



The anarchist commons

Sandra Jeppesen, Anna Kruzynski, Rachel Sarrasin, Émilie Breton.
Collectif de Recherche sur l'Autonomie Collective (CRAC; Collective
Autonomy Research Group)

Analyzing the anarchist commons in Montreal, Canada using participatory action research interviews with 127 participants, we find that anti-authoritarian groups and networks addressing disparate but connected struggles are building an anarchist commons, constructing a loose grouping of spaces, networks and collectives united by a shared political culture. Key debates are explored, centering on: intentional development of the commons; mixed labour models; and anti-oppression practices of calling in vs. calling out. Participants indicate an understanding of the anarchist commons through theories and practices beyond capitalism, including feminist, queer, trans and anti-racist commitments. Finally we argue that the shared anti-authoritarian political culture provides a certain resistance to enclosure of the *anarchist commons* through the processes and practices used to construct it.

Introduction

The notion of the commons has long been understood as referring to spaces for open participation of regular people, and is thus both a concept and practice with an affinity to anarchism. De Angelis and Harvie (2014: 280) define the commons as 'social systems in which resources are shared by a community of users/producers, who also define the modes of use and production, distribution and circulation of these resources through democratic and horizontal forms of governance'. Caffentzis and Federici (2013) map out a partial history of the commons, showing how the sharing of land and projects for sustainable communities has long existed in a range of global locations and extensive formations. They consider several contemporary small-scale anti-capitalist

projects, suggesting that squats, urban gardens and other autonomous self-organized groups are examples of contemporary anti-capitalist commons. Thus the definition of the commons exceeds a simple notion of openness, as we see in Ostrom's account of the commons as a space 'where the members of a clearly demarked group have a legal right to exclude non-members of that group from using a resource' (Ostrom, 2000: 335). While *anarchist commons* tend to focus on open access principles, they also tend to provide basic membership principles articulated in a basis of unity, although these tend to fall outside any legal framework. The *anarchist commons* are spaces owned and managed in common by anarchists and anti-authoritarians, and sometimes open to outsiders (Anarchist FAQ, 2012).

Robinson (2009: 1) has found that, 'Anarchist social movements are relatively understudied, despite indicators of their resurgence in the last decade. Today, however, anarchist politics have diversified to address a variety of social issues'. An economic-determinist model of the commons must be extended to consider this diversity of struggles. In this paper we will describe our methodology, situate anarchist theories of the commons within the literature, and provide a mapping of the Montreal anarchist commons as a case study. We will argue that the range of anti-authoritarian groups and networks in Montreal addressing several disparate but connected struggles are engaged in building the *anarchist commons* in a loose grouping of spaces, networks and collectives that are united by a shared political culture (Sarrasin et al., 2012), illustrating this with examples from empirical interviews. Key discussions emerge, including the need for more intentional development of the commons, mixed-labour models that may address tendencies toward self-exploitation, calling people in rather than calling them out on oppressive behaviors, and understanding the anarchist commons through theories and practices beyond capitalism. Finally we will argue that this political culture and the processes engaged in provide a certain resistance to enclosure of the anarchist commons.

Methodology: Rooted participatory action research

This research project is part and parcel of the Montreal *anarchist commons*. It was undertaken by the *Collectif de Recherche sur l'Autonomie Collective* (Collective Autonomy Research Group, CRAC), a bilingual anti-authoritarian *profeminist* collective doing research with and rooted within anti-authoritarian groups and networks that have emerged in Quebec between 1995 and 2010 (Breton et al., 2012a; 2012b). The CRAC collective is comprised of anti-authoritarian and anarchist activists who self-identify as *profeminist*, and uses prefigurative non-hierarchical decision-making and research processes. We define the term

profeminist as anti-authoritarian and anarchist activists who self-identify and/or organize as radical feminist, pro-feminist men, radical queer, trans, anti-racist and/or anti-colonialist, where the ‘and/or’ signifies the possibility of identifying with more than one (Breton et al., 2012a).

We focused our research on anti-authoritarians concerned with resistance to patriarchy and heteronormativity, including environmentalist, anti-capitalist, anti-racist and anti-colonial organizers. We identified approximately two hundred anti-authoritarian and anarchist groups, which are listed on our website in an anarchist repertoire (CRAC, <http://www.crac-kebec.org/en>). From those, we interviewed 117 participants who self-identified as *profeminist*, in nine groups and networks (see Figure 1). Many of these have explicitly anarchist values and practices that confront the immediate lived realities of everyday life (Sarrasin et al., 2012; Kruzynski et al., 2012; Breton et al., 2012a).

Collectives	Networks
Convergence des Luttes Anti-Capitalistes (Anti-Capitalist Convergence, CLAC) (n = 22)	Féministes Radicales (Radical Feminists) (n = 15)
Les Panthères roses (The Pink Panthers; queer anarchist direct action collective) (n = 8)	Autonomous Gardens (urban autonomous farm collectives) (n = 15)
Ainsi Squattent-elles (Thus she squats; Anarchist-feminist radio program) (n = 9)	Profeminists organizing in anti-colonial and anti-racist networks (n=23)
Ste-Emilie SkillShare (queer people and trans people of colour arts collective space) (n = 9)	
QTeam (radical queer collective) (n = 10)	
Collectif Liberterre (Free Earth; green anarchist collective) (n = 6)	

Figure 1: Our sample of groups and networks in the Montreal anarchist commons.

The research took place in three phases: (1) initial contact and interviews; (2) compiling results into a monograph or case-study for each group/network and validating them through collaborative discussions, of which seven have been completed (CRAC, 2008; 2009; 2010a; 2010b; Breton, 2013; Eslami and Maynard, 2013; LeBlanc, 2013); and (3) a transverse analysis across all of the interviews on specific themes, with a validation of findings in the research

collective and then in focus group workshops. This paper presents findings from the transverse analysis on the theme ‘political culture’ – a comparative analysis of all of the groups and networks taken together. To validate and extend the findings, we held a weekend of reflection in February 2011 in which approximately 80 activists participated. The transverse analysis was conducted by activist-scholars each with ten or more years’ experience in the anti-authoritarian milieu, and this participatory experience also informs our analysis.

Situating the anarchist commons: Theory and practice

The commons is a concept used to indicate spaces and goods that are held and used in common by a community or collectivity. De Angelis and Harvie (2014: 290) argue that the relation between capitalism and the commons has always been one of ‘co-dependence and co-evolution’, as even very early forms of the commons were subjected to the logic of enclosures, often benefiting the already wealthy. Neoliberal capitalists today are engaged in an intensified enclosure of the commons, in an ‘attempt to subordinate every form of life and knowledge to the logic of the market’ (Federici, 2010). Countering these enclosures, ‘new forms of social cooperation are constantly being produced’ that construct a commons as a third space, an ‘alternative to both State and Private Property’ (*ibid.*). While the commons eschew the capitalist profit motive, De Angelis and Harvie (2014: 290) find that the labour and resources of the commons may sometimes support capitalist activity. Moreover the commons itself may be theorized with capitalist assumptions as per Hardin (1968), who assumes that, for example, herders on a commons will feel compelled to increase their herds limitlessly, thereby exponentially depleting the resources of the commons until they are no longer useful. De Angelis and Harvie (2014: 286) provide counter examples where those using a commons are more concerned with long-term sustainability and subsistence than capitalist accumulation. While Hardin’s type of commons does not ‘put constraints on, and push back, practices based on commodity production and capital accumulation’ (De Angelis and Harvie, 2014: 291), explicitly anti-capitalist commons that promote independence in social reproduction and horizontal decision-making often do (*ibid.*).

Caffentzis and Federici (2013: 92-94) propose six criteria for an anti-capitalist commons: (1) commons are produced; (2) commons are invested in collective labour; (3) commons should be non-state, and produce the public good; (4) commons serve community, balancing responsibilities and rights; (5) “commons require regulations”; and (6) commons are founded on egalitarian principles. The proposal offers a principled starting point for considering the features of an *anarchist commons*, which has shared organizational principles and political

commitments that challenge the economic logic of late capitalism, as well as its social logics. However, there are some differences.

The *anarchist commons* draws on the anti-capitalist commons in that it is distinct from both private property and state-owned commons. It does not preclude selling or buying things, but rather exchanges at events such as the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair are governed by anarchist norms—the booksellers will be worker co-ops such as AK Press; the food providers will be horizontal activist groups such as the People’s Potato or the Midnight Kitchen; people will trade or sell zines and patches for the cost of production; art, film, radio, and other media are freely accessible to users and producers. There is a political economy of mutual aid based on self-determination and prefigurative political practices fostering horizontal social, political and economic relationships. This political economy appears to be very resistant to the logic of capitalist and other forms of enclosure.

The *anarchist commons* creates a political culture in organizational practices based on shared commitments to diverse political struggles, shared ethical principles, and alternative social norms. As Grégoire¹, a participant from the CLAC (*Convergence des Luttes Anti-Capitalistes*, or the Convergence of Anti-Capitalist Struggles) mentioned:

For me, what was super important, was the organizational mode. The principle of general assemblies and self-management and the decentralization that we tried to do which didn’t necessarily work, but the effort in all facets of doing that, to do it differently... It was one of the only activist milieus that made the effort to include Francophones and Anglophones in the same milieu, or to do rotation of certain tasks such as facilitation, a speakers list, all of that, these were the means that I found interesting which made the involvement activist, not just in the results but in the way things were done.

These social norms are part of an anti-capitalist *profeminist* ethic, favoring cooperation over competition, listening over speaking, gift or barter economies over profit, and linguistic inclusivity. Norms of political process are put into practice in workshops, discussion spaces and other types of public spaces organized by anarchists such as the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair. These include: no behaviors that exhibit sexism, racism, heterosexism, colonialism, ableism or other forms of oppression; taking turns and being respectful when others are speaking; raising one’s hand to be on a speakers list which prioritizes marginalized and first-time speakers; twinkling or making jazz hands rather than

¹ All quotes from participants are anonymized. Names have been changed, although activist group and network names are given for context. Some quotes have been translated from French to English by the authors.

interrupting when one likes what someone is saying; self-facilitating by being aware of how much space one is taking up and limiting interventions if speaking too often; and doing go-around check-ins where everyone in a workshop introduces themselves, says what pronoun they go by, and speaks about how they are feeling, their organizing work, and/or what they expect from the meeting or workshop; and explicit processes for addressing dominating behaviors. These social norms are not predominantly anti-capitalist, but are based on *profeminist* anti-oppression politics, and are expressed in the basis of unity for various groups, for example, the Bookfair's statement of Principles (Montreal Anarchist Bookfair, n.d.).

The social norms of the *anarchist commons* described here are part of a widespread global political alternative based on three important principles: collective autonomy, self-determination, and self-organization.

First, *collective autonomy* is the principle in which collectives or affinity groups are organized in autonomous formations, as distinct from NGOs, political parties, social services, unions or other top-down organizations. They are autonomous specifically from capitalism and the state, and their autonomy is put into practice through processes that create collective autonomy through day-to-day actions. As Rowan, a participant from Liberterre said, 'The idea is that it is not really the government who is going to do something, so the actions, it is necessary to take them in hand personally and collectively'.

Second, *self-determination* is the principle in which collectives determine how they will function themselves. Decisions are not separate from responsibilities and rights, but rather are negotiated with and respectful of the diversity of communities the collective exists in relationship with. However, external organizations or individuals may not determine decisions of the group. As Victoria from ACAR (profeminists organizing in anti-colonial and anti-racist networks) mentions: 'if you're working from a place of the politics of self-determination, that [for] the issues that you are working on, the people most affected by those issues should be the ones leading those struggles, and [at] the forefront of them'. Conversely, the group will not determine decisions for others. Monique from Ste-Émilie Skillshare puts it this way: 'If everybody talks their own life and talks about their own story and doesn't try to pretend they're somebody else's or try to pretend that they know about somebody else's life or somebody else's struggle, then we don't need to steal from other cultures, right?'. Thus a respect for self-determination is applied both internally and externally to a collective.

Third, *self-organization* is the principle by which collectives organize themselves using horizontal processes such as consensus decision-making. As a CLAC participant, Kai, stated: ‘I think that it is something that everyone has access to construct, to influence, to share tasks, to build consensus, so that one is not dependent on institutions, the government, that it is by our own efforts, our own will, our own work, that our direction is determined by ourselves’. Groups use task rotation, skill-sharing, and other forms of knowledge co-production to organize and carry out their work in self-organized formations.

Moving beyond anti-capitalism, *profeminist* anti-authoritarians use anti-oppression politics (Breton et al., 2012b), theorizing oppression using intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989; Sandoval, 2000; hooks, 2000; 2007 [1984]; Bilge and Denis, 2010). Oppression can be defined as illegitimate institutionalized power that allows certain groups to exercise dominance over others. These are some of the axes along which oppression takes place:

[gender], race, colour of the skin, age, ethnicity, language, ancestral origin, sexual orientation, [sexual practices], religion, socioeconomic class, skills, culture, geographical location, and status as migrant, Indigenous person, refugee, internally-displaced person, child or person living with HIV/AIDS, in a conflict-zone or occupied territory. (Morris and Bunjun, 2007: 5)

An opposition to all of these interlocking systems through collective organizing is at the heart of the *anarchist commons*.

Empirical findings: Practices and processes in the anarchist commons

The cartography of activism (CRAC, 2011: 3) in the anarchist commons using an anti-oppression intersectionality framework can be conceptualized as a set of five overlapping circles (see Figure 2):

- *Profeminist*, anti-patriarchy, anti-sexism, for bodily autonomy
- Anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-imperial, international solidarity, (im)migrant and refugee rights, e.g., No One Is Illegal, Solidarity City, Israeli apartheid
- Environmental justice, food security, e.g., Liberterre, Autonomous gardens, People’s Potato, Midnight Kitchen
- Queer, trans, anti-heteronormative, anti-homonormative, e.g., QTeam, Ste-Émilie Skillshare, Les Panthères roses
- Anti-capitalist, anti-state, anti-police brutality, workers’ rights, anti-poverty, anti-gentrification, no borders, no prisons, e.g., CLAC, Centre Social Autogéré, Collective Opposing Police Brutality.

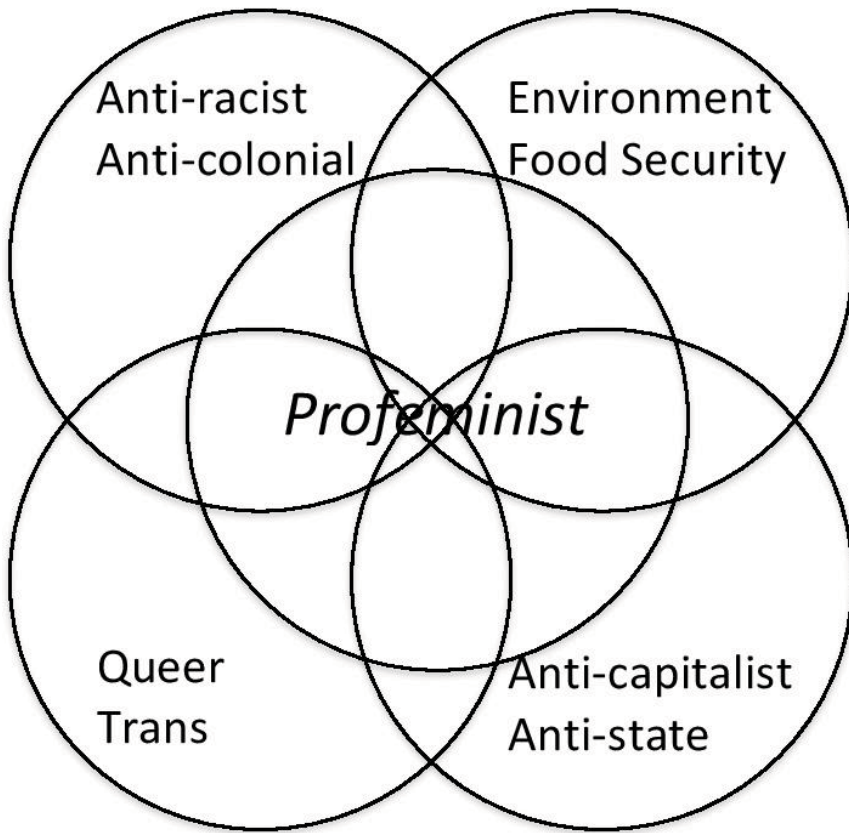


Figure 2: Cartography of the anarchist commons in Montreal.

Many struggles occur at the overlap of two or more circles. Migrant worker struggles occur at the intersection of anti-capitalism and anti-racism, and may also connect to queer and trans struggles. Gaza was mentioned by several participants: a pink (queer) bloc would participate in a Gaza solidarity protest, and an anti-Israeli-apartheid group such as Queers Against Israeli Apartheid might participate in an LGBTQ pride parade. Police brutality connects to anti-racism in struggles against police profiling, and racialized violence and shootings. Anti-capitalism intersects with colonialism in indigenous struggles against resource extraction, which intersects with environmental justice. *Profeminist* practices intersect with every struggle.

We have found that anarchists and anti-authoritarians are engaged in providing for ourselves and simultaneously radically altering the types of spaces and services that are typically expected to be provided by the state (education, health care, child care), capitalism (media, food production, clothing, retail stores,

workplaces), or personal relationships (housing, kinship, love, intimacy). Examples include popular education workshops such as those put on at the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair or the Forum Against Police Violence and Impunity, Community Supported Agriculture provided by the autonomous gardens, and intentional family relationships mentioned by Ste-Émilie Skillshare.

Furthermore, we have found that anti-authoritarian individuals, groups and networks taken as a whole represent a contemporary articulation of anarchism defined by a fluid political culture and set of processes or ‘a collective identity built around a way of being, thinking, and doing’ (Gordon, 2007: 14). Despite some of our differences, we refer to ourselves as a whole when speaking of the movement, and when we talk about social change, we talk in large part about the same things (CRAC, 2011: 4-5). Anarchism is thus understood as both a set of prefigurative processes and a political organizing culture that creates and is created by the anarchist commons.

Prefigurative processes of the anarchist commons

Ideas and practices spread within anarchist spaces, communities and outward through non-hierarchical processes of ‘cross-pollination’ (sharing principles and practices through face-to-face discussions as people move between various collectives and meeting spaces) that grow out of a commitment to principles of mutual aid and co-production of knowledge. Anarchists set up and self-manage spaces that allow for expressions and practices of collective autonomy in the here and now, as Emerson from *Les Panthères roses* expressed:

For me, what is also important, is to create spaces. I don't believe in the complete change of the world tomorrow morning, but for me it's already very important to be able to create spaces where political ideas can really be put into practices, my political ideas must be put into practice. That I am able to live according to my ideas, I think it is already an enormous job. It is really very difficult. Anyway, for me, it allows me to go out into the world outside, which is savage, and to be able to survive because I feel well.

They are collectively rather than individually oriented, challenging individualism, and re-orienting toward community, caring, compassion, mutual understanding, and respect.

Emanating from this orientation toward the commons and the public good is the collective production of autonomy from top-down institutions. Collective autonomy cannot just be written down in a manifesto or basis of unity however, it must be put into practice in everyday processes. As Stéphanie put it,

You're always going to run into people that haven't done much self-reflection and I think however radical of a group you build with all kinds of structures in place to make sure that racism within an organization is minimized, that organization is part of society so it has to be constant on-going work. You can't be like "well we've, you know, put in place our anti-harassment policy or anti-racism policy so we're good to go." It always has to be on-going work.

Other examples of process-related techniques include: check-ins and check-outs at the beginning and end of meetings, when people share personal experiences and discuss how they feel about the meeting; a vibe-minder to track the emotional tenor of the meeting and call for a break if people are getting aggressive, tense or tired; a time-watcher to ensure each topic doesn't go over time (a known pitfall of consensus decision-making!); scheduled play times to create pleasure in the organizing process; and retreats that set aside decision-making to concentrate on relationship building and visioning. As people engage in anti-authoritarian processes, they develop alternative capacities by creating relationships that replace socio-cultural norms of domination with cooperation, active listening, collective self-care, and consensus building.

In addition to the use of anti-authoritarian processes, a second understanding of anarchism as process is the concept of permanent revolution. As Carlsson and Manning (2010: 951) argue, 'human beings are forever resilient in recreating patterns of behavior based on mutual aid, collaboration, and collective need, despite the forces working against those desires and impulses'. But to categorize and constrain these behaviors and practices would risk becoming authoritarian, so many participants agreed that it was neither necessary nor desirable to solidify the definition of their projects in any prescriptive way, sometimes even avoiding the label of anarchist as too constrictive (Breton et al., 2012a; 2012b).

Most participants recognized that the ways we organize may differ, according to the decisions taken by those directly concerned, based on their social position, and their understanding of how best to put collective autonomy into practice. Thus affinity groups placed importance on open-endedness with respect for a multiplicity of ideas and practices, and for free and voluntary association. The fact that there may be tensions between people or groups with different needs and aspirations is what makes attentiveness to process so important. Cindy Milstein (2010) argues that it is precisely in the struggles of day to day organizing that anarchism takes place, and our findings confirm this (CRAC, 2011: 7-8).

Shared political culture of the anarchist commons

The shared political culture of the anarchist commons is similarly organic, experimental, open to change, adaptable to geo-political developments, and emblematic of an overall political fluidity, without being trapped in an endlessly

self-referential cultural relativism on the one hand, or a fixity of purpose, structure and demands on the other. The shared anti-authoritarian political culture can be characterized in three ways: solidarity and forefront organizing through confrontation and construction; value-practices in affinity group organizing; and anti-oppression consciousness integrated into day-to-day organizing.

For the most part, anarchist work is grounded in a dual political strategy of confrontation and construction. Confrontation strategies aim to destabilize and delegitimize the current socio-political order, whereas construction strategies build grassroots alternatives. Being in solidarity with those active on the frontline of struggles was seen to be a key anarchist 'value-practice' (Jeppesen, 2009). Strategies for acting in solidarity and being good allies were widely discussed. Stéphanie articulates a common position on solidarity:

it's important to send a message of solidarity, to send a message to the people that are directly affected "you're not alone, and other people care." I think it's important to send a message to the oppressors that there's not universal consent to the oppression. For example, a message being sent to the Canadian government that – I'm just focused on Gaza because it's happening right now – a message that not all people in Canada think that's it okay that Canada is being complicit in the bombing of Gaza. And also, it's an important way of *using* that privilege. Sometimes you just have more access to power structures, or more leeway to take certain risks, as someone that's not directly affected. So migrant justice organizing springs to mind, like, people that don't have immigration papers are taking a much greater risk in taking a direct action where you're going to get arrested, than people that do have immigration status. So if at a certain point it is strategically useful to do a direct action with a high degree of risk of arrest then that's a role for allies.

Solidarity organizing takes place when those most affected are at the forefront of the struggle taking leadership roles, but not necessarily at the forefront of the protest facing down police lines. This conception of solidarity suggests that people with more privilege will use their social location to work with and support those in frontline struggles, a position reiterated in our weekend of reflection. One participant, however, mentioned that when they came to Canada from Latin America many activists wanted them to be at the forefront of Latin American solidarity organizing. They felt it was difficult to live up to those expectations as they were just one person among many in the struggle. This kind of figure-heading may inadvertently serve to create awkward hierarchies of expected leadership, and we must be careful not to establish new power dynamics through our rejection of these very power inequities. Checking in with people about how they feel in specific situations, and practicing active listening may be helpful.

In addition to the forefront model, anti-authoritarians articulated a commitment to a shared set of principles, of which we identified ten: social justice, mutual aid, solidarity, freedom, equality, spontaneity, autonomy, democracy, respect for diversity, and creativity (CRAC, 2011: 5). Grounded in these principles, ‘value-practices’ (Jeppesen, 2009) emerge that define the shared political culture. For example, the principle of mutual aid might result in the value-practice of resource sharing, whereby resources such as a computer, food, work expertise, a spare bed, heirloom seeds, or books and zines might be shared mutually among activists.

Affinity group organizing is a common decentralized form of anti-authoritarian political culture. Affinities can coalesce around identities, interests, or localities, such as a neighborhood that is gentrifying (Centre Social Autogéré) or a personal identity such as queer and trans people of colour (Ste-Émilie Skillshare). Some affinities were found to be quite different. For example, the anti-gentrification work undertaken by the Centre Social Autogéré was organized among people who lived in the same geographical proximity, where activists reached out to strangers to develop affinities. On the other hand, Ste-Émilie considers their affinity to be so close that they self-identify as an intentional family. Networking structures used by affinity groups are flexible and decentralized, allowing for effective communication, coordination, and organization of campaigns in everyday life. There is a common understanding among anti-authoritarians of what an affinity group entails, and how such a collective will be organized using a shared political culture.

We found that people in various networks (e.g., radical feminists, *profeminists* organizing in anti-colonial and anti-racist networks) organized in both explicitly anarchist groups and more mainstream groups. This included radical community groups that worked along anti-authoritarian lines but were not explicitly anarchist. However, some people felt that there were limits to this kind of work, as some groups’ practices did not account for interlocking oppressions:

in mainstream organizations where there’s an assumption that everybody participating in the organizing personally has enough money to, say, hold the meeting in an expensive restaurant, or if the meeting goes beyond last metro, we can all take a cab home... Those are the instances where I would feel silenced; if the group itself has no conception of the operating of oppression within the group itself. (Stéphanie)

This example emphasizes attempts to address interlocking issues through practices such as providing free food at meetings, ensuring meetings end before the last metro, and providing dependent-care and transportation subsidies.

These principles are flexible to some extent, as anarchist practices account for practical modes of crisis intervention where survival is at stake. Stéphanie mentioned specific examples where they would make decisions based on immediate need:

I have no qualms about taking a woman to a women's shelter, even if that women's shelter doesn't accept trans women or women who don't have immigration papers. If the woman that I'm working with is going to be not killed by her spouse if I take her to that women's shelter, and is going to be killed by her spouse if I don't, I'm going to take her. Or if somebody's going to get deported if we don't get the Canadian Council of Refugees to sign on to their case.

Anti-authoritarians would prefer a women's shelter that is trans-inclusive, with a 'don't ask, don't tell' policy so that undocumented people can access its services. However, a person's immediate survival needs would over-ride these political or ideological preferences.

The prefigurative processes and shared political culture of the anarchist commons are continually under development through self-reflection and in response to political change.

Discussion

All of these forms of anarchist organizing, taken together, form a set of alternative institutions and social-political practices, and yet this *anarchist commons* faces several challenges today.

Intentionality

Federici (2010) suggests that there is a problem in the lack of cohesion of the commons, as 'the left has not posed the question of how to bring together the many proliferating commons that are being defended, developed, and fought for, so that they can form a cohesive whole and provide a foundation for a new mode of production'. Our research confirms this.

Collectives and affinity groups tend to start because there are individuals interested in a particular topic, issue, identity, or practice. The *anarchist commons*, therefore is not intentional in terms of collectively taking decisions among the entire community to start or provide particular anarchist 'institutions'. Each city, instead, will have specific institutions depending on local factors. Philadelphia has a mental health care collective called Philly's Pissed partially due to explicit struggles with mental health and gendered violence. Toronto had an Anarchist Free University for many years. Vancouver has several vegetarian collective

restaurants because of the west-coast emphasis on sustainability and permaculture. Montreal has several anarchoqueer collectives because the city is home to a large radical queer population. The challenge is for the global anarchist movement to make decisions more intentionally, so that each city can have a flourishing *anarchist commons* that might provide all of these institutions, or so that institutions can be networked together.

It was also found that collectives come and go, as the need for specific activism arises, or the geopolitical context shifts. As Adrienne from QTeam said:

I don't really feel like it's even necessary for QTeam to last forever. I really think that QTeam is there to serve the needs of the people who are organizing within it and if that need changes or if there's no longer that need than I don't think that those individuals are going to stop doing queer activism or doing activism, I think it will have served its purpose and people will do other things because that's what's coming up.

Challenges thus are less directly related to enclosure, and derive instead from questions of sustainability, adaptability and resilience, due to the experimental nature or changing needs of our organizing work. Groups such as QTeam, Ste-Émilie Skill-Share, the CLAC, and other *profeminist* anti-authoritarian collectives did not express a concern about enclosure of the commons, or the co-optation of their groups by capitalism. The organizing structures, processes and political culture seem to make enclosure unlikely, as the commitment to a consistency of ends and means, or prefiguration, prevents this to a large extent. Instead what was emphasized was that a balance needs to be struck between intentional long-term sustainable collectives and spaces, and fluid adaptability of activists and collectives to sociopolitical events and collective needs.

Self-exploitation

In 'Nowtopia' Carlsson and Manning (2010: 925) suggest that labour separated from class relations is not exploitative, as people 'reinvent work against the logic of capital', and 'fully engage their capacities to create, to shape, to invent, and to cooperate without monetary incentive'. But one of the internal critiques of anarchist organizations is that, although we might critique exploitation by capitalists, when working for ourselves we often engage in self-exploitation, working long hours for little pay. Some anti-authoritarian worker co-ops, such as the Media Co-op, are faced with difficult choices between paying low wages in order to make the collective sustainable, and maintaining the financial sustainability of writers and editors who may need to find other jobs, or work extra unpaid hours.

Unpaid activism is another anarchist working model. Many activists said they didn't have time to do all of the organizing work they wanted to. The Montreal anarchist library (DIRA) and the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair are both organized and run by unpaid volunteers. The 'labour of love' model of anarchist organizing and of 'nowtopia' are an integral part of neoliberal labour precarity. José van Dijk (2009: 50) argues, 'the sliding scales of voluntarism are inversely proportional to the sliding scales of professionalism, resulting in new mixed models of labour'. The risk is that participation in unpaid/underpaid jobs may lead to fewer opportunities for paid professional positions, as contemporary critics of internships argue (de Peuter, Cohen and Brophy, 2012). Activists may inadvertently be playing into the hands of neoliberalism, trading off creative and political autonomy for personal austerity, a practice which may not be sustainable. As Jacqueline argues,

It was self-managed, I guess, but CLAC couldn't ever survive without the support of other factors in society. It wasn't independent from society,... it's not like a self-managed factory, a self-managed territory. ... You have to rely on universities for your space or funding or people have to rely on working at Café Dépôt if it's that, or working as a professor's assistant, or not working, rely on welfare. It was self-managed as an institution, sure, but it wasn't self-reliant.

Mixed-labour models, where people work part-time at low-wage jobs and do unpaid labour in activist groups, do not guarantee collective self-sufficiency, whereas the *anarchist commons*, considered as a whole, has this potential if it can become slightly more intentional.

Unpaid activist labour can lead to burnout, which depletes the collective resources of the *commons*, as experienced individuals may not have the capacity to pass on expertise. This over-exertion often falls on the shoulders of those experiencing multiple oppressions, specifically women and/or people of colour and/or queer and trans people and/or indigenous people and/or people with disabilities. Furthermore, when anti-capitalists burn out from doing too much anti-capitalist organizing, they often return to living in capitalist modes, as there are few supports in place for those not engaged in collective organizing. Thus the tensions in amateur/professional or unpaid/paid labour are crucial to resolve for the long-term sustainability of the anarchist movement and its participants.

Calling people out/calling people in

Racialized, gendered, heteronormative, colonial or ableist group dynamics also cause tensions, which may be dealt with directly by 'calling people out' on their privilege. Resources such as 'White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack' by Peggy McIntosh (1989) or 'Where was the Color in Seattle?' by Elizabeth Martinez (2000) were helpful in facilitating these kinds of conversations.

Activists noted, however, that the process of calling someone out is emotionally draining. The person calling out might not find support in the group for taking this action. Those called out might leave one group and join another, failing to check their own behavior. The process might sideline a collective's organizing work, and some collectives might not survive the process.

Other activists noticed a group's racialized or gendered dynamics, but second-guessed themselves because the people who seemed dominant also appeared more experienced. Paradoxically, the power dynamics that felt oppressive were second-guessed because those dominating the meeting were so effective in asserting their power as a right to speak. Yet others noted how they silenced themselves because they worried about being judged for not having the correct political analysis.

Ngoc Loan Tran (2013) argues that calling out can be draining, heartbreaking, and destructive. Instead of 'calling out', they propose 'calling in':

I start "call in" conversations by identifying the behavior and defining why I am choosing to engage with them. I prioritize my values and invite them to think about theirs and where we share them. And then we talk about it. We talk about it together, like people who genuinely care about each other. We offer patience and compassion to each other and also keep it real, ending the conversation when we need to and know that it wasn't a loss to give it a try.

Calling out and calling in are both practices of anti-oppression politics that attempt to call into question dominating behaviors internalized from the dominant culture.

The desire to focus on building bridges through caring and compassion is a strong current in the *profeminist* anti-authoritarian movement. There is a desire for gentleness, pleasure, enjoyment and passion in life and in organizing, which motivates us in calling people in rather than out, engaging in collective self-care rather than self-exploitation, and creating intentional families or affinity groups with other people we care about.

Beyond the anti-capitalist commons

The anarchist commons is thus different from an anti-capitalist commons. Caffentzis and Federici (2013: p. 95) assert that: 'Anti-capitalist commons are not the end-point of anti-capitalist struggle, but its means'. Anarchists, however, have always argued for prefiguration in that the means and ends must be consistent. The principles or means of self-organization, self-determination and collective autonomy are also the ends or strategic long-term goals of anarchist organizing. What is important is the *process* of creating social change, not just in moments of

rupture, such as protests, but also through living arrangements, food production, work relations, knowledge co-production, media, and art, all of which expand and nurture the anarchist movement. These processes are themselves political, creating a new type of society through their practice. Because they are explicitly anti-capitalist in both means and ends, they offer strength in resisting co-optation or enclosure by the mainstream.

Second, the Marxist emphasis on economic relations is inadequate to the task of producing a diverse commons. For Habermas (1991 [1962]), the public sphere comprises the sum of all communicative action to create cooperatively generated mutual understandings among people to make positive political contributions to society. The anarchist commons includes practices related to challenging straight-white-male (SWM) domination of anti-capitalist and anarchist counter-public spaces that include feminist (Fraser 1992), queer (Berlant and Warner 1998), anti-racist (Sehdev 2002), and anti-colonial (Tuhiwai Smith 1999) counter-publics.

Demonstrating the interconnectedness of issues in the anarchist commons, queer activist groups such as QTeam or Les Panthères roses engage in direct actions that critique pink dollars and consumerism in the gay village, and they are also active on issues such as Israeli Apartheid, critiquing the Israeli state's false claim that the gay nightlife of Tel Aviv somehow compensates for their oppression of Palestinians. This solidarity is reciprocal. As Stéphanie mentioned,

I do see it as important for directly-affected people to self-organize. I do think solidarity is needed, but not only solidarity, like, from people who aren't affected towards people who are affected, but solidarity amongst all kinds of different people that are fighting all kinds of different oppressions, right. So queer people are oppressed, Palestinians in Gaza are getting bombed so it's good solidarity to have a pink bloc at the Gaza demo, right. So it's not just non-Gazans have privilege and Gazans, Palestinians don't so therefore – like I think when solidarity is one way, it's pretty tenuous.

To take a second example, Ste-Émilie Skillshare provides a queer and trans inclusive space for artistic production and hanging out, which is also explicitly anti-racist and anti-colonial. Instead of economic determinism, the *anarchist commons* derives from the principle of solidarity with those directly affected by an issue, challenging the hierarchy of oppression that considers economic oppression first.

A third question to consider is the liberal assumption inherent in the notion of egalitarianism. Caffentzis and Federici (2013: 94) caution against constructing the commons around a homogenous privileged group; they are concerned that participation be open to all, through 'access' and 'egalitarian decision-making',

key principles in an *anarchist commons*. They overlook potential challenges, however, in creating a commons within a diverse and structurally unequal society. Micro-aggressions, cultural differences, and structural inequities (for instance requiring a time commitment that only the privileged can fulfill, requiring people to speak the dominant language, etc.) can close the doors of a commons to specific groups despite a stated commitment to egalitarianism. This often happens in activist spaces, as was widely discussed by the Occupy movement (cf. Farrow, 2011; Doyle, 2011). While anarchist groups are also plagued by similar dynamics, many *profeminist* groups and collectives have developed practices to challenge this, as we have shown here. The *anarchist commons* thus does not presume egalitarianism, but actively fosters relationships of equality based on *profeminist* anti-oppression practices, horizontal organizing, and prefigurative politics (Breton et al., 2012), which can create and bring together a diverse range of interconnected counter-hegemonic publics.

Conclusion

A large proportion of anti-authoritarian organizing in Montreal is done by women, queer and/or trans people and/or people of colour. There may be SWM-dominated anarchist groups, however, the anarchist milieu in Montreal cannot be reduced to these groups. As Lucie observed,

You would come into any meeting in Montreal and be like ‘wow there’s lots of folks of colour here’ which is true. Most of the anti-capitalist organizing that I’ve been involved with there’ve been lots of folks of colour involved. I think that it’s a very particular – I would say that most people of colour that you meet who are at these meetings are highly educated.

This research reveals the depth and breadth of anti-authoritarian organizing along anti-racist, anti-colonial, queer and/or feminist lines, allowing us to extend our understanding of what counts as anti-authoritarian activism and to challenge the invisibilization of these forms of activism within the anarchist movement.

Processes for dealing with power imbalances in horizontal collectives range from the formal to the informal. For example, Lucie from ACAR talked about an informal process undertaken in the context of organizing against Israeli apartheid:

[T]his kind of ties into the question in terms of hierarchy of oppressions. I think sometimes gender-based analysis falls by the wayside ... Organizing around Apartheid stuff, we’re in a huge group where there are a lot of strong personalities, some women who have really strong personalities and men who have really strong personalities, and it ends up that a lot of the men in the group end up taking up a lot of space. It also ends up that the only Palestinian in the group is a man. And

there are just these ways that it plays out I think in those [big] meetings... where we have to get a lot done ...while also keeping a bigger view, of the bigger picture, and everything that's going on in Gaza right now. ... [T]here are times in that room where it feels like women's voices aren't being heard ... [S]ome people go away from the meetings sometimes and talk about it afterwards and sort of talk through it, and I've seen it actually change, and I've seen some of the dynamics change, and it's really exciting.

Feminist discussions took place outside the collective among active members, and males in the group took it on to self-facilitate, becoming aware of how much they tended to speak, and trying to speak less to make space for others to participate.

An anti-oppression framework helps us to name, discuss, address, and account for power dynamics in organizing spaces, workplaces, home spaces, and everyday life. The starting point is an understanding of ourselves and the roles we play in different relations of oppression/privilege. These roles derive from (in)visible privileges that all members of a dominant group are granted *de facto* because of their social location. Moreover, axes of privilege reinforce each other; different positions accumulate, overlay each other, and thereby magnify power and status. Through its focus on anarchism as process and shared political culture, the *anarchist commons* is not just resistant to enclosure by capitalism, but also to domination or enclosure by white supremacy, patriarchy, colonialism, ableism, and heteronormativity.

The *anarchist commons* is thus more than just the sum of its parts. It is a deep-seated political project prefiguring a constantly evolving alternative political form based on principles of collective autonomy, self-determination, and self-organization put into practice in the pleasure, work, everyday living, and activist organizing that make up all of our lives. As Nicole from Ste-Emilie Skillshare puts it:

I think that I like it best when we are all together, in this cheesy way [laughs], like when there are Open Studios, and everybody is here and there are so many nice people coming in, like, I don't know, whether just hanging out and talking about people stuff and working on projects together and stuff. Like for example, the Anxiety Zine is the best project ever, like everybody was here all the time folding paper, hanging out, and this was really, really nice. That's one of the best parts of organizing at Ste. Émilie.

references

Anarchist FAQ (2012) 'What about the "tragedy of the commons"? Surely communal ownership will lead to overuse and environmental destruction?' [<http://www.infoshop.org/AnarchistFAQSectionI6>].

- Berlant, L. and M. Warner (1998) 'Sex in public', *Critical Inquiry*, 24(2): 547-566.
- Bilge, S. and A. Denis (2010) 'Introduction: Women, intersectionality and diasporas', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 31(1): 1-8.
- Breton, É. (2013) 'La CLAC: portrait d'un réseau anticapitaliste', in R. Bellemare-Caron, É. Breton, M-A. Cyr, F. Dupuis-Déri and A. Kruzynski (eds.) *Nous sommes ingouvernables. Les anarchistes au Québec aujourd'hui*. Montréal: Lux éditeur.
- Breton, É., S. Jeppesen, A. Kruzynski, and R. Sarrasin (Research Group on Collective Autonomy) (2012a) 'Prefigurative self-governance and self-organization: The influence of anti-authoritarian (pro)feminist, radical queer and antiracist networks in Quebec', in A. Choudry, J. Hanley and E. Shragge (eds.) *Organize! Building from the local for global justice*. Oakland, CA: PM Press.
- Breton, É., S. Jeppesen, A. Kruzynski, and R. Sarrasin (Research Group on Collective Autonomy) (2012b) 'Feminisms at the heart of contemporary anarchism in Quebec: grass-roots practices of intersectionality', *Canadian Woman Studies*, 29(3): 147-159.
- Caffentzis, G. and S. Federici (2013) 'Commons against and beyond capitalism', *Upping the anti*, 15: 83-97.
- Carlsson, C. and F. Manning (2010) 'Nowtopia: strategic exodus?', *Antipode*, 42(4): 924-953.
- Collectif de recherche sur l'autonomie collective (CRAC) (2011) 'Anti-authoritarians in Quebec: united by a political culture', Discussion paper, February 2011, Québec.
- Collectif de recherche sur l'autonomie collective (CRAC) (2010a) *Les Panthères roses de Montréal: un collectif queer d'actions directes*. Montreal: CRAC.
- Collectif de recherche sur l'autonomie collective (CRAC) (2010b) *Une Révolution peut Commencer par un Seul Brin de Paille: Portrait de deux jardins autogérés de la grande région de Montréal*. Montreal: CRAC.
- Collectif de recherche sur l'autonomie collective (CRAC) (2009) *Ainsi Squattent-Elles!* Montreal: CRAC.
- Collectif de recherche sur l'autonomie collective (CRAC) (2008) *Collectif Liberte terre*. Montreal: CRAC.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989) *Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Legal Forum.
- De Angelis, M. and D. Harvie (2014) 'The commons', in M. Parker, G. Cheney, V. Fournier, C. Land (eds.) *The Routledge companion to alternative organization*. Abingdon, Oxon, and New York, NY: Routledge.
- De Peuter, G., N. Cohen and E. Brophy. (2012) 'Interns unite! You have nothing to lose – literally', *Briarpatch*, 9 November.
- Doyle, S. (2011) 'How Occupy's (non) power structure enables sexism', *Global Comment*, 26 October [<http://prospect.org/article/occupy-wall-streets-race-problem>].
- Eslami S. and R. Maynard (2013) 'L'antiracisme et l'anticolonialisme au cœur des luttes antiautoritaires', in R. Bellemare-Caron, É. Breton, M-A. Cyr, F. Dupuis-Déri et A. Kruzynski (eds.) *Nous sommes ingouvernables. Les anarchistes au Québec aujourd'hui*. Montréal: Lux éditeur.
- Farrow, K. (2011) 'Occupy Wall Street's race problem', *American Prospect*, 24 October [<http://prospect.org/article/occupy-wall-streets-race-problem>].
- Federici, S. (2010) 'Feminism and the politics of the commons', *The Commoner*, 14 [<http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=113>]

- Fraser, N. (1995) 'Politics, culture, and the public sphere: toward a postmodern conception', in L. Nicholson and S. Seidman (eds.) *Social postmodernism: Beyond identity politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gordon, U. (2007) 'Anarchism reloaded', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 12(1): 29-48.
- Gordon, U. (2008) *Anarchy alive!* London: Pluto.
- Habermas, J. (1991 [1962]). *The structural transformation of the public sphere*. Boston: MIT Press.
- hooks, b. (2007 [1984]). *Ain't I a woman: Black women and feminism*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- hooks, b. (2000) *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
- Jeppesen, S. (2009) 'Creating guerrilla texts in rhizomatic value-practices on the sliding scale of autonomy: toward an anti-authoritarian cultural logic', in N. Jun and S. Wahl (eds.) *New perspectives on anarchism*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Kruzynski, A., R. Sarrasin and S. Jeppesen (2012) 'It didn't start with Occupy and it won't end with the student strike: the persistence of anti-authoritarian politics in Quebec', *WI: Journal of Mobile Media (Out of the Mouth of Casseroles I)*, Spring issue [<http://wi.mobilities.ca/it-didnt-start-with-occupy-and-it-wont-end-with-the-student-strike-the-persistence-of-anti-authoritarian-politics-in-quebec/>].
- Leblanc, J. (2013) 'Contre le patriarcat, je résiste et je me bats', in R. Bellemare-Caron, É. Breton, M-A. Cyr, F. Dupuis-Déri and A. Kruzynski (eds.) *Nous sommes ingouvernables. Les anarchistes au Québec aujourd'hui*. Montréal: Lux éditeur.
- Martinez, E. (2000) 'Where was the color in Seattle? Looking for reasons why the Great Battle was so white', *Colorlines* [http://colorlines.com/archives/2000/03/where_was_the_color_in_seattlelooking_for_reasons_why_the_great_battle_was_so_white.html].
- McIntosh, P. (1989) 'White privilege: Unpacking the invisible backpack' [<http://www.isr.umich.edu/home/diversity/resources/white-privilege.pdf>].
- Milstein, C. (2010) *Anarchism and its aspirations*. Oakland, CA: PM Press.
- Montreal Anarchist Bookfair/Salon du livre anarchiste de Montréal (n.d.) 'Principles' [<http://www.anarchistbookfair.ca/about/principles>].
- Morris, M. and B. Bunjun (2007) 'Faire de la recherche avec les cadres d'analyse féministe intersectionnelle. Pour saisir la complexité de la vie des femmes' (Doing research with a feminist intersectional analysis framework: Understanding the complexity of the lives of women), Ottawa: Institut de recherche sur les femmes [<http://www.criaw-icref.ca/faire-de-la-recherche-avec-les-cadres-danalyse-feministe-intersectionnelle-pour-saisir-la-complexite>].
- Ostrom, E. (2000) 'Private and common property rights', in B. Bouckaert and G. De Geest (eds.) *Encyclopedia of law and economics, Volume I: The history and methodology of law and economics*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar [<http://encyclo.findlaw.com/2000book.pdf>].
- Robinson, C. M. (2009) 'The continuing significance of class: Confronting capitalism in an anarchist community', *WorkingUSA*, 12(3): 355-370.
- Sandoval, C. (2000) *Methodology of the oppressed*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sarrasin, R., A. Kruzynski, S. Jeppesen, and É. Breton (Collectif de recherche sur l'Autonomie Collective) (2012) 'Radicaliser l'action collective: portrait de l'option libertaire au Québec', *Lien social et politique*, 68: 141-166.

- Sehdev, R. K. (2002) *Anti-racism and public spheres: An examination of the politicization of anti-racism at the Writing Thru Race Conference, 1994*. Ann Arbor. MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Tran, N. L. (2013) 'Calling IN: A less disposable way of holding each other accountable' [<http://www.blackgirldangerous.org/2013/12/calling-less-disposable-way-holding-accountable/>].
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (1999) *Decolonizing methodologies*. London: Zed Books.
- Van Dijk, J. (2009) 'Users like you? Theorizing agency in user-generated content', *Media Culture & Society*, 31(1): 41-58.

the authors

Collectif de Recherche sur l'Autonomie Collective (CRAC; Collective Autonomy Research Group) is an anti-authoritarian, (pro) feminist research collective active between 2006 and 2012. CRAC was devoted to the study of anti-authoritarian initiatives in Quebec using a participatory action research methodology.

Sandra Jeppesen has been active in the global anarchist movement for many years, in environmental, anticapitalist, feminist, antiracist and queer actions and organizing. She is a writer and educator, currently employed as Assistant Professor in Interdisciplinary Studies, Lakehead University Orillia, and Coordinator of the program in Media Studies for Social Change.

Email: sjeppese@lakeheadu.ca

Anna Kruzynski was first involved with a radical feminist collective (Nemesis) and is now a member of a neighbourhood-based anti-authoritarian affinity group, la Pointe libertaire, working towards the self-management of all aspects of community life. She is employed as Associate Professor at the School of Community and Public Affairs, Concordia University, Montreal.

Rachel Sarrasin is an ally of the anti-authoritarian movement in Quebec. She has just completed her PhD in Political Science at Université de Montréal on the dynamics of the anti-authoritarian movement between 2000 and 2010. She is also employed as a political science teacher in the CEGEP network in Quebec.

Émilie Breton has been a community organizer in the anti-authoritarian and anarchist milieu in Quebec for many years. She was a Masters student in political science at the Université de Québec à Montréal, and conducted interviews with the Convergence des Luttes Anti-Capitalistes (CLAC). She is now studying acupuncture and oriental medicines.