

# “Marginalizing Magdalena”

Intersections of Gender and the Secular in Anarchoindigenist  
Solidarity Activism

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**At the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair** in May 2008, more than a hundred people crowded into Kwakwaka'wakw author Gord Hill's workshop on Colonialism, Anarchism, and Indigenism, the most popular event that day. Synthesizing anarchist and indigenist philosophies of egalitarianism—*anarchoindigenism*—is a popular project among this generation of radical activists. On the same day local anarchist activists offered a workshop on Anarchism and Atheism, explaining how these are mutually inextricable. While the construction of non-Western anarchism may be valid and the emergent discourse of *anarchoindigenism* signifies a promising conversation across difference, none of the indigenous peoples that activists consider anarchist are atheist. The ironic juxtaposition of these workshops and the tension between them exemplifies a schism in *anarchoindigenism* and the solidarity activism it engenders.

Below I illustrate some practical challenges to transnational anarchistindigenous solidarity activism posed by antireligious sentiments among anarchist activists. Drawing on fieldwork I conducted among Montreal anarchist collectives in 2006 and 2007, I focus primarily on a speaking tour organized by nonindigenous anarchists that brought two indigenous activists from Oaxaca, Mexico, to Que'bec and Ontario. This story constitutes an example of how a secular worldview compromises anarchist activists' ability to engage in horizontal solidarity across difference. The same tale also serves to illustrate another aspect of anarchist activist praxis that appeared during my research: anarchists' lack of engagement with gendered power within activist collectives and the gendered aspect of neoliberal political economy.

While both these issues—secular biases and gendered definitions of politics—are complex problems themselves, in this article I engage with both in order to highlight a manner in which they are articulated: the public/private divide as applied to religion and politics and to the domestic and the public is one and the same. I demonstrate the combination of these dichotomies in their dual marginalization of an indigenous woman during the speaking tour, and I argue their historical articulation for three reasons. First, by throwing into relief the coemergence of both dichotomies in the context of capitalist modernity and the colonial encounter and by showing instances of how these prevent horizontal collaboration across race, culture, and gender in coalition activism, I suggest a political economic function of secularism—the doctrine that separates politics from religion. In other words, we may consider secularism a form of racism that functions to uphold the logic of neoliberal political economy, even among some very committed anticapitalist activists. Furthermore, I will argue that this disenchantment tale contributes to what it describes, reducing vision for radical transformation most generally. In more than one sense, then, activists' engagement with religion may be more subversive than anarchists allow.

Second, just as work has been done among feminists to demonstrate the historicity of the domestic/public split and the ideological function of heterosexuality in capitalist and neoliberal restructuring, I propose two interrelated reasons why feminists in particular should take up the project of interrogating the political economy of secularism: the dichotomies opposing both gender and religion to the political cannot be understood

in their isolation, and secularist attachments prevent transcultural solidarity among women.

Third, a political economic analysis of secularism is rhetorically useful to engage many of the activists in question. Political economic discourse is the language of the activists in my research, and in many ways their analysis is quite sophisticated. I feel it timely and important to speak to, as well as about, such activists because anarchist-indigenous activist networks are proliferating around the globe and the challenges and potential of these encounters are likely similar to the ones that appeared during my research. I therefore aim to contribute pragmatically to a “pro-lineal genealogy” (Smith 2008, xxvii) of anarcha-indigenism, that is, a genealogy that charts the potential of anarchoindigenism if centered by the analyses and experiences of indigenous women.<sup>1</sup>

My discussion is organized in the following manner. First, I briefly describe the genealogy of the anarchist activism I researched. This will serve to explain my terms—after all, “anarchism” is a word charged with a wide array of meanings and is often misunderstood. I then introduce my field site and methodology. The remainder of the article is organized into two parts, whose threads converge in the concluding sections. The first part is an ethnography of the speaking tour, followed by an examination of secularism in terms of how it challenges anarchist solidarity activism across racial and cultural divides as well as limits the radical imaginary most generally. The second part begins with another ethnographic segment to illustrate gendered power and conflicts among the activist collectives I researched. This is followed by an analysis of challenges to anarchist solidarity across gender as well as among anarchafeminist and indigenous women.

The two concluding sections synthesize the previous discussions in different, complementary ways, aiming to build bridges both in theory and in practice. In the first of these sections, I draw articulations between gender and secularism (leaving aside anarchism) to discuss specific challenges to feminist solidarity across cultural difference and argue for new openings in this regard. This discussion concludes by suggesting a certain congruence between anarchists’ political philosophy and the subjectivity of many women’s movements in Latin America—a possible inspiration for future anarchist solidarity movements. Finally, I summarize the pitfalls and possibilities illustrated here of putting the discourses and praxes of feminism, anarchism, and indigenism in conversation and recapitulate how my ethnography and analysis may contribute to a prolineal genealogy of anarcha-indigenism.

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that, while the ethnographic routes we travel differ, Andrea Smith’s own prolineal genealogy of coalitions among feminists, anticolonial indigenous struggles, and evangelical Christian movements involves a critique of the secular Left that parallels my own.

## Historical and ethnographic context

I provide here a select history of the alterglobalization movement, since this is the context in which the term “anarchism” has recently returned to currency, imbued with new significances, and from which anarchoindigenism arises as a discourse. The alterglobalization movement might arguably be traced to the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, which began in 1994, on the day that the North American Free Trade Agreement came into effect.<sup>2</sup> The Zapatistas’ subsequent use of Internet media to make their struggle known and to call for a global mobilization against neoliberalism resonated strongly among diverse activist groups all over the world (Khasnabish 2008). The Zapatistas’ engagement with the racialized, gendered, and capitalist logic of neoliberal globalization resonated with many anticapitalists who had become disillusioned with “old” class-based politics yet who saw the limits of “new” rights-based identity movements (Day 2005; Graeber 2008). The Zapatistas’ particular autonomist approach also signaled a new anticapitalist relationship to the (Mexican) state. As opposed to the “old” anticapitalists who sought a dictatorship of the proletariat, the Zapatistas sought to “change the world without taking power” (Holloway 2005).

All these aspects particularly appealed to autonomist, anarchist, and antiauthoritarian movements all over the world that, by nominal definition, are against all forms of domination and critique the hierarchical state form as oppressive, unnecessary, and part of the world capitalist system. Anarchists have a long history of identifying egalitarian, stateless societies among indigenous peoples (e.g., Kropotkin 1955), an imaginary that the Zapatista movement both evoked and revitalized. The neologism “anarchoindigenism” is often invoked in conjunction with a reverence for the Zapatistas (see, e.g., Alfred 2005).

For all these reasons, when the Zapatistas organized the Second International *Encuentro* (Gathering) for Humanity and against Neoliberalism in Barcelona in 1998, more than three thousand activists from fifty countries arrived, a significant portion of whom identified as autonomist or anarchist (Juris 2008). Many of these people were North American and European activists whose movements combined the ideals and rhetoric of the Western anarchist traditions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the organizational forms of feminist movements responding to the authoritarian New Left, that is, prefigurative politics (means matching ends), consensus decision making, and the ideal of participatory rather than representative democracy (Katsiaficas 2001; Lamoureux 2004; Maeckelbergh 2009). At this Zapatista *Encuentro* the activists present syncretized all these ideals with those of the Zapatista movement when they organized the People’s Global Action (PGA) network.

The PGA network, born at this meeting, proliferated into many regional direct action networks that in turn coordinated the series of large-scale mobilizations, the first of which took place in Seattle in 1999, against the World Trade Organization, the

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the Zapatista uprising, see Harvey (1998).

International Monetary Fund, and other neoliberal initiatives. It was the regional PGA network in Montreal that organized the demonstration against the Free Trade Area of the Americas in Que ´bec City in 2001 (see Graeber 2008). Most of the activists in my ethnography were politicized in this context or shortly afterward. Many identified as anarchist, others as autonomist anticapitalists. All shared the ideal of means matching ends and made collective decisions by consensus. All activist collectives organized autonomously from the state, being critical of the nation-state form and of all hierarchical organizations. All activists revered the Zapatista movement to differing degrees and looked to other anticolonial indigenous peoples movements for inspiration as well.

## Methodology

I began this research project with a history of experience among these social movements in Montreal. My decision to research my peers’ and my own activism was inspired by my familiarity with both its compelling and its problematic aspects, a desire to articulate constructive critique, and my knowledge that my insider/outsider positionality as activist/researcher would allow a unique opportunity—after all, anarchists tend to be extremely critical of “the establishment” and are not inclined to trust academics they do not know. I proceeded according to the tenets of feminist participatory research methodology put forth by Patricia Maguire: “development of critical consciousness of both researcher and participants; improvement of the lives of those involved in the research process; and transformation of fundamental societal structures and relationships” (2008, 418). During the research process I worked to identify participants’ own perceptions of significant problems in our activist practice (422) and ultimately concentrated on the themes I chose based on the fact that many of my peers—granted, mostly women—felt it was important to do so. The central site of research was an autonomist Zapatista solidaritycollective that I had recently joined. When I began my fieldwork, I explained I would be conducting participant-observation research but would protect the anonymity of all participants in my writing. Beyond one year of participant observation (2006–7) within meetings, public events, and informal gatherings, I interviewed activists in our collective and those who attended the events we organized. We often collaborated with other activist collectives to organize events such as the speaking tour I describe in this article. I researched these collectives as well from my unique vantage point within the Zapatista collective. These sites were secondary in that my research among them involved less intense participant observation and a less systematic set of interviews. However, the significant amount of contact I had with activists in these other groups allowed me to distinguish patterns among collectives versus the idiosyncrasies of my own. While the ethnography offered here refers primarily totheZapatistasolidaritycollective,itcanbetakentorepresentcertaingeneral patterns among these collectives.

All the quotations I offer in this essay come from my field notes rather than recordings. They were either collected during the course of my participant observation and written down that same day or else scribbled down during conversations and interviews. One of the challenges in researching anarchist activists is a wariness among them that recordings and photographs evidencing their participation could be used against them if they were to fall into the wrong hands. Thus, although audio recordings, videos, and photographs can bestow a certain legitimacy on research findings, the very fact that they may constitute indisputable evidence is the reason I could not and would not pressure activists to offer them. For the same reasons, I have used pseudonyms for the names of activists and collectives that appear here. In any case, names are irrelevant since the purpose of my research is not to critique any particular person's or collective's practice but to speak to certain discourses, logics, and practices common among them. I call our group the *La Otra Campan~a* (the other campaign) collective because it was inspired by the Zapatista initiative that went by this name, and I note to my readers that this collective no longer exists at the time of writing.<sup>3</sup>

Our *La Otra Campan~a* collective had a shifting core of a dozen people, half originating from Mexico, half born in Que´bec. A few dozen others would rotate in and out of meetings and attend larger events. We organized demonstrations to raise awareness of social movements and their repression in Mexico, held film screenings and speaking events on related topics, and organized benefits to support political prisoners in Chiapas and Oaxaca. We spoke in a mix of English, French, and Spanish—all three languages that I speak. In 2006 we coorganized the speaking tour of two activists from Oaxaca, which I discuss below.

## Part I: Who's speaking in the speaking tour?

In October 2006, several anarchist collectives in Montreal, including our *La Otra Campan~a* collective, collaborated in organizing a speaking tour of two indigenous activists from Oaxaca who were involved in the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (*Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca*; APPO). The APPO had formed in June that year, following police repression of a camp (*planto´n*) of teachers occupying the central plaza of Oaxaca City. What began as an annual demonstration for fair wages and school supplies became a broader movement as Oaxacans joined to support the teachers who had been attacked. They formed the *Asamblea*, demanded an end to government corruption, and called for the removal of the governor of Oaxaca, Ulises Ru´ız Ort´ız. Over the course of the summer, APPO participants took control of

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<sup>3</sup> *La Otra Campan~a* was the Zapatistas' campaign parallel to the Mexican federal election campaign of 2006, which aimed to build a broad national movement from below and to the left (*desde abajo y a la izquierda*).

local media outlets, barricaded the city against police, and coordinated the autonomous government of the city of Oaxaca through APPO assemblies.<sup>4</sup>

The coincidence of the speaking tour with these sensational events was by chance, however. The tour had first been proposed in 2005, long before the APPO existed, to raise awareness of indigenous peoples' struggles in Oaxaca in general. Montreal activists had invited an indigenous man and woman from Oaxaca to come as spokespeople through an international anarchist Internet network. A man's name was advanced at the outset, but choosing a woman took longer for reasons unknown to us, causing a yearlong delay. By the time Juan and Magdalena finally arrived in October 2006, the story they had to tell—and the story activists in Montreal wanted to hear—was the story of the APPO.

The monthlong tour through Que´bec and Ontario involved events at universities, community centers, union offices, and the indigenous communities of Kahnawake, Six Nations, and Kanehsatake. Juan spoke of union movements, the formation of the APPO, and the state repression of his people. He spoke in the third person, assuming the voice of a generalized, objective “other.” Magdalena spoke in the first person, about specific people who were tortured and what they told her afterward. She told stories about her experience as a community health worker (*promotora*) and described how government representatives tried to persuade her to promote sterilization among indigenous women across the region. Magdalena also spoke of the need to maintain harmonious ways of life among the communities (*pueblos*) and the need to respect all of Creation, land, water, and peoples. She spoke alternately of God (*Dios*) and the Creator, synthesizing moral ecology and popular Catholicism. The anarchist translators largely omitted these references and summed up her narratives rather than offering the word-for-word translation they granted Juan's discourse.

In November we attended a telling of the *Gayanashagowa*, the Great Law of Peace of the Iroquois (*Haudenosaunee*), at the community of Six Nations, where Juan and Magdalena were the final speakers and guests of honor. Before Magdalena spoke, she inquired about the correctness of mentioning God, being sensitive to the horrific stories she had just heard about the church's residential schools for indigenous youth in Canada. A man in our collective said “F—k Jesus anyway, we're not here to talk about religion, what's important is the struggle (*la lucha*)!” to which Magdalena responded, “Maybe I shouldn't speak, let Juan go without me.” Another collective member and I assured her that she could express herself freely, that the audience would understand the difference between her faith and an endorsement of this church. It was true. The indigenous translator captured her poetry, and the audience hung on her every word, nodding as she spoke.

In university activist settings, however, the response was quite different. The audiences, like the organizers and translators, responded much more enthusiastically to

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<sup>4</sup> For deeper discussion of the APPO movement, see Mart´mezVa´squez (2007) and Castro de Sa´nchez (2008).



Juan: “Remember when that guy asked why the APPO is against political parties and Juan answered ‘Because we are indigenous’? Wasn’t that awesome?” Magdalena inspired much less discussion. When I asked audience members what they thought about Magdalena’s contribution, I received responses such as “Oh, she’s got a lot of ... spirit,” and the conversation would inevitably return to Juan.

In the second week of the tour, a shift was perceptible. Whereas at the beginning of the month Juan and Magdalena were splitting speaking events equally, gradually Juan was occupying the microphone for longer periods of time. He would pass the microphone to Magdalena to introduce herself in Zapotec (her first language) and then take it back, speak for an hour, and pass it back to her to thank the crowd and say good night. While one could partially attribute this to disrespect on the part of Juan, the situation was clearly more complicated: a dialectic between Juan and the audience—including tour organizers—was encouraging his speech while marginalizing that of Magdalena.

Some women activists, myself included, noticed this and were troubled. We approached the men who were to form the next relay of accompaniment during the tour and suggested we discuss the situation. One man replied, “Magdalena doesn’t want to talk, she’s very shy, and we have to respect cultural differences; we shouldn’t force her to do something she does not want to do.” Other men echoed the need to respect “cultural norms,” citing antiracism as an important collective value. Yet another said it was important to keep our “white feminism” to ourselves, as it was not appropriate to “impose our personal politics.” One woman responded by asking if any of them had actually asked Magdalena how she felt, including whether she would like to be speaking more. The first interlocutor shrugged, while another replied, “Let’s face it, Juan has more of an analysis, he is more articulate, educated, and he’s had more experience in politics and the union movements.”

This argument was striking for a few reasons. The man’s comment alluding to our responsibility not to intervene due to Magdalena’s cultural difference was an ironic invocation of cultural relativism given these activists’ otherwise uncompromising critique of representation in favor of participation. Despite their concern with “voice” (as in “giving voice” to “indigenous activists”), the substitution of Juan’s voice for Magdalena’s was seen as unproblematic. The second response pointing to Juan’s more extensive experience in politics and superior education was also both disturbing and revealing. I recount this argument as well as the conversation at Six Nations deprecating religion versus *la lucha* (the “pure” struggle) because together they summarize succinctly the logic implicit in many other activists’ conversations I recorded during this tour.

These exchanges illustrate interlocking axes marginalizing Magdalena’s subjectivity and voice. On the one hand, Magdalena did not have an “analysis” since she situated her struggle in religious as opposed to materialist terms; on the other hand, Magdalena displayed less “experience in politics” because she had not participated in “union movements” but rather worked as a *promotora* struggling against the forced sterilization of indigenous women—a distinction based on gender. I believe that each of these preju-

dices would have worked against her independently, but the overlapping effect of two public/private dichotomies—as applied to sexuality and religion—made it especially difficult for her listeners to understand her as political.

I will consider and challenge each of these dichotomies in turn, and then in their interaction. I begin first with the opposition of religion and politics.

## Part I (continued): “No gods, no masters”?

Once my attention was drawn to the activists’ prejudice against religion during the speaking tour, I began to sense a systematic taboo against religion within my collective and others with which we worked. David Graeber’s recent ethnography of anarchist activism (based partially in Montreal) suggests that the staunch secularism of past anarchist movements has subsided precisely because of increasing anarchist collaboration with indigenous peoples movements as well as the influence of anarchafeminist paganism (2008, 220). While these currents do exist, in my own experience the majority of anarchist activists are still devoted to secularism (and the pagan-anarchists to whom Graeber refers are a favorite butt of their jokes). As has been noted elsewhere, while there is arguably an anarchist sensibility in many religious traditions (see, e.g., Damico 1987; Marshall 1993), religiosity is rare in the anarchist tradition per se (Christoyannopoulos 2009).

I offer a few examples of anarchists’ prejudice against religion from my fieldwork. The organization that funded Juan and Magdalena’s airfare was the Christian Committee for Human Rights in Latin America (*Comite ´ Chretien pour les Droits Humaines Amerique Latine*; CCDHAL), yet in the speaking-tour documentation the group appeared as CDHAL, without the “Christian.” This was also the case in pamphlets referring to CCDHAL at the Montreal Anarchist Bookfairs in 2006 and 2007—an explicitly Christian organization is apparently not welcome next to “The Hardcore Punk Guide to Christianity” and stickers quoting Mikhail Bakunin’s famous phrase: “If God really existed, it would be necessary to abolish Him.” In La Otra Campan˜a collective meetings, we would often lament our lack of contact with communities beyond the “student radical scene.” But whenever we were invited to attend church picnics to share (*convivir*) with working-class or immigrant communities, heated debates would ensue about whether to compromise our antiauthoritarian ideals by endorsing Christianity. Invitations would ultimately be rejected.

There is a particular irony in all of this, since our collective was meant to be a Zapatista solidarity collective. It is well documented that pastoral projects of the Catholic Church in the 1970s and 1980s played a key role in the mobilization of indigenous resistance in Chiapas (see, e.g., Floyd 1996; Womack 1999) and that Catholic faith as well as “the ways of the ancestors” (Nash 2001, 227) contributed to the communitarian ideals that informed the 1994 Zapatista uprising (215–26). Even the Zapatista motto

*mandar obedeciendo* (lead by obeying) comes originally from the catechism (Womack 1999; cited in Otero 2004, 339).

Furthermore, while liberation theology does not critique male domination, its analysis of other social hierarchies has led indigenous women to question gender inequalities (Herna ´ndez Castillo 2008). And it was women’s insistence on challenging domination in everyday life that expanded the Zapatista movement’s goals from “the redistribution of wealth or the expropriation of the means of production” to include those about “the human being having a space for dignity” (Subcomandante Marcos in Le Bot 1997, 146). It thus might be argued that what qualifies the Zapatista movement as anarchist rather than Marxist is due to religious activity. One might think that anarchist-minded Zapatista solidarity activists would therefore not be so categorically dismissive of religion, however valid their critiques of the institutional church.

But such was not the case. Given that the activists with whom I worked often expressed, overtly and tacitly, that famous Marxist adage “Religion is the opiate of the masses,” it appears that deeply entrenched prejudices against religion within materialist socialist theory greatly influenced their worldview. This was to the detriment of their solidarity work and, as I will argue, their anticapitalist imaginary more generally.

Below I examine secularism, both socialist and liberal varieties, as historically rooted in capitalist modernity and the colonial tradition. To understand how secularism is itself integrated within colonial capitalist political economy helps to clarify how challenging it must form part of an anticapitalist project. In other words, anarchists and others are advised to rethink their prejudice against religion not merely to respect cultural difference or honor the particular philosophical genealogy of Zapatismo but, more importantly, to consider how secularism as an ideology impedes anticapitalist and anti-imperialist resistance more broadly.

The concept of “religion” is a construct of European modernity. Throughout much of the world, what may be seen as sacred beliefs and practices are not conceived as a discrete sphere of life. It was in the context of the colonial encounter, where Europe discovered its own gods as a part of a diverse pantheon, that Christianity granted other communities and traditions the name it had only ever given to itself—religion—and reincarnated itself as “secular” (Anidjar 2006). The dichotomy of “religion” and the “secular” is thus founded in the imperial project of Western Christendom, which it thereafter served to justify (Asad 2003). In other words, by dividing “religion” from “politics” the European capitalist state mystified its Judeo-Christian cosmology. Secularism may also be understood in its specifically capitalist as well as Christian/colonial genealogy: the naturalization of the rational, secular marketplace encouraged the idea of a mystical, private sphere of religion (Fitzgerald 2007). In our day, neoliberalism takes the hyperrational logic of liberal capitalism to the extreme in its idealization of the “free” rational market and individual subject (Harvey 2006).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Consider, e.g., the function of the religious/secular binary during the United States–led war in Iraq. The Washington administration’s “faith-based” politics is in fact secular, i.e., based on the notion

Secular socialism developed in tandem with secular liberalism. Beforehand, European social movements that aimed to redistribute wealth and level social power, including those movements against enclosure, privatization, and state consolidation, had “religious” foundations (see Linebaugh and Rediker 2000; Federici 2004). Likewise, anti-colonial millenarian movements sprang up regularly all over the world as responses to the ravages of colonial capitalism (see, e.g., Burridge 1969; Varese 1996). The particular notion that revolutionary movements must be against God(s)—that is, against not just the church but the notion of the sacred—as well as the ruling class is due specifically to the secularization of utopian thought in the Western tradition, concomitant with the rise of capitalism and colonialism. This genealogy is found in the works of Charles Fourier, François-Noël Babeuf, Robert Owen, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Henri de Saint-Simon, Louis Auguste Blanqui, Mikhail Bakunin, and, of course, Karl Marx, who developed materialist-socialist ideologies (see Manuel and Manuel 1979; Lancaster 1988, 164–94). The main point to appreciate here is that atheist socialism and anarchism are historically specific; just as the European state displaced its Christian origins, so Marx and Friedrich Engels’s revolutionary program represented a secular adaptation of Christian socialism. God is replaced by History, the new “man behind the curtain.”

Rather than viewing popular religion as necessarily socially stabilizing, secular-minded anarchists should perhaps consider the synergistic relationship between sacred rituals of transgression and radical political movements (Burke 1979; Bakhtin 1984). Revolution in fact appears to be very possible where modernity collides with tradition, where “moral economies” are inextricable from popular religious practices (Scott 1976). I have already pointed to the religious and indigenous cosmological underpinnings of the Zapatista movement, which the activists in my collective avowedly aimed to emulate. Furthermore, it has been argued that in Oaxaca, Mexico—the state Juan and Magdalena originated from—it is in popular religion especially that “social critique may be seen, heard, and felt” (Norget 2006, 16). While popular religion alone may not overturn the dominant order, it nevertheless acts as a wellspring against colonialism, capitalism, and anomie.

Considered in this light, we may see religious sensibilities (such as Magdalena’s) or the conscious reenchantment of the world (e.g., the rituals of pagan-anarchists) as acts of resistance, challenging the dichotomy of spirit and matter that Gloria Anzaldúa calls the root of all violence (1987, 36–37). In this sense, materialist socialism simply does not go far enough. Jane Bennett’s work on “enchanted materialism” (2001, 80) is a promising inroad here; she demonstrates that without the sense of wonder, indeterminacy, and “presumptive generosity” (12, 131) related to an enchanted sensibility, leftist moral codes and calls for coalition are inert. Perhaps this is why Laura Pulido (1998) notes that, even during the twentieth century, some of the more power-

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of superior, privatized religion vs. a projection of the Muslim world that lacks a separation between religion and politics. It is this very construction that has served so well to advance neoliberal reform in Iraq (see Harvey 2006).

ful social movements have been based on “spirituality” because of its “creative power” (721–22). Classic secular/materialist socialist and anarchist critiques largely took for granted the analytical categories of liberal political economy: what often constituted a rhetorical strategy has come to function as an analytical trap. The anarchists in my research aimed to subvert neoliberal political economy, yet they did not question the disenchanting worldview that it is imbricated with, which is a cosmology of its own—a self-referential, all-encompassing paradigm as historically specific as those identified as religious—and one that takes for granted the ideal hyperrational subject presupposed by neoliberalism.

The fact that the activists in my research were unable to recognize the subversive potential of religious sensibilities, whether those of Magdalena or more generally, is therefore disturbing beyond their failure to respect others’ “difference” or “identity.” Beyond merely respecting a voice like Magdalena’s, activists might do well to listen to it. In sum, we must go beyond “theorizing primarily from the point of marginalization” (Alexander 2005, 328; see also Smith 2008, 83, 89, 222). A truly decolonized solidarity must entail taking the sacred seriously and must consider the belief structures of its practitioners as having effects that are real (Alexander 2005, 326–28). The vast majority of people in the world, including activists, are not secular subjects. And if we distill the sacred foundations from the political work undertaken by this majority—that is, if we distill the content from the form—we miss crucial lessons about the radical imaginary (Alexander 2005, 326).

Sometimes the anarchists with whom I worked critiqued other (white, Western) anarchists’ religious practices as cultural appropriation because these anarchists had not been socialized into these practices from birth but had adopted them later. This throws into distinct relief the problem of anarchists’ preoccupation with “respecting” (reifying?) cultural identity. The sacred is thus rendered as alterity, nothing more than a cultural accoutrement. Instead, it may be argued that decolonization requires a deliberate relearning of the indivisibility of the material and the sacred, which is different from appropriation and commodification (Anzaldú 1987, 68–69). Taiaiake Alfred, a Mohawk exponent of anarchoindigenism (2005, 45), similarly writes that ceremony and ritual are not “mystical” but rather “serve real purposes in grounding us and keeping us together as persons and communities” (249), a prerequisite for any effective anticolonial struggle or political action (see also Smith 2008, 268–69).

I think Graeber is right to wonder whether there is significance to the fact that the consensus process that anarchists are so obsessed with is “always, elsewhere, seen as partaking of the sacred” (2008, 129). Maybe one way for secular-minded anarchists to begin decolonizing their practice is to realize that myth and ritual, not to mention faith, are already manifest in their politics. Working to bring about postcapitalist social relations—a possibility unproven—requires enormous faith. Inspired by traditions of other times and places, anarchoindigenism is easily categorized as a religious revitalization movement (Wallace 1970). If engaged profoundly, it is also a potential subversion of imperialism.

## Part II: Either gender is private or feminism is imperialist—you just can't win

A distinct, yet as I will argue interrelated, bias among the activists in my research rendered sexuality and gendered power apolitical and private, just as religion. I examine the historical interrelationship of the private/public split as applied to both sexuality and religion in the next section. First, however, I want to point out how a gendered definition of politics overlapped with prejudices toward religion during the speaking tour, marginalizing Magdalena in two ways. I have already described how Magdalena's narratives, which invoked the sacred and centered on gendered concerns (racist reproductive health policies) were not considered politically interesting by audiences and organizers. Gendered definitions of politics also came into play when local activist women tried to intervene to defend her voice, yet they were dismissed as feminists whose concerns were "personal" and "white." It is the treatment of feminism and gender dynamics specifically within activist collectives that I turn to now, focusing on four points: how gendered conflicts centered around a public/private articulation, how anarchist men mobilized postcolonial critiques of feminism to dismiss gender, how anarchists' equation of "indigenism" as "anarchism" is problematic from a feminist standpoint, and how challenges to solidarity among women were evident in our collective's work.

Within our La Otra Campana collective there was a gendered division of labor, in which women performed most operational tasks without having equal power in decision making. These tasks included minute taking; e-mail communication; translation; layout of flyers and posters; and the social labor of facilitating meetings, mediating conflict, and welcoming new members. Women were more likely to volunteer for such tasks, especially new female members who were keen to gain the respect of the group. A pattern thus unfolded whereby young women between the ages of 20 and 25 joined and participated only to burn out a few months later and be replaced by new enthusiastic peers. Meanwhile, the same group of men would continue in the collective, adding to their gender privilege the prerogatives of seniority.

Women would also leave our collective because of a variety of gender-related problems, such as grievances around sexual aggression and objectification by men within or outside of the collective. These were considered "personal" issues to be dealt with on an individual rather than collective basis. Thus, despite our group's nominal rejection of all forms of domination and espousal of prefigurative politics, a conceptual divide between private and public spheres continued to delimit what was considered political. Consensus was fetishized in a system of formal procedures that governed meetings, while outside of this public arena informal hierarchies governed relations. For instance, within our meetings tasks would often be divided equally among members, but then afterward men would delegate theirs by way of private phone calls. Work was often shouldered off by appealing to women's commitment to the struggle or deeming it an "honor," for example, men offering women the opportunity to represent the collective

in radio interviews or public speeches. This supposed inversion of roles meant that women simply worked more.

Beyond our La Otra Campan~a collective, where I experienced these dynamics firsthand, I interviewed women in the other collectives we worked with, which gave me the sense that the problems in our collective were not unique. During various conversations, women of three different collectives said that men raised the subject of honoring women's voices for the purpose of avoiding work or improving the collective's image and expected to be credited as antisexist anarchists for doing so. Meanwhile, when women brought up women's concerns, men labeled them divisive or accused them of trying to get attention or take control.

Another common way that anarchist men dismissed gender, whether within collective dynamics or the world at large, was by arguing that feminism is imperialist. It was disturbing to see that critiques of white feminism originally put forth by women of color were adopted by men, both white and of color, to dismiss gender entirely as a concern (certainly not the intention of feminists of color). White male anarchists often mobilized this argument when dealing with white women but rarely did so when confronted by a woman of color; male anarchists of color mobilized this argument against both. For example, both white women and women of color were concerned about marginalizing Magdalena, and all were accused of espousing "white feminism" as well as imposing "personal" concerns. Male activists' fascination with indigenous societies as intrinsically anarchist seemed to fuel this problem. When activist women attempted to counter men's arguments that gender hierarchy was merely a Western or first-world preoccupation, men invoked "egalitarian" indigenous societies to rebut women's position.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, whose challenge to the unified category of women has become classic (1997), writes that "difference" has been embraced over "commonality" to the detriment of *feminist* anticapitalism (2003, 225). My study appears to exemplify Mohanty's point. During my research, anarchist men shifted between arguing that women's oppression is a private affair and arguing that feminism is a Eurocentric narrative. Whether the justification was Marxist or post-, gender got the short end of the theoretical stick.

## **Part II (continued): Secularism as a challenge to solidarity among women**

The women in our collective tried in various ways to engage the gendered dimension of neoliberal political economy and to enact a feminist transnational solidarity within our anarchist-indigenous collaborations. We can see this in the conflict over Magdalena's voice, for instance. Also, on various occasions, women in our collective suggested that we build links with women's movements in Mexico and Latin America.

However, men often countered that we should not concentrate on movements concerned with “just” women. Some of us organized events about the struggles of women within the APPO and the Zapatista movements, but we did this outside of the collective *per se*, by holding separate meetings—a classic double-duty arrangement within the Left. I stress our efforts because the main challenge to building a specifically feminist solidarity effort was men’s resistance to the idea. However, the stumbling blocks to our efforts at feminist solidarity went beyond male domination in our collective itself. Women in Montreal, anarchist or otherwise, Mexican or Que´be´cois, are not natural allies of women like Magdalena.

For example, during the speaking tour, some organizers and audience members had a difficult time appreciating Magdalena’s offense at government agencies pressuring her to promote birth control, and they pressed her on this issue: “Forced sterilization is clearly unacceptable, but what’s wrong with condoms—don’t you think it’s important for women to have control over their own bodies and reproduction?” Of course privileged women have a different take on “reproductive rights” than women who have faced race- and class-based genocidal policies in this regard. This issue has been very divisive between middle-class feminists and indigenous women in Mexico (see, e.g., Herna´ndez Castillo 2008), as well as in many other places. It should be no surprise that this same debate surfaced in transnational anarchist solidarity activism.

But this was not the most disturbing schism, partly because for every woman who challenged Magdalena on this issue during the tour, two more intervened to explain how class and race privilege were informing the woman’s position. Instead, challenges related to secularism were arguably of greater concern. I say this precisely because they did not appear on our radar at the time as a recognizably contentious issue. During the speaking tour, our preoccupation with Magdalena’s marginalization was based on a concern about the gendered hierarchy of voice rather than the hierarchy of secular/religious, political/domestic discourses contained therein; that is to say, we were concerned with the form more than the content. Our preoccupation with “voice” was no less than that of our male peers, and our position was also implicitly relativist. We similarly theorized from the point of marginalization. The distinction was merely that we were attuned to gendered marginalization whereas the men were not.

My earlier discussion of the coimplication of secularism, capitalism, and colonialism, as well as the detrimental effect of secularism on anticapitalist coalition building, applies equally to the women and men in our collective. I return to this discussion now, then, to stress some particular challenges to overcoming secular attachments within Western feminisms, and I stress specific reasons why feminists in particular should overcome them.

First, consider the challenges. While the women in our collective were less dogmatically opposed to God, the church, or the Creator, (e.g., we generally supported proposals to participate in church-based events), the differences in position were slight and did not involve arguments against secularism itself. Beyond the secular biases we share with our male peers, anarchist women are generally familiar with an anarchafeminist



tradition that heavily critiques the patriarchal church and also inherits certain secularist attachments within Western feminism more broadly. Western feminism has had a paradoxical relationship with secularism. While Western feminism's first wave had deep Christian/colonialist justifications and overtones, second-wave feminism purged this history and, like socialism, reincarnated itself as secular (Sands 2008). At this same juncture, North American feminists began to consider the secular more emancipatory for women than the religious.

This is unfounded. When the secular is contrasted with Judeo-Christian patriarchal power, this popular understanding seems to have some merit. But in fact there is no necessary connection between secularism and gender equality: the equality that secularism promises always was, and still is, troubled by sexual difference (Scott 2009). Ethnographies of secularisms on the ground demonstrate their diversity and diverse effects for women (see, e.g., Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008). To cite but one example, it has been demonstrated that the decoupling of civil and religious hierarchies in Oaxacan municipalities that began in the 1950s has led to decreased public participation and power among women (see Stephen 2006).<sup>6</sup>

Saba Mahmood (2005) has demonstrated how an insistence on the political subject as secular poses a challenge to solidarity with women whose concept of self has been shaped by nonliberal traditions. Her argument also has bearing on attempts at feminist solidarity with indigenous women in Mexico, whose subjectivity and agency are strongly shaped by their cultural context (see Millaín Moncayo 2008). While Mahmood's ethnography and much other recent work that concentrates on the schisms between feminism, secularism, and colonialism focuses on Muslim women in particular, I suggest that a similar reflection could benefit critical discussions about transnational feminism more broadly and efforts at transnational solidarity with women in Latin America in particular. In other words, we should be scrutinizing Western feminism rather than Muslim women, secularism rather than religion. Below I present some reasons why secularism should be of particular concern to feminists in general, and I then discuss the particular detriment of secular attachments to solidarity with women in Latin America.

### **Part III: Building bridges—the crux of gender and the secular**

It was during my reflections on Magdalena's marginalization on the speaking tour that I began to think deeply about both gender and religion being displaced from politics as beyond mere coincidence. I had drafted two separate essays, one discussing secularism among anarchist activists and the other concerning gender dynamics within collectives, but I began to think it important to draw the connection between them: the politi-

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<sup>6</sup> For an explanation of the civil-religious *cargo* (burden) systems in Oaxaca, see Cancian (1965).

cal economy of colonial capitalism relies on the conceptual division of politics and sexuality, spirit and matter, and a host of other mutually affirming dichotomies.

In general this is not a particularly new idea. Nevertheless, I could not find scholarly work that takes aim at the parallel historical privatization of gender and religion and also illustrates how these exclusions combine to complicate activists' efforts at overturning neoliberal political economy, which necessarily requires building coalitions with women, colonized peoples, and indeed both at once. I felt that combining these two discussions would be of benefit. For this reason, I explore the historical articulation between gender and secularism below and then bring this discussion to bear on my ethnographic case.

The common designation of religion and (the female) gender as private has nothing to do with religion and gender sharing anything essential. Rather, a link exists between secularism and gender precisely because the religion/secular dichotomy holds together, and is in turn sustained by, a number of other shifting dichotomies, such as nature/supernature, body/soul, spirit/matter, private/public, inner/outer, production/reproduction, and reason/desire. As reason became the defining attribute of the political citizen, religion joined the sexual in the realm of the "passions"; "the public/private demarcation so crucial to the secular/religious divide rests on a vision of sexual difference that legitimizes the political and social inequality of women and men" (Scott 2009, 4). These dichotomies extend into colonial logic, in which the "construction of a 'sexual space' paralleled the construction of a space to be colonized" (Blunt and Rose 1994, 10). Secularism, gender, and colonial logic are coimplicated as "secularization in the Christian lands of the West proceeds by defining religion as a matter of private conscience just as (in the sense both of similarly to and at the same time as) it privatizes matters familial and sexual" (Scott 2009, 3).

The salient point here is that the coincidence of public and private in social theory, as applied to domestic/political and religious/secular divides, in fact relies on a gendered order. A gendered order preceded the privatization of religion; its disqualification from the political and its feminization were one and the same.

Earlier I suggested secularism's coimplication with colonial capitalism and neoliberalism, both historically and in terms of how present-day secular attachments among anarchist activists work to the detriment of transnational coalition movements against neoliberal political economy. I called for a political economic analysis of secularism as part of the anticolonial, antineoliberal project. I now emphasize that for this analysis to be complete, a feminist critique of the political economy of secularism is crucial. It is no coincidence that secularism itself hinges on a gendered regime, that the rational subject idealized by neoliberal capitalism is a male subject, and that neoliberalism relies on a gendered order in its thrust toward "privatization" (see, e.g., Cornwall, Gideon, and Wilson 2008). More rigorous attention to these correspondences may help us better understand neoliberalism, secularism, and gender, both in their relation and respectively. Furthermore, an awareness of these correspondences could enrich both

scholarship and solidarity activism concerned with women and social movements in Latin America.

Women in Latin America have often situated their collective action and agency in religious and kinship terms at once (see, e.g., Jelin 1990). Again, this conflation should not be seen as representing anything essential to womanhood but is perhaps due to an epistemic advantage among women vis-a'-vis the function of "politics" itself because of their relegation to the "private." Amy Lind's ethnography illustrates particularly well how indigenous women's refusal to identify as political indicates their alienation from and distrust of the formal political process, attesting to their "feeling that they do not belong to that sphere" nor "necessarily want to be there" (2005, 108).

Because of the contingency of these identifications—their inessentiality—there are, of course, women in Latin America who do not follow this pattern, including indigenous women in Oaxaca (see, e.g., Hernández Castillo 2008). It is a broad pattern, however, of which Magdalena appears to be an example. I return to my ethnographic case to stress that Magdalena is not an anomaly, because we must see the case of Montreal activists' failure to appreciate her political subjectivity as suggestive of broader challenges to transnational solidarity activism with women's movements in Latin America. Bringing a secular bias to such a project is bound to have deleterious gendered as well as racialized effects, since it is women more so than men who situate their politics in religious as well as domestic terms.

A further take here is that Magdalena and others who situate their political agency within scales both larger (the cosmos) and smaller (the family) than the modern public sphere may demonstrate particular subversive potential. It is not that the religious is always or necessarily more subversive of capitalist political economy or always more emancipatory for women. However, a capacity to situate one's political subjectivity in realms beyond the analytical categories of materialist socialism appears to complement the imagination of radical transformation. There is a rather extensive literature categorizing women's movements in Latin America as feminist versus feminine, strategic versus practical (e.g., Molyneux 1986), as well as many critical rejoinders to this typology (e.g., Jelin 1990). To these I would add precisely this: perhaps women in Latin America, Magdalena included, who situate themselves as mothers and religious subjects, who would not appear sufficiently feminist, strategic, or politically agentive according to such typologies, are in fact ahead of the game.

Furthermore, inasmuch as these women situate their acts of resistance on cosmic or domestic scales, or both, their disregard for the "political" dovetails with the anarchist project of decentering the nation-state in the framework of analysis. In this sense, not only are movements inspired by kinship and the sacred perhaps ahead of much feminism but anarchism as well. Reflection on this point could stimulate new and interesting directions for anarchist solidarity movements.

## Part III (continued): Building bridges—coalitions of anarchism, indigenism, and feminism

The few scholars who have turned their attention to these newest anarchist movements have researched and presented inspiring aspects of these movements that are hardly obvious to outsiders and have explained the current meaning and praxis of anarchism—a concept widely misunderstood. All this literature points to the challenges of racism and sexism (among others) in these movements against “all forms of domination,” some offering elaborate examples and treatment of these issues. However, instances of sexism and racism are largely positioned as idiosyncratic or due to prior socialization rather than embedded to a certain extent in the secular political economic emphasis that characterizes much historical and theoretical anarchism, and functions as an “axiom of unity” (Tsing 2005, 89) among movement participants. This is not to say that anarchism is intrinsically problematic. Anarchism may indeed function as an “engaged universal” (Tsing 2005, 8), that is, a universal that is charged and changed by its travels across difference, one through which indigenous, feminist, and classic anarchist concepts of reciprocity, community, and equality come to terms. It is simply that this project is not fully realized.

Regarding the dialogue between anarchism and feminism, a certain engagement remains. The anarchists I worked with had integrated the feminist concern for prefigurative politics but not its gender critique, and indeed this “anarchist” ideal was sometimes deployed to shut down gender as an appropriate axis of analysis and action (i.e., silencing women who raised gender concerns by accusing them of taking control or assuming leadership). Turning to the dialogue between anarchism and indigenism, the story presented here raises concern about indigenism functioning merely as a dressing on anarchism, like Magdalena’s greetings in Zapotec that hung on each side of Juan’s speeches, their value purely aesthetic, used to legitimize already existing anarchist discourse (i.e., calls for stateless societies). A cocreative anarchoindigenism, emergent from a horizontal conversation across difference, would not only be more respectful but has much more subversive potential.

Regarding the dialogue between feminism and anarchoindigenism, the latter may be qualified by the former in order to avoid disregarding gender hierarchy in simplistic essentializations of indigenous communities as necessarily egalitarian. Too many ethnographies are sold at anarchist book fairs in Montreal and elsewhere that equate the stateless with the egalitarian (e.g., Barclay 1982; Clastres 1987), feeding a gender-blind anarchoindigenism whose effects we can see, for example, in the activists’ reticence to challenge the Oaxacan indigenous spokesperson Juan when he did not live up to egalitarian ideals. Because of their equation of “anarchist” with “indigenous,” anarchistactivistsmaynotbeabletobringthemselvesoseesuchdisjunctures, or they may digress nonetheless because of a relativism that sacrifices gender for race. Suchrelativismandgender-blindconstructionsofanarchoindigenism are bound to

fail not just indigenous women but any anticolonial movement, since any liberation struggle that does not challenge patriarchy cannot substantially challenge colonialism or white supremacy (see Smith 2008, 271–72). This is not to say that we should dismiss indigenism as an essentialist romanticism (see also Nash 2001, 17). Anarchoindigenism may carry within it the potential for a critically engaged conversation across difference but only if the universalisms of anarchism and indigenism are constantly reformulated through dialogue and engaged with a third universalism, feminism, which itself must constantly be reformulated.

I told this story about Magdalena, and historicized it the way I did, in order to throw into relief the ways these dialogues are at present incomplete and yet ways they could be furthered. It is in this sense that I offer this ethnography as a prolineal genealogy of anarchoindigenism, what anarchoindigenism could mean if engaged with feminism and anticolonialism at once. I centered Magdalena and the intersections at play within her story to cast light on how anarchist, indigenist, and feminist analyses may be furthered by focusing on the experiences and analyses of indigenous women.

If anarchists listen to learn from both indigenous and feminist activists, they may reconsider the equation of “egalitarian” and “stateless,” view the division of politics from kinship as a modern construction, and perceive the reification of public and private spheres of life as perpetuating a distinctly capitalist logic. Likewise, if both feminists and anarchists listen to learn from coalition with indigenous activists, they may consider sacred imaginaries beyond alienation and perceive religion as a potential medium for transformative vision. Subverting coloniality means transcending secular political economic frameworks because there is more hope for resistance in an enchanted world.

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