

Prefigurative self-governance and self-organization: the influence of antiauthoritarian (pro)feminist, radical queer and antiracist networks in Quebec.

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At the turn of the century in Quebec, we witnessed a resurgence of anarchist-style organizing that, ten years later, has burgeoned into a nebula of antiauthoritarian groups and networks. This phenomenon, common to many countries in both the Global North and the Global South, emerged out of the uprisings against global capitalism's newest configuration, neo-liberalism, which came onto the public radar in North America in 1999 with the mass street protests against the World Trade Organisation in Seattle. Since then, antiauthoritarian activists organizing in Quebec have been at most local, regional, national and even at some international street protests: the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in 2001, the protest against the G8 (held in Kananaskis) in Ottawa in 2002, the Summit on the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America in Montebello in 2007, the Olympics in Vancouver in 2010, and the G20 in Toronto the same year, and the anti-IMF protests in Washington in 2000 (among others). These counter-globalization protests have garnered widespread mainstream media attention globally, some of it more positive than others. Less documented however, is the grassroots organizing that the same groups and networks engage in on a daily basis in their hometowns, outside the media spotlight. Even less visible is the work of feminists and pro-feminists² working within these networks, be it in radical feminist collectives, radical queer groups or anti-racist and anti-colonialist organizations.

In this paper, we would like to argue that there are three important micro-cohorts³—different social movement threads—of antiauthoritarian activists engaged in self-organization at the grass-roots level in Quebec today: (1) radical feminists, (2) radical queers, and (3) feminists and pro-feminists organizing in anti-racist and anti-colonial groups and networks. Furthermore, these micro-cohorts have played a role in developing radical analysis, strategy, and organisational modes in a variety of spaces inside, overlapping with, and external to the broader antiauthoritarian movement they/we are part of.

1. Prefigurative self-organization and self-governance.

The antiauthoritarian movement is inspired in many ways by anarchist ideas and practices. Although some groups and networks in the movement don't hesitate to state their allegiance to anarchism, a good number of them do not make this claim in their public discourse or in particular organizing spaces⁴. However, despite this resistance to pigeon-holing, they/we share a set of values and practices linked to a common antiauthoritarian ethic⁵ or ethical compass⁶.

For the most part, antiauthoritarians first take position against all forms of illegitimate authority, all forms of oppression and domination which are considered to be interconnected and mutually reinforcing: capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and sometimes anthropocentrism and ableism. The antiauthoritarian ethic enacted by these activists is characterized by a number of values that influence their analysis, their practice and their vision of what a better

¹ The use of they/we in this paper indicates that we are making this contribution as participants in the antiauthoritarian movement, and, within this movement, as members of a feminist research collective called the Research Group on Collective Autonomy (*Collectif de recherche sur l'autonomie collective* or CRAC) that is documenting and analyzing the movement. Using a prefigurative participatory action research (PAR) methodology, we have interviewed 120 activists since 2005, in nine different groups and networks, each of which has participated or is participating in the production of a monograph, from writing to validation to lay-out and public launch. CRAC is affiliated with the School of Community and Public Affairs, Concordia University. Website: www.crac-kebec.org. Contact: info@crac-kebec.org. CRAC members authoring this article are: Emilie Breton, MA candidate, Université de Québec à Montréal; Sandra Jeppesen, Assistant Professor, Interdisciplinary Studies, Lakehead University Orillia; Anna Kruzynski, Assistant Professor, School of Community and Public Affairs, Concordia University; Rachel Sarrasin, PhD candidate, Political Science, Université de Montréal.

² We use the term pro-feminist to indicate men who are feminist allies.

³ Nancy Whittier. 1997. «Political Generations, Micro-Cohorts and the Transformation of Social Movements», *American Sociological Review* 62 (5): 760-778.

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

⁵ Collectif de recherche sur l'autonomie collective. 2011. *Antiauthoritarians in Quebec: united by a political culture*. Discussion-paper submitted to a CRAC retreat, February 12-13th 2011, Montréal.

⁶ Cindy Milstein. 2010. *Anarchism and Its Aspiration*. Oakland: AK Press.

society may look like: freedom, solidarity, collective autonomy, social justice, respect, spontaneity and mutual aid, among many others.

Concretely, this means promoting organisational forms and modes of action that are consistent with this antiauthoritarian ethic, based on fundamental principles of self-governance and self-organisation. Since most antiauthoritarian activists would argue that the State is an authoritarian body, which aims to maintain and reproduce relations of domination, they therefore seek to abolish it. They participate and organize convergences or fluid coalitions to engage in street protest that aims to interfere with the normal functioning of hegemonic institutions and norms.. This is perhaps the better-known aspect of antiauthoritarian organizing and the most documented part of the movement but for most activists, however, it is only a small part of what we do. The tactic of confrontation is accompanied by the long-term strategy of the prefigurative construction of a better world in the here and now. Participants tended to agree that it is through the everyday activities of ordinary people that social change happens, in two different ways: when people have a direct say in decisions that affect their lives (self-governance) and when they/we are the main participants in the application of these decisions (self-organization). In accordance with these beliefs is the widely-held sentiment that a better society is produced by the activities that people carry out in the here and now, a notion sometimes called prefigurative politics⁷.

Antiauthoritarian groups and networks have therefore developed organizational forms based on these values, which allow for experimentation with different ways of “doing” and “being.” In keeping with the idea that decision-making should be done by those directly concerned, antiauthoritarians create small “affinity groups”⁸ of 5 to 20 people who come together based on some form of affinity or like-mindedness—be it neighbourhood commitments, friendship, a specific common political interest, an ideological affiliation, a common identity or identities, among others. Affinity groups tend to organize locally around a particular issue, and the same groups may also come together in coalitions to organize campaigns or mass convergences at protests such as those discussed earlier. Throughout most of the activities of this decentralized and fluid organizational form, similar practices may be used: consensus-based decision-making, task sharing, skill sharing, resource sharing, horizontal organizing without leaders, mutual emotional care-taking, no official membership lists or fees, join by doing, and so on—all facilitated by a number of mechanisms that aim to reconstruct social relationships to achieve equality in the here and now.

Prefigurative politics are taken further through counter-institutional initiatives that break with the logic of systems of domination, in an attempt to render existing hegemonic institutions and norms redundant⁹. The more cracks there are, the logic goes, the greater the chances of transforming the system at its root. These initiatives—be they self-managed organic farms, independent media, alternative bookstores or libraries, free schools, day cares, show spaces, safer spaces, or bike repair shops—are resources upon which the movement can depend, and seedlings of another society in the making. For many activists who invest time and energy in these little utopias, the hope for fundamental social change lies in their ability to show by example that self-governance and self-organization is not just desirable but also enjoyable and achievable in the present moment. The articulation of this goal, at the heart of the antiauthoritarian movement today, is shaped in many ways by the work of (*pro*)feminist activists involved in different groups and networks of the broader antiauthoritarian movement over the last 15 years.

2. The three (*pro*)feminist micro-cohorts.

Micro-cohort #1. Radical feminist groups, spaces, actions and gatherings.

In Quebec there is a strong tendency for radical feminist groups to organize in non-mixed women-only spaces¹⁰. Some feminists have experienced sexism within left-wing student organizing and/or anti-capitalist networks, or they might perceive a lack of a feminist analysis of globalization among anti-globalization activists. These experiences among others can be the impetus for the creation of autonomous women-only spaces. During the first part of the decade 2000-2010, there was a proliferation of collectives and affinity groups in Quebec, including: Les Sorcières, Némésis, Les Amères Noëllés, les Insoumises, les Amazones, Rebelles sans frontières, Les femmes ont faim, Cyprine, les Féministes Radicales de l’UQAM (FRUes), les Fallopes, Groupe F.E.M.M.E.S Sororitaires, les Lilithantes, La Riposte and Ainsi Squattent-elles! Since 2003 these various grass-roots groups have been organizing sporadic radical feminist gatherings that create space for networking and mutual support, and consolidating their organizing efforts, drawing between 50 and 100 women. Radical feminists form “purple”¹¹ contingents at street protests against the institutions and instruments of capitalism, under the slogan: « Nous refusons d’être

⁷ Uri Gordon. 2008. *Anarchy Alive*. London: Pluto Press ; C. Milstein 2010.

⁸ See, among others, Sam Dolgoff. 1974. *The Anarchist Collectives: Workers' Self-Management in the Spanish Revolution, 1936-1939*. Free Life Editions.

⁹ Richard Day. 2005. *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*. London: Pluto Press.

¹⁰ Collectif de recherche sur l’autonomie collective. *Radical Feminists: a Monograph* (forthcoming).

¹¹ Anarcha-feminist colours : purple and black

soumises, pendant que les mâles capitalisent! »¹² (loosely translated—we refuse to submit, while males capitalize). They organize demonstrations, blockades, street theatre, occupations and other direct actions against various instruments of patriarchy. For example in March 2000, the Collectif Les Sorcières “decorated” a Catholic church with metal hangers, tampons, condoms and burning crosses in an effort to denounce the appropriation of women’s bodies and their reproductive functions by patriarchal institutions such as religion. They are best known for their actions opposing violence against women, for their pro-choice actions against pro-life advocates attempting to criminalize abortion, and for actions standing up to anti-feminist men’s organizations. They organize workshops and publish opinion pieces on these and other women’s issues, such as the gynecological and pharmaceutical industries, sex work, the gendered division of labor, and the socialization of children.

Micro-cohort #2. Radical queer groups and actions.

At about the same time that this explosion of radical feminist groups took place, other activists also struggling against patriarchy decided to form radical queer groups in an effort to increase the visibility of LGBT people and issues across the province. Among the first of these affinity groups to emerge in Quebec were *Les Panthères Roses* and the Anticapitalist Ass-pirates, both of whose basis of unity included a principled stance against all categorizations, especially the binaries woman/man and homo/heterosexual.

Radical queer groups organize “pink blocs” in many of the anti-capitalist street protests and also form radical anti-capitalist contingents in mainstream LGBT events like the pride parade during Divers/Cité in Montreal or organize in the counter-festival called Pervers/Cité. Using direct-action in-your-face tactics *Les Panthères Roses* raised a range of issues, including: the exploitation of pink capitalism, by vomiting on the doorsteps of Montreal’s Gay Village shops on Valentine’s Day (Operation Pepto Bismol); the institution of marriage, by staging a divorce during the first Gay and Lesbian Bridal Show; violence and discrimination within the gay community via a die-in in the streets of the Gay Village during Gay Pride; and the increasingly homophobic positions of the federal government by welcoming Stephen Harper with the Sodomobile, a car upon which an effigy of the Prime Minister was being sodomized by a papier-mâché pink panther¹³. Their creative forces are also used to promote their own radical queer parties and film screenings, which create “safer spaces” for those who do not feel comfortable at mainstream LGBT events and venues due to the homonormativity¹⁴ of the white-cisgendered¹⁵-male-dominated gay scene.

By the mid-2000s, critical of the white-dominated aspect of some radical feminist and radical queer groups, and some straight-male-dominated anarchist groups, queer people of colour and supporters set up a space called the Ste-Emilie Skillshare, an autonomous silk-screening and artist workshop in Saint-Henri in Montreal¹⁶. Under ‘who we are’ on their website, this is found:

The Ste-Emilie SkillShare is a group of artists and activists, primarily people of colour and queer people, committed to promoting artistic expression and self-representation in our communities. **The Skillshare collective runs** an art studio for people to learn new skills, share their skills, and create art in the spirit of revolution and anti-oppression (anti-racism/ sexism/ classism/ homophobia/ transphobia/ ableism/ sizeism/ etc). **Our space is open to all.** Long live skill-sharing!¹⁷

Another group called Q-Team¹⁸ formed out of the death of the Anti-capitalist Ass-pirates. According to their website:

Qteam is a Montreal-based radical queer collective committed to anti-imperialism, anti-racism, short shorts, queering activist spaces and politicizing queer spaces, the downfall of single-issue politics, raging pervy queer dance parties, destroying all prisons, opening all borders, burning pink dollar\$, and keeping on keeping on¹⁹.

¹² Coalition féministe radicale contre le G20. Online. <http://feministesradicalescontreleg20.wordpress.com/> (accessed October 2010).

¹³ For more information, see CRAC. 2010. *Les Panthères Roses de Montréal : un collectif queer d’actions directes. Une monographie du Collectif de recherche sur l’autonomie collective.*

¹⁴ Homonormativity is the notion that TV representations of ‘gays’ and ‘lesbians’, have become stereotypical and normative, influencing what is accepted as ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ behaviour in the gay village, i.e. typically white, middle-class, affluent, able-bodied, gender normative, and conforming to a particular body and beauty image. Queers challenge these norms, pointing to the intersectionality of other identities with queer—particularly gender queers, trans-gendered and trans-sexual bodies, anti-racist queers and queer people of colour, queers who live in poverty, etc.

¹⁵ The term cis-gender refers to a person who lives in and is satisfied with their birth-assigned gender designation; cis-sex refers to a person who lives in and is satisfied with their birth-assigned sex designation.

¹⁶ Coco Riot. Ste-Emilie’s Skillshare: a Monograph (draft title). Collectif de recherche sur l’autonomie collective (forthcoming).

¹⁷ Ste-Emilie’s Skillshare website, <http://steemilieskillshare.org/who-we-are> (accessed on February 27, 2011)

¹⁸ Ashley Fortier. *QTeam : a Monograph* (draft title). Collectif de recherche sur l’autonomie collective (forthcoming).

¹⁹ QTeam website : <http://www.qteam.org/> (accessed on December 20th 2010).

Committed to working on front-line struggles²⁰, these two groups have developed an anti-oppressive or intersectional analysis and practice based on the understanding that all systems of oppression are interlocking, as is clear in both of these self-descriptions. This perspective informs their active involvement with groups struggling against racism, colonialism and imperialism, on issues as wide ranging as: police brutality and impunity; racial profiling by police; immigrant detentions and deportations; Canadian military and economic imperialism overseas; indigenous self-determination; justice for migrant workers, non-workers and illegalized individuals and families; Israeli apartheid and Palestinian rights; and LGBT prisoners' rights²¹.

Micro-cohort #3. Feminists and pro-feminists in anti-racist and anti-colonial organizing.

Clearly some of the newer radical queer groups engage on issues of racism and imperialism. Understanding capitalist globalisation as a form of colonisation, many (*pro*)feminists organise, for example, within the two active (im)migrant justice groups No One is Illegal Montreal, and Solidarity Across Borders, organizing direct actions such as the Status for All March from Montreal to Ottawa (2005), facilitating popular education initiatives such as the Migrant Justice Caravan bringing information to different neighbourhoods, and engaging in direct-action case-work including organizing sanctuaries to prevent deportation of refugees. Some are involved in anti-war organizing, border and national security issues, racial profiling and police violence and impunity.

(Pro)feminists in the current moment.

Currently in 2011, there are but a few organised groups that identify explicitly as radical feminist, namely the longstanding collective Les Sorcières. Radical feminists, however, are still active in Quebec. They continue to come together for the yearly Ya Basta! gatherings, they organise feminist contingents when street protests are called by other antiauthoritarian groups, and they create ad-hoc organizing coalitions on an as-needed basis. Moreover, a good number of radical feminists from Quebec are involved in a burgeoning Canada-wide coalition of young feminists (14-35 years of age) called the RebELLEs movement²², initiated originally by the Federation des femmes du Québec (FFQ; Quebec Federation of Women), but who organize with a certain degree of autonomy. There are also newly emerging radical queer groups, like PolitiQ²³, who work on issues related to trans identities and other health-related concerns for trans people. In addition to the groups and networks mentioned above, which are explicitly feminist and/or queer and/or anti-racist anti-colonialist—our three micro-cohorts—most antiauthoritarian groups have strong feminist organizers within them, although the issues around which they may be organizing, such as the environment, community housing, or poverty, might not be explicitly feminist. Indeed there are many anarcho-feminists or antiauthoritarian feminists who do not organize in women-only groups, and this has historically been the case since the beginning of the anarchist movement.

3. Revolution by cross-pollination.

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

Within ourselves and our affinity groups: anti-oppression strategies for power sharing.

For many (*pro*)feminists, the process of cross-pollination begins with the self and one's immediate proximate environment, that is, with those who share affinity in organizing together on a daily or very frequent basis, perhaps even living together. Part of this proximate organizing involves self-governance and self-organisation, which are *processes* full of moments of excitement and pleasure, interspersed with moments of struggle, challenge and tension. For many of our research participants there is a recognition that in all human groupings there will be differences, which means that there is a constant challenge posed by the potential for these differences to become stratified and hierarchical. This tension plays out in two related ways. First, there is the simple fact that people have different ways of thinking, being and doing, and these differences can cause misunderstanding

²⁰ Research participants generally understood front-line struggles as those led by people directly affected by (multiple) oppressions, be it poverty, lack of status, racism, transphobia or sexism, to name a few.

²¹ Shirene Eslami and Robyn Maynard. «Anti-racist and anti-colonial antiauthoritarian networks in Montreal» (draft title). In Bellemare-Caron, Rémi, Émilie Breton, Marc-André Cyr, Francis Dupuis-Déri and Anna Kruzynski (eds.). *L'anarchisme au Québec aujourd'hui : idées, pratiques et espoirs*. Montréal: Lux Éditeur (forthcoming); Shirene Eslami and Robyn Maynard. *Anti-racist and anti-colonial (pro)feminists: a Monograph* (draft title). Collectif de recherche sur l'autonomie collective (forthcoming).

²² The RebELLEs movement website, <http://www.rebelles.org/> (accessed on January 11th 2011).

²³ PolitiQ, queers solidaires! website, <http://www.wix.com/politiq/politiq> (accessed on January 11st, 2011).

or conflict that must be addressed in order to facilitate collective self-governance and self-organisation. Second, there is the analysis developed within an anti-oppressive framework, that in our society different people have differing levels of privilege and thus more or less access to power over others. Power-over, according to “Nathalie and Tasha’s Fantastical Anti-Oppression Workshop,” is:

the exercise of privilege with the intention and/or effect of keeping those privileges and maintaining the overall pattern of distribution of those privileges (intention may be explicit or not; but good intention is not relevant)—we are all responsible for recognizing our own privilege and for making sure that we are not oppressing others.²⁴

The starting point for an anti-oppression framework is therefore an understanding of ourselves as implicated in the many roles we may play in different relations of oppression and privilege. These roles stem from those often-invisible privileges that **all** members of a dominant group are granted *de facto* because of their social location or membership in that group. As we come to recognize these positions of power, the anti-oppression framework allows us to identify the privileges from which we may benefit and how they mutually reinforce each other (that is, how different positions cumulate, overlay each other, and therefore confer more power). This implies becoming aware of and naming the mechanisms of power that are active at the junction points of different systems of oppression, to better combat them²⁵.

Given this understanding of the mechanisms of privilege (and not just oppression), we have found that many (*pro*)feminists have developed critiques of the idea that it is possible or even desirable to create movement spaces that are free of all structure or hierarchy. They have emphasized, following Jo Freeman, that a movement that claims to be without any structure can easily become tyrannical²⁶, as informal hierarchies develop and often people who do the most work or speak the most at meetings will gain a certain amount of power-over within a group, even though there is no official group leader. To counter this, some groups and networks regularly use mechanisms or tools in meetings that help people to reflect upon their social position and the behaviors that might facilitate or impede egalitarian social relations. Some of these mechanisms include: a power-line activity where people move forward or backward based on a list of axes of power, to help group members see their relative power and privilege; anti-racist workshops to build a better understanding of white supremacy and white privilege; trans 101 workshops to develop a deeper understanding of queer and trans identities and struggles; workshops on the language of domination that aim to facilitate the development of more respectful and inclusive communication skills; “check-ins” at the beginning of a meeting and “check-outs” at the end to name and respect each other’s emotional states and processes; a “vibe checker” who is responsible for identifying tensions and mediating if the need arises; speakers’ list strategies that aim to ensure everyone who wants to speak gets their turn; task-sharing to promote skill-sharing and reduce specialization which may lead to power-over; and so on. These mechanisms, and many more, allow for the naming of problematic behaviors, but they are often not enough when it comes to changing them. For instance, through these mechanisms, a group may identify that one member has significantly more influence related to her position of relative privilege. Perhaps she has acquired more knowledge because she does many tasks, perhaps she has more time to participate than others given her well-paid part-time job, or perhaps she has no children or other demanding responsibilities. In relation to privilege and oppression, perhaps she is more confident or feels more entitled to speak because of white or heterosexual privilege, she may come from a middle-class background and not be so worried about her economic survival as others in the group, she may have a higher level of education which intimidates others or causes them inadvertently to defer to her, and so on. For these and other reasons, such as being fluently bilingual or multilingual, a person may take on many of the more high-profile tasks, like public speaking or publishing, facilitating workshops or meetings, writing press releases, or doing outreach with the public. This is a self-perpetuating problem, because the more one takes on high profile tasks, the greater their confidence becomes, and the more others will expect her to continue to do those tasks. The problem of relative privilege, as we can see, is a complex and recurrent one that plagues many antiauthoritarian groups because it offers no easy solutions.

Some groups have dealt with this by organizing moments and spaces for skill-sharing or sharing knowledge and skills so that everyone may fully participate both in the self-organizing and self-governance of the group, and within their own personal lives as well. It is based on the recognition that skills do not need to come from formal education or experts. Skill-sharing may take the form of a workshop for group members given by an activist who is skilled in the particular area, or it may involve teaming-up a more experienced with a less experienced group member for a specific task. Processes such as skill-sharing provide opportunities for micro re-distributions of power, after anti-oppression workshops or meeting mechanisms such as the line of power have identified informal power hierarchies.

Within the broader antiauthoritarian milieu: power dynamics and allies

Experimenting with real-time lived equal social relations becomes an even greater challenge within the broader antiauthoritarian milieu. (*Pro*)feminists often bring these ideas and practices into the organizing picture when they participate in

²⁴ *Nathalie and Tasha’s Fantastical Anti-Oppression Workshop*. Montréal: QPIRG Concordia (not dated).

²⁵ Collectif de recherche sur l’autonomie collective. 2011. *Intersectionality, anti-oppression and front-line struggles*, Discussion-paper submitted to a CRAC retreat, February 12-13th 2011, Montréal.

²⁶ Jo Freeman. «The Tyranny of Structurelessness». In *Quiet Rumours*, Dark Star Collective.

groups, networks, activities, or convergences that, although antiauthoritarian, are not necessarily working through these ideas on a regular basis, and may sometimes be unreceptive or even hostile to them. More specifically, *(pro)feminists* are working to bring a feminist, queer, anti-racist and anti-colonialist analysis to the broader antiauthoritarian movement, drawing attention to the intersections of capitalism, class, poverty, the state and globalization with patriarchy, race, sex, (dis)ability, and gendered power relations.

In terms of organizational process, it happens regularly that an activist with an anti-oppressive sensibility will recognize unequal power dynamics arising in a large meeting, and take it upon themselves to name underlying tensions related to privilege and power. They are also the ones who will most often suggest incorporating mechanisms that may facilitate better lived equalized social relations. There is a risk associated with this task, which is that the person making these critiques or suggestions—often already struggling to be heard within the group—will be seen as disruptive, or have their concerns otherwise dismissed by the group as a whole, specifically by the powerful member(s) unwilling to examine their privilege. This is yet another on-going challenge.

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

(Pro)feminists who engage intentionally in support of those struggling on the front-lines on issues related to racism, imperialism and colonialism, particularly women of colour, have worked to define the role of an ally or supporter and put it into practice. Taking on this role means choosing to use (or not to abuse of) one's position of power and privilege to support the struggles of those who are directly affected by a problem. For example, Q-Team has explicitly chosen to support groups working on anti-racist, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles, based on their analysis of the current political context, the requests for support they have received, and the social locations of their members (e.g., Queers against Israeli Apartheid). Similarly, PolitiQ, struggling against heteronormativity and homonormativity, engages in support work with transsexuals and transgender folks; and *Les Panthères Roses* engaged in solidarity work with sex workers such as the peer sex-worker harm reduction group Stella. Concretely, this support may take the form of engaging in behind-the-scenes organizing or providing access to scarce resources, instead of taking on more visible, more externally validated roles like media spokesperson or outreach.

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

The roles played by many *(pro)feminists* are uncomfortable ones. Because all persons have internalised, to some extent, ways of being and doing that are contrary to an antiauthoritarian ethic, the moments during which behaviours are named, critiqued and reconstructed can easily become tension-filled. It is common that people feel attacked or guilty or both; they become nervous because they don't really know how to change things; they become afraid to talk or to do anything constructive. This space of discomfort is, however, also a potential zone for transformation. It is in these moments that learning occurs and that different social relations emerge, ripen and spread. These processes are part and parcel of a vision of social change based on revolutionary processes of collective self-governance and self-determination. In fact, fifteen years ago, when the contemporary antiauthoritarian movement first emerged in Quebec, there was little understanding among young activists of how internal group dynamics are related to privilege and power. There is no doubt that it is the busy work of *(pro)feminists* from both this and earlier generations that has allowed for a shift in organisational culture that today is more coherent with an antiauthoritarian ethic.

Within mainstream communitarian and social movements

(Pro)feminists also engage with more mainstream community and social movements. Radical feminists have facilitated workshops on direct democracy and direct action in women's centers during the mobilising activities for the World March of Women; radical queers work with Stella, a community organisation working on issues related to sex work; *(pro)feminists* involved in antiracist/anticolonial groups like No One is Illegal will work closely with the Immigrant Workers' Center on issues related to migrant justice; and so on. Less formal moments of junction are also very common. In fact, it is interesting to note how many antiauthoritarians choose to work for pay within these community and social movement organisations. The organizations

that attract *(pro)feminists* are most often themselves at the margins of the mainstream; they tend to share a conflict-over-power analysis that leads to an oppositional stance toward power-over (versus a collaborative stance)²⁷, they have remained true to their direct-democracy organisational form and to the process of political popular education, and they are more open to antiauthoritarian ideas and practices.

(Pro)feminist activists tend to shy away from state-funded community-based service organizations that are caught up in daily management of the consequences of the systems of exploitation.. Their thirst for self-determination also explains their hesitation to get involved in top-down formal social movement federations or coalitions that require official membership, that limit participation of members because leaders do the bulk of the work, or that require fees. Moreover, given that they/we do not believe that emancipation is possible within a system that is managed by the State and its institutions, they/we are critical of those organizations whose politics is one of demand rather than of the act. Generally, *(pro)feminists* do not demand rights or liberties from the State, as do most mainstream community and social movements. For most antiauthoritarians, these kinds of reforms end up legitimizing the State, reinforcing it while leaving the root causes of exploitation intact. That being said, many *(pro)feminists* will support or work on organizing campaigns to win concrete measures that improve living conditions in the short-term or that ensure peoples' survival. This is often the type of campaign that the community and social movement organizations named above tend to engage in, putting forward demands such as: more housing; de-criminalization of sex work; status for refugees; simpler processes for name changes for trans people; protection of forests from clear-cutting; and the like. At first glance, this may seem to contradict the politics of act that is at the heart of antiauthoritarian organizing; however, a nuanced analysis allows us to see that these kinds of reforms are of a different nature than those that supposedly protect rights or liberties. Here, people benefit immediately from the gains, gains that are in fact contrary to the interests of those in power, gains that are won by struggle, and that produce a balance of forces²⁸.

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

4. Concluding thoughts

(Pro)feminists have cross-pollinated our/their analysis, strategy and organizational forms among ourselves and our affinity groups, within the broader antiauthoritarian movement, and within more mainstream community and social movements. This cross-pollination work, intentional or not, has taken different forms, both formal and informal, be it through discussing and debating in regular meetings and activities, taking risks to name social relations that reproduce power-over, circulating organizing materials and tools, facilitating workshops and skill-shares, and/or supporting the struggles of people on the front-lines.

This work has contributed to the growth and deepening of an organizational culture that is grounded in an antiauthoritarian ethic, based on fundamental principles and strategies of collective self-governance and self-organization. More specifically, through self-organization and self-governance, *(pro)feminists* are helping to translate the specific values of freedom, solidarity, collective autonomy, social justice, respect, spontaneity and mutual aid into practice in various fields (organizations, movements, etc.), thereby contributing to the prefigurative process that is at the core of contemporary anarchist or antiauthoritarian organizing²⁹. This prefigurative process is about creating spaces for the practice of self-governance and self-organization—spaces of action, encounter, conflict, learning, politicization, deconstruction and reconstruction of social relations. These processes have cross-pollinated with mainstream community and social movement organizations; there is a growing renewed interest in antiauthoritarian ideas and practices, and some organizations are even loosening up their formal top-down organizational structures to make space for DIY activists, as well as opening their doors to discussion and debate about conflict-over-power analyses and strategies. These are some of the baby steps towards increased collective self-governance and self-determination in society as a whole. The more people who are exposed to these ideas and practices, who get to experiment with them and feel empowered in their experience, the greater the chances that a mass movement will emerge—and is perhaps already emerging—from the grassroots.

²⁷ Jill Hanley, Anna Kruzynski and Eric Shragge . La communauté : une politique néolibérale ou un site de transformation sociale? In Harper, E. (ed.), *Le travail social : théories, méthodologies et pratiques* (forthcoming).

²⁸ Anna Kruzynski and Marcel Sévigny. 2009. « Bâtir un contre-pouvoir ». *Revue Relations* 731 : 25-26. Available on line : http://www.revuerelements.qc.ca/relevations/archives/derniers_nos/731/731.htm.

²⁹ Geneviève Lambert-Pilote, Marie-Hélène Drapeau and Anna Kruzynski. 2007. « La révolution est possible : un portrait des groupes libertaires autogérés au Québec ». *Possibles: Les jeunes réinventent le Québec*, 31 (1-2); C. Milstein 2010; U. Gordon 2008; R. Day 2005.

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QTeam : <http://www.qteam.org/>.

RebELLEs : <http://www.rebelles.org/>