

Communisation vs Spheres

2nd part of 'The Suspended Step of Communisation'

'Communisation vs Socialisation' (the first part of 'The Suspended Step of Communisation') had two aims. On the one hand, it showed that seizing elements of capital might be 'communisation'—that is, pure 'dis-appropriation', the abolition of all property relations, even collective or 'proletarian' property relations. The seizure of elements of capital aims at the constitution of a *new community of individuals*—creating amongst themselves, in their singularity, unmediated relations—in the course of their struggle against capital, as the very content of this struggle. But, on the other hand, this process of 'communisation' has an intricate link with another possible content of these seizures—that is, as appropriations, socialisations aiming instead at the constitution of a *new economy*, which would be self-managed, social, popular, and counter-revolutionary. Each of these two possibilities is, for the other, *its own proper other*. They find themselves in a conflictual relation, in which each one, in its own practice, recognized the other as necessary, as a moment of itself.

In this process of class struggle, which leads to the abolition of classes, individuals were *in fact* posed as being beyond gender, since they established a community of immediately social individuals. The overcoming of genders was taken as *implicit*. This second part of the text tries to explain what these terms actually mean—this 'in fact' and this 'implicit'. This overcoming perceived as naturally included 'in the movement'—as something that *goes without saying*, due to the content of the movement—should be subjected to critique as such. It is not sufficient to say that communisation, being communisation, is by definition the overcoming of genders. Although distinct 'fronts' within the struggle cannot possibly exist, no element of class society will be overcome without being attacked for itself.

The analysis of gender domination in capitalism shows that this domination is immediately identical to the division of all social activities into two spheres.

“The sexed character of all categories of capital signifies a general distinction in society between men and women. This general distinction acquires as its social content that which is the synthesis of all the sexualities of the categories: the creation of the division between public and private. This distinction is the synthesis because the CMP is a *political* economy. In other words, the CMP, because it rests on the sale of the labour power and a social production that exists as such only for the market (value), rejects as "non-social" the moments of its own reproduction which escape direct submission to the market or to the immediate process of production : the private. The private is the private of the public, always in a hierarchical relation of definition and submission to the public.” (*Réponse aux camarades américaines*)

The revolutionary process of the production of communism will take place within and, most notably, *against* the generalised crisis of capital. The crisis of the reproduction of the relation of exploitation is, in equal measure, the inability of capital to exploit proletarians profitably and the inability of proletarians to offer sufficiently cheap labour power (sufficiently under its value) in order to valorise capital. In other words, proletarians cannot live on a prayer and, in particular, their women cannot cook it into the reproduction of labour power !

Already in the present moment of the crisis (a crisis still in its beginning), there is an ‘illegitimacy of wage demands’. This means that salary demands—for pay and/or working conditions—are no longer compatible with a capital that normally would have been able to combine an increase in the rate of exploitation (rate of surplus value) with an increase in real wages (a system described by capital’s proponents as the ‘sharing of productivity gains’). In the present moment, these demands are no longer possible. In the deepening crisis of the class relation—in the moment when inter-capitalist exchanges are blocked and states are about to wage war against proletarians (and against each other, as well), in order to force the proletarians into trash-zones and thus to make possible the continuation of a savage exploitation—in this moment what is at stake is survival. The struggle against capital thereby becomes a struggle for survival itself. This will be the starting point, on a much larger scale, of what had already begun in Argentina in a limited and transitory way : the seizure of elements of capital.

Struggles against capital, against both its crisis and its anti-proletarian offensive, are already struggles concerning the reproduction of the lives of proletarians. Proletarians will seize those elements of capital necessary for their survival, and these seizures will be revolutionary actions against capital. Argentinian proletarians ‘recovered’ firms abandoned by their owners and got them up and running according to the well known principle : *We produce, we sell, we pay ourselves*. This is self-management, but it is only possible in a context where the money thus obtained still functions as money and can be exchanged against means of subsistence. In a situation of extreme crisis that is no longer possible; it is necessary to seize the means of subsistence themselves (something that happened in the case of refrigerated warehouses in Argentina).

Anyway, generalised self-management is devoid of meaning. It would be overcome in the course of the struggle that self-management would necessarily have to wage against capital, as well as by the complete absence of a dynamic of accumulation internal to self-management. The latter can only represent a phase in a process leading either to communising measures (for the continuation of the struggle against capital) or to a latent or open counter-revolutionary regression.

In Argentina, the movements of the unemployed organised various activities: ‘production workshops’ (such as bakeries, collective gardens, brick-makers, and packaging of household products) whose products were destined for self-subsistence or for selling to others. These ‘workshops’, most often under collective self-management, could be considered as embryonic forms of a parallel economy. This parallel economy has—to a very limited extent—begun to constitute a community of fighting proletarians. In and through that community, a transformation of relations has begun, in

particular of gender relations, which brings into question the division of social activities in two separate spheres: one private, the other public.

Whether in a revolutionary situation or in every struggle in which they are opposed to capital, proletarian women always bring into question, practically, the existence of the private sphere. When working women strike, it is never just a strike. It is always a *women's* strike—because the private sphere, to which they are inextricably linked, is pushed into the heart of the public sphere. In that way, women put into question not only the existence of this private sphere but also that of the public sphere, by means of the intimate and personal character of the relations of struggle within which women exist, relations which put into question the political and social character claimed by public activities in distinction to private.

We could say not only that every women's struggle is feminist, but also that every women's struggle contains the opposition of women to their gender belonging – paradoxically, even if they assert themselves as women !

Here are some extracts from an account of women's struggles in Argentina:

Women were first to blockade the roads when their companions found themselves jobless, but they were made invisible. They fought for food, for health and for dignity, as they were doing everyday in their homes. With struggle, organization, and camaraderie, women began to question the place they occupied: in their homes, in organizations and in the world.

“To go out is a revolution”, said Viviana (age 33, mother of five and a housewife since she was 16) from the Movement of Unemployed Workers (MTD) of Lugano. She describes the process as something that didn't occur in one day, but rather as a journey with no possibility of return: “Before, I had to wake up at 4am since my husband had a job; when he would leave I had to clean the house before the children woke up, help them get ready, bring them to school, come back, feed them, do housework, and not to miss one single episode of the novella. After, he was jobless.”

In 2001, Viviana attended a parents' meeting held in the space where children received after school tutoring. She liked it and began attending regularly. They discussed unemployment and various problems in the neighborhood, and they began to devise a plan of action that would include everyone. Viviana's husband would leave her every Saturday, uttering the same sentence: “You're wasting your time.” That was before the creation of the MTD.

The first time Graciela Cortes went out, it was only a couple hundred meters from her house. She was 40 when she agreed to teach sewing to other jobless women. “Yes, I had trouble at home. In spite of

the fact that I was still doing housework, still taking care of the children. I was doing everything, yet I had problems. I decided to go out. First politics was not really interesting to me, but when I began to miss the meetings, I realized politics was inside me. My husband would tell me not to go, but I explained to him: alone I won't get anything, we need to be a multitude.”

Graciela took part in the 18 day blockade at Isidro Casanova with the CCC. She asked herself out loud:

“—What good will it do to me to obey him if we eventually split? I have no regret. I did things I would never have done before. All that thanks to the sewing machine and Women's Meetings.”

—The Meetings?

—They open your mind. I changed in the Meetings.

—Why?

—You see every woman.”

For a while, Gladis Roldan was pleased to say that she was a member of the women's subcommittee of the lead-committee of the inhabitants of the *asentamiento* Maria Elena (a piece of occupied land, which became, over time, a stronghold of CCC in La Matanza). Then, in 1989, she attended a National Meeting of Women for the first time. During a debate, a woman asked her: “Why is it a *subcommittee*? You could just as well be in the lead-committee.” With a glowing look, Gladys said: “You can imagine how we came back [after that]!”. The discussion with the men lasted two months. Finally, the women moved into the lead-committee and the subcommittee of women—may it rest in peace—was disbanded.

These quotes confirm that the existence of private and public spheres was practically challenged, but we must also consider occasions of very harsh opposition from certain male proletarians.

“There are female comrades who declare in the assembly: ‘I couldn't come to the “piquete” (road blockade) because my husband beat me, because he locked me down.’ For that, the women-question helped us quite a bit... because you've seen that it was us, the women, who were the first to go out for food, job positions, and health... And it brought very difficult situations—even death. There were husbands who did not tolerate their wives attending a meeting, a ‘piquete’. It did happen. I'm not saying it doesn't happen anymore today.”

The defense of the male condition is the defense of male domination. It is the defense of the existence of two separated spheres of activity, as we can perceive in the following example:

— I can tell you the story of a female comrade who was involved in the movement when we were nine neighborhoods, in 1996. She was from here, from La Juanita, and she separated from her husband because she couldn't take it anymore. He was jobless, she began to attend and he went crazy, he began to beat her. Then he left. The next morning, he came back, he tied her up, and lit her on fire. She died. He couldn't stand her going out.

— Why?

— Because going out changes your life.

“Going out” changes one's life in the strongest sense. That women who “went out” into the struggle changed both its form and content. In the relentless class struggle against the capitalist crisis, the suppression of the two spheres of activity is the condition for victory. For the abolition of classes is not a basis on which the abolition of genders could be based. One can only be accomplished with the other, and vice-versa. The workers' program never contemplated the abolition of gender, even under the form of an ultimate perspective beyond the famous period of transition—when only *equality* could have been possible. That is because the communism described by the program was only the society of associated producers. But production implies reproduction, the latter taking place on the side as subordinated and dominated. This domination would always have had the allocation of women to childbirth as its content, that by which women exist as such.

The defense of the existence of two spheres is the defense of the existence of economy and politics, of politics as very condition for the economy. The public sphere is by nature male and the participation of women in this sphere doesn't change its nature. Vis-à-vis this political-economic sphere, the private sphere of reproduction persists even if “putting women back where they belong” is difficult in a situation where various aspects of class struggle confront each other (popular power, self-management, wild seizures). When it occurs, it is the sign of a serious defeat, at least locally. In Spain, the withdrawal of women from the front lines took place during the militarization of militias, a key element for a complete restoration of the State and the victory of the counter-revolution.

Communization—the production of a community of immediately social individuals in and through a struggle against capitalist society—is the abolition of classes and of the state regardless of its form (communes, councils, unions, or cooperatives). Communization is the abolition of all moments of public activity as separate from the private activity of reproduction, which itself cannot exist without exchange and/or distribution. It thus implies also the abolition of exchange and distribution (even of a “non-exchange-ist” sort, since that is only a temporary form before the return to the market, as every measure similar to “war communism” shows). Communization integrates production and consumption, as well as production and reproduction. For that reason, all book-keeping—all keeping track of accounts—is abolished, since accounting for “products” in itself supposes the separation between pro-

duction and consumption. Most important of all, the abolition of the separation between production and consumption is, in itself, the abolition of women.

Women are abolished by the abolition of the sphere that specifies them. The private sphere becomes public, and the public sphere becomes private. Programmatism only had as its objective to get women out of the home, to turn them into proles, to socialize domestic work. It had as its objective the equality of men and women in socialism. The fact that this particular objective was never realized cannot be differentiated from the impossibility of programmatism succeeding on its own terms. Nevertheless, we can specify the impossibility of achieving equality between men and women in a public sphere that has totally absorbed the private sphere. For the public sphere remains public, that is to say, economic and political. The reproduction of individuals, who continue to be proletarians, cannot realize itself in a so-called 'unified' (that is to say, single) sphere. Against capital, the reproduction of proletarians assumes that women are assigned to childbirth and thus that all the women are appropriated by all the men—both in general and *in particular*. In this way, the order that founds the family is reconstituted.

The abolition of the public sphere—as opposed to its reconstitution—is thus precisely what will be at stake in the struggle between the revolution and the counter-revolution. It will be, at the same time, the struggle to abolish the state, rather than reconstitute it—or better, we might say that the struggle to abolish the state will be nothing other than the struggle to privatize the public sphere!

In the public sphere, leaders of all kinds face a mass of anonymous and replaceable citizen-workers, that is to say, average individual members of a class (since singular individuals exist only in the private sphere). The abolition of the state and of exchange is the abolition of the public sphere, but it is at the same time the transformation of anonymous and replaceable proletarians into individuals defining themselves in immediately social relationships. They thereby become strictly irreplaceable individuals, relating to one another only as singular individuals, who can be in no way average.

Of course, the public sphere is not 'privatized' any more than the private sphere is socialized, but it is abolished as a sphere involving relationships between average and anonymous members of classes. The singular, social individual abolishes both the social yet anonymous individual of the public sphere and the singular yet asocial individual of the private sphere. Just as the abolition of classes and of spheres are two aspects of the same communisation, so too the de-capitalization of capital and the abolition of all of society, so too the abolition of proletarians and of women are two aspects of the self-transformation of all workers—men and women—and thus of all persons into immediately social individuals, constituted in their entirety (physically, mentally and intellectually).

We have seen how the entry of individual proletarian women into the public sphere of struggle puts into question their definition in the private sphere, as well as how that entrance pits them against proletarian men. However, struggling proletarian women also come up against the capitalist offensive—which is both the capitalist crisis and a set of ‘painful but courageous’ policies that the state implements to combat the crisis—by taking it out on the bodies of proletarians.

Towards the end of the Argentine movement, women in several of the movements of the unemployed decided to constitute themselves as movements of unemployed women. Bruno Astarian understood these organizations of struggling women—in his interesting pamphlet on the Argentine movement (*Echanges*)—as a weakness, a division with the struggle, which occurred towards the end of the movement. The ascendent phase of struggles often masks oppositions that later appear when those struggles decline—and that is not necessarily a weakness. However, from the point of view that considers the abolition of gender to be constitutive of communism, it looks otherwise.

The self-organization of women will be an unavoidable moment of the revolutionary process. This statement should be understood in the same manner in which we say, ‘self-organization is the first act of the revolution; it then becomes an obstacle that the revolution must overcome’. The self-organization of women will be the means given to women to combat that which defines them as women. It will thus also enable them to abolish themselves as such. The overcoming of the state and economy realizes itself in the unification of activities: those that are productive as well as those that are reproductive (and those that occur in struggle). This unity will integrate childrearing just as much as car repair and armed combat, if it’s still necessary. *The organizations of women will be, in themselves, precisely this unity.* Women, struggling as such, can only struggle for a unity that also unifies themselves—in the face of the cleavages that divide each and every one of them: into proletarian and woman, into citizen and woman, and into man and woman!

However, women’s self-organization will also have to struggle within itself against a tendency, which will necessarily exist, to limit its role to representing and negotiating for women’s equality (in recognition of women’s ‘indispensable contributions’). This ‘strictly feminist’ tendency will exist in connection with everything that promotes a socialization of the economy and the state. It is likely that the most ‘radical’ women, who proclaim their will to abolish women as such, will be called out as ‘traitors to the women’s cause’, as well as to a real and non-sexist democracy. All those who oppose themselves—and these may be the majority—to democratic procedures and/or elected offices will be attacked for wanting ‘to confiscate the revolution for themselves and to constitute themselves as an elite co-opting the revolution at the expense of the masses’.

Struggling women and their organizations will have to unite all women without constituting an anti-sexist front: ruined petit-bourgeois women, peasant women, and all those who are ‘without employment’—including housewives, whether poor or more or less middle class. The revolutionary women’s movement—fighting to constitute a unity of struggling proletarians, without exchange or politics—will integrate these groups because they are groups of women and because they experience the crisis as women. They will all join the movement against capital and—doing what they always do, but never openly—they will lead and organize real life. This life is now private, but the revolution will make *a new life at once intimate and public*, totally feminine because it is no longer feminine at all.

The communizing current comes out of the critique and overcoming of left-communism and anti-Leninist councilism. True to its origins, this current remained fundamentally anti-feminist in its period of total marginalization. Feminist ideology was interpreted as one of those ‘modernisms’, which substituted for the proletariat a new revolutionary subject (e.g. women, the youth, or immigrants). Of course, there is an anti-class feminism, but it does not speak for all feminists. On the contrary, feminism is an evolving phenomenon; it is infinitely diverse. The idea of the self-abolition of the proletariat, which marked a stage in the development of a positive notion of communisation, was based on a working-class positivity which was, paradoxically, at the same time negative. Communization—which has overcome every idea of a revolutionary nature of the proletariat—understands itself as an immanent overcoming of that program.

Thus even if TC hadn’t itself questioned, over the intervening decades, the possibly macho character of the theory of communization, that macho character had to be rejected. For the revolution produces immediately social individuals—that is to say, individuals beyond any determination that society gives them in advance. The individual was considered to be immediately social, but the question of the distinction between genders remained a blind spot in the theory. The question was resolved ‘implicitly’ without ever having been posed. It took the appearance, within the TC-group, of ‘a comrade but a woman’, for the abolition of women and men to be taken *explicitly* as defining the immediately social individual. The target had not been hit. In class struggle, in communisation, in the production of this immediately social individual, there can be no blind spot, no problems solved only ‘implicitly’. We had to re-open the question of the contradiction between proletariat and capital, that of the contradiction between men and women, of exploitation, and of capital as a contradiction-in-process. This was not done without waves, but at least without tidal waves. It was not done without raising our voices, but at least without conflicts. The fruit was ripe... without a doubt had been ripe for a long time.

Today, a consensus seems to exist in the communising current, which considers the revolution as an abolition of genders as much as of classes. But a debate exists with regard to the question of whether there is a contradiction between genders of the same sort that exists between classes. It is important that this debate should not be only formal, but rather should take into account the crucial importance of women’s struggles in the present moment, as well as their specificity as a crucial element of the abolition of genders through the abolition of classes—and vice versa. That is the objective of this text.

The communizing current has already had a debate with elements still attached to the autonomy of the class, elements which could even be described as ultra-left. We have also had debates with immediatist or alternativist communists. And now we will have debates—one hopes productively—with radical feminists who want the abolition of women as much as that of classes.

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