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**FEMINIST CLASS POLITICS
FROM #METOO TO #WESTRIKE
GLOBALIZE #NIUNAMENOS
FEMINISM FOR EVERYONE!
QUEER ORGANIZING FROM THE MARGINS
GENDER AS SYMBOLIC GLUE
THE RIGHT-WING'S GRIP ON FAMILY POLITICS
QUEERING CLASS THEORY**

BREAKING FEMINISM IN SEARCH OF A NEW FEMINIST CLASS POLITICS

PREFACE

Recent years have seen a global wave of feminist protests. In the US, the Women's Marches brought hundreds of thousands to the streets, while #MeToo raised public awareness for sexual violence. In Poland, Ireland and Argentina similar numbers protested against restrictions on reproductive rights and the 8th of March mobilized masses from Berlin to Buenos Aires and from Istanbul to New Delhi. In Spain, around 5 million people participated in a feminist general strike. These protests appear as the only successful transnational social movement of our times that is challenging right-wing populism as well as authoritarian neoliberalism. At the same time, right-wing parties and movements are gaining momentum, attacking the achievements of the women's and LGBTIQ movements. They portray feminist issues as elitist and as a threat to allegedly 'natural' gender roles and ways of life. On the one hand, they build on existing racist and sexist attitudes and intensify them. On the other hand, they successfully articulate widespread discontents with social inequality and lack of democracy in the age

of neoliberalism, presenting themselves as the voice of the 'common people'.

All of this poses new challenges for feminist politics to effectively organize against the anti-feminist backlash and to take a clear stand against right-wing authoritarianism as well as neoliberalism. A New Feminist Class Politics can be an important strategy in addressing the intersecting bundle of domination and inequality. The devaluation of women and the exploitation of feminized and racialized care work are the main stakes of the current capitalist economy. Interlocking systems of oppression demand intersectional political answers. How can we fight sexual violence not only in Hollywood, but also at the workplace? How can we connect the struggle for abortion rights to a broader framework of reproductive justice? How do we fight the privatization and precarity of care work and create conditions of good care for the many, not just the few? This reader brings together different feminist analyses that address these questions and offer some strategic approaches to our future struggles.

FROM #METOO TO #WESTRIKE

A POLITICS IN FEMININE

LIZ MASON-DEESE

A year before #MeToo erupted in the United States, women in Argentina were fighting against an epidemic of violence against women in which, on average, one woman was killed every thirty hours. At noon on October 19, 2016, thousands of women all over the country walked out of their jobs and stopped doing unpaid housework, as well as carrying out the emotional work required of political organizing. The strike was Argentinian women's response to the growing number of femicides in the country, and specifically to the brutal murder of the young Lucía Pérez. But in their call to strike, they connected the many forms of violence that women experience in an economic system based on their oppression and exploitation:

»Among women under thirty years of age, unemployment is at 22%. Our lives are precarious. Women regarded as sluts sent to prison. Trans women are daily

repressed in the streets while their right to join the working world is not guaranteed, leaving prostitution as their only option. Women murdered by their partners or for a job. Abused by their parents or beaten by the police. We are experiencing a hunting season. And neoliberalism tests its strength against our bodies. In every city and every corner of the world. We are not safe.«¹

Half a million women in Buenos Aires went out onto the streets on that October 19th, expressing their outrage and their determination, and, in the process, opening a space for building women's collective strength. Participants emphasized the importance of telling their male partners and comrades, »we are not here for you today«, doing only the work that was necessary to be together with each other, with *estamos para nosotras* as their slogan.

The strike made visible the myriad forms of labor that women carry out on a

daily basis; their refusal functioned as a map of the labor women do – paid and unpaid, formal and informal, in the household, the office, the school. It brought different women together, despite their differences, enabling them to recognize both the similarities and the differences in their everyday practices, their forms of labor, and their exposure to violence.

A few months later, millions would take to the streets in the United States against the openly misogynist new president. The Women’s March, despite some of its liberal leanings its purely institutional understanding of politics, its focus on a narrow set of issues and a narrow definition of »woman«, and its emphasis on Trump rather than the longer term and structural factors behind women’s oppression – was an important experience for the many women who started to question assumptions about the supposedly post-feminist world we live in, as well as the agenda of neoliberal or *lean-in* feminism. If we supposedly have gender equality, then how could a man who openly brags about assaulting women have become president? From these questions, many began to think about their own experiences of inequality, of discrimination, and violence. For many women, it was also their first experience of mass collective action.

As a group of mostly university professors and students, many of them Latina migrants in the United States, argued during the first Argentinian strike:

»We felt that it was important to stand up in solidarity and soon realized that we also wanted to make visible (...) a form of violence that happens in the U.S. as well. For instance, the day of the strike, students — Black, white, and Latina — began recounting their own experiences of microaggressions and violence in the U.S, of being harassed on the street and at work and at school (...) As we can see, the violence in Latin America does not seem so far away. We are connected through a shared set of experiences. In a country like the U.S. where news about gender-based violence is dominated by stories about rapists not facing repercussions, and in universities where one in every six women is sexually assaulted, women started to ask: What would happen if we went on strike too?«²

The viralization of #MeToo adds to this growing global organization of women. The spread of the hashtag and the narratives accompanying it were powerful not only for making visible harassment in every industry and in every space, but also as an action through which women could find a collective voice. However, many felt ignored or left out by the focus on certain industries and deserving subjects. The #MeToo movement is thus at its weakest when it is limited to individual denunciations made by famous women, or focusing exclusively on institutional action and change.

What can the #MeToo movement learn from Latin American feminists? How can a global perspective help develop new insights into forms of violence and create

a politics that challenges the fundamental basis of gender inequality?

POPULAR FEMINISMS IN LATIN AMERICA

Women in Latin America have been organizing collectively to fight against gendered violence for many years. The bordertown of Ciudad Juárez became a flashpoint for the struggle against femicide, as activists faced the neoliberal laboratory of the maquiladoras: On the one hand, American companies seeking cheaper labor across the border, on the other hand a new class of young women, migrants, seeking freedom in paid labor away from the confines of family and community. Since the implementation of NAFTA, hundreds of these women have been disappeared, tortured, and/or murdered, while the perpetrators of those crimes generally go unpunished. Most investigations point to a network of complicity between patriarchal state institutions, local law enforcement, drug traffickers, and factory bosses seeking docile workers.

It was the quests for justice led by family members and friends of the murdered girls and women, that initially brought attention to the issue of femicide in Latin America. That these women and girls were mostly poor factory workers, students, and proletarians in the informal sector, and that their disappearance was initially ignored by the government, the press, and most academics, is not a fact that should be forgotten. The movements that formed in response therefore

emphasized the relationship between the brutal violence against women and girls and Ciudad Juárez's position in a globalized production system, directly linking the murders to gendered economic exploitation.

Further south in 2014, Ni Una Menos (NUM) formed as a response to the increasing rate of femicides in Argentina and the lack of institutional response. Both an organizing collective comprised of journalists, writers, artists, and academics, and a larger movement made up of women from diverse class backgrounds, NUM has been organizing a number of large mobilizations over the last two years, along with two women's strikes. The first national action included a public reading, including art and poetry. The following year, larger open assemblies and a large march in June preceded the first women's strike in October. This momentum carried over into 2017, with the women's strike on March 8 and plans for another strike in 2018. The power of Ni Una Menos has reframed the debate about gendered violence and women's work and contested gender relations at multiple scales.

Ni Una Menos builds on a long history of women's organizing in Argentina, especially the annual National Women's Meeting and the movement to legalize abortion. The National Women's Meeting, which has been held in different cities across the country since 1986, drew approximately 70,000 women to Rosario in October 2016. These meetings are

self-organized, horizontal, open gatherings to discuss a variety of issues, from reproductive health to domestic violence to discrimination in the workplace. They bring together women from different regions of the country, and from different political and ideological as well as class and ethnic backgrounds. While women from political parties and some unions were already participating in the meetings, it was when women from organizations of unemployed workers began to attend that the class character of these meetings shifted considerably. Debates about abortion from a human rights perspective were suddenly transformed when women living in slums began talking about friends who had died from unsafe and clandestine abortions.

These experiences reflect a certain type of popular feminism, which has only recently taken hold in working-class neighborhoods. On the one hand, it emerges from the frustration that women experienced who were participating, for example, in the movements of the unemployed, the workers' cooperative movements, or other populist and leftist struggles, where they have been doing the important everyday organizing work but were rarely in leadership positions and continued to experience violence from their »comrades.« Many of these women had collectively organized to ensure the survival of their families and communities during the worst of Argentina's economic crisis and therefore were not likely to passively accept these

mistreatments. They began to call out and publicly denounce male aggressors, in ways similar to #MeToo, but also to turn those political spaces into sites of building women's collective power.

Some of the most marginalized and precarious workers in Argentina play a leading role in this feminism from below: street vendors and informal stallholders, textile workers in clandestine workshops or at home, workers in cooperatives, recipients of government benefits, and other workers in the informal sector. Together these sectors are understood as the popular economy and the workers are collectively organized in the Confederation of Popular Economy Workers (CTEP). While most of the major unions in the country were resistant to the idea of the women's strike, CTEP was one of the organizations most supportive of both women's strikes. Because of their precarious position – missing just one day of work could mean not being able to feed their family that day – these workers run unique risks in participating in a strike action. Yet, they were one of the first groups to endorse the strike and participated heavily in the event, recognizing that the popular economy is largely made up of women and that these women are more likely to experience the full continuum of gender-based violence.

This multiplication of feminism in different spaces has broadened the focus of feminist activism. From ever urgent demands for reproductive rights and equality in the formal workplace and formal political

sphere, new demands arise connected to everyday forms of violence and precarity. This addresses questions of the reproduction of life itself – recognizing the multiple ways that contemporary capitalism attempts to directly extract value from life and, in doing so, puts that life at risk.

A COLLECTIVE SUBJECT IS BORN

Drawing on these Latin American feminist movements, we should ask how the abuses of power identified by #MeToo are part of a larger constellation of violence and coercion. Is it possible to find a common cause between low wage, mostly Black and migrant university housekeepers facing an abusive manager, and female students on the same campus facing high rates of sexual assault?

Common ground cannot be assumed *a priori* but that does not mean that it cannot be created. One of the most insidious elements of patriarchal oppression is having been taught to blame ourselves for our experiences of abuse and to not speak about what happens to us. #MeToo has opened a space for challenging that atomizing silence, demonstrating not only how widespread violence is, but also its structural nature. To challenge the very foundation of gendered violence, we must learn to make these connections.

In a statement released on January 8, 2018, Ni Una Menos attempts this in their call for an international women's strike, »Because this tool allows us to make visible, denounce, and confront the violence

against us, which is not reducible to a private or domestic issue, but is manifested as economic, social, and political violence, as forms of exploitation and dispossession that are growing daily (from layoffs to the militarization of territories, from neo-extractivist conflicts to the increase in food prices, from the criminalization of protest to the criminalization of immigration, etc.)«³

Largely, these connections have been made through the practice of assemblies, where women share stories of facing sexual harassment, of being afraid to advocate for better working conditions, of staying in abusive relationships. A woman shares a story, another woman relates and adds her experience, another woman, maybe one working as a domestic employee, doesn't feel included in the narrative and objects, adding another layer to the analysis. The differences between experiences are neither erased nor ignored, nor are they considered insurmountable. Through the assembly, through the process of working out common language and taking to the streets together, a new collective subject is born.

Assemblies multiply in diverse spaces: in workplaces, in unions, in political organizations, in schools, in urban neighborhoods, towns, and rural areas. There are assemblies of artists and writers, of musicians, of teachers, of migrants. Other assemblies bring together two or more different groups to facilitate dialogue and collaboration. For example,



an assembly between Ni Una Menos activists from around the country and indigenous Mapuche activists in El Bolson brings women together under the slogan of »our bodies, our territories.« In this way, the commodification of land and natural resources is connected to the exploitation of women.

Women's assemblies occur within unions and among laid off PepsiCo workers fighting for their jobs. In Buenos Aires, the slogan »We want ourselves debt free« is a play on one that originated in Ciudad Juarez, »We want ourselves alive.« The statement accompanying the

Women's Day in Berlin, photo by Mike Herbst ① ②

action proclaims: »Finance, through debt, constitutes a form of direct exploitation of women's labor power, vital potency, and capacity for organization. The feminization of poverty and the lack of economic autonomy caused by debt make male violence even stronger.« Financial precarity and gendered violence are interrelated, in both theory and practice.

At the heart of all this violence, these various women's groups argue, is the devaluation of women's reproductive labor and a

systematic attack on reproduction. This attack plays out in multiple arenas, from the renewed defense of the heteropatriarchal family model by right-wing governments around the world and neoliberal austerity's cuts to state support for social reproduction, to attacks on reproductive rights and direct violence against women's bodies.

As Silvia Federici so importantly showed us, this violence is not new; it lies at the heart of capitalist accumulation, constituting its original and repeated violence. This means, in turn, that the autonomous organization of women to collectively ensure their reproduction poses a threat to capital, threatening the separation of workers from their means of reproduction, which underlies capitalist accumulation. Violence against women's bodies has what Rita Segato has termed a »pedagogical« or disciplining effect, creating obedient subjects beyond the individual targets of violence. Segato argues that this is an essential element to maintaining colonial and capitalist power arrangements in general by discouraging any type of resistance to dominant power relations.⁴ Today, as capital seeks to broaden its methods of extracting value from reproductive labor, the very reproduction of life is put at risk. It is the networks and communal ties that women have long organized and relied on that begin to break down with this expansion of capital accumulation based on finance, making women increasingly vulnerable.

As Latin American feminists conceptualize the links between forms of

violence, they are also mapping contemporary forms of exploitation and drawing a new map of class composition. In so doing, they identify new opportunities to forge alliances: »In the two Women's Strikes that we organized in less than a year, together with women trade unionists and all types of organizations, we were able to put on the agenda and assemble the demands of formal workers and the unemployed, of popular economies along with the historical demand for the recognition of the non-remunerated tasks that women perform, and of politicizing care work and recognizing self-managed work.«⁵

By starting from the different ways in which value is extracted from women's labor and violence visited on their bodies, these activists describe a capitalist system founded on and sustained by violence against women.

A TRUE GENERAL STRIKE

From this work of connection, the women's strike emerged. As NUM explained in their statement calling for the March 8 International Women's Strike: »Using the tool of the strike allowed for highlighting the economic fabric of patriarchal violence. And it was also an enormous demonstration of power because we removed ourselves from the place of the victim to position ourselves as political subjects and producers of value.«⁶

Or, as Verónica Gago says speaking of the October strike: »The strike managed (...) to connect violence against

women with the specific political nature of the current forms of exploitation of the production and reproduction of life. This produced an impressive effect. First, because it broadened the idea of the strike. We started bringing together women from all different sectors, waged or not, young and old, employed or unemployed. This really caught on and activated people's imagination about how to multiply the effectiveness of the tool of the strike. What does it mean to strike in your position? If you are not unionized, but also if you are in an organization (in school or a community network, for example) and so on.«⁷

The women's strike, as carried out at distinctive sites across Latin America in October 2016 and globally on March 8, 2017, was thus about centering women's labor, but it was also about the economic and political function of gendered violence.

Yet, despite its global reach, critics were quick to argue that the women's strike was not a »real strike« because it did not follow the strictures or forms of strikes past. But how could it? As Mariarosa Dalla Costa plainly wrote in 1974, »no strike has ever been a general strike. When half the working population is at home in the kitchens, while the others are on strike, it's not a general strike.« While perhaps today we have seen more than men in big factories go on strike, it still stands that we have never seen a truly general strike. The Madrid-based collective Precarias a la Deriva made that point clearly when they asked, of women and precarious workers

who were unable to participate in a general strike called by Spanish unions, »what is your strike?« Their collective inquiry mapped the difficulties precarious workers faced in participating in the national action without losing solidarity with the action itself. Instead, this insight was a starting point to expand the idea of what a strike could be, drawing from an expanded vision of what work is. The strike became an »everyday and multiple practice« that takes place across a range of spaces from the street to the household.⁸ In other words, the women's strike is inseparable from the very practice and process that makes the strike possible, it opens up a new practice and time. »We women are reclaiming our time, to no longer do what is imposed on us, but to do what we want. To find ourselves, think together, speak up, occupy the streets, the plazas, appropriate public space and turn it into a space of hospitality and free circulation for ourselves.«⁹

A POLITICS IN FEMININE

In a video supporting the 2018 Women's Strike, Silvia Federici explains that »striking means not only interrupting certain labor activities, but it also means committing ourselves to activities that are transformative, that in a certain sense take us beyond our routine concerns and everyday life and that contain in themselves other possibilities.«¹⁰ What are these other possibilities that we might find if we stopped, for a day, reproducing gendered hierarchies and gender roles? #MeToo

has made it clear what we are against. But what are we fighting to create?

Looking before and beyond the women's strike, we see the emergence of a tendency that Raquel Gutiérrez has called a »politics in feminine.« This is not tied to essentialist notions of women's abilities, but rather to one rooted in the unique perspectives and collective capacities of those charged with protecting and reproducing life. It is not referring merely to female participation in political activity or making demands in »women's interests«. A politics in feminine refers to a way of doing politics differently, a way that seeks to overturn the social relations at the heart of capitalism, to *change everything*.

A politics in feminine ensures that social reproduction is our collective responsibility – a goal that necessarily increases women's political power and targets capital accumulation. While at times engaging state power, importantly Gutiérrez's concept is not defined by accessing or taking state power. Its politics do not contort itself into demands that are legible to the state but grow and take shape according to its own logic. In Gutiérrez's words, a non-state-centric politics »is strengthened by defense of the common, it displaces the state and capital's capacity for command and imposition, and it pluralizes and amplifies multiple social capabilities for intervention and decision-making over public matters.«¹¹

»To be victims,« Verónica Gago writes, »requires faith in the state.« Politics

in feminine refuses victimhood. Instead, its strength lies in what various feminist activists have called *among women*, or practices of everyday self-organization allowing not only for discussing shared experiences, but also for something akin to consciousness-raising. Here, all women and their different experiences and knowledges are valued, leaving no room for superstars, whether actresses or academics. In networks of interdependence *among women* skills and relationships are developed that allow them to challenge the norms of power.

More than a politics of survival, a politics in feminine is built around desire, around women's desire, and in direct opposition to a form of politics that conceives of militancy in terms of self-sacrifice and suffering. Its goal is to enhance the spaces for women's joy and desire to flourish. #MeToo can open the space, not for a »sex panic« as some critics would have it, but for a politics premised on *desire*. The desire not to be harassed or attacked as well as the positive desire to assert our bodily autonomy, to move freely about the city and between states without fear, to build our own lives and own relationships in ways that do not reproduce the given gendered hierarchies. As Ni Una Menos stated in their call for the first International Women's Strike in 2017, »Because #WeWantOurselvesAliveAndFree we risk ourselves in unprecedented alliances. Because we appropriate time and we create availability for ourselves, we make being

together a relief and conversation among allies. Of assemblies we make demonstrations, of demonstrations celebrations, of celebrations a common future. Because #WeWomenAreHereForEachOther, this 8th of March is the first day of our new lives.«¹²

#WESTRIKE

What will it take to move from #MeToo to #WeStrike? I can only offer a few suggestions: first, we must emphasize the collective element of our experiences of harassment, abuse, assault, discrimination, and oppression. We must turn #MeToo into a process of investigation, into a collective charting of how different women are situated in colonial-capitalist-patriarchal power. And through this mapping, construct concrete relationships of resistance and alliance, where we are figured not as victims seeking redress but as active political subjects. In order to enact lasting, systematic transformation, to *change everything*, we cannot fall into the trap of politics as usual, a politics of victims, a politics centered around the state. It means a politics in feminine, valuing the creativity that emerges from time and space among women.

As the Latin American movements have shown, it is in the practice of this politics in feminine that a new collective subjectivity is born. It is not our experiences of violence that defines who we are, but our struggle against violence that defines a collective *we*.

This article first appeared in Viewpoint Magazine. We publish a slightly shortened version.

1 Ni Una Menos Statement, October 19. A collection including this and other statements from Ni Una Menos, Argentina is forthcoming in the journal *Critical Times*. See: <http://directory.criticaltheoryconsortium.org/critical-times>.

2 Erika Almenara, Ivonne del Valle, Susana Draper, Ludmila Ferrari, Liz Mason-Deese, and Ana Sabau, »We Strike Too: Joining the Latin American Women's Strike from the U.S.«, *Truthout*, October, 2016.

3 Ni Una Menos Statement, January 8, 2018.

4 See Rita Segato, *La guerra contra las mujeres*. (Madrid, Traficantes de sueños, 2016).

5 »Desendeudas nos queremos.« Ni Una Menos Collective, June 2, 2017.

6 Ni Una Menos Collective, »How Was the March 8 International Women's Strike Woven Together?«, *Viewpoint Magazine*, February, 2017.

7 Amador Fernández-Savater, Marta Malo, Natalia Fontana and Verónica Gago, »The Strike of Those Who Can't Stop: An Interview with Verónica Gago and Natalia Fontana«, *Viewpoint Magazine*, March, 2017.

8 Precarias a la Deriva, »A Very Careful Strike: Four hypotheses«, *Commoner*, N. 11, Spring/Summer 2006.

9 Ni Una Menos Statement, November 25, 2016.

10 Gago, »Bloquear y transformer.«

11 Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, *Horizonte Comunitario-Popular. Antagonismo y producción de lo común en América Latina*. (Cochabamba: Sociedad Comunitaria de Estudios Estratégicas y Editorial Autodeterminación, 2015, pp. 89).

12 Ni Una Menos statement, March 8, 2017.

»FEMINISM IS FOR EVERYONE«

PERSPECTIVES FOR A FEMINIST CLASS POLITICS

BARBARA FRIED

2017 began with a global wave of feminist protests. Opposition to Donald Trump's election as the 45th President of the United States was expressed most visibly by the Women's Marches – and not only in the US itself. In Poland, resistance to restrictions on reproductive rights by the country's right-wing government continued, while 8 March brought hundreds of thousands onto the streets from Buenos Aires and Istanbul to New Delhi. In Germany, as well, International Women's Day witnessed demonstrations the likes of which we had not seen in decades.

At the same time, right-wing parties and movements are successfully taking up, articulating and mobilising widespread and to some extent justified popular anger in the ongoing organic crisis of neoliberalism: anger at a society in which the needs of the many are trampled upon while obscene wealth coexists with growing existential

crisis and social inequality; anger at a society in which democratic structures and procedures are hollowed out and in which ongoing pressures towards flexibility and market pressure are a daily reality for many, making it impossible to reconcile wage labour, reproductive necessities and other wishes and desires. These »neoliberal breaking points« (Goes 2017) are not actually solved by the Right but rather taken up so effectively that they sometimes appear as the most visible pole of »resistance« to the status quo. With their mobilisation against »gender mania«, »early sexualisation« and »marriage for all«, they organise massive assaults on the achievements of the women's and gay movements, and against anyone and everyone who fails to conform to the stereotype of a heterosexual, white »normal citizen«. By offering national-social and seemingly simple solutions tied to an allegedly homogenous and harmonious

collective, they have pushed emancipatory forces onto the defensive.

This constellation has brought renewed attention to existing praxes and approaches towards every day, connective and organising politics across the broader Left. In light of the AfD's rise in Germany, Brexit in the UK and Donald Trump's victory in the US, the publication of Didier Eribon's *Returning to Reims* in German translation also helped to push the question of class back to the centre of the Left's agenda (see the debate in *LuXemburg-Online* 2016 and Candeias 2017), as relevant segments of the working class expressed their dissatisfaction with neoliberalism's unfulfilled promises by voting for right-wing parties. Why is it that the Right manages to operate as an articulation of anti-neoliberalism? What does this have to do with left-wing politics in recent decades? And most importantly: why are feminism and the women's movement – aka »gender mania« – so easily depicted as part of the despised establishment? What does this mean for future feminist responses – what could a feminism look like that takes on these questions, or even formulates a feminist class politics?

THE LEFT: NOT ENOUGH CLASS, TOO MUCH »HOOPLA«?

The common criticism heard lately is that the Left neglected the social question by devoting its attention to »identity politics«. It spent too much time on feminism and other alleged fringe topics, and thus helped

pave the way for the Right's success. Both of these are of course not true. It is true, however, that the Left has grown disconnected from large segments of the working classes and unemployed. This is particularly true of social movements and the so-called »emancipatory Left«, but to a certain extent also applies to the party and trade union-oriented social Left, which is also mostly confined to academic and professionalized contexts and often fails to take up the everyday concerns of many people in a way that speaks to them. This is not only the case for overwhelmingly male workers in the former industrial cores, but also for migrant service workers and precariously employed knowledge workers. Left-wing praxes are mostly not a point of reference for them.

It is not the case, however, that this »alienation« is the result of *too many* »pink-violet-green« topics. On the contrary: even today, feminist and migrant perspectives as well as ecological questions barely make it into the canon of the political Left (and only partially into that of the movement Left). They are treated, sometimes with good intentions but often in a delimiting and dismissive way as a bunch of »hoopla«. A systematic interweaving of feminism and left-wing »core topics« remains uncomplete, so that »women's politics« is often still viewed as a sectional demand, unrelated to the critique of labour relations, the distribution of wealth and financial crisis. This division must be overcome by pushing forward the development of a feminist class politics.

FEMINISM ON TRIAL

On the other hand, it is also true that the concerns of many »non-white« women as well as women from socially marginalised backgrounds remain largely absent within feminist struggles – even those beyond bourgeois feminism. The issues of the women's and environmental movements and the struggles for social acceptance and equality of different ways of life (whether LGBTIQ or migrant) have grown detached from the concerns and everyday realities of many people. Some of them were »expropriated« and selectively integrated into hegemonic projects – such as demands for gender quotas in the boards of major German corporations, diversity programs for executive personnel, as well as a parental allowance that disproportionately benefits high-earning families. This made them appear more like attempts to provide careers to highly-qualified, flexible individuals ready to perform, effectively turning them into projects of the elite (see Hajek 2017). In this process, parts of the movements named above were painted into the corner of the politics of recognition, and neglected to conceive their concerns systematically as questions of social justice, to discuss poverty, social exclusion and marginalisation as central moments of racism and sexism, and to analyse gender relations as a social and economic structural category.

It is for this same reason that the gains in emancipation and freedom won by various social movements were so easily integrated into the neoliberal project,

whereby »diversity« has been reduced to an ingenious technique of neoliberal hegemonic rule. It is precisely because of this reality that so many are inclined to accept a rebellion against the status quo cast as a struggle against the »musty 1968ers« and their alleged political correctness.

FEMINISM AS AN ACCOMPLICE OF NEOLIBERALISM?

Nancy Fraser is probably the most prominent representative of this (self-)criticism, the foundations of which she already began to formulate at the turn of the millennium (2001, see also Haug 1998). She sharpened her argument in the wake of the Trump shock, speaking of feminism's »complicity« with »progressive neoliberalism« (2017), allowing itself to be taken over without resistance and thus separating justice from diversity, the latter reduced to a neoliberal and individualistic husk. This circumstance calls for fundamental renewal. Sarah Leonard, editor of *The Nation* and a feminist activist in the US, sees in the current crisis and in the American context more generally the need, but also the chance, to reformulate feminist politics by developing a »feminism for the 99 percent« (2017).

In the process of exploring perspectives for an inclusive feminism, we must (self-)critically reflect upon the mechanisms of passive revolution and neoliberal integration sketched out above, albeit without dramatically dismissing all hitherto existing feminist praxes as Fraser's diagnosis sometimes seems to suggest.

Not only were significant steps made worth defending, but there were and are always other, subaltern forms of feminist struggles which were often viewed as something of a kill-joy in the era of business feminism embodied by Hillary Clinton in the US and Kristina Schröder in Germany, and thus often confined to the margins. In many of the conflicts occurring here, social questions are indivisibly tied to racist discrimination and gender disparities: whether autonomous women's shelters, projects against sexual violence, anti-racist/feminist organisations like the Respect Network, the self-organisation of women refugees, as well as countless groups conceiving of themselves as alternatives to the mainstream gay and lesbian movement. These kinds of praxes must be sought out and engaged in a serious dialogue while also further developing our own politics, rather than risk obscuring them in our critique.

WHY ANTI-FEMINISM ATTRACTS SOCIAL DISCONTENT

Equally if not more important, however, is understanding why so many people seem willing to oppose the curse of authoritarian neoliberalism in the form of anti-feminism. Why is frustration with the system so easily attributed to »gender mainstreaming« and »marriage for all«, turned against those who actually or usually only allegedly have profited from it? What desires of the subaltern classes are being tapped into here, and to what extent does this also express moments of

rebellion against moments of neoliberalism's selective integration?

Arlie Russel Hochschild's most recent book, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, takes on precisely these questions. Based on conversations with Trump voters in the Mississippi Delta, she describes how many felt »slapped in the face« at »the entrance gate to the middle class« (2016). In this worldview, social mobility resembles a seemingly endless queue in which one waited patiently for years while others constantly skip ahead. It is always the Other which neoliberalism allows to jump forward at the decisive moment – or at least, that is how it is perceived. The justifiable anger of many at not having »their turn« after so many unfulfilled promises is channelled into a conformist revolt against those who actually or usually only imaginedly or merely symbolically profited from neoliberalism.

In the early 1980s, the Projekt Sozialistischer Feminismus published a text on gender relations and socialist women's politics, arguing that the movement's »victories carry the markings of the social order under which they were achieved.« With view to the proletarian defence of nuclear family relations as discussed at the time, they went on, »every piece of privacy is also an escape from capitalist relations of production [...] The defence of women's oppression [as housewives] would thus be an element of a specific form in which the working class opposes capital« (PSF 1984, 83).

Looking at today's situation against this backdrop, the modern version of

this clinging to or »reclaiming« of the heterosexual nuclear family by the Right could (also) be read or deciphered as such an oppositional moment against the thoroughly economised way of life. There are obvious gains in individual emancipation associated with the tendential dissolution or questioning of the stagnant nuclear family characteristic of Fordism: both the economic independence of women as well as the legal recognition of same-sex partnerships – that is, a degree of de-heterosexualisation and freedom of choice in this arrangement – as well as, implicitly, the notion that gender is ultimately a social construction. At the same time, however, it has led to sharpened forms of increased pressure to valorise and a double burden pushing people towards exhaustion when all adults are expected and forced to work according to the so-called adult-worker model. Moreover, this means privatisation and individualisation, as the nuclear family was not replaced with plural and socialised care arrangements, but rather with constellations of joint family liability no longer necessarily based on lineage or genealogy. A »defence« of the sheltered family space and with it traditional ideals of femininity is thus an oppositional moment against pervasive neoliberalism, unrestrained flexibilisation and society's ongoing abandonment of responsibility for the conditions of social reproduction. From a (queer-)feminist perspective, of course, this cannot mean calling for the »defence of the family«, but we neverthe-

less must take this oppositional nature seriously. Otherwise, we will never be able to understand why right-wing and even conservative Christian narratives are so attractive (see Hajek 2017).

This observation facilitates another perspective on the otherwise seemingly plausible claim that (queer-)feminism's demands contributed to the Right's success. It is neither true that feminists are at fault for their rise, nor is it the case that it had nothing to do with the changing ways of life which were, at least partially, achieved by the women's movement. The feminist goal of gender equality in neoliberalism replaced the »unemancipated housewife« with the constantly active and highly capable family manager. It is the latter, however, which today proves to be a burden for so many women and men alike (albeit in different ways), experienced as a functional shift beyond mere economic pressure, including a devaluation of prior social roles and qualifications, destabilising self-confidence and emotional securities. Against this backdrop, then, right-wing ideologies of the family can *also* be understood as a reaction to these changes, perceived as »feminist« rather than »neoliberal«. That the Right manages to gather support for »anti-feminist« positions outside of existing right-wing and racist/reactionary milieus is partially due to this fact.

HOW FEMINISM COULD RELATE (DIFFERENTLY) IN EVERYDAY LIFE

When searching for new feminist praxes and politics, we have to ask ourselves which

experiences and moments of everyday consciousness a class-oriented feminism could relate to, as it is only through this lens that we can identify shared perspectives for social change. The central question is thus: which desires and needs does right-wing discourse take up, and how could they be interpreted differently, reprocessed and articulated in an emancipatory way?

One example: in the context of a neighbourhood organising project sponsored by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (see Pieschke 2017), a neighbourhood meeting was held last summer under the motto of »What do we want to and what can we change in our district? What concerns us the most?« After touching on several topics, the recently-finished refugee shelter next door (inevitably?!) came up: a young single mother suddenly burst out, »They have a brand-new playground and a massive high fence around their house!«. Only over time was it possible to work out where her envious glances came from, as well as the notion that »locking in« the adjacent refugees somehow constituted an undue privilege. For this single mother working full-time, a situation in which children could play safely or even under the supervision of security guards seems paradisiacal compared to her lived reality, in which parents must either be constantly present – which, given the packed day, means stress – or constantly worried that their five-year-old daughter could »get away« from the open courtyard of their apartment block – a common fear among

parents today, stirred up by contemporary domestic security discourses. Independent but safe play seemed possible in the refugee shelter, unlike in her own apartment block. Here, an understandable wish is articulated in the form of racist notions of competition: »Why do ›they‹ get that while ›we‹ don't?« A discussion emerged about how to »create security« in the residential area beyond meters-high fences. Who had similar fears and wishes? How could mothers in the apartment block band together? Who else could keep an eye on the children playing in the actually quite delightful and green, but also open courtyard?

Struggles against (sexual) violence and for the right to move safely and freely in public space are distinct feminist concerns, and the fact that the Right always plays the children's safety card does not make the issue any less important. So why not think about how feminist debates around »self-organised security« (see Brasselle 2017) can be conducted to move beyond left-wing scenes and relate to the concerns of these mothers, as well as those of refugee women? A neighbourhood meeting like this is still a long way away from ending fear. What it shows, however, is that we as the Left have to make an effort to find out which individual claims and desires can be articulated in the language of the Right. This is not always obvious. We have to find forms of first recognising and, ideally, differently articulating *and* addressing them. This will require a great deal of translation work (see Steckner 2017).



Conflict and development ⓘ ⓘ ⓘ

FEMINISM FOR ALL – RENEWING FEMINISM

The question facing feminist class politics is: which of the demands we have raised thus far relate to whose interests? And are we capable of communicating our goals in a way that they can even be »heard«? How can we orient our projects towards representing the concerns of the many?

Here, insights from early intersectionality debates are crucial. Audre Lorde, a black poet and lesbian feminist activist, for example, pointed out that »equality« for black women was never a convincing feminist narrative, not least due to the devastating and blatant differences *between* women (1984). A debate on feminist class politics can learn much from this notion, as it also reflects the experience of many women here: »These debates have nothing to do with my life.« They construe a collective woman, which possesses no

meaning nor action-enabling form as a realm of experience. If feminism is largely associated with quotas in corporate boards and haughty-sounding language rules, but not with struggles against precarised work or for expanded social benefits for single parents, then it should come as no surprise when feminism appears as an elite project.

The critique of aspects of feminist struggles can, against this backdrop, be formulated somewhat differently. Rather than arguing: the feminists failed to account for this and that, we should ask: which everyday experiences of women (non-white, socially marginalised, transwomen, etc.) are not represented? And most importantly, through which praxes, changed spaces of discussion and coalitions can this be altered?

WHO IS THE WORKING CLASS? INTERSECTIONAL CLASS ANALYSIS

Adopting this perspective, it becomes clear that the widespread notion in the current debate of a contradiction between identity politics on one side and social or class politics on the other is an analytical dead-end, not to mention incorrect in a double sense. These are not two different problems to be addressed separately, with the concerns of socially marginalised people over here, and those of women/LBTIQ/migrants over there. This alleged opposition is, instead, itself an expression of the problem of both a reductive class analysis and well as an oversimplified analysis of gender relations



(and racism). In terms of what constitutes »class relations«, the dominant conception suggests that »class« emerges strictly in a narrowly-defined sphere of production. Often, this perspective is limited to wage labour. At the same time, the language of class analysis lacks the necessary terms with which to formulate the experiences of discrimination which do not emerge (solely) from one's position in the totality of the relations of production, i.e. everyday racist degradation and sexist debasement.

If we understand heteronormativity and gender relations as »relations of production« and »fundamental regulating

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relations« (Haug) in all spheres of life from the outset, it becomes clear that gender is not an *additional*, albeit *equally significant* relation of oppression – as many debates around race, class, and gender tend to imply – but rather a moment of class relations itself, an arrangement with which to organise the social division of labour and thus social rule. This always includes the internal *division* of the class, for which the ordering of gender plays a central role. Division into, for instance, those who perform unpaid care work and those for whom

this is generally taken care of for, or those who pursue a skilled occupation and those who – for half the money – work in social services, and accordingly into those who can continue to live well even after their retirement and those who will not receive an adequate pension. These are all questions of gender relations and thus not forms of domination outside of class relations to be incorporated into our analysis, but rather an intrinsic component thereof.

Similar is true of racism, which Stuart Hall once described as »one of the dominant means of ideological representation through which the white fractions of the class come to ›live‹ their relations to other fractions, and through them to capital itself« (1980, 341). He analyses racism as a form with which white workers are integrated into the ruling project and their support for this project is organised. In this arrangement, incorporation or rather support is exchanged for privileges, freedoms, and certain life opportunities denied to others – thereby pitting the »incorporated« in opposition to other parts of the class.

This stratification of class relations through incorporation and division along categories of skin colour or gender sets the bar for solidary action quite high indeed. Yet this is precisely what the goal of a feminist or intersectional class politics must be: asking what kinds of politics enable the overcoming of these relations, meaning »all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable essence« (Marx), without empowering some parts

of the class at the expense of others along the way.

BECOMING A CLASS? ADDRESSING THE CONTRADICTION STRATEGICALLY

A precise and up-to-date class analysis is central to such an undertaking, but still only half the battle. It is not only decisive how the class changes and differentiates in the face of high-tech capitalism, precarisation and flexploitation, but also how class formation occurs (albeit through changed forms of incorporation) under these changed relations. In reference to Gramsci, Hall emphasises that »so-called ›class unity‹ is never *assumed*, *a priori*.« Rather, »classes, while sharing certain common conditions of existence, are also crosscut by conflicting interests, historically segmented and fragmented in this actual course of historical formation. Thus the ›unity‹ of classes is necessarily complex and has to be *produced*« (1996, 423).

The question of this »making of class« (E.P. Thompson) expands our perspective for today's debates: if this class struggle necessarily presupposes the class, how can we ensure that it actually comes together in struggles, in order to end oppression and thus become a »class for itself« (Marx)? Which praxes and politics are capable of this? How must they be constituted, particularly under conditions in which the subaltern lacks both a common language and often understanding of common interests, and in which everyday life provides practically no spaces of encounter, of shared ways of life in which to

experience and develop shared concerns? What could be a point of reference for collective action in such a situation?

Politics or praxes into which all relations of domination are condensed and can be resolved in one swift blow do not exist. It remains to be seen what the shared, activity-guiding issue will be in any given situation, how it can be formulated collectively and in a way that produces not exclusive solidarity, but rather unity in difference.

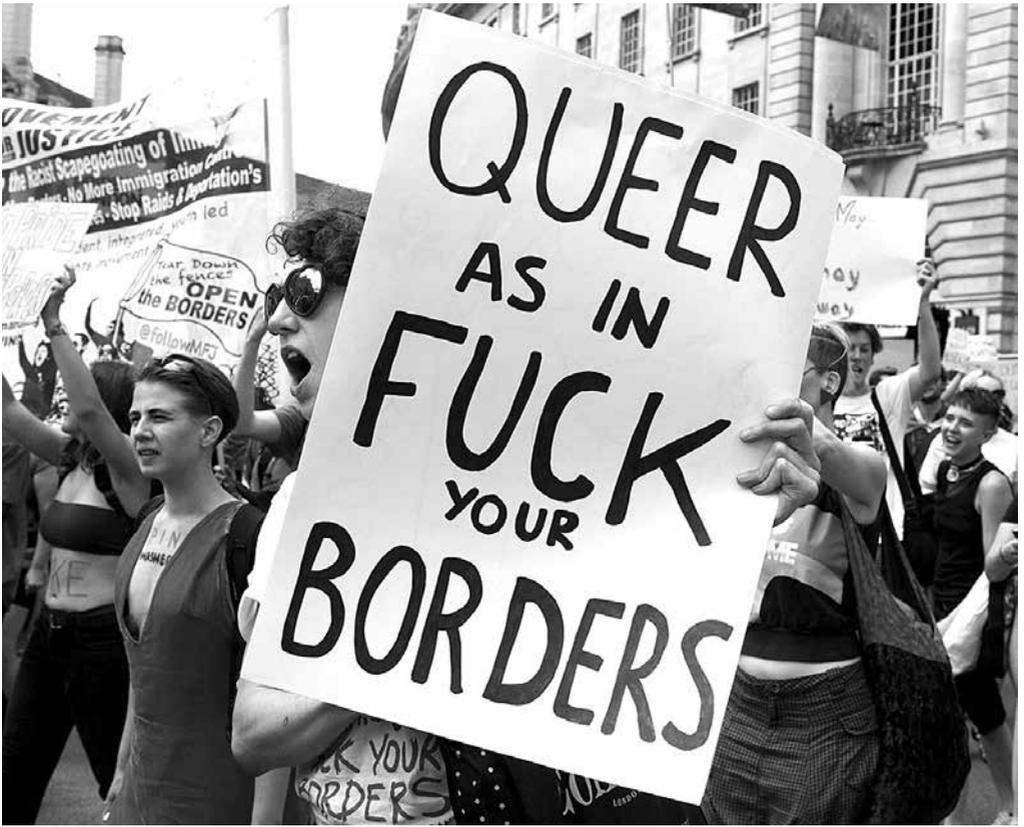
The question of how common interests can be produced in differing contexts in a way that facilitates collective action was always a central question for the labour movement, reformulated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as »strategic essentialism« in the 1980s from a feminist/post-colonial perspective, as part of her critique of class reductionism and Western feminism. Spivak proceeded from the dilemma that political (self-)representation without the formulation of collective subjects will not succeed, as unity »in action« is necessary in order to challenge existing relations of power. Such collective subjects, in turn, are linked to essentialisation. The extent to which commonalities are created along certain experiences also increases the danger that other experiences, particularly differences within a group, will be ignored, thereby creating potential (new) exclusions. This applies to both »the class« as well as »the women«. In order to become capable of action in the first place, however, we cannot circumvent the

need for a temporary – that is, strategic – essentialisation (Spivak 1990, see also Bringmann 2017).

CONNECTIVE PERSPECTIVES, POPULAR PRACTICES AND THE UNLEARNING OF PRIVILEGE

Developing a feminist class politics must confront this double bind. For our debates, that has to first mean sharpening our eye for internal differences. In this regard, both Marxist class-analysis as well as large parts of feminism exhibit major lacunae. This also means becoming aware of one's own internalised privileges and perspectives »unlearning« (Spivak) them through a painful process, in order to truly become connected. This entails taking the debates of post-colonial feminism into account in a fundamental way (see Becker 2017). At the same time, the various dimensions of the production and reproduction of domination are never to be addressed »totally«. On the contrary – the goal formulated above of understanding and addressing domination in an intersectional manner so as to avoid producing new exclusions runs the risk of being politically debilitating, as no political praxis can fulfil this aspiration entirely. Popular politics can hardly be developed in this way.

So how could it work? Strategies of transformation cannot be developed in a vacuum, but rather must relate to and intervene in existing struggles, controversies and movements. Various already-existing feminist practices and demands



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must be investigated to determine which concerns are already contained therein and where they could be »enriched« with a class perspective, but also how to avoid systematic marginalisation or exclusion. The totality of different experiences does not necessarily have to be reflected in all demands and politics at all times, but rather must be incorporated into the horizon of collective action, in the social conditions to be created by a democratic commonality (see Demirovic 2017). To the extent that such a perspective exists today, it does so

only rudimentarily. Our job is to develop it concretely in a common struggle for space to satisfy a wide variety of wants and needs.

This direction has emerged in debates around perspectives for feminist organising in care struggles over recent years. For example, the demand for cost-free and democratically organised social infrastructure in all spheres of care has been established and developed as a common perspective (see Winker 2015, Fried and Schurian 2016, and many more). Here, incipient traces of a feminist class politics can be found, albeit generally discussed with different terminology. In discussions and politics emerging

from the Care Revolution network, the decision was made to prioritise feminist organising in a field whose struggles in home and care work constitute a central field of feminist movements. Moreover, privatisation and market pressure become experienceable in everyday life here, where racist division and discrimination play a central role in the face of the international division of labour and »global care chains« (Hochschild). Finally, it has also constituted a centre of trade union struggles in recent years. These strategic reflections shared the goal of developing a popular feminist politics that incorporates everyday concerns and struggles for concrete improvements while simultaneously pursuing a fundamental re-ordering of gender arrangements and modes of production and life. Such concrete, connective politics are very challenging indeed, but several obstacles have already been tackled (see UmCare 2016 and Fried and Schurian 2016, 2017).

How such a popular class-oriented (and post-colonial/anti-racist) feminism could look has been further developed by an ongoing debate in the United States for several years. The movement for »reproductive justice« criticises contemporary feminist practices around the topic of sexual self-determination – a central field of feminist struggle – as reductive. From the perspective of non-white women, they formulate, among other things, the necessity and possibility of focusing on more than unrestricted access to abortion. Due to racism and eugenics policies, the right to bear children is equally



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as precarious as the right to end unwanted pregnancies for many women, particularly indigenous and black (see Hentschel 2017). Accordingly, reproductive justice must also incorporate the right to children.

In the spirit of a feminist class politics, we must take up this thought and add another perspective: here and there, struggles for sexual self-determination for both indigenous and black as well as many socially marginalised »white« women must include fighting for conditions under which it is truly possible for everyone to have children if and how they choose. This means not only birth, but also securing childrearing socially, which means that adequate labour relations as well as modes of living, de-precarisation, guidance, child care, education opportunities and much more must be incorporated into the political horizon of feminist struggles for sexual self-determination. Only if these

prospects are available to everyone can we really speak of freedom of choice when it comes to abortion or raising children.¹

IN SPITE OF IT ALL: CLASS AS A STRATEGIC POINT OF CRYSTALLISATION

In both these and other feminist struggles, then, we must explicitly incorporate or work out a class perspective without it becoming dominant or understanding class questions *a priori* in a traditionalist sense – an understandably common concern in debates around feminist class politics. The task of a class feminism (or a Left seeking to develop such a feminism) must thus be to investigate existing struggles and demands to determine where implicit or explicit exclusions are produced, or rather at which points feminism's class perspectives can be strengthened.

This includes the important question of how different parts of the class which should be involved in these struggles can be won over – particularly those that are not used to interpreting their problems as class problems due to previous feminist and other political debates, as well as those who in light of previous debates around social questions are not used to thinking of their problems as questions of given gender relations. We must develop forms with which different concerns can be taken up *and* reformulated as questions of class, gender and, in this sense, as shared identity.

Instead of class *or* identity politics, we need class *as* identity politics – a politics in which the overcoming of class relations in a non-reductionist sense becomes a

common point of reference addressed differently in different places and in different fields, but with the common goal of shaping our conditions and ways of life collectively and democratically for all – and with a clear sense of antagonism vis-à-vis ruling politics and attempts to divide and conquer (see Demirovic 2017).

In this way, various movements beyond feminism can be cohered together into a new class politics, in order to form a »connective antagonism« (Candeias 2017) to neoliberalism, which also contests the Right's position. In the current social situation, an inclusive feminism or a feminist class politics appears as a compelling counter-pole not only to an aggressive anti-feminism, but also to an authoritarian project »from above« and »from the right« as a whole. The fact that a movement opposing both the liberal feminism of a Hillary Clinton and the government of Donald Trump was the most visible thus expression of such discontent thus far. In the spirit of the early theoreticians of intersectionality, we must renew our push for a perspective of »feminism is for everyone« here, as well.

Translated by Loren Balhorn

1 Perspectives for disability politics can also be extended in a similar sense: the existing social pressure to abort fetuses with foreseeable genetic »anomalies« or other disabilities can only be effectively countered when the necessary social conditions for living with disabled children and people as such are secured. Only then can we speak of real freedom of choice in this context.

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RAGPICKING THROUGH HISTORY

CLASS MEMORY, CLASS STRUGGLE AND ITS ARCHIVISTS

TITHI BHATTACHARYA

In 1990, I watched the Polish film maker Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Blind Chance* (1981/1987) without registering the paralyzing potential of a particular scene. The protagonist, Witek, meets an old Communist by chance on a train. As a result of that meeting Witek decides to join the Communist Party. Later, again by sheer chance, he runs into an ex-partner, also his first love. A beautiful, tender and fierce sex scene follows. In the calm of the after, Witek, almost absentmindedly, whistles the Internationale. His partner murmurs something approvingly. And then Witek says ›How would you like it if I sang this everyday?‹ The young woman recoils. She knows he has joined ›The Party‹. She leaves the room and his life.

For many years that scene haunted me and it is only recently that I am beginning to understand the contours of my unease with and attraction to it. The

woman approved of the Internationale but recoiled from the organization that claimed to embody its spirit – the Party. There is a traumatic split here between the history qua memory of the working class and the organisation of the working class, which is supposed to be the guardian of that memory. I am of course aware that in Kieślowski's native Poland, the Party and the bourgeois State were braided in a particular relationship that does not apply to our times.

Yet, our current conjuncture invites a renewed rethinking of two historical imaginaries: first, what is class memory? To ask this question is really to reopen a discussion on what is class struggle – and, more specifically, how does our collective memorialisation of struggles past inform our relationship to struggle in the present. Second, and relatedly, who can be this struggle's archivist? And this is a question of organisational form: what form can

emerge out of such struggle, and try – or fail – to shape it.

If we think of the events and moments that have invoked the category of ›class‹ for us in recent times, we would confidently list the movements around Bernie Sanders, Jeremy Corbyn, Trump’s election, the unexpected Brexit vote, more recently both Marine Le Pen and Mélenchon’s rise in popularity in France. These examples, we would further say, encapsulate what the left have long called ›class polarisation‹. The working class announcing its brutal political maladjustment in inviting radically opposed visions of our possible collective futures.

But why are these moments of *class-ness* as opposed to anything else? What kind of political rhetoric and historical correspondence make us identify them as ›class‹?

First, there is the rhetoric of the protagonists themselves. Sanders, Corbyn and Mélenchon have all made open or gestural nods to that one word banished for so long in our Cold War-neoliberal world: socialism. What could be more evocative of class-ness than the very invocation of the word socialism?

However, beyond this rather easy congruity, I would urge us to reflect a bit further, for this impressionistic ›class-ness‹ appears to encompass both poles of mobilisation: From Trump to Sanders and from Mélenchon to Le Pen (indeed, recently the BBC – Radio 4, April 19, 2017 – interviewed a French worker

who said he was torn between voting for Mélenchon and Le Pen).

What lends these moments their class-ness is thus their implicit identification with economic issues. The fact that this is implicit is of significance to my argument and we will come to that later. But first let’s examine briefly the multiple ways in which the appeal of all these moments lie in an ›economic‹ argument. First there is the obvious and explicit attack on austerity. Both Trump (at least during his campaign), and Marine Le Pen have attacked ›globalisation‹, international trade deals, and discussed the economic misery of their native working class. Jobs, conditions pertaining to jobs, lack of jobs and the specificity of jobs are inscribed all over the movements generated from both poles of the political spectrum, to which were added traditional ›social democratic‹ issues such as healthcare (Corbyn’s defense of the NHS), education (Bernie’s free college plan) and as Marine Le Pen herself characterized Brexit: ›reindustrialisation‹.

What is significant for our argument is that this intense and anxious economic discourse, from both the right and the left does not actually use the category of the ›working class‹, or even the term class, as its analytical or operational pivot. The discourse, however, *does* have a pivot – and it is as powerful as class: it is the ›nation‹, all the way from ›Make America Great Again‹ to ›Unbowed France‹.

The Marxist Left’s own specific historical training enables us to nominate



NiUnaMenos-March in Neuquén, Argentina, June 2015, photo by Cecilia Maletti ①📷

this current rhetorical and political move, rightly, as a class discourse.

Let us go back to our original identification challenge, this time to try to list recent movements and discourses that we, on the Left, have *not* listed as evocative of ›class‹, or class as metonymically standing in for the ›economic‹. Now several apparently discrete categories of movement appear before us. We can name Black Lives Matter under ›race‹, the movement for Trans rights or reproductive justice under ›gender‹, the BDS movement under ›anti-imperialism‹ and so on. Not only have we not given these movements the blessing of ›class‹ or ›class struggle‹ we have, on occasion, analytically (as opposed to politically) counterposed these as movements of ›identity‹ as opposed to class struggle.

This is the kind of historical training we need to rethink in the current conjuncture, as it is neither useful nor Marxist. Given that, in the last four decades neoliberalism has either smashed or chipped away at workplace organizing and organizations, as a left we should have expected struggle to erupt away from the point of production. The fact that these are not directly about wages, or work, does not invalidate them as class struggles in the Marxist sense. Indeed, I submit that at the current moment it is these struggles that contain the *power of redemption* over the discourse of economic deprivation discussed above. How?

First, if we turn to the so called ›economic‹ rhetoric of what has been called the populist right and the renewed Social Democratic Left, as we noted, it is firmly anchored to the nation. That race and/or immigration will be the weak links for the populist Right is perhaps no surprise, but they remain unhealed wounds for the renewed Social Democratic left. Melenchon is bound to laicité and its attendant Islamophobia; Bernie has been consistently wrong on Palestine and other imperial policies; and even Corbyn, the best of them all, is not for the complete abolition of borders. Without reducing the complexities and contradictions of this tendency, we can broadly say that it is predicated upon anti-austerity politics combined with a national anti-elitism. *National borders remain the chains that bind their possibilities.*



Women's Day in Berlin, © Christian Mang

If these were the politics proclaimed by such mass parties, in say the 1980s, the Far Left's demarche would almost be predictable. Unfortunately there is, for the first time in decades, a Far Right anti-austerity and anti-elitism on offer, and if the Social democratic left seeks to cohere its ›economy-as-class‹ discourse around the nation state, the Right can do that job with far more passion and conviction and hence far more successfully.

For the Far left, especially the Marxist Left, then, questions of oppression, i.e. race, gender, immigration, and questions of internationalism cannot be something

we do in addition to class struggle but ought to be the redemptive levers to prise apart two sets of political forms: one, the economic nationalism on offer from the Far right and the Social Democratic Left; and two: the oppression politics of the 1 per cent, that came from the Centrist neoliberals for the last few decades, whose claim hinges on the idea that it is *participation in*, not rejection of, capitalist structures that is best route out of oppression. More women Presidents, more vegans in the IDF.

The obsessive religiosity of identifying struggles around workplace issues as the only ones worthy of our attention is not only doomed to failure in this moment when union density is at a historic low, but this political methodology does not bear up either to Marxist theory or to actual labour history. Even for workplace struggles, our imagination and hence theory has been too often narrowed to what our early Marxist predecessors might have called ›economistic‹ thinking. For instance, it is important to remember that the enormous success of the CIO and the combativity of the working class in this country was not predicated upon the issues of wage raises or money benefits but rather *conditions of work* in the shop. Writing reflectively about the CIO in the 1960s – republished recently by *Viewpoint* – the Black radical labor organiser James Boggs wrote that the

CIO movement gave the American public its first real taste of class consciousness and social thinking, establishing...for the first time the idea of democracy on the job, in the factories, the offices... it has established a framework within which Negroes could fight for equality inside the plant. It has done the same for women workers.¹

If Boggs's excellent *Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook* were to be summarised as a twitter hashtag it would read: unions need to build *social* power. Or: unions need to establish themselves both in the workplace *and in society*. Let us dwell on this concept, for it is relevant to our argument about broadening the definition of class

struggle and expanding the understanding of the ›economy‹.

One of the many uses of social reproduction theory and the way many of us have applied it to our current moment has been, not, as many of its critics wrongly think, to draw our attention away from the point of production, but rather to demonstrate the imbricated relationship between the spaces of production of commodities and spaces of production of labor power. Social Reproduction Theory is particularly useful in illuminating the relationality of capital and hence has the capacity to indicate vital strategies for confronting it in our times.

Applying Social Reproduction Theory to James Boggs' observations above, we could say that at a time when labour organising was weak or non-existent at the point of production, creative organising in non-work spaces, in working-class communities, neighbourhoods, and churches, created organizational and insurrectionary traditions that helped build working class confidence and power and ultimately assisted in building in the workplace. Differently put, social reproduction theory is governed by a politics of reconfiguration of lived experience and forms of human life within capitalist social relations.

The relationality of capital is particularly central to social reproduction theory and has specific valence to the argument we are making here about an expanded notion of class struggle. Capitalism does not just produce commodities, but in order to do so in a continuous sequence, it also needs to re-

produce capitalist social relations. But every site of reproduction is a doubling where twin possibilities exist: that of reproduction of existing relations and the interruption of such relations. Thus every struggle that challenges the reproduction of existing social relations, whether by demanding that the police be disarmed or borders be opened, has the internal potential to take general form, irrespective of whether they began within the workplace or without.

In an angry letter to Paul Lafargue and Laura Marx in 1870, Marx engages with Bakunin thus:

the working class must not occupy itself with *politics*. They must only organize themselves by trades-unions ... you see what a caricature he has made of my doctrines! ... The ass has not even seen every class movement *as* a class movement, is necessarily and was always a political movement.

The equating of Bakunin with certain equine species aside, what does Marx mean here of class movement as class movement?

He elaborates on the concept further a year later in a letter to Friedrich Bolte:

Every movement in which the working class comes out as a class against the ruling classes and tries to coerce them by pressure from without is a political movement ... The attempt in a particular factory or even in a particular trade to force a shorter working day out of individual capitalists by strikes, etc. is a purely economic movement. On the other hand, the

movement to force through an eight-hour, etc., law, is a political movement.

When we write the memory of class struggle of our era shall we abandon the struggle for Palestine, antiracism and feminism to the margins of our chronicle and await the purely magical workplace struggle to emerge out of a vacuum? Or shall we try again to reread Marx and think about the relationality of struggle? If the latter, then to be the chroniclers of this memory we need archivists appropriate for the task, or organisational forms that do not envisage the future only as an endless repetition of the past or try to squeeze social reality into a convenient Marx or Lenin quotation.

Marx urges us to expect new organisational forms during social movements. ›Though these movements‹, he writes ›presuppose a certain degree of previous organization, they are in turn equally a means of developing this organisation.‹ Organisations that are simply the inheritors or guardians of the past may not be that archivist, as the past may have been too ruinously cleaved from the present. Those organisational forms that can force a futural anticipation onto the past will perhaps be our first Maroon shelters from where a new ›horizon of expectations‹ can be forged.

This contribution was first published by salvage zone.

1 Boggs' essay is the first chapter in *Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook*.

GENDER AS SYMBOLIC GLUE

HOW ›GENDER‹ BECAME AN UMBRELLA TERM FOR THE REJECTION OF THE (NEO)LIBERAL ORDER

WERONIKA GRZEBALSKA, ESZTER KOVÁTS AND ANDREA PETŐ

›Nevertheless one may say of it that it fiddles while Rome burns. It is excused by two facts: it does not know that it fiddles, and it does not know that Rome burns.‹ (Leo Strauss)

In his contemplations on political science in *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (1968), Leo Strauss described the condition of political science through scathing references to the Emperor Nero, supposed to have been playing a fiddle as Rome burned. This analogy metaphor is an accurate reflection of the progressive elites of the post-Brexit, post-Trump era; they maintain a business-as-usual attitude while the foundations of liberal democracy are challenged. Amongst this elite are mainstream politicians, mobilizing public sentiment in order to sustain the status quo hidden behind the slogan, ›defence of democracy‹, human rights activists, proclaiming the righteousness of their approach, policy experts,

prescribing technocratic solutions such as gender mainstreaming, and feminist scholars, defending themselves against the intrusion of the new and unknown by declaring a the need to ›reject calls to compromise, to understand‹, becoming entrenched in rigid categories and values. These reactions stem from the conviction that, by their nature, progressives are on the right side of history and, therefore, business-as-usual is not vain ›fiddling‹. At the same time, the progressive elite ignore the fact that Rome is already burning. To paraphrase Gramsci, the globalized (neo) liberal democratic order is in crisis, and as a new paradigm is struggling to be born, various morbidities are allowed to rise to the surface.

One such morbid symptom of this period of transition is illiberalism; a system which rests on the rejection of civic liberalism (checks and balances, civil

liberties), but undermines democracy itself in the process.

Gender politics has played a crucial role in establishing this new mode of governance, yet not quite in the way previous analyses have suggested.

It is simplistic to believe that Kaczynski, Orbán and Trump have risen to power simply by tapping into a ubiquitous and deeply engrained hatred of women and homosexuals. Rather, for many voters, equality politics, both in the narrow sense of policies aimed at eradicating various forms of inequality, and as a symbol of a positive, progressive vision of the future, have come to signify everything that is wrong with the current state of politics.

THE EMERGENCE OF ›GENDER IDEOLOGY‹ AS AN ENEMY FIGURE

In recent years numerous countries across the globe have witnessed the emergence of powerful, transnational social movements mobilizing against an enemy known as ›gender ideology‹, and ›cultural Marxism‹, in much of the Western world, ›Gayropa‹ in post-Soviet countries or ›political correctness‹ in the American context. These movements have successfully mobilized people against various human rights and equality issues such as women's reproductive rights, LGBT issues, gender equality policies and gender mainstreaming, sexual education, gender studies as an academic field and political correctness. At the peak of those campaigns it was not uncommon for ›gender ideology‹ or

political correctness to be portrayed as the new incarnation of Nazism and Leninism (Polish MP Beata Kempa), bemoaned for enslaving the people (Ukrainian Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk), presented as a threat to children comparable to paedophilia (Slovak MP Pavol Gorisak), or blamed for turning American campuses into ›ivy-covered North Koreas‹ (American public intellectual William Lind).

The visibility of ›gender talk‹ in political discourse has created a novel situation for the gender studies scholars and activists who have, for decades, complained about ghettoization. Perceived as marginal, their critical perspective was not present in other disciplines, their departments or programs were relegated to campus cellars or attics, and their policy goals were underfinanced and pushed to the back of party manifestos. With the current illiberal populist offensive pushing for a paradigm shift this situation has changed fundamentally. The term ›gender‹ is now often used by the Right to mobilize supporters against (neo)liberal democracy. Because of the centrality of the concepts of gender and equality to these illiberal movements, many political commentators treated them as a problem in itself; understanding such rhetoric as a backlash against emancipatory politics, a mobilization of fundamentalists against the achievements of feminism and sexual minority rights, and an outbreak of hidden hatred towards women. However, we believe that this is not quite the case.

GENDER AS ›SYMBOLIC GLUE‹

In order to understand this phenomenon, and to highlight the crucial role played by gender politics in the current paradigm change, we have introduced the notion of gender as ›symbolic glue‹.

For illiberal populist forces, we argue, the concept of ›gender ideology‹ has become a metaphor for the insecurity and unfairness produced by the current socioeconomic order.

This metaphor has enabled them to tap into people's feelings about the world around them, and direct them towards equality issues. This has been done in a number of ways.

Firstly, in constructing a dynamic within which the notion of ›gender‹ is perceived as a threatening concept the right has united separate contested issues attributed to the progressive agenda under one umbrella term. ›Gender ideology‹ has come to signify the failure of democratic representation, and opposition to this ideology has become a means of rejecting different facets of the current socioeconomic order, from the prioritization of identity politics over material issues, and the weakening of people's social, cultural and political security, to the detachment of social and political elites and the influence of transnational institutions and the global economy on nation states.

Secondly, the demonization of ›gender ideology‹ has become a key rhetorical tool in the construction of a new conception of ›common sense‹ for a wide audience; a

form of consensus about what is normal and legitimate. It is important to note that social mobilization which is based on an opposition to ›gender ideology‹ and political correctness does not just demonize the worldview of their adversaries, and reject the human rights paradigm which has long been the object of relative consensus in Europe and North America. Instead, they offer a liveable and viable alternative centred on family, nation, religious values and freedom of speech, one which is attractive because it rests on a positive identification of an individual's own choice, and one that promises a safe and secure community as a remedy to individualism and atomization.

Thirdly, opposition to ›gender politics‹ and ›cultural Marxism‹ has also allowed the Right to create broad alliances and unite various actors that have not, necessarily, been eager to cooperate in the past: different Christian Churches, orthodox Jews, fundamentalist Muslims, mainstream conservatives, far right parties, fundamentalist groups and in some countries even football hooligans.

TAKING CRITIQUE SERIOUSLY

It is clear that the success of the illiberal populist revolution, which uses the rhetoric of gender equality as ›symbolic glue‹, cannot be understood purely as the effect of an influential discourse and clever political mobilization strategy. It has a

Bilbao, 8 March 2018,
strassenstriche.net  



long history and it is a re-emergence of the ›dark legacy‹ of exclusionary and marginalizing ideologies and practices in Europe which the post-1945 liberal world order had hoped to tame forever. Yet while Rome is burning, progressive politics needs to recognize that there is, indeed, a fire.

We must acknowledge that the growing popular support for the illiberal vision stems from the very real failures of progressive politics.

One way to break out of the business-as-usual deadlock is to take the criticism of the new populist Right seriously and to acknowledge that, while these actors often offer the wrong solutions, they also, in exposing undelivered promises of equality and representation, uncover pertinent issues which resonate with the public.

However, self-criticism on the Left has been possible only within the limited framework of commonly shared dogmas, such as the established narratives of linear progress and raising public consciousness, and, as such, many progressive thinkers have not dared to pose these questions. Rita Felski argued already in 1995 that in seeing itself as the vanguard of modernity, rising above the as-yet-unawakened masses, the women's movement has itself become a prisoner of progress. The extent to which liberal ideas have become entrenched in the value-laden notion of linear progress is especially problematic today, when the lived experience of precariousness and insecurity continue to contradict this promise. This entrenched

position also carries the risk of false consciousness and the binary classification of people as being on the right or wrong side of history, creating false, value-based dichotomies (either for or against equality). And not only this dichotomy is false but it has been exploited by the Right more successfully than by so-called progressive actors.

One of the issues critically addressed by anti-›gender ideology‹, or anti-PC, forces, and closely connected to this legacy of the Enlightenment, is the technocratic and depoliticized character of equality politics. This is the price this politics of emancipation has paid for its academic institutionalisation. When equality is addressed in the language of policy, it is presented as a depoliticized issue, requiring expert knowledge and evidence-based solutions, rather than as values worth fighting for, or a political matter susceptible to debate. To some extent, this depoliticization also takes place when issues of equality are formulated in a rights-based language or identity politics framework. Here, too, issues are often rendered apolitical, presented as a matter of inherent right or personal identity that cannot be disputed outside the given framework.

The labelling of opponents of liberal politics as ›backward‹, ›biased‹ and ›sexist‹, is one obvious consequence of these approaches.

This labelling is a reaction which stems from the conviction that opposition could be halted if only people better

understood ›what gender is really about‹, or were more accepting of the complexities of human sexuality. Illiberal populist mobilization can thus be understood as an attack on the ›enlightened‹ attitude and a disenchantment with mainstream politics in a Weberian sense, a reaction to the assumed authority of experts, and to the decontextualized language of politics which increasingly fails to measure up to the people's experience addressing their concerns in an appealing language, and with the promise of substantive change.

Another contested issue has often been framed as ›elitism‹ by its critics and concerns the perception that certain social groups benefitted from equality politics more than others. Many authors have noted that the way in which struggles for social justice have shifted their focus from a more materialist paradigm to recognition and representation (including fighting the glass ceiling or improving the depiction of women in the media) have turned some feminists into the ›handmaidens of neoliberalism‹ and, at the same time, the voice of a privileged minority. This shift has largely rendered these movements blind to their own entanglement in neoliberal logic. In this framework, the representation and recognition of oppressed minorities, the simplistic creation of more categories seemingly liberating us from the ›gender cage‹, has become a focus. At the same time, it has become ever more difficult to question the ways in which oppression operates in the current socio-economic

order and how the structural sources of inequality can be eradicated.

THE NEED FOR SELF-CRITICAL IMAGINATION

This saturation of public discussions with distorted visions of equality politics by right wing populists, and the exploitation of misconceptions of the term ›gender‹ in illiberal political mobilizations, demands a new, self-critical strategy on the part of gender scholars and activists, as well as left-leaning political parties. The progressive agenda must extend beyond narratives of identity and representation and into structural critique as well as reflect on the extent to which it is embedded in the neoliberal order. There is a pressing need to address issues such as economic inequalities, shrinkage of the state, precarity of work or privatization of care, all of which have their gendered consequences which cannot be addressed effectively within the framework of recognition and representation alone. If progressives do not take them seriously, these structural issues which were on the agenda of previous feminist movements will come to be addressed by the illiberal populist Right in the form of exclusionary and fear-mongering policies in order to attract wider support. It is time to revive the structural critique because Rome really is burning and the time for fiddling is over.

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HOLY SHIT

FAMILY AND GENDER POLITICS OF THE RIGHT WING »ALTERNATIVE FOR GERMANY«

GERD WIEGEL

THE AfD'S FAMILY AND GENDER POLITICS

Racism, hostility towards refugees and authoritarianism are crucial elements in the ideology of the AfD (»Alternative for Germany«), the new right-wing party which gained around 12% percent of the vote in the 2017 parliamentary elections. When people are scandalised by AfD statements and actions, the focus is usually on these topics. They are central to the public image of the party and its parliamentary group also because the AfD links nearly all policies to the issue of immigration. At the same time there is a polarity within the AfD between the neo-fascist right and the national-liberal centre, mostly around where it stands on the social question. The right of the party is ethnicizing the issue of social conflict, while the centre puts emphasis on a nationalist policy of market radicalism. This dichotomy that is also closely linked to power relations within the party is bridged and blurred by

an overarching broad consensus in another field. The issue of family and gender politics is crucial for the party's ideology and articulated in a fiercely antifeminist way.

THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND GENDER POLITICS IN THE IDEOLOGY OF THE PARTY

When discussing the reasons for the rise of the new radical right-wing party in Germany, usually two areas are identified in which the AfD successfully articulates wide-spread fears and discontents. On the one hand, the party takes up issues in a socio-economic domain such as the fear of losing social status and job insecurity. On the other hand, the party is taking up fears and uncertainties related to changes of social values. The AfD offers an attractive proposition to those sections of society that are unsettled by the changes of gender and family roles and by new ways of living and loving. The party offers them political representation, affirms

their traditional views and ways of life and defends them against all challenges. Family and gender policies are the key areas for the AfD in this domain and the party is actively claiming a dominant role in these fields. Unlike socioeconomic questions, this topic is largely uncontested within the AfD, so it acts as a unifying theme between the otherwise opposing fractions. It plays a central role not only ideologically, but also in terms of the party's organisation because it does actually offer positive reference points for very different groups within the party. Whereas the conservative, bourgeois right wing of the AfD, that is partly influenced by Christian fundamentalist views, puts emphasis on traditional gender roles and sees the family as the nucleus of the state, the neo-fascist right is more interested in the control of reproduction and demographics as well as in forms of masculinism.

With the exception of migration and Islam, no theme is communicated as aggressively by the AfD as that of the entire family and gender policy. Alongside the term ›Islam‹, ›gender‹ could well be a key enemy label in the party manifesto. The issue is addressed from a dominantly male perspective. Only 16% of AfD members are women (by way of comparison: CDU = 25%, Left Party = 37%). In the Bundestag elections, the AfD received 10% of the female vote and 15% of the male vote. Of the 92 AfD representatives in the Bundestag, 82 are men. However, all the polls conducted over many years have shown that the issues covered by the AfD, especially

in the field of refugees and migration, are supported equally by women and men. The AfD therefore has untapped potential among female voters. Developments since the Bundestag elections appear to indicate that the AfD intends to do more to exploit this potential. After the elections Alice Weidel, Leader of the AfD faction in the Bundestag, announced that she wanted to make the Bundestag faction more female and to attract more women to the AfD through new themes. She mentioned the party's inadequate response to the issue of combining family and career.¹

THE PARTY MANIFESTO AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION IN PARLIAMENT

In the first six months, the AfD Bundestag faction has been attempting to address the topics in the area it outlined in its manifesto. They include a commitment to the »traditional family as a role model«, a commitment to »strengthen the role of parents and counter gender mainstreaming's stigmatisation of traditional gender roles«, and a commitment to »more children instead of mass immigration« as an expression of an active population policy based on populist, nationalist principles.³ Drawing on these themes, the AfD election manifesto states: »Germany needs a paradigm shift towards a national population policy.« With this policy, the AfD claims to be fighting against Germany's »self-abolition«. It aims to rename the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) as the »Federal Ministry for

Family Affairs and Population Development«. In order to emphasise the population policy mission of its populist wing in particular, the AfD is also calling for action on women's capacity for reproduction. In a reference to abortion, it states: »Abortions must be reported. Failure to comply should result in a significant penalty. In this way, it is hoped that abortion statistics will reflect the true number of abortions.« The idea is to apply sanctions primarily to women who oppose the family model set out by the AfD, or who do not want to conform to it. This is the point of the party's reservations about the state support for single parents (mostly women) – something the party does not aim to abolish completely (as it did in the first draft of its manifesto), but still intends to restrict in the medium to long term. Unlike »nearly every other party«, the AfD claims that it does not stand for »unconditional support for single parents«, and instead calls for »differentiation between cases where this situation was caused by bad luck, the individual's own fault or as a result of their own decisions«. This is also the purpose of another AfD demand: »Serious misconduct against marital solidarity must be taken into account again in the legal consequences of divorce.« Ultimately, the AfD brands »gender ideology« as »anti-constitutional«.³

Since October 2017, the AfD Bundestag faction has had the opportunity to implement these manifesto promises, and in the first few months it has in fact made its mark, particularly in the area of

family and gender policy. Three approaches have dominated so far: firstly, the AfD Bundestag faction is attempting to disguise its central theme of anti-Muslim racism as an active policy for the protection and rights of women. Secondly, any form of systematic discrimination against women is questioned by the AfD and any measures to combat it vilified as an expression of »gender ideology«. Thirdly, the AfD faction is using parliamentary questions as a way of affirming its family policy vision.

When the AfD organised two so-called ›Women's Marches‹ in Berlin, supposedly to draw attention to violence against women and the alleged disregard for women's rights by Muslims in Germany, the AfD Bundestag faction used the protests against the first of these marches as an opportunity to call for an ad hoc debate in the Bundestag entitled »Strengthening women's freedom and equality – constitution, not parallel society«. In the debate, AfD Bundestag member Nicole Höchst used the alleged murder of a 15-year-old girl by her under-age Afghan boyfriend as an opportunity to present the AfD's anti-Muslim racism as a way of protecting women's rights. The »Islamisation of Europe« was, she claimed, responsible for the creeping and politically unopposed theft of women's basic rights, for which the »opinion monopoly« of the »educating press« was partly responsible.⁴ The linking of anti-Muslim resentment to the supposed protection of women is used repeatedly by the AfD in debates. For example, AfD



Bundestag member Gottfried Curio argues:
»If, because of a failed immigration policy, our women are soon to find themselves facing a majority of young men from archaic, misogynistic societies: are women to start avoiding wearing short skirts, then start covering their hair with a headscarf, until they eventually have to walk around shut inside a burka? Are safe spaces to become a scarce commodity and evening jogging a test of courage? It must not come to that.« (Minutes of the 14th session of the 19th legislative period, p. 1112)

In the debate on International Women's Day, AfD representative Nicole Höchst

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vehemently opposed an alleged »equality totalitarianism«, which would, she claimed, destroy »the standing of millions of free, self-determined women« through quotas and other forms of assistance. Höchst denied any form of structural discrimination against women – »Structural discrimination against women is like a yeti: everyone talks about it, but no one has ever really seen it« (19th legislative period, minutes of 17th session, p. 1387). She proceeded to talk about the structural discrimination against women in Islam, which, she claimed, posed

the real risk to women in Germany: »They are handing us over to the gender segregation and systematic discrimination against women that is structurally embedded in this so-called religion. They are leaving our daughters and granddaughters with an Islamised German state in a centrally governed Islamic Europe.« (ibid.)

Marc Jongen, one of the ideological masterminds of the AfD Bundestag faction, complained that through »gender mainstreaming«, the »battle of the sexes in our educational establishments and authorities is being set up for the long term, by order of the state. As a result, the relationship between the sexes has been exposed to a permanent and subliminal poisoning.« Behind this he sees an »attitude dictatorship that is gradually taking on Orwellian proportions (...).« (Deutscher Bundestag, 19th legislative period, minutes of the 12th session, p. 985)

The AfD is currently raising the issue of demographics and birth rates, primarily in the form of written requests in parliament. The AfD has asked the government about possibilities for »increasing the birth rate in Germany with the help of family policy measures« (printed paper 19/2584). It cites as the central problem: »There are too few German children being born« (ibid), which immediately reveals the issue at stake. In its question on »long-term effects and consequences of early external childcare« (printed paper 19/2239), the party supplies the applicable family model and role pattern. Extract from the question: »One of the dangers for children, according

to the study, is that crèches, if they are used too early, too often and for too long, can weaken the maternal feeling – or even prevent it developing at all. This happens primarily in mothers who already had a weak bond with their child.« (ibid)

CONNECTING FACTORS OF THE AfD'S POLICY

Despite its obviously reactionary character, the positions of the party in the field of family and gender policy are also connected to real needs and problems that the party claims to address in its proposals, for instance in their criticism of the adult-worker-model. The all-encompassing claim of neoliberal capitalism to call on individuals' labour at any time is not experienced as self-realisation and emancipation by everyone. Particularly for many women it is often linked to double burden within the framework of a patriarchal division of labour, imposing the larger share of reproductive work on their shoulders. With the magic slogan »freedom of choice«, the AfD is articulating the existing desires of some women to escape (at least temporarily) the constant pressure of availability for the job market. The return to traditional role patterns thus appears as a free choice and as a liberation from a supposedly one-sided and enforced model of emancipation for women. The desired upgrading of family and care work is aimed primarily at women, who are to be offered the family as a »refuge«. So far, the AfD has not raised the issue of an

equal distribution of family work between men and women or made demands to make family and work more compatible. The party has in some cases even firmly rejected these ideas – despite the claim by the leader of the AfD Bundestag faction cited above. In its manifesto, the party generally opposes state involvement in matters of raising children: »The increasing assumption of child-raising duties by state institutions like crèches and all-day schools, the implementation of the ›gender mainstreaming‹ project and the general emphasis of individuality are undermining the family as a basic values-generating unit of society. The economy wants women as workers. A mistaken feminism only values women at work, but not women who are ›only‹ mothers and housewives. These women often experience less recognition and are financially disadvantaged.«⁵

By framing its anti-Muslim racism as a kind of »protection« of women against the dangers of a patriarchal Islamism, the party also connects with real experiences and problems of Germany's migrant society. Since the 2015/16 New Year's Eve events in Cologne and the killings of young women by refugees, if not before, the AfD's forcefully communicated threat discourse has met with an opinion, spread partly by the media, that this is a specific form of threat. The aforementioned ›Women's Marches‹ initiated by the AfD are the party's attempt to use these sentiments to its own advantage and to put itself forward as the true guarantor of emancipation and women's rights.

At the end of the day, the party's positions on family and gender policy connect with key uncertainties among its core voters: male, middle-aged and skilled workers.⁶ In addition to the socioeconomic uncertainties in this group, questions about their own role perception also play an important part. The sole breadwinner model has been eroding for a long time, but for some years now this process is compounded by the fact that the qualification of the largely male pool of skilled labour is being called into question. This is perceived by some of the male AfD voters as a further attack on their own role model. Here too, the AfD offers clear identity models that counter these uncertainties and account for part of the party's attraction for its largely male following.

*Translated by Ros Mendy and Sally McPhail
(lingua•trans•fair)*

1 See <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2017-10/afd-weidel-regierung-2021>.

2 All citations from the Alternative für Deutschland manifesto, p. 41.

3 All AfD citations: ›Programm für die Wahl zum Deutschen Bundestag 2017‹ (manifesto for the German Bundestag elections 2017), pp. 36–38.

4 See ›Deutscher Bundestag, 19. Wahlperiode, Protokoll 7. Sitzung‹ (Minutes of the 7th session of the 19th legislative period) p. 585 ff.

5 Alternative für Deutschland party manifesto, p. 41.

6 See Horst Kahrs, ›Jenseits der Statistiken sozialer Ungleichheit. Facetten modernisierter Beziehungen zwischen Arbeitswelt, Lebenswelt und Politik‹, in: *Sozialismus* 7/8, 2016, p. 5–10.

NI UNA MENOS

INTERVIEW ABOUT FEMICIDE AND ITS POLITICAL MEANING

WITH ALEX WISCHNEWSKI

Alex, you are actively involved with the platform »Keine Mehr« (Not One Less), whose aim is to bring the femicide debate to Germany. Why are you using the term femicide instead of talking about individual murders of women?

Femicide, or feminicide, is the killing of women and girls because of their gender. Every femicide involves the killing of a woman, but not every killing of a woman is a femicide. So it is not simply about differentiating between female and male victims.

Instead, the term is intended to make certain murders of women visible as a form of hate crime and to draw attention to the social context. On the one hand, this means understanding femicide as an extreme expression of unequal gender relations and a male desire to dominate. Numerous studies and reports have shown that the risk for women to be exposed to

violence rises particularly when traditional gender arrangements are shifting – especially during and after a separation or divorce. A murder is the culmination of this violence. For this reason, researchers also talk about revenge for wounded macho pride. At the same time we need to ask which social conditions permit such acts to take place at all. Talking about femicides not only makes these killings of women visible, but also helps to mobilise political opposition.

At the moment, violence against women is discussed in public primarily when the perpetrators are migrants and refugees. Can a broad discourse on femicides help to counter this racist instrumentalization?

Racist instrumentalization of sexual violences are on the rise at the moment, but they are not a new phenomenon. During colonialism and in the Nazi era, the image-

ry of the violent, intrusive foreigner was used to legitimise one's own violence. It's easy to re-activate this cultural memory. We saw this in the debate about ›honour killings‹ in Muslim families, which have received far more public attention than killings in German families and relationships, although differentiating between the two is not always easy. The construct of the ›other‹, of course, always serves to create the construct of the ›self‹ – in this case an apparently progressive German majority into which the ›others‹ are unable to integrate themselves. The same thing is happening again now. Last December, when the German news programmes reported the murder of a 15-year-old girl by her Afghan ex-boyfriend and labelled it a ›relationship crime‹, and therefore as something outside the public interest, there was a huge public outcry. Unfortunately, however, this is a standard label within the German media. The concept of femicide is a very helpful and important feminist intervention here because it does not trivialize or belittle the act. After all, we don't want people to stop talking about murders carried out in the name of supposed honour. Instead, the aim is to elevate all so-called relationship crimes to an issue of public interest. If we manage to make the patriarchal structures visible that are supporting these crimes, we can also counter a racist instrumentalization of the issue. Because projecting sexual violence on the ›other‹, the foreigner, also serves the whitewashing of your own society.

Once you have established the notion that femicides are a structural problem that permeates our society this is no longer possible.

The name of your platform – »Keine Mehr« – references the »Ni una menos« movement in Argentina, where hundreds of thousands of women have been demonstrating since 2015 against femicide and patriarchal violence. What opportunities do you see for such feminist mobilization in Germany?

›Ni una menos‹ represents a qualitative leap in raising awareness of femicide as an issue, and now joins together a large number of anti-patriarchal demands. However, this mass movement did not happen out of the blue but builds on decades of mobilizing and numerous debates. In Germany, we do not have these preconditions. The women's movement here has achieved a huge amount, but at the same time there is the myth that gender equality is already a reality. In addition, the institutional integration of large sections of the women's movement has often led to their demise as an active social movement and made independent mobilization efforts harder. This has only been changing in the past few years. We have seen a new strength of the movements against sexual violence and harassment and for sexual liberty, but there is still little awareness that extreme acts like femicide occur here in Germany, too. Last year alone, 147 women were killed by their current or former partners. In addition, there were 224 known cases of



Ni Una Menos-March in Neuquén, Argentina, Juin 2015, photo by Cecilia Maletti ①Ⓢ

attempted murder in relationships and the actual figure is probably higher because many murder attempts are not reported. This means that a femicide attempt takes place almost every day – and that’s just the ones within intimate relationships. Moreover, there is a lack of valid data. Against this background, our primary aim at Keine Mehr is to collate and disseminate knowledge. We want to raise awareness and disrupt the silence around these issues in Germany. This is why we decided to start with a conference on the topic instead of calling for a demonstration immediately.

What were the results of your conference? And what are the aims and demands of the Keine Mehr platform now?

The conference took place in November 2017 and was split into three parts. In the first part, the independently run women’s refuges in Germany (*Autonome Frauenhäuser*) presented the available figures on femicides and highlighted the gaps in the data. It became clear that more data and more sophisticated analyses are needed for Germany, ideally by an independent research institute. In the second part, Gender Equality Media presented the media coverage of femicides, which has a powerful influence on the public understanding of the problem. Killings of

women are still trivialized by terms like ›family tragedy‹ and ›crime of jealousy‹. This triggered our idea to produce guidelines on sensitive reporting and a dedicated image database. Regarding the fact that many Latin American countries have already made femicide a separate statutory offence, the third part of our conference focused on the legislation and juridical practice in Germany. The existing paragraphs on murder in the German penal code require a global assessment of all the circumstances leading to the crime, including the intentions of the accused. So the judges are to decide whether an act was committed out of anger, aggression or despair and which category of murder they chose. This shows even more strongly the need to raise the general awareness of sexist violence against women and femicides. The judicial personnel must be reached this way too. A call for training would probably not achieve anything because the judiciary is independent and would not follow it. There is a blog summarizing all the results of the conference, which also serves as a database and provides ideas for multipliers and the interested public.

What does all this imply for feminist organizing and mobilization? In Argentina and Spain, for instance, there have been successful women's strikes; do you think this is possible in Germany?

Mobilization around violence against women is frequently accused of feeding into the image of women as victims, as passive



and helpless. And yes, there is sometimes a point in that. A strike is a great method to break out of this mould. It is a way of actively protesting against the conditions that facilitate violence and femicide and these also include economic conditions. This is why Keine Mehr has joined other voices in calling for a strike in Germany on 8 March 2019. But of course, we have a different feminist movement and level of mobilization in Germany than in Argentina – and also a different strike culture and history. However, the power and success of the strike movements in Spain and Argentina have inspired and empowered many women in Germany. So we can see a South-North-transfer of organizing experiences. This will of course be a long process, but we think and hope it will be unstoppable.

The interview was conducted by Lukas Hoffmann. Translated by Ros Mendy and Sally McPhail (lingua•trans•fair)

OUR PEOPLE ARE WORTH THE RISKS

A SOUTHERN QUEER AGENDA FROM THE MARGINS AND THE RED STATES

SOUTHERNERS ON NEW GROUND (SONG)

Southerners On New Ground (SONG) is a regional Queer Liberation organization made up of people of color, immigrants, undocumented people, people with disabilities, working class and rural and small town, LGBTQ people in the South. We believe that we are bound together by a shared desire for ourselves, each other, and our communities to survive and thrive. We believe that Community Organizing is the best way for us to build collective power and transform the South. Out of this belief we are committed to building freedom movements rooted in southern traditions like community organizing, political education, storytelling, music, breaking bread, resistance, humor, performance, critical thinking, and celebration.

In the best parts of our tradition as LGBTQ people for liberation, we have resisted assimilation. We have held die-ins, we have risked our lives at Pride celebra-

tions, we have been willing to be part of spectacle, and even to be hated, in hopes that our work would mean motion towards liberation. We have witnessed a mainstream LGBT movement that has moved away from these practices, and many of us have spent years in conference centers and hotel rooms all around this country pushing back on a mainstreaming of this movement. It is not enough to disagree with the mainstream agenda. We must be actively creating, resourcing, and organizing new strategies that move a politics of intersectionality into the fields, the small towns, the cities, the bedrooms, the televisions, and the visions of this country, and this world. These strategies must work tirelessly to build contagious power with those LGBTQ people who have been left behind by a mainstream gay rights agenda, and the unlikely allies who have been passed by. In the past two years, SONG has

mobilized and transformed thousands of LGBTQ people in the South through two campaigns. In 2011, our campaign against anti-immigrant hate in Georgia unleashed the power of an unprecedented number of LGBTQ people in a fight for liberation that was not slanted »single-issue« towards the traditional definition of »gay rights«. In 2012, our fight (with coalition partners) against the anti-family amendment in North Carolina (denying the basic rights of all unmarried couples and our children) was named by the North Carolina News Service as one of the biggest grassroots efforts in the history of North Carolina. Both of these campaigns happened in the South: the part of the country that the media tells us is the most hateful and hostile to oppressed communities. We know without a doubt that all the successes in this work originate from the thousands of LGBTQ Southerners and allies who led these efforts. They are voting for a new queer agenda with their sweat, risk-taking, and voices. SONG listened to them, created an organizational container, and provided strategic direction: they did the rest. At every turn, when we re-framed messages away from a narrow, single-issue gay rights agenda, our people on the ground responded with vigorous affirmation, agitation and effort.

All over this country, our people grow tired of a defensive, apologetic LGBT strategy against the Right wing. Bullies do not stop when they are appeased. We have nothing to apologize for, and yet we

watch as our own people and issues are publicly »de-gayed«, portrayed as middle class, and white—all in the name of eventual Equality. In the South, we watch tall grass grow up over the houses where our neighbors used to live, up over the businesses that used to populate our small towns. We watch as our family members are detained and deported, our comrades pushed involuntarily into sex work just to survive, and our children are incarcerated. We turn on the television and hear a conversation about

LGBTQ people every day that names us as perverted, sinful, and worthy of pain, isolation and death. Yet, our mainstream movement, that claims it speaks for us, tells us to wait for policy wins. We are assured that these wins will trickle down to us as some form of victory on our behalf. As people living in the South, as undocumented immigrants, as people of Color, as trans people, as rural people, and as people with disabilities: SONG says this is not good enough. In the absence of stronger national leadership, we call on queer liberationists to build and amplify our power, and take our rightful leadership regardless of the scales of our organizations—be they local, statewide, regional, or national. This article seeks to lay out a little bit more about evolving thoughts on how to do just that from a Southern perspective on queer liberation. We hope that it inspires other groups who have not already done so to seize the moment, stop, listen, and respond to the conditions of today.

A LIBERATION AGENDA FOR ALL PEOPLE—WITH LGBTQ LEADERSHIP IN ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE

The following is an evolving definition of queer liberation, compiled out of a Queer People's Movement Assembly in 2012:¹ *Queer liberation seeks liberation for all peoples through working for the recognition of our whole selves; the integrity of the relationships and families we embrace; self determination in choices for our bodies in sexuality, gender, eroticism, disability, safety, and privacy; the dignity of our spiritual practices; fairness in our economic systems, our work and its compensation; full access to participating in and benefiting from society's institutions; human rights for all; and justice as a birthright for all.*

An on-going queer agenda in the South means we work for participation within our full humanity for LGBTQ people and all people to have dignity, safety, and liberation. We work always from a place of multiplicity, plurality, and transformation. Intersectionality does not mean that we work only with LGBTQ people with similar politics—it means we work within a larger movement for liberation for all people globally, within coordinated and useful roles. For SONG, this means a focus on restoring rightful leadership for LGBTQ people within that struggle for liberation from the origin point of our home in the South.

SOUTHERNERS ON NEW GROUND (SONG) AND THE SOUTH: WHO WE ARE

In 1993, SONG was founded in the vision of 3 African-American and 3 white lesbians

who dared to dream an organization that could build and sustain organizing across lines of race, class, culture, gender and sexuality. SONG challenged the notion that Justice is about »Just Us« and began the work of building an infrastructure of Southern LGBTQ organizers who could unite a region around our common good all the way to our core. SONG's political work was born not just of out of a desire to do cross-issue work, but out of the notion that any »movement« for LGBTQ people has to account for our racial and ethnic communities, our elders, our children, as well as our bodies and the land we live on. The idea of going beyond our »couple« formations, and into our relationships with community by refusing to split people's identities into boxes, was the only way to make our lives visible to other Southerners, and each other. For almost twenty years we have moved, built, and supported groups of LGBTQ people who live and work at the intersections of race, class, culture, gender and sexuality, especially in small towns and rural parts of the South.

SONG's work in the South is grounded in history, a belief in redemption, and a belief in those who have been left behind by power structures. History--because this land is thick with what came before us--Native Peoples, slavery, Civil Rights Movement, traditions of resilience, beauty, pain. Redemption-- because we believe that while the South is a physical geography of white supremacy and poverty and how both form plantations, mountain top



removal, and slave labor; it is also more than that. It is a place of redemption and hope for many—a place where folk reconcile with the past in an honest and painful way, a place where people can stay in lands riddled with pain, remember old traditions, and birth new ways. Belief in those left behind—because while we have been underfunded, lacking in infrastructure, brutalized by poverty, racism, homophobia, transphobia and all manners of oppression, movement people in the South have always been fighting (like oppressed people all over the world) to keep our heads up. We have found creative ways

Women's Day in Bilbao 2018, strassenstiche.net/flickr  

based on kin structures to push toward liberation. We have not turned our back on food, singing, culture, our elders, our youth, and our craftspeople and artisans. We find joy in such unlikely places. Being Southerners On New Ground to us means loving hard histories, giving thanks, making visionary space, pushing forward, being kin, seeking wholeness and realizing there is no liberation in isolation.

One place our work comes from is the great joy when you sit in a member's



kitchen, talking politics, enjoying the wonderful hospitality of cornbread and greens, while looking out the screen door at the creek behind their house. There is great joy when the work connects people who are isolated, gives voice to those who have been denied air time, and builds folks sense of home as a place where they can also be queer. Part of SONG's work is supporting the unquestionable right to return of all Gulf Coast people, especially people of color and poor people; and it is also SONG's work to support the right to return *and stay* of all LGBTQ and gender non-conforming Southerners. For many, it is a daily fight to stay home or a brutal process of trying to come home. We love our region and our work is to make it a place where Southern queers can come home and stay home to live with self-determination, dignity, and respect. Our work is also grounded in the fear and sadness that so many LGBTQ rural people and small town people feel after they have left these homes behind for cities and/

or »the North«. *We call on our communities to recognize that turning privileged backs on other peoples suffering will never make the hurt go away, or make our communities whole.*

Violence, unemployment, and severe isolation have been huge deterrents for organizing LGBTQ people in many small Southern communities. This is also true in many other communities. In some communities that SONG works in, we are the only LGBTQ organization in that community, which has its benefits and challenges: positively, most of our new members are not jaded about organizing, and scarcity of resources means they will show up, and be deeply motivated to organize; negatively, many of them do not know what organizing or even »Gay pride« is when they first encounter SONG. It takes time to determine where we can go in some communities to connect with our base, because there are so few LGBTQ organizations in many Southern states. Less than fifteen Southern LGBTQ organizations have a staff of more than three people. The states that do have statewide LGBTQ organizations often have a staff of two to three people for the whole state (with the notable exception of Equality Florida). Most of the campaigns related to LGBTQ issues in the South in the past decade have been initiated by national organizations. SONG's constituency was recruited into campaigns that they did not choose, and told that the options were to lose big (80–20) or lose less (70–30) such as marriage amendment fights in Georgia, South Carolina, and Kentucky. These

situations have left SONG with a Southern base that is largely turned off from national organizations, and their efforts.

THE SOUTH AS A TESTING GROUND: THE USAGE OF LGBTQ COMMUNITIES BY THE RIGHT WING

In order to understand what this work means, we must understand not only who our communities are and what they need, but also the role that we have been cast in a Right wing agenda. The Right works as a cover for the interests of global capitalism, and they are in an extremely effective stage in their history right now. The Right, especially the theocratic Right, has been extremely successful in organizing the South to vote a conservative »family values« agenda and in taking over public institutions from school boards to legislatures. To build their voting base, they have created a beast with several arms: opposition to women’s equality, homosexuality and gay rights, sex education, family structures that don’t reflect marriage between a man and woman and children with official legitimacy, – and ultimately, underlying everything, all the gains of the Civil Rights Movement. Every strategy of the Right in the South builds on resentment of the Civil Rights Movement, and even when homophobia appears the focus, racial discrimination is always a goal. The Right drives towards an authoritarianism that is deeply patriarchal and fundamentalist. In particular, the Right has used homosexuality as a wedge issue to mobilize voters, to raise millions of dollars,



[strassenstriche.net/flickr](https://www.flickr.com/photos/strassenstriche/) ⓘ

and to paint LGBTQ people as sick, sinful, anti-family sexual perverts. The strategy has been to separate LGBTQ people from their communities, their families, and in particular, all children. It has been a classic effort to dehumanize and destroy us. It is no surprise that the Right would use the South as its first terrain for these strategies. The stereotypes of the South are primarily of conservative, religious, and poor white people in rural communities. This is only a partial truth. The South is ever-growing into a region that has one of the highest concentrations of African-Americans and Latinos in the US, huge communities of poor and working class people, and the largest US rural population. To ignore the South is to ignore these communities, and our needs. The South is more than just one region among many in the US, it is a place that epitomizes and symbolizes the fight for power happening in the US around

cultural issues and racial demographics. The Right has been successful in convincing progressive communities in the US to abandon the South. This needs to change if we want to unlock the keystones of the Right's core strategies.

BOLD ACTION IN THE NAME OF QUEER LIBERATION

As people in the South, we know that we hold only part of the strategy puzzle that can move us towards the next level of our work for global queer liberation. In dialogue and commitment to common cause, we can find ways forward together with many of you reading this. We offer this evolving list as a set of places to start (or continue) key conversations about next steps in our collective queer agenda:

Given our losses at the polls around even the most-watered down versions of questions that matter to us (for example, marriage ballots, etc.); we must unleash our creativity around a wider range of strategies that could bring our messages, communities, and work to scale

Recognize the importance of combining conversations and writing on LGBTQ intersectionality with symbolic media action, direct action, base building and amplification of intersectionality through grassroots organizing. When this synergistic work is happening, we must document, amplify, and replicate it well

Build our capacity for resiliency and problem solving until it is as strong as our capacity to be critical. Twenty years of

bringing righteous critique to a mainstream LGBT agenda has left us weak in the areas of transforming beyond conflict, towards united action. When a leader makes a mistake, we often eat that person alive. This has to stop if we are to make bold steps towards queer liberation

Try out new ideas and move faster on opportunities. Given that there is so much we can work on as queer liberationists, we can easily get stuck in the stage of considering our choices for strategies and tactics. We need to take responsibility for, and transform, our tendency in the 'queer left' to get so caught up in process that we do not lead work that can affect hundreds of thousands (in some way, space or form) versus groups of twenty or less at a time. There is no perfect choice when our people are suffering this much. Our pride and perfectionism must come second to our needs to try new strategies and make mistakes in order to win concrete gains and learn lessons

Strengthen our ability to message to each other and media in an intersectional and accessible way. There is so much public conversation about LGBTQ people, but too little amplification of our own voices about our own lives. Those who do speak for us are usually bringing a mainstream agenda

Build real relationships and trust with new coalitions and alliances that may seem to be unlikely partners, particularly those that represent large bases of marginalized communities. As we work on fronts of struggle that unite us with broad groups of marginalized people, we must take risks

together. Of course, risks in movement building look vastly different for people based on individual privilege and power. At the same time, our people (in the South, and elsewhere) are showing all the time that they are ready to take risks and those of us who are strategists need to be dreaming up plans worthy of their courage

Recognize that for many queer liberationists this is political *and* spiritual work. In SONG's campaign in North Carolina, 35% of our 16,000 signed-up volunteers were people of faith. We must transform our organizations to meet the needs of our bases – and name this work for all it is, and all it means to people, while still holding firm to our politics and our fight against religious supremacy and fundamentalism.

Organize in line with visions worthy of our history, our legacy, and people. We have to be able to draw a direct line from our current strategies to our long-term liberation dreams – no matter how long that line is in terms of time, or how beset the landscape is with massive challenges. Wins must be defined within that long-term vision, with an eye for concrete needs of our people now

Be good to each other by supporting, challenging, and transforming our own leadership. We must constantly be asking each other and ourselves if we are willing to be transformed in the service of this work. If we are still in this work, someone has been patient with our leadership, and in turn, we are called upon to be patient with other leaders.

IN CONCLUSION

Because our survival depends on the process towards queer liberation, this agenda (crafted by thousands) will go forward whether large national organizations adopt it or not. However, we call on them to do so. We call on mainstream national organizations to use their resources to respectfully listen to, support, strategize with, network, and convene grassroots groups on the front lines. We move forward in this work with the support of many long-term relationships: particularly the support of the groups in the ROOTS coalition, Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, Project South, the Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights [GLAHR], the National Day Laborers Organizing Network [NDLON], and many others. Our work is made possible because of this bigger legacy and fabric of work. We hope that some part of the work we have done here is helpful to you. For more information visit SONG's website at: www.southernersonnewground.org

This article originally appeared in the Fall 2011/ Spring 2012 edition, The New Queer Agenda, in the Scholar & Feminist Online journal published by the Barnard Center for Research on Women.

1 People's Movement Assemblies (PMA) emerged at the US Social Forum in Detroit in 2010. Since then, PMAs organized around different issues have been convening in other places. The Queer People's Movement Assembly met at the Creating Change conference in Baltimore in January 2012. See <http://peoplesmovementassembly.org/node/419#queer> for more information.

YOUR GENDER IS YOURS, PROLETARIAN!

QUEERING CLASS STRUGGLE

ATLANTA INA BEYER

In leftist debate, queer identity politics and class politics tend to be dealt with separately. In real life, however, things are more complicated, as queer subjects always belong to social classes too. The precarious are neither all heterosexual, nor can they always be assigned to just one of two binary genders. Even in debates about connective class politics, queer perspectives are generally ignored. One problem in determining new class politics lies in the restrictedness of conceptualisations of (working) class subjects. Politics of representation – with their scope from aesthetic to political representation (Schaffer 2008, 83) – play an important part in this: Representation means depiction (*Darstellung*), conception (*Vorstellung*), and standing in for someone or something (*Vertretung*). These meanings are inextricably intertwined, inconceivable individually.

Identity – including class identity, or the ways we can conceive of it – is, as Stuart Hall (1996, 6) put it, constituted through and »within, not outside representation«. Lacking the resources for aesthetic representation, i.e., being unable to produce one's own image, is often connected to exclusion from political representation (Shohat 1995, 170). This is also a class issue. Against the backdrop of neoliberal austerity policies in Great Britain, cultural studies scholar Rhian E. Jones points out that the currently much discussed crisis of political representation of the working classes is also a problem of their cultural representation. Focusing on the figure of the »chav«, as personified for example by Vicky Pollard's character in the TV series *Little Britain*, she shows how stereotypical, demeaning representations of a supposed underclass serve to individualise and moralise social »failure«. Such portrayals produce an image

of a discarded Other, in contrast to which a white, heteronormative, middle class lifestyle ideal is co-constituted. Jones (2013, 20) makes these media representations comprehensible as techniques of neo-liberal governance: They help restrict the capacity for powerful action ›from below‹ (cf. Jones 2013, 20). Emancipatory politics of representation therefore need to produce images of precarious lives that allow for more resistance. They should do this by supporting and strengthening (self-)representations of discarded Others – hitherto unseen in conceptualisations and portrayals of class – thereby making unlikely solidarities across ›identitarian divides‹ conceivable. To that end, currently dominant queer debates and representations, in which class issues seldom feature, need to change as well.

One example of how this could look is the Swedish film *Folkbildningsterror* (›Popular Education Terror‹, 2014). The concepts of disidentification and queer utopia introduced by José Esteban Muñoz offer an interesting perspective from which to trace how the film develops queer representations of class. The queer theorist, who sadly died much too early in 2013, was critical of the narrow political horizons of the US-American gay rights movement of his time. He argued that demands for same-sex marriage and a purely formal, civic equality – which continue to form the backbone of mainstream gay and lesbian politics – aimed to benefit just a small circle of economically privileged queers. Only those persons could expect a better



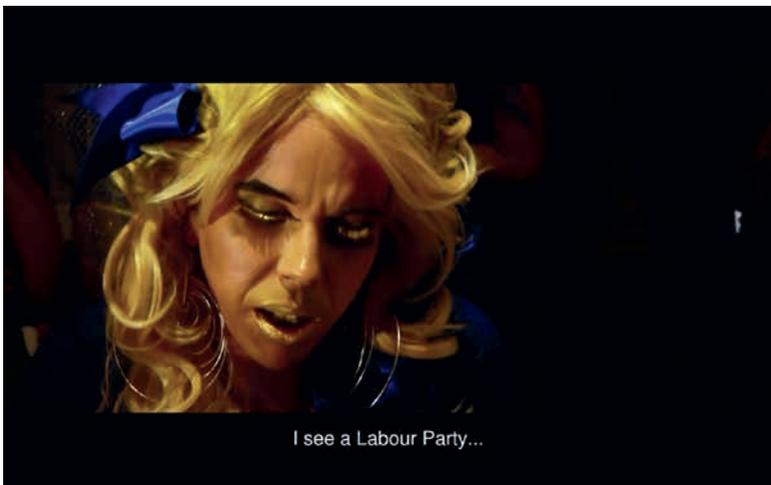
›Folkbildningsterror‹, Sweden 2017

life from becoming integrated within North American (middle class) culture (Muñoz 2009, 20).

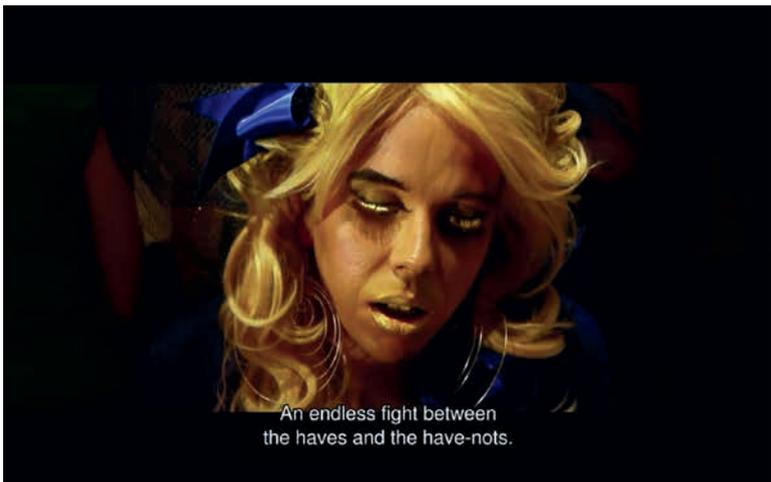
In such politics, queerness is understood above all as a sexual identity that is separate from other aspects like race, gender, or class, and thus highlighted as a dominant if not singular marker of difference. Muñoz, by contrast, insisted that queerness be conceived of as a collectivity, as a *concrete utopia* – a concept introduced by the philosopher Ernst Bloch. As long as the majority of queers continued to lack better futures, since intersecting racialised, classed, and gendered power inequalities were yet to be overcome, the primary function of queerness would have to be as an ideal that could guide action: yet to be reached, queerness nevertheless appears on the horizon as a possibility and promise of better futures (ibid., 1). Muñoz retains the necessarily identity-related aspects of queer



The cards will reveal the unseen
about the past, present and future.



I see a Labour Party...



An endless fight between
the haves and the have-nots.



politics that are rooted in shared experiences of sexual and gender marginalisation. At the same time, his understanding of queer constitutes an all-encompassing critique of power relations and social domination. In his view, queer aesthetic production is indispensable to thinking beyond heteronormativity, racism, and capitalism. Like Ernst Bloch, he attributes emancipatory potential – »a forward-dawning futurity« (Muñoz 2009, 1) [»*Dämmerung nach vorn*« (Bloch 1959, 86)] to artistic works, in which, Muñoz (2009, 1) claims, one can often already find blueprints of the worlds promised by queerness (ibid.). Such works, including that of *Folkbildningsterror*, make it possible to see and feel beyond the restrictions of the present in order to pursue better futures.

TRANS-SPECTRES ARE HAUNTING EUROPE...

The glitter-punk, colourful queer film alternates between musical, fantasy comedy, and left-autonomous-queer agit-prop. It was developed and shot over three years by a collective of friends and activists from Gothenburg. With a good dose of humour, *Folkbildningsterror* brings together queer ways of living, activism, working class affiliation, and subcultural chic. The focus is on the trans¹ characters Theo and Cleopatra, as well as a nameless, notoriously tense rabbit. Theo's mother is chronically ill but is nonetheless harassed by the employment office. Theo wants to help her, but he also has other problems. In addition to his own

stress with the employment office and a lack of future prospects, Theo is preoccupied with thoughts of gender transitioning as well as with unfulfilled romantic desires.

One of the film's first scenes shows Theo in a small room with two doctors. As in an interrogation, they harass him under the cold light of a naked light bulb with questions: Did he play with dolls or cars in October 1991? What is his star sign? They discuss his gender identity on the basis of haphazard scraps of information. Theo is shouted at: He must decide »what« he is. The doctors collapse in hysterical laughter, which merges into a mobile ringtone: »The Internationale« anthem. Theo wakes up; fortunately, it was just a dream. But the employment office is on the phone, summoning him to an appointment to make an »action plan« to find a job. If he doesn't attend, he will lose his benefits.

Wearing a pink tulle dress, transwoman/drag queen Kleopatra Caztrati stops a car in a rainy Swedish landscape and gets in. The driver starts up a conversation. He wants to know whether she's an artist. She's not a »real woman«, or is she? She gets out again shortly after. Striding across tarmac, fields, and railway tracks, she sings the first electropop song of the musical:

*The ghost of Europe is shifting shape.
As one of several unknown factors,
I have arrived
soft as a southern breeze, heading for a storm.
Because now, the times will shift.
Synchronise your fights my friends.*

*Shoulder a piece each of the horizon.
Our Big Bang is now.*

According to director Lasse Långström, the film was created as a response to the electoral victory of the right-wing conservative variant of neoliberalism in Sweden. There, the Sweden Democrats took just under 13 per cent in the 2014 parliamentary election. *Folkbildningsterror* is an attempt at an intervention, a call for a turnaround and change of times, as Kleopatra's song makes clear. The film is directed against the slandering and discrimination of minorities, as well as against proposed legal reforms that aim to dismantle the welfare state. The situation calls for quick action – »we must be *swift*« – and the coordination of different struggles. Europe's spectre (an allusion to the Communist Manifesto) has changed its shape. The lower classes will rise: their time has come. But, unforeseen by Marx and Engels, the transwoman/drag queen, too, has risen as an »unknown factor«, giving the wretched of the Earth a new and hitherto unknown face.

Kleopatra offers to help Theo with his plan in return for allowing her to move in with him. She is new to the city and has no money. But his »plan« proves to be greater than anticipated: when Kleopatra does a tarot card reading for him, it shows an endless struggle between the haves and the have-nots, as well as the Swedish Social Democrats, who have betrayed the lower classes. »They've cleared the way for the right wing to sell out our public welfare«,

Kleopatra interprets the cards. »You have to do something.« she says to Theo. He's still laughing: »What am I gonna do – save the welfare?« But that's exactly what becomes the mission, which leads the two to team up with the above-mentioned rabbit shortly after. The rabbit needs their help in order to free his rabbit comrades and all the other animals from the zoo. They form a kind of urban guerilla group. But their cooperation is not free from conflict. The rabbit is sick of leftists who justify the slaughter of his rabbit comrades by redefining them as »working class food«. For her part, Kleopatra criticises the polarising distinction of »nature« versus »artifice« that is implicit in the rabbit's arguments.

More and more people join to support the cause. Help is offered, for example, by transwoman Lilith, who plays a leading role in the local BDSM² community, and has magical powers. On the condition that she may spank Theo's behind, she promises to jinx Margareta, the employment office agent who harasses his mother. To do so, she needs a lock of Margareta's hair. In Theo's kitchen, Kleopatra, Theo, and the rabbit are shown plotting a scheme to obtain the hair. The poster hanging above the kitchen table shows the figure of an angel, with the famous last sentence of the Communist Manifesto: »Workers of the world, unite!«

QUEER(ING) VISIONS OF THE CLASS WAR

Despite its fantastical elements, *Folkbildningsterror* remains close to a portrait of a subculture. As it increases in size, the group

debates (in plenum, of course), what to do next. They discuss the pros and cons of militant action and decide to go underground. In order to break the symbolic nexus between weapons and cis-masculine violence, they agree that anyone who uses a weapon must also wear a dress. Preparations are underway to occupy a factory, to kidnap the Swedish minister of immigration, to wreak revenge on the chairman of the Swedish social security authority – who is to suffer all the chronic pain that afflicts Theo's mother – and to free the animals from the zoo.

In the meantime, Theo receives a letter from the gender investigation authority. His application to transition has been rejected. Kleopatra tries to comfort him. They go for a walk, and she deconstructs the binary-gendered world using exaggerated Butler-esque terminology: »All the violence aimed at our bodies is an attempt to uphold the system that categorises us as women and men.« As they reach Gothenburg's Museum of Art, she opens her pink handbag and lets packets of tablets rain down upon Theo. »Testosterone, oestrogen. Take it all!« she cries and runs towards the steps of the building, then turns back again to say: »Or, you don't need to take anything!« The scene then unfolds into one of the film's most spectacular musical numbers. Wrapped in a black and gold cloth, with her hand gently resting on her cheek, Kleopatra begins to sing as more and more figures with bare upper bodies and black angels' wings emerge from behind the arches of the museum's façade. They stride onto the

steps and start to form a kind of choreographed army. It is no coincidence that they bear a certain resemblance to the figure of the angel on the poster in Theo's kitchen.

»Hear the angels of trans liberation, Your gender is yours, proletarian«, sings the choir. The trans angels are no petitioners: »We will combat the identitarian and validational charity. We'll uncover society's torments, not be preserved in minority.« The politics of recognition with its mere political concessions are not enough for them. Instead they unmask identity as a kind of force.

The film's characters disidentify with dominant representations of queer and class identities. José Muñoz uses the term disidentification to describe a practice employed by many marginalised subjects to resist normalising discourses. Because they cannot or do not want to completely adapt to hegemonic notions of identity, part of their everyday experience is that aspects of their identities and life experiences remain hidden in the social fields in which they move. As an (aesthetic-)political strategy, disidentification means opening a third position between identification and counter-identification, a position in which identities can be narrated anew, so that they can contribute to the emergence of counter-publics and resistance.

Trans positions – which remain marginalised even in queer (political) discourses – and precarious queer living situations are central themes of the film. Queer and trans needs are formulated as

class needs as well, as part of the struggle for the good life for everyone. In so doing, the film charmingly illuminates diverse queer subcultures. Unafraid to laugh at itself, with a shrill anarchistic aesthetic style reminiscent of John Waters or Bruce LaBruce, the film celebrates the unruliness and quirkiness of queer ways of life. At the same time, varying differences among the protagonists are negotiated. The characters work together despite manifold disputes, and they cannot be reduced to one-sided notions of queer or class identity. They want everything, for everyone, and for free: free love, free choice of gender and access to hormones, a self-determined life instead of exploitation, disciplining, state-sanctioned harassment, and pathologisation. The film represents different forms of precarity, experiences of violence, exclusion, marginalisation, and exploitation, and thus makes it possible to collectively reflect upon them. With tongue-in-cheek humour, but nonetheless to be taken seriously, other forms of collectivity take centre stage. The protagonists are not interested in getting married. Instead, they protest together against transport ticket inspections, employment office harassment, machoism, and deportations. They fight for a utopia that surpasses the limits of the (old) welfare state: an actual »welfare society«. Rather than adapting to the limited options of the here and now, they insist upon alternative ways of being together in the world, and ultimately upon a better world. For a brief

moment in time, despite the authorities' persecution, the group explores this new welfare society in the premises of the occupied factory, celebrating free love and the good life for everyone. The queer utopia that is put forward in *Folkbildungs-terror* is a vision of a new kind of solidarity across social divides – across different experiences, identities, and positions.

*Translated by Pip Hare and Joanna Mitchell
(lingua•trans•fair)*

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1 Trans is a term used to refer to a broad spectrum of people whose gender identities do not (fully) correspond to the gender they were assigned at birth.

2 The overlapping acronym encompasses the erotic practices bondage and discipline (B/D), dominance and submission (D/S), sadism and masochism (S/M).

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