activity, by propelling certain questions to mass scales, by creating the collective, by allowing an "apprenticeship" of self-management, as Bensaïd said.

We must seriously rethink this question, because after 50 years of neoliberalism, if we still expect something from the capitalist state to improve our living conditions substantially, we're in trouble. This does not mean that we should no longer demand things from the state. A lot of things, especially in the northern countries and in the current state of the balance of power, can only depend on the state for the time being: an increase in the legal time limit for abortion, the disarming of the police, the free change of gender on identity papers, etc. But that doesn't stop us from breaking away from the state. But this does not prevent us from breaking with the "statist culture" that has been established on the left and which wants us to systematically position ourselves within the framework of "dialogue", negotiation, and demand vis-à-vis the state.

We should always ask ourselves why we are making such demands, and whether we could not resolve the question “by ourselves”, whether “by ourselves” – or the process – is not more interesting than mere propaganda, whether it does not allow us to go to unexplored places.

For example, the question of how to deal with gender violence: are we calling for a law, or are we trying to deal with the issue collectively, through feminist self-organization? A bit of both? How do we do it? To what end? We must keep in mind the final goal, and see if what we want, allows us to get there. Not because of a fetishization of revolution, but because, generally speaking, anything that is not in the collective interest is a great disservice to us or to other layers of the subaltern classes.

For example, does collectively and politically nurturing the idea that we should “change the police” for a better reception of victims move us towards this goal? Or would it not be a more ambitious proposal to develop a network of solidarity, strong enough and localized on the street corner, to welcome victims, deal with aggressors and propose popular self-education against violence? In particular, when it is now possible to hear on a massive scale that the police are a racist, sexist and LGBTQI-phobic institution safeguarding the interests of capital, should we try to “correct” them? Moreover, what would be the concrete implications of a police “reform” for a whole part of our class that is systematically attacked by the police? Is it desirable for a section of women to be able to trust the police, when this would undoubtedly send the vast majority of the oppressed back into an individual relationship with police violence?

This is just one example that deserves to be developed further, but it seemed important to press for a return to strategic thinking about our demands so as not to be locked into “non-choices”. For it is true that at an individual level, to protect oneself, filing a complaint is sometimes the only way out. But should we continue to make a virtue of necessity and consider the narrow margins of manoeuvre left to us by neoliberalism as the basis of our strategies?

And this is all the more true with the climate emergency and the destruction of the planet hanging over our lives. Can we still be satisfied with a few demands to improve our living conditions “little by little”, when every day we are getting closer to disaster?

2.B.6. If we keep this strategic thread in mind, then a whole bunch of debates get resolved pretty quickly. Let’s take the thorny “prostitution/sex work” debate and refocus on trans issues. It’s interesting to do that, because due to a lot of laws, discrimination, hatred, it’s the only possible paid activity for the vast majority of trans people in the world.

In this case, we can’t just say “let’s ask for laws to get prostitutes out of prostitution and wait for the police to do their job”. To do that is to take political power away from people who take action for themselves and give it back to the state and the police. We believe that the only political position that allows us to keep the path of building a movement for a revolutionary transformation of society is to support all those who self-organize and create networks of solidarity, outside the state and often against the police. This is the only position that allows us to hold both ends of the solidarity with an important part of our class – women, migrants, gender minorities, who die every day in marginality – and the proliferation of spaces that can claim to contest the political power of the state.

It is also the only position that allows us to be responsible “at our level”. For let us say it clearly and in all modesty: it is not a question of minimizing trafficking, but do we really think we can fight against the mafia today? In some countries, certainly, and then, specific strategies are deployed. But these do not involve the police: generally speaking, for whole sections of our class, the police are never part of the solution.

Let’s not deny either that part of the bourgeoisie might want a legal sex work market to find new markets. No concept has strategic value in itself, it is what you do with it politically that makes it powerful in one way or another.

For example, when American revolutionary anti-racist activists say “Black Lives Matter”, they give that slogan a different meaning than when Disney, Biden or Macron use it. It seems to us that what is interesting is to place ourselves on the side of the dynamics of struggle.

Now, to come back to our example, the notion of “sex work” is today a notion that allows a whole bunch of people to self-organize, to subjectivize, to create solidarity, mutual aid, to fight. In this framework, the only possible position for the development of a feminism for the 99% that considers the feminist strike – and therefore self-organization and self-activity – as a central element, is to integrate all the frameworks of feminist self-organizations that allow important parts of the proletariat to organize. This does not prevent us from being in solidarity with survivors – nor with those who are caught up in trafficking.

But the debate has too often been caricatured by those who support the “abolition/exclusion of trans people/fight against Islam” triptych. Because although nothing prevents us from standing in solidarity with sex workers and integrating them into our feminist strategy while standing in solidarity with survivors when developing a feminist movement for the 99%, it is not possible to consider as valid frameworks and demands that go beyond the relationship to the state and to integration with capitalism when one’s perspective is precisely to integrate feminism with the state. Because at bottom, this feminist current is not mistaken in its attack on trans women, Muslim women and sex workers, but also more and more on queer women: it’s about attacking the people who often constitute the bottom of the proletariat, the individuals who are the least easily integrated into bourgeois normality. It’s about creating scarecrows to normalize oneself: it’s hoped that by selling what’s most out of the norm at a time of fascistization of society – and on the number one enemy that Muslim women embody – one will be able to get some small improvements to the rights of some women.

2.B.7. Finally, it seemed important to stress that an ambitious policy for trans rights cannot be achievable under capitalism. And that we must do everything to demonstrate this so as not to fall into the traps set by neoliberalism.

Let’s try to imagine what it would be like in a society in which it were “normal” to be a trans person. What would have happened to get there? It would imply the end of gender stereotypes and gendered differentiation of individuals. The existence of real ‘free choice’ and self-determination, free from coercion and discrimination. As we have said, transphobia is an integral part of macho violence. It is one of the coercive biases that separates men and women, productive and reproductive work, the possibility of maximizing profits and minimizing the costs of reproducing labour power. If there is no more transphobia, if there are no more constraints on the self-determination of individuals, then there is no more assignment... And so, if there is no longer any assignment, how can we justify the separation between the spheres – and the devaluation of reproductive work? In fact, the end of transphobia raises the question of social equality.

The same goes for the measures that could be put in place to really improve the living conditions of the 99% of trans people. For example, for trans migrants, the regularization of undocumented migrants. Free medical care, which means free access to health care. Equal conditions of access to employment: this implies real gender-neutral education for example. All these things go against the current trend of neo-liberal globalization, finance, and the free market. All things that seriously raise the question of integrating the trans liberation agenda into a revolutionary agenda – and never fighting the wrong fight. As we have said, what we should be interested in is the emancipation of all people, social equality, not equal opportunities to exploit other human beings.

2.B.8. It is therefore important that these demands are elaborated by the people concerned, but discussed and carried forward in mass movements: our objective is that our class should be aware of the need to undermine, for example, the hierarchization of gender, the sexual differentiation of roles, etc. The example of the Russian revolution in relation to feminist demands should also enlighten us on the fact that things only evolve according to the relations of force and the state of consciousness of our class, not by passing laws that can always be reversed.

Thus, taking into account trans issues must allow us to question gender stereotypes, heteronormativity and to attack both macho violence and oppressive relations. It is like the issue of lesbianism for example, which at the same time redefines heterosexual sexuality in that it confronts and popularizes the fact that there are other ways of doing – of doing sexuality and relationships – that are more respectful, less violent, more fulfilling, etc.

Popularizing the fact that trans existences exist and anchoring it as something “normal” for us allows us to question heteronormative sexuality, toxic masculinity and the injunctions to femininity as posed by macho dominance relations. We insist on one point: we say, normally, “for us”. Because it’s also about redefining normality, about having a perspective of “what normality for our class as a class that becomes aware of its revolutionary role” and not within the framework of neoliberal normality.

Our ultimate goal is societal change, not making music videos for Gucci.

PS:

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[1] The term “left-boomer” is not to be taken in its sociological definition (which corresponds to an age group) but rather in its political definition. We consider that it easily condenses a whole bunch of characteristics of this part of the left that lives in the past and doesn’t understand the current evolutions of the world – for example, the left that still considers it relevant to talk about the “centrality of the working class” in order to counterpose workplace intervention to the rest of the militant “sectors”, which thinks that the unions are the alpha and omega of social struggles, which is often authoritarian, practices “black humour”, hardly questions its internal practices, and last but not least, whether reformist or revolutionary, still thinks that there is a way to use social change and that it has remained unchanged since 1917/36/68/81 depending on the current.