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ing the same argument. If class is understood as being simply a matter of economics, and particularly those aspects of capitalist economics that appear most pressing to white heterosexual men; if class-centricity means that a deep understanding of the way in which capitalism produces capitalists and workers is essential for all anarchists, while deep understandings of the way in which patriarchy produces men and women, and white supremacism produces white people in relation to a multiplicity of (in)subordinate races[15], are not; worse still, if it means that obscure historical knowledge of failed revolutions and exegesis of the texts of dead theorists takes precedence over the experiences of living people, then class must be removed from the centre of our theory. If, however, class is understood as encompassing the totality of hierarchical social relations, as being the product of many systems acting sometimes in concert and sometimes autonomously of one another, and moreover as bringing together a diversity of experiences and struggles in a spirit of solidarity and mutual recognition, then this is precisely the heart of anarchism.

[15] See "Abolish Whiteness" by Noel Ignatiev, http://imaginenoborders.org/pdf/zines/AbolishWhiteness.pdf for a development of this point.

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then an awareness of the ways in which privilege manifests in inter-personal relations is of particular importance.[13] The ability to contribute to shaping the direction of the movement is predicated on the ability to speak and be listened to by others within the movement. The ability to speak from an authoritative position, with the expectation of being listened to, understood and treated seriously, the ability to rely on certain culturally-specific assumptions (common sense[14]) in making a point, and so on, are more readily available to those who are already privileged by power structures than it is to those who are not. Awareness of privilege, then, is an important counterbalance to social forces which produce marginalisation, which allows us to organise more effectively against those forces. This is the precise opposite of the liberal-moralist theory of privilege, which elevates privilege awareness to the status of an abstract good.

The class struggle

At this point one might be wondering what precisely the implication of this argument is. Do I mean to say that class must no longer be at the centre of anarchist politics? Or am I saying that class is understood in a way that is too narrow? I am saying both of these things, or, more precisely, both are valid ways of pars-

[13] For another class-struggle anarchist perspective on "Privilege Theory", which takes a somewhat different approach from mine, see "A Class Struggle Anarchist Analysis of Privilege Theory" from the Anarchist Federation Women's Caucus, http://www.afed.org.uk/blog/state/327-a-class-struggle-anarchist-analysis-of-privilege-theory–from-the-womens-caucus-.html

[14] "Many quite nefarious ideologies pass for common sense. For decades of American history, it was "common sense" in some quarters for white people to own slaves and for women not to vote. Common sense, moreover, is not always "common" — the idea that lesbians and gay men should be protected against discrimination and violence strikes some people as common-sensical, but for others it threatens the foundations of ordinary life." "A 'Bad Writer' Bites Back" by Judith Butler, https://pantherfile.uwm.edu/wash/www/butler.htm

contraction of the welfare state (in particular the cuts to child benefit function to prevent problematic sections of the working class from reproducing and placing a burden on the state, while imposing a particularly cruel form of discipline on those that do), the taxation system (VAT on condoms, for example), education, public health etc.

An intersectional approach thus reveals the deep interconnections between superficially distinct spheres of political activity. Women's struggles and the class struggle are found to be inseparable. The slogans "Can't Pay, Won't Pay" and "My Body, My Choice" resonate deeply with one another, as both involve a refusal of biopolitical control and an assertion of the right to live self-directed lives autonomous of the demands of the powerful. Intersectional praxis involves, in part, uncovering these interconnections and writing them into the public discourse.

Speaking and listening

As anarchists, we are not immune to the effects of being formed within a social context in which women, queers and people of colour are sytematically oppressed. Practices of dominance and submission are deeply ingrained into our culture and habituated within normative forms of social interaction, and cannot simply be dispelled with the performative declaration: "I am anti-racist", I am anti-sexist", "I am an anarchist" etc.[12] Put simply: if left unexamined, our subconscious habits in social interactions will reproduce the marginalisation of the already-marginalised within the anarchist movement.

If, as I have argued, the building-blocks of anarchist theory and practice are the subjective perspectives of those who experience oppression directly (as opposed to ready-made theoretical systems)

[12] See, for example, "Towards an Anarchist Anti-Racism" by Dónal O'Driscoll, http://www.wsm.ie/c/toward-anarchist-anti-racism

As class-struggle anarchists dealing with the relations between gender, race and class, we must, in theory and practice, pick a path between two pitfalls. On one side is economic reductionism – the reduction of all political questions to the social relations of production – which erases the perspectives and struggles of women, queers and people of colour; submerges their voices within an overly generalised class narrative, in which the idealised Worker is implicitly white heterosexual and male; or consigns their struggles to a secondary importance compared to the "real struggle" of (economic) class against class. On the other is a stultifying and inward-looking liberal-idealist identity politics, concerned fetishistically with the identification of privilege and the self-regulation of individual oppressive behaviour to the (near) exclusion of organised struggle, which, while amplifying the voices of the marginalised, consigns them to an echo chamber where they can resonate harmlessly.

While both poles described are actualised within the anarchist milieu, we should not make the mistake of thinking that both pitfalls are equally imminent. White supremacism and patriarchy[1] are hegemonic within our society and this is reflected in anarchist spaces: dismissive "critiques" of identity politics are far more common than over-enthusiastic engagement. Therefore this piece will not offer yet another of these critiques, which more often than not function only justify the continued ignorance and inaction of those unwilling to destabilise their privilege.[2]

Rather this piece deals with a more difficult question: "How does one reconcile the diverse political perspectives of feminists,

[1] I am using these terms in a broad sense for the sake of readability. White supremacism encompasses all oppressions on the basis of race, ethnicity, culture, nationality and migration status which function to empower whites. Similarly, patriarchy includes the oppression of women, queers, trans* people and others oppressions on the basis of gender.

[2] For a balanced critique, see "The Poverty of Privilege Politics" by by Tabitha Bast and Hannah McClure, Shift Magazine, http://shiftmag.co.uk/?p=679

queers and activists of colour with the tradition of class-struggle anarchism?" I do not offer a complete or authoritative answer, but rather attempt to move forward a conversation which seems to be perpetually re-iterating its own beginning: "we must begin to talk about gender and race issues". Indeed we must, but we must also move beyond beginning.

The traditional approach

Most class-struggle anarchist understandings of the inter-relation of gender, race and class allude in one way or another to the Marxist base-superstructure model of society, that is, that the relations of production are the base of society, which generate the political superstructure which includes the state, culture, gender and race relations etc. A vulgar Marxist idea of the base-superstructure model holds that the base determines the superstructure absolutely and the superstructure is unable to affect the base. The implication of this is that no specific agitation on gender or race issues is needed: if women, queers or people of colour wish to improve their position in society they should simply participate in the class struggle which will necessarily and automatically result in the dissolution of all hierarchies. A particularly crude but somewhat instructive example of this thinking tells us:

> *In any class society—thus, in any society in which the state and the economy exist—only the ruling class can be truly said to have privilege… [S]o-called privileges are nothing more than a minimal easing of the conditions of exploitation experienced by people in these specific social categories. They are intended to convince these people that they have more in common with their exploiters than with those not granted the same "privileges" and to*

particular tactical engagement in a more generalised struggle against austerity, and the campaign for abortion rights in Ireland, which forms part of a wider struggle to maximise reproductive choices for women – and ask: what is the relationship between austerity as a generalised imposition on our class and the restriction of reproductive choice as a particular imposition on women? What are the common forms of social control mobilised in these two seemingly discrete spheres?

Both are biopolitical projects; that is, both aim, at the level of the individual and of the population at large, at producing certain kinds of people and not others in the furtherance of particular objectives. Austerity, which is commonly understood as a mechanism of extracting capital from the population and transferring it to a capitalist class in crisis (which is true), is also a project aimed at reshaping our lives to produce austere subjects: idealised workers primed for participation in neoliberal markets, who provide a maximum of productivity at a minimum cost, living lives with a minimum of material comforts, a restricted sphere of social activity, whose activity is continually aimed at maximising marketable skills, actively seeking job "opportunities" etc.[10] The restriction of reproductive choices, while often seen as merely a result of backward religious moralism, must also be understood in this way: by denying women access to abortion outright and ensuring that access to contraception is expensive, sexual activity (and the social activity surrounding it) is disciplined toward the production of life within certain normative contexts (i.e. the stable monogamous relationship, called marriage in its ideal form) while other forms are precluded.[11] Both involve the mobilisation of many of the same mechanisms of social control: the police, the judicial system, the

[10] In particular, various reforms of the social welfare system have a particular aim of disciplining the unemployed in this way.

[11] The fact that this project is increasingly an abject failure producing an assortment of individually and socially problematic situations is besides the point here.

> *convince the others that their real enemy is not the ruling class, but rather those granted a less intense level of exploitation… Since only the ruling class truly has privilege, the destruction of privilege will only occur when we destroy all rule.*[3]

This sort of utopian thinking denies that gender or race have any autonomy from class: patriarchy and white supremacism are merely tools employed by the ruling class to divide the workers. Of course, in reality, the establishment of a communist economic system does not preclude the continuation of patriarchy or white supremacism. One can easily imagine, for example, a communist system where women are held to be the collective sexual property of men, with sexual access ensured by systematic rape and battery, whose economy is perfectly functional.

More sophisticated variants of this model, often accompanied by some dialectical flourish, acknowledge the necessity of specific anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-homophobic, and anti-transphobic agitation, lest these dynamics persist "after the revolution", but still understand gender and race issues as being essentially forms of bigotry fostered by the ruling class to divide workers against themselves to prevent the realisation of their collective "objective" interests as a class. Gender and race struggles are thus positioned as ancillary to the class struggle, even if they are formally considered "central" to it. Patriarchy and white supremacism are not understood as constituting systems in their own right and forms of power other than the economic are rendered invisible. The pertinent question here is not whether this picture is correct in some "objective" sense — whether metaphysically all power "really" resides in the means of production — but rather: which voices are amplified by this framing and which are muted? What forms of action are opened and foreclosed by choosing this framework at the

[3] "A Question of Privilege", Venomous Butterfly, http://www.geocities.ws/kk_abacus/vb/wd8priv.html

The theory of intersectionality was developed to address the issue of how a movement could begin to accommodate the incoherency of perspectives entailed by the abandonment of universalism and still continue to function effectively.[8]

Intersectionality recognises that these incoherences are not merely intellectual disagreements, but rather reflect real differences in the experience of oppression from different subject-positions. We are all oppressed and privileged in various ways within various systems, and these systems interact in complex ways to produce a totality within which gender, race and class cannot be disentangled and approached as distinct objects: ones positioning with respect to race, for example, changes qualitatively what it means to be a certain gender. We must therefore reject the notion that the class struggle is or could be the same for everyone, and turn to the more complex task of treating class as contingent on other hierarchies.

> *Dare to look at the intersectionalities. Dare to be holistic. Part of the heart of anarchy is, dare to go against the grain of the conventional ways of thinking about our realities. Anarchists have always gone against the grain, and that's been a place of hope.* - bell hooks[9]

Examining intersectionalities means not just developing an understanding of the different forms of oppression and the struggles against them, but also means asking certain questions about the ways in which they intersect. To illustrate, let's examine two seemingly distinct areas of recent WSM activity — the Campaign Against the Household and Water Taxes (CAHWT), which is a

[8] See "Refusing To Wait: Anarchism and Intersectionality" by Deric Shannon & J. Rogue, http://www.anarchist-studies.org/node/339 for an account of the history of this development, as well as an excellent exposition of intersectional theory.

[9] "How Do You Practice Intersectionalism? An Interview with bell hooks", Common Struggle, http://commonstruggle.org/bellhooks

expense of another? Who among us has the power to define the "objective" interests of the working class?

'Scientific socialism' and subjectivity

> *No theory, no ready-made system, no book that has ever been written will save the world.* - Mikhail Bakunin[4]

A particularly egregious influence of Marxism on anarchist thought is the supposed need to understand the world systematically – to render the world objectively knowable through the development of a theoretical system, which totally describes reality, and provides a set of objective truths against which other understandings of the world can be compared – related to the failed project of "scientific socialism". Anarchists (Bakunin in particular) have long recognised the authoritarian nature of this project: a movement mobilised according to scientific theories can only be a movement of "experts" leading the masses – the "false consciousness" of the masses can only be directed to revolutionary ends by the Party, which, by some unknown means, comes to be the bearer of true consciousness backed up by objective scientific facts.[5]

Objective or universal knowledge is impossible. We exist within a web of social relations and only a god would be able to view the totality of social relations as an objective observer. What we see and what we do not is dependent both on how we are positioned relative to others and in which directions we choose to look. The systems we develop for understanding the world are therefore

[4] Quoted in *Michael Bakunin* (1961) by E. H. Carr, p. 175

[5] Within the Marxist tradition, this attempt to attribute the "perspective of totality" to the Party has been criticised by John Holloway. See *Change The World Without Taking Powe* r, p.35, http://www.edtechpost.ca/readings/John%20Holloway%20-%20Change%20the%20World%20Without%20Taking%20Power.pdf

products of the particular web of power relations in which we are situated; are necessarily at best partial, subjective and tentative; and reflect both the oppressions and privileges to which we are subject. Their proper function is as working theories that enable us to act as effectively as possible within our social context, not as dogmas to which reality must be made to fit. Claims to objectivity and universality are nothing other than a power grab; what is considered central to the struggle for human liberation is a reflection of who has power within the movement. The centrality of economics to our theory, and our particular conception of what class struggle entails and what it does not must be critically re-evaluated in this light.[6]

Intersectionality and privilege

> *[T]here is an important value in overcoming the fear of immanent critique and to maintaining the democratic value of producing a movement that can contain, without domesticating, conflicting interpretations on fundamental issues.* - Judith Butler[7]

Feminist theory provides useful theoretical tools for analysing the inter-relations of gender, race and class. Critiques of second-wave feminism, particularly from women of colour, highlighted the role of universalist feminist narratives in the marginalisation of working-class women, women of colour, and those whose gender expression or sexuality deviated from the norm: the idea of a universal female experience in practice meant the universalisation of the issues of the most privileged sections of the feminist movement.

[6] At the risk of stating the obvious, I am not advocating here a rejection of science as a methodology or the embracing of irrationalism; rather we should embrace a certain epistemological modesty and reject the power effects of positioning a particular set of ideas as scientific/universal/totalitarian.

[7] "The End of Sexual Difference" in *Undoing Gender* by Judith Butler, p. 176