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A Dialogue on the French and Québécois Contexts

Francis Dupuis-Déri and Irène Pereira
(translated by Jesse Cohn)

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Since the publication of Houria Bouteldja’s book, Les Blancs, les Juifs et nous, in spring 2016 (Paris, La Fabrique [Whites, Jews, and Us, MIT Press/Semiotext(e), 2017]), a controversy surrounding the use of the term “race” has emerged in anarchist circles in France¹. Those who use such a notion are called “racialist” and likened to racists. This particularly affects the concept of “intersectionality” that comes from the social sciences and has been taken up by activists in order to better articulate our thoughts about different forms of oppression, such as gender, race, and class². Recently, the anarchist group Regard Noir [Black Gaze] (since

¹One might mention, among other incidents, the one that took place in Marseille in the bookstore Mille Bâbords which took place in October 2016. See the bookstore’s press release: [www.millebabords.org / spip.php?article30041](http://www.millebabords.org/spip.php?article30041).

²For more information on developments in the theory of intersectionality, one can refer to several issues of journal that can be found on the online platform Cairn: www.cairn.info/.

voluntarily dissolved) published, with the Anarchist Federation, a pamphlet titled *Classe, genre, race et anarchisme* [Class, Gender, Race and Anarchism], featuring translations of short texts from the *The Women's Caucus of the British Anarchist Federation* which help to reflect on the concept – and the phenomenon – of “privileges.”³

Grand Angle [Wide Shot], a site for anarchist discussion, wished to propose a conversation among anarchists and social scientists, to clear up certain misunderstandings and compare the French and Québécois activist and intellectual contexts. Indeed, Francis Dupuis-Déri is or has been active in organizations of an anarchist orientation in the United States, France, and especially Québec. He teaches political science and women's studies at the University of Québec in Montréal (UQAM) and he has written several books, including *L'Anarchie Expliquée à mon Père* (with Thomas Déri, Montréal, Lux, 2014, forthcoming in English next Fall as *Anarchy Explained to My Father* from New Star Books) and *Les Black Blocs* (Montréal, Lux, 4th ed., 2016, now available in English translation as *Who's Afraid of the Black Blocs?: Anarchy in Action around the World* from PM Press). Irène Pereira has been active in various anarchist organizations (CNT, *Alternative Libertaire*) and is a member of the editorial collective of the journal *Réfractions*. She teaches in the ESPE at the Université de Créteil and participates in the network “Gender, Race, Class” of the Association Française de Sociologie. She has published, among others, *Anarchistes* (Montreuil, La ville Brule, 2009) and *L'Anarchisme dans les Textes* (Paris, Textuel, 2011).

Irène Pereira: For my part, I'm really amazed at the development of this controversy in anarchist circles in particular because it equates the Party of the Republic's Natives [*Parti des Indigènes de la République*] (PIR) with positions that it doesn't

³The Women's Caucus of the Anarchist Federation, *Classe, Genre, Race & Anarchisme* (translation of *The Class Struggle Analysis of Privilege*), Groupe Regard Noir/Anarchist Federation, 2016, 32 pp. Online: web.archive.org [English: afed.org.uk].

support, like intersectionality. Indeed, Houria Bouteldja is the author of a text which criticizes the concept of intersectionality⁴. In reality, this text was a response to criticisms of the PIR coming both from Philippe Corcuff⁵ and from a collective article written by Malika Amaouche and others⁶. Both contributions, prior to the publication of Houria Bouteldja's controversial book, question the ambiguous positions of PIR on antisemitism and homophobia. So you can see that there is no identity between the fact of supporting PIR and using the sociological concept of "race": this seems to me a mistake that some French anarchist activists have made for lack of knowledge of all the literature on these topics. Actually, intersectionality is a concept that originated in US black feminism. Furthermore, analyses mostly from the perspective of intersectionality try to deconstruct the categories essentialized by various relations of domination, while "essentialism" is now positively embraced by the PIR⁷.

In general, I feel that in all this, besides a reduction to the PIR, there is a lack of knowledge of all of these theories especially on

⁴Houria Bouteldja, "Sexe, race, genre: une nouvelle divinité à trois têtes" (December 2015). URL: indigenes-republique.fr English: "Race, Class and Gender: A New Three-Headed Divinity," trans. Geneviève Rail. URL: <http://indigenes-republique.fr/race-class-and-gender-a-new-three-headed-divinity/>.

⁵Philippe Corcuff, "Indigène de la République, pluralité des dominations et convergence des mouvements sociaux [Indigenous of the Republic, plurality of principalities and convergence of social movements]" (July 2015). URL: www.grand-angle-libertaire.net.

⁶Malika Amaouche, Yasmine Kateb, and Leah-Nicolas Teboul, "Pour une approche matérialiste de la question raciale. Une réponse aux Indigènes de la République," *Vacarme* 72 (Summer 2015). URL: www.vacarme.org. English: "Towards a Materialist Approach to the Racial Question: A Response to Indigènes de la République," *The Charnel House* (25 June 2015). URL: <https://thecharnelhouse.org/2015/07/24/toward-a-materialist-approach-to-the-question-of-race-a-response-to-the-indigenes-de-la-republique/>

⁷Norman Ajari (member of PIR), "Faire vivre son essence" (June 2016). URL: indigenes-republique.fr.

the part of their opponents. Thus, I can read: “For those good people, all of world history can be summarized in two dates: 1492 and 1830. The ‘decolonial’ perspective – the term ‘decolonial,’ moreover, replaces ‘anti-colonialist’ or even ‘revolutionary,’ and inaugurates a permanent, decontextualized political identity – views the history of the world through the prism of the history of Franco-Algerian relations”⁸. The problem is that the decolonial perspective⁹ has nothing to do with Franco-Algerian relations because it is the basis for a Latin American school of thought (hence the reference to 1492). Another misconception that is found in anarchist circles is that these theories are postmodern and opposed to a materialist approach. The origins of decolonial thought have more to do with dependency theory and the philosophy of liberation, which are Latin American currents, than with postmodern theories. Similarly, the origins of the theory of intersectionality are to be found in American black feminist currents¹⁰ rather than in postmodernism. Its reception in France has been particularly via the networks of materialist feminism. We find another simplification in a reduction of queer theory to postmodernism as opposed to materialism. But such a conception is clearly questionable in the case of queer of color theory,¹¹ which has had significant impact on the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM).

⁸Introduction to *La Race Comme si Vous y Étiez* [*Race, As If That’s What You Were*: an anti-“racialist” pamphlet]. URL: forum.anarchiste.free.fr .

⁹Decolonial thought is a Latin American intellectual movement which is comparable to postcolonial studies in the English-speaking world. For more information, see, e.g., issue 62 of *Cahiers des Amériques latines: Philosophie de la libération et tournant décolonial* (2009). URL: cal.revues.org .

¹⁰Jules Falquet, “Déclaration du Combahee River Collective [translation: The Combahee River Collective Statement],” *Cahiers du CEDREF* [Online], No. 14, 2006. URL: cedref.revues.org [original: americanstudies.yale.edu].

¹¹Sophie Noyé, “Pour un féminisme matérialiste et queer [For a Materialist and Queer Feminism],” *Contretemps* (April 17, 2014). URL: www.contretemps.eu .

More on Grand Angle: see Francis Dupuis-Déri, “Que faire de l’État dans la théorie de l’intersectionnalité? Une réflexion anarchiste.” Date: 04-03-2017 [English version: “Is the State Part of the Matrix of Domination and Intersectionality?: An Anarchist Inquiry,” *Anarchist Studies* 24.1 (2016): 36-62].

Let’s just say that what amazes me is that I feel some anarchists pay attention to the issue when it concerns “whites,”¹² but that they seemed frankly unmoved when, for example, the PIR was making ambiguous statements about homophobia. Moreover, it seems to me that there is a misunderstanding about the concept of “race” as it is used among other concepts in the literature on intersectionality and decolonial thought. Indeed, it is not a biological concept, but a social construction that continues to organize society unequally. This is why some researchers in France prefer to talk of “social relations of racialization [*racisation*].” It is a reality that, in France, there is a whole revival of sociological work on this issue that has long been relatively taboo.¹³ The other source of my amazement at these controversies in France in the anarchist milieu is that since the mid-2000s, French anarchist militant organizations like Alternative Libertaire (AL)¹⁴ or the Coordination des Groupes Anarchistes (CGA)¹⁵ have already been engaged in reflection on these issues, so this is not so new. Finally, when I read foreign literature (in English, Spanish or Portuguese), this (sociological) category of “race” is present in many countries and highlighted precisely by the people who want to fight *against* racism. Looking at the United States, the Black Lives Matter movement is a good example: it supports an intersectional approach, combining [an awareness of] class, racializa-

¹²The notion of “White [*blanc*]” and “whiteness [*blanchéité*]” refers to an entire current of social science research. See, in France, the work of Sylvie Laurent and Thierry Leclère, *De quel couleur sont les Blancs?* [*What Color is White?*] Paris: La Découverte, 2013.

¹³Take, for example, a study on racism against black students: www.cafepedagogique.net.

¹⁴Alternative Libertaire constituted an anti-racism committee specifically to reflect on these issues.

¹⁵This is a reflection that seems also to have been covered in some texts published by the CGA, such as the text appearing in June 2012: “Pour une révolution anarchaféministe [For an Anarchafeminist Revolution].” URL: [www.cga.org].

tion [*racisation*], gender, queer, and disability [identities]. It's even in these critical milieus that one can find the seeds of resistance to Donald Trump in the United States today, as demonstrated by the positions of Angela Davis.¹⁶

In France, for example, the government banned the gathering of ethnic statistics because of their history with the Vichy regime. The notion of "race" is still very marked by the memory of Nazi collaboration. There is a tendency in France to assess every issue by relation to its own national history. However, this history is not necessarily that of immigrant populations that comprise it. For example, Martine Fernandes¹⁷ studied the case of the use of the term "Portuguese race" in rap by Franco-Portuguese immigrants. This usage has at least two distinct references, but have nothing to do with the history of France. The first is the mobilization of the concept of "race" in Chicano (Mexican-American) rap, which served as a model for some Franco-Portuguese rap groups like La Harissa. The second is the history of the concept of race in Portugal during the Salazar dictatorship. Before World War II, the regime points to a Lusitanian origin for the "Portuguese race." But later, to continue justifying colonization, the regime highlights the fact that the Portuguese would be characterized rather by hybridity [*métissage*], especially with African populations: this is Luso-Tropicalism. The scheme is thus based on a sort of racialist ideology without racism, which actually serves to mask a real social racism. Today the affirmation of a "Portuguese race" in Franco-Portuguese rap is an affirmation of identity,

¹⁶Angela Davis, "Aucun être humain n'est illégal [No Human Being Is Illegal]," *L'Humanité* (January 23, 2017). URL: www.humanite.fr.

¹⁷Martine Fernandes, "Miki-le-toss ou comment repérer un guech en quelques leçons: l'identité ethnique 'tos' en France à travers les blogs de jeunes lusodécendants ['Miki-le-toss' or How to Spot a 'Guech' in a Few Lessons: 'Tos' Ethnic Identity in France in the Blogs of French-Portuguese Youth]" *Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2007). URL: epress.lib.uts.edu.au.

anarchists) participated in the organization of events as part of the debate on "reasonable accommodation." Anarchists have also mobilized against the attempts of Pegida (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West) to gain a foothold in Montréal. These are just some examples of initiatives involving anarchist solidarity with Muslims who suffer from the effects of Islamophobia every day.

I imagine that such situations are possible in France, but I would also imagine – I am speculating here – that the Islamist attacks against *Charlie Hebdo*, then at the Bataclan and in Nice, sent shock waves through French anarchist networks, and that there are effects of resonance between the rhetoric of the State and those of some anarchists concerning Islam and secularism [*laïcité*]. I also think of that very strong official ideology of universalist republicanism, which anarchists can take up without appearing too inconsistent in relation to some anarchist principles. Perhaps all of this makes alliances between white anarchists and Muslims more difficult for you. I also wonder if the weight of anticlericalism is not heavier in anarchist circles in France (maybe it is also a generational issue – the anarchist scene in Québec is quite "young"); the vast majority of anarchists here are atheists, but the anticlerical tradition is less prominent (although the atheism of some anarchists may also undermine their interest in indigenous mobilizations, often marked by a spiritual discourse, especially among women). This is odd, since Québec only secularized belatedly, in the 1960s. But I don't think the Catholic Church today is as important in Québec as it is in France, as we have seen with the homophobic protests against marriage for all. While France calls itself secular [*laïque*], the Church in France seems to me far too influential and powerful: it might be a more legitimate target than Islam, for anarchists who are of Muslim origin... But obviously, that is for you to decide.

That said, in the 1920s and 1930s, anarchists and communists of Jewish origin in Montréal amused themselves by eating ham sandwiches in front of the synagogues as an anti-religious provocation. Okay. But it seems that this kind of action has a different meaning when it's practiced not by anarchists and communists of Jewish origin, but by anarchists of Catholic origin, for example, because there then is a real risk of playing into antisemitism and fascism (in the 1930s, Québécois fascists smashed the windows of Jewish businesses in Montréal on St-Laurent boulevard). I can't see myself, as a non-Muslim, going to protest today outside a mosque, considering the international political context; perhaps one should also ask the opinion of anarchist comrades of Muslim origin... if there are any in our networks.

Although the situation is not the same (especially because the jihadists are not anarchists), it seems to me that anarchism's history can help us to reflect on the current situation. We must take seriously the ideas and principles of anarchism to assert ourselves as anarchists, but we must also know which should prevail in certain circumstances and in different contexts. Anarchists are anticlerical, okay, but also practice anti-racist, internationalist solidarity. Thus, Véronique Hébert, a Atikamekw Métis playwright from Wemotaci, presented a collective performance titled *Les Mots Qui n'Existent Pas* [*The Words That Don't Exist*] at the Montréal Anarchist Theater Festival in 2013, then at the Montréal First Peoples' Festival. One of the characters explains that anarchy means both freedom from domination and "multiplicity in the face of uniqueness."

In Montréal, anarchists have been very involved in the defense of Muslims imprisoned by means of a "security certificate" which permits detention without charge (and thus without trial). Anarchists were also involved in the organization of the People's Commission Forum which denounced, among other things, repressive "security" measures concerning immigration. Anarchists (especially English-speaking and racialized

but is not intended to develop a discourse of Portuguese racial supremacy. It is an affirmation of pride in being Portuguese, a proud reversal of stigma, among young people from the working classes, addressed to working-class immigrant youth. What I find problematic is the difficulty experienced by the majority of French public opinion in getting out of its Franco-centrism and trying to understand the immigrant as other. In this respect, it seems to me that Canada, which presents itself as a multicultural society, has made more of an effort to do so. Thus, research has been undertaken to understand the specific experiences of Portuguese immigrants in Toronto's Little Portugal.

Francis, can you give us some background, first on how Québec integrates racial issues into legislation (e.g., the issue of "Canadian indigenous peoples" or the issue of ethnic statistics) and secondly, how do Québécois anarchist circles position themselves in relation to the issue of race and notions such as intersectionality?

Francis Dupuis-Déri: To situate the debate about the use of the word "race," let's say first of all that I have come to a curious conclusion through my regular comings and goings between Québec and France, there including stays of several months in France: the anarchists in Québec are ultimately very Québécois, and anarchists in France are very French. Aspiring to be an anarchist is not enough to magically escape both our national context, which strongly influences us, and a certain cultural socialization through the family, schools, media, public debates, and even party political rivalries (even if we do not vote...).

I think that anarchists from Québec – I'm generalizing, of course – tend to adopt a conceptual framework which coheres with the official ideology of Canada, namely a respect for differences associated with the policy of multiculturalism. I'm not saying that Canada and Québec are not racist societies, nor that anarchists here are not racist or sexist, but there is a tendency to accept – in principle – the values of multiculturalism and

diversity.¹⁸ Similarly, Québécois anarchists tend – I’m generalizing again – to accept the influence of feminism and feminists, who are very energetic and highly institutionalized in Québec (in a province of 8 million inhabitants, there are many more resources for women than in France, hundreds of shelters, day centers, etc.). Moreover, women did much to introduce and disseminate intersectionality in Québec.¹⁹

As for ethnic statistical data, these do not seem to be a problem in Québec: we are used to the State counting the number of English-speakers, French-speakers, and native people, and providing other categories of “ethnic origin” in the census (over 200 in the 2006 census!). This is part of our official history (like the US), which was obviously racist from the very beginning. However, this information now allows civil society to act to protect rights and fight discrimination by getting a more accurate picture of the reality of specific issues (education, employment, housing, health, etc.).

On the side of the anarchists, the influence of the national context is not the only one, of course, and we must not underestimate the local differences in anarchist networks: historical experience and the force of habit, which tendencies are more or less well-represented, the circulation of certain ideas through songs, books, magazines, or transnational mobilizations, etc. In Québec, the French anarchist network is influenced by the pres-

¹⁸For a discussion on the relationship between capitalism and racism in Canadian history, see: Mostafa Henaway, “Pas de capitalisme sans racismisme [No Capitalism Without Racism],” *Le Devoir* (Jan. 3, 2017). URL: www.ledevoir.com.

¹⁹I think, among others, the work of authors such as Sirma Bilge, Diane Lamoureux (who has just translated Patricia Hill Collins’ book, *Black Feminist Thought*), Geneviève Pagé (who has precisely studied feminists’ importation of intersectionality to Québec) and more militant initiatives, such as the Regroupement Québécois des Centres d’Aide et de Lutte contre les Agressions à Caractère Sexuel [Québec Coalition of Centers for Aid and Struggle Against Sexual Assault] (RQCALACS), who proposed province-level training on intersectionality for its members.

taken aback to hear a French comrade declare during a debate on spirituality and anarchism, in a Paris café, that “as anarchists, we have the right to criticize all religions, even Islam.” This is another rather basic Republican (or even liberal) argument. Of course, anarchists have “the right” to criticize all religions, but is it so important for anarchists right now? Just about everyone agrees and repeats that Islam produces an inhuman barbarity, whether in the guise of the Taliban, al Qaeda, or the Islamic State. Is adding an anarchist voice to the chorus really useful for advancing anarchist values such as solidarity and cosmopolitanism, anti-racism and anti-militarism? What do anarchists gain by raising their voices against Islam, when Islamophobia is the official ideology justifying a permanent war, and when Muslim communities are closely monitored by the police, face systemic discrimination, and suffer verbal and physical attacks in public space (several weeks ago in Québec, a Euro-Québécois attacked a mosque and shot 6 Muslims, wounding several others, including one who has been in a coma).

History, however, teaches us that anarchists have often been the target of racism: Sacco and Vanzetti were not only anarchists, but also Italians, then a kind of European sub-race composed of poor, uneducated and dirty people who could not be assimilated to North America. These Italians were not really “white.” When an Italian anarchist murdered Empress Sissi in Geneva, there were riots against Italian shops and cafés. Similarly to many anarchists of Jewish descent (Emma Goldman and thousands of others), they are presented in North America as individuals who were not only unable to fit in, but whose religious, cultural and political values would endanger social and political stability. At the beginning of the 20th century in the United States, the Immigration Act was also known as the Anarchist Exclusion Act, since it was intended to curb the influence of the anarchists of foreign origin.

Islamists (here are the reactionaries and conservatives prominent who blame this word being used by progressives and PC types to censor them). That said, there are also proponents of “secularism [*laïcité*]” in Québec, a term mostly used today to better criticize Islam and especially Muslim women wearing headscarves (some are obsessed with them); this is the case even in the feminist movement, e.g., during the Estates General of feminist action and analysis, which lasted two years and were the scene of a rather sharp confrontation between partisans of an intersectional approach (defended, among others, by the Fédération des Femmes du Québec) and the universalist proponents of secularism (defended, among others, by Pour le Droit des Femmes).²⁷

The mobilizations for secularism (and against Islam and Muslim women who wear a headscarf) are generally associated with a party which has since disappeared, Action Démocratique du Québec (ADQ), which launched a debate about “reasonable accommodation,” and the Parti Québécois (PQ), a sovereignist party that took an identitarian turn in order to gain votes among its opponents, at the expense of a certain tolerance. Both parties have a great responsibility for the tension of the public debate on these issues in Québec. By their public statements and political maneuvers, they opened the way for an uninhibited racism. Our former French colonial status, still strongly influenced by France, did not help matters, since Québec has number of “couriers” who bring us the debates in France over the hijab (e.g., columnist Christian Rioux, from the newspaper *Le Devoir*, or Mathieu Bock-Côté, who also writes for *Le Figaro*).

That said, if I may once again make a comparison between the anarchists in France and Québec, I must say I was rather

²⁷For an up-close and detailed analysis of this struggle, see the master’s thesis that Marie-Ève Campbell is completing at the political science department at UQAM; see also Caroline Jacquet’s doctoral thesis for the same department.

ence of English-speakers in Montréal who come from English-speaking Canada or the United States. These anarchists’ ideas and practices are strongly influenced by radical environmentalism and anti-speciesism, radical queer movements and the antiracist struggles of the African-American community. On the French side, we receive – usually about 5 or 10 years late – ideas about intersectionality, queer, trans and anarcho-indigenism, among others, and we end up (sometimes) integrating them into our thought and practices, usually after arduous struggles. For their part, the French-speaking anarchists of Québec have more contacts with Latin American activist networks. In addition, the circulation of ideas and forces between France and Québec, favored by travel and moving, stimulates reflection on anti-fascism, squats, and autonomous spaces, but also “translations” of the ideas of the Invisible Committee. In terms of revolutionary syndicalism, it draws its inspiration from France (CNT), but even more so from the United States (IWW).

In short, the colonial past which determined that Québec’s linguistic duality is not just a matter of culture and identity. It is also an environment that promotes a circulation and exchange of ideas and practices which, in turn, promotes certain anarchist tendencies (as is well demonstrated, indeed, by many books – mostly in English – on the experience of German, Italian, and Yiddish immigration to North and South America at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries). We are a kind of outpost or colonial trading post through which ideas and experiences pass and exchange with one another.²⁰ Finally, as I get older, I notice that many more anarchists than before are not only interested in the struggles of indigenous peoples here but managing to form alliances for struggle with indigenous people (I’m thinking of the group *Ni Québec, Ni Canada*

²⁰I take this image of the trading post from Jean-Pierre Couture, who suggested it in an analysis of conservative and reactionary networks in Québec, collected in Pascal Durand and Sarah Sindaco (eds.), *Le discours “néo-réactionnaire”* (Paris: Éditions CNRS, 2015).

[Neither Québec Nor Canada]). This leads to a reflection on our relationship to the colonization and settlement of the territory. For example, what is an “autonomous space” if it is located on land stolen from indigenous people as part of the process of colonization? How to recognize that we also participate in a colonial dynamic, if we have European origins? For example, you speak of the colonial relationship between France and Algeria. This is very important, of course, still very much a live issue in France and Algeria. But as seen from Québec, we know that France also has a colonial debt to Québec, and even a historical “responsibility” for the impact of European colonization suffered by indigenous people (here we should also speak of the “crimes against humanity” for which the Canadian government, but also those of France and Britain, are responsible).

If anarchists from Québec therefore tend to be “Canadian” (multiculturalist, etc.) it seems to me (I could be wrong) that the anarchists in France have taken on board a republican thought with “universalist” pretenses, i.e., the official ideology of the regime in place (just as, in Québec, anarchists speak the language of multiculturalism). I have heard anarchists in France make statements that would have provoked laughter or cringing in Québec, for example, rejecting the alternation of turns to speak between men and women on the pretext that one would then also have to reserve turns “for Arabs, dwarves, and humpback whales” (a basic republican universalist argument).

I am aware that I’m stepping into a minefield with my speculations (I know that there are also anarchists in France who practice or accept gender-separate feminist organizing [*non-mixité féministe*], who fight against Islamophobia, etc.). Let me go a bit further, though, and suggest that what I just said is also true to the meaning of words: that is to say, it is not always the same according to time and place. In Québec, the word “community” doesn’t have the same meaning that it has in France; we use it in the associative meaning – “community groups” are social organizations [*organismes associatifs*] whose mandate is

Some anarchists would not support a Jewish person because of the association between international finance and Judaism that could sometimes be found in the anti-capitalist imaginary of the time. Fortunately, some anarchists of the time saw, beyond the fact that Dreyfus was a military officer from a bourgeois family, that this case concerned a struggle against the injustice produced by the army, an apparatus of the State. In the case of Islamophobia, it is not a matter of supporting a religion but of considering that a person doesn’t have to be physically attacked in the street just because she wears a veil or that a person doesn’t have to suffer discrimination simply because she is Muslim. It doesn’t seem that defending the right to criticize religions means allowing that to legitimize the unjust acts that are perpetrated against religious minorities – whether the person wears a *kippa* or a Muslim veil. What is interesting in the report of the Council of Europe is that it highlights, in the case of Islamophobia as much as that of anti-Roma prejudice [*romophobie*], homophobia, and transphobia, that French politicians are helping to trivialize these ideas by their words. In their general critique of the State, anarchists can help by playing a role in the specific critique of state racism: anti-immigrant policies, security and police policies targeting immigrants...

I wondered if, particularly in Québec, anarchist circles were also impacted by similar controversies – the critique of technology vs. gender or atheism vs. Islamophobia – or are these really Franco-French debates?

Francis: Islamophobia is not a term that is problematic for anarchists in Québec, at least to my knowledge. At the Montréal Anarchist Bookfair in 2015, for example, three anarchists presented a workshop entitled “Anti-racist anarchist perspectives against Islamophobia in Québec.” Obviously, one would hope to offer a more encompassing term that doesn’t just mean fear (phobia), but also contempt for and even hatred towards Muslims. But this is the word that is used here in Québec, and it’s the first time I’ve heard this theory that it was invented by

wing and conservative religious networks at the time of “marriage for all”²⁴ or the “absentee day” against the teaching of gender theory in the schools. Nevertheless, it is interesting to recall that at that time, another controversy about “gender” – an absurd controversy, in my eyes – took place within the anarchist movement. In circles of the radical critique of technology and anti-industrialism, some protested against the notion of gender,²⁵ seeing in social constructivism an avatar of technological constructivism. Again, for simplicity, we took the part for the whole. Certainly, there are technophilic approaches on the part of Donna Haraway or Paul B. Preciado. Nevertheless, these critiques neglected to note that the deconstruction of gender binarism was initiated by materialist feminist anthropologists studying traditional societies and showing that there were people in those societies who were not assigned to one of the two dominant genders. Similarly, these critiques do not specify that such approaches can be combined with ecofeminist analyses to criticize industrialism.²⁶

But as I said, we also find blockage around the concept of Islamophobia. It must be said that in France, generally speaking, a number of media personalities have promulgated the idea that this notion is propaganda coming from Islamist circles. This reduction is nevertheless surprising: in 2016, the increase of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic acts in France is denounced by the Council of Europe – hardly an Islamist organization. I think it is possible to make an analogy between the attitude of anarchists toward Islamophobia and toward the Dreyfus affair.

²⁴ Although anarchists and feminists also highlighted the questionable nature of the demand for marriage for all when we should demand the abolition of marriage for all.

²⁵ Escudero Alexis, *La reproduction artificielle de l'humain* (Grenoble: Le monde à l'envers, 2014). URL: alexisescudero.wordpress.com/.

²⁶ See in this regard: *Genre et environnement: Nouvelles menaces, nouvelles analyses au Nord et au Sud*, coordinated by Pascale Molinier, Sandra Laugier and Jules Falquet, *Cahiers du genre*, no. 59 (2015). URL: [<https://www.cairn.info/revue-cahiers-du-genre-2015-2.htm>].

not defined by ethnic or gender identity.

I am also aware that it should be made clear how words that evoke the principles recognized by the State [*principes officiels*] (multiculturalism, secularism, etc.) are taken up by anarchists and translated into the internal struggles of left and far left circles, to promote this organization or that tendency, to consolidate alliances or, on the contrary, to confirm old rivalries, etc. (as Émeline Fourment has wisely suggested to me). I imagine that the word “race” smells of sulfur for anarchists in France, probably because some were heavily influenced by the official debate on the French Constitution in 2013 to delete the word “race,” and without probably also by the past and present of the French far right and fascism. Now, the word “race” as it appears in texts about intersectionality was proposed by antiracist African-American writers in the triptych “gender, race, class.” This is not new, though. In the 1970s, Angela Davis, a former Black Panther, signed a book (in English and French) *Women, Race, & Class*. I have never heard of debate about the title of this book, no more than about the book by the (white) French feminist sociologist Colette Guillaumin, titled *Sexe, Race et Pratique du Pouvoir* [*Gender, Race, and the Practice of Power*]. Similarly, the Québec feminist Diane Lamoureux, who translated Patricia Hill Collins’ book *Black Feminist Thought* into French, explains in her preface her choice translation for certain words, such as *blanchitude* (inspired by *négritude*) or *blanchité* [for whiteness], but it doesn’t seem appropriate to her to try to defend having kept the word “race” in the French version.

If one refuses the African-American feminists’ use of the word “race,” then we should also refuse to read Bakunin, since he wrote a book called *God and the State*. If God does not exist, then speaking of “God” will only confirm believers in their faith! To avoid using the word “God,” let’s talk of an “imaginary deified entity.” We would then have the anarchist slogan: “No imaginary deified entities, no masters!”

Sorry for my sarcasm...

I consider that anarchists should be enthusiastic about intersectionality, since it proposes to take seriously and combat all possible systems and forms of domination, oppression, appropriation and exclusion. Is that not also, in principle, what anarchism proposes?

Now, we need words to name the socially and culturally constructed categories, gender, race and... class. Yes, yes: class, too. For many in the 19th century, and probably still today, class is strongly influenced by biology and heredity. It is often considered that wealth is passed down from father to son and poverty from mother to daughter, hence the idea that poor mothers should not have too many children. Inheritance officially and legally consecrates biological influence in the class system, along with the marriages that often take place between members of the same social class, the choice of schools and activities for children, etc. In other words, while class is a social construction, our membership in a class is strongly influenced by our birth.

But saying “class” doesn’t mean that you are defending a biological conception of class, much less defending the capitalist system. Similarly, you can say “gender” or “race” without defending sexism or racism. We can obviously prefer to talk about a “racialized person” or “racialized” to avoid the word “race.” But should the important thing for anarchists be to rebel – in public – against the use of the word “race” in texts written by African-American antiracists, or to mobilize against the racism of “our” States, which today is especially directed against the “Arab” Muslim population? I can’t see how spending our energy countering the use of the word “race” will have much impact on this kind of culturalist racism, in the name of which emergency laws and military invasions are justified that should (in my opinion) horrify anarchists.

But I have said too much: probably you will can say to me that I don’t understand everything about the anarchists in

haps on one or two occasions. As part of indigenous mobilizations, such as land occupations with barricades, it is generally understood that the anarchists who join them are auxiliary, that is to say, the initiative and the process of decision-making must remain in the hands of indigenous people.²³ There is a respect for the autonomy of struggles, an understanding of the process of emancipation which is summarized by the slogan: “I don’t need you to set me free, I’ll free myself!” The English-speaking anarchist network distributes several pamphlets, produced by African-American or indigenous networks, which offer ways to better distinguish the positions of the “ally” (who often acts independently to “save” the other, or is limited to a vague expression of solidarity or intermittent and distant support), of the “auxiliary” (who helps on demand, taking on the less valued tasks, but without taking many risks), and the “accomplice” (who agrees to take risks, even alone, by directly confronting other white men, at the risk of losing comrades and friends or offending colleagues).

But I have trouble believing that the situation is so dark in anarchist circles in France: with Islamophobia in power, war in Africa and the Middle East, the emergency laws and the Front National waiting for its chance, is this not a good context to mobilize an intersectional analysis? And as I said, I know many friends in France who have integrated feminism into their anarchism (and vice versa), who rebel against Islamophobia, etc.

Irène: The anarchists are invested in supporting struggles for migrants or in the antifa struggle against the far right and confusionism. But it happens that the joint is difficult between the fight against religious conservatism and the fight against Islamophobia. Anarchist activists were involved against the right-

²³See, on this, Sarita Ahooja’s text, “Les anarchistes et la lutte pour l’autodétermination des Autochtones [Anarchists and the Struggle for Indigenous Self-Determination],” in Rémi Bellemare-Caron et al. (eds.), *Nous sommes ingouvernables. Les anarchistes au Québec aujourd’hui*, Montréal, Lux, 2013, pp. 187-202.

media). In short, I sometimes say I'm an alpha male. It's probably no coincidence that I was more refractory at first to queer, and more recently to trans movements. It took me many discussions and many readings to get beyond some of the arguments I advanced (in fact: prejudices disguised as arguments) as if these were original and relevant ideas that queer or trans people would have never thought before that I think... But I never had trouble with the separate organization [*non-mixité*] of others, such as feminists. I always found amazing the virulence of some men who get angry about separatism [*non-mixité*] as if it were a crime of high treason... From a slightly trivial point of view, I can say I have lots of other things to worry about when I am excluded from an event (a meeting, discussion, demonstration, etc.) as a man with white skin. It's not so bad. Seriously, I especially think it is fair and legitimate for the subaltern to get together without the presence of the dominant. After all, that's what union members do in their committees and assemblies, to which bosses and executives are not invited. Finally, I think that even anarchists like to have time to just be with other anarchists, right? This is the idea of anarchist collectives, anarchist publishers, anarchist radio, etc. We not only exclude our enemies, e.g., fascists, from some of our events and activities, but sometimes even anarchists of different tendencies, although we might meet with anarchists of other tendencies at convergences and coalitions.

While I believe that the women's separatism is better accepted in Québec than in France, it is also routinely challenged, for example, in unions, where the legitimacy of the "women's committees" is questioned, or in the student movement, where critiques are raised against feminists who propose to organize women-only demonstrations, such as the March 8th, or on the theme of "Take Back the Night" [*La Nuit, la Rue, Femmes sans Peur*]. I think that separate organization by race is rare in Québec, in mixed networks of the left and far-left, but I've never heard anarchists get publicly upset about it, except per-

France, and that there are networks which have adopted an intersectional analysis. Why do you think this happens in some networks and not others?

Irène: Before answering your question directly, I would like to join you on the very French-centered nature of the approach in France. For example, I work a lot now on issues of education, which, as we know, have occupied an important place in the history of anarchism. I first got interested in anarchist educational experiments in France during the Belle Epoque, and the Freinet movement in which many anarchist militants are still active. But in this context, I felt some dissatisfaction with the pedagogical approaches in use within the Freinet movement, insufficiently "political" for my taste. So I turned to foreign literature to see what was happening. This is where I found that in the Iberian and English-speaking areas, since the 1980s, there had emerged, following the work of Paulo Freire, a rich pedagogical movement: critical pedagogy. During that time, France had remained totally alien to this fact, while elsewhere teachers committed to social change may be identified by this label of critical pedagogy. But among the ideas that are very present in this movement, I want to mention two. The first is that Freire, due to an educational trip to the US, met black American feminists like bell hooks, and he was convinced that he could not define oppression by class alone, but that gender and race oppression also had to be fought. The second idea, which is very present in critical pedagogy, as well as in feminism, is the importance of the lived experience of oppression.

But I think that the adoption of an intersectional analysis in France is first linked to a certain "positionality"²¹ and the social subjective experience of oppression that this has constructed. In fact, even before the concept of intersectionality arrived in France, there was a whole line of research around the sociol-

²¹ A term that refers to the social position a person occupies within social relations.

ogist Danièle Kergoat that sought to articulate the social relations of gender and class since the 1970s, but this work led by Kergoat is no stranger to her personal social trajectory. Similarly, in the mid-2000s, the researchers reopening these questions in France, with an interest in black American feminism, such as Elsa Dorlin or Jules Falquet, are persons who have a personal trajectory that leads them to an intersectional position in terms of gender, sexuality, or race. This generation of researchers had an influence on students and activists who have also helped to disseminate these themes within activist circles, especially among anarchists. This is the case with Alternative Libertaire, I suppose with the CGA, or in the transqueerdyke [*transpédégouine*] community. This positionality is also found in some activist groups like LOCS (Lesbians Of Color) which, because of the purpose of their collective (aid to migrant and refugee lesbians), have developed a *de facto* intersectional approach.

This dimension is often misunderstood by white, straight, male, cisgender anarchists. They interpret this as the fact that they have no right to speak because of their (biological) nature without understanding that it is their social position that tends to make them blind to certain questions. A number of male anarchists I know think their traditional vision of anarchism sufficient to respond all the problems and they do not realize they can silence others [*invisibiliser*] and take positions that are harmful to groups of whose problems and difficulties they are not even aware. These are people who have never thought about the subjective experience and the everyday difficulties that can be experienced by a woman, a racialized, homosexual, transgender or disabled person (as there are very interesting social approaches to disability giving rise to a critique of ableism which is part of intersectionality). For example, in an article on queer pedagogy which I translated, the teacher, who stated in her text that she was lesbian, explained how she never alluded to a couple's life during classes, how one of her fears was that

students would ask her directly about it or even to find homophobic graffiti about her in the building. So many fears that heterosexual teachers never experience.

It is quite significant that another point crystallized by the debates in French anarchist circles is the issue of separatism [*non-mixité*] on the part of racialized people,²² and sometimes that of separate [*non-mixte*] anarchy-feminist groups as well. This is a point that seems to me to have an irrational desire for control of a dominant group on a subordinate group. I sometimes conducts feminist self-defense courses. I am often then forced to justify separate organization [*la non-mixité*]. My male interlocutors, who push me on this point, then show signs of discomfort when I ask them whether they might need to defend themselves against someone putting his hands on their thighs or buttocks, trying to grab them or rub up on them in transit. In a way, though, it is the anarchist movement which, with workers' autonomy, produced the justification for the idea that is the basis of separate organization [*non-mixité*]: the oppressed must be able to meet, to talk among themselves, and above all, to decide for themselves without being subject to the domination of their oppressors within their own collective.

Personally, I tend to think that in Québec, the question of gender separatism [*non-mixité de sexe*] has at least been settled. I assume, from what you said earlier, this must also be the case concerning [the separate organization of] racialized people. Am I wrong?

Francis: It would probably be better to speak directly with the people concerned, because I'm precisely one of those men who was assigned a male identity at birth (cisgender), with white skin, heterosexual, and even middle age and middle class, endowed with a good deal of cultural capital (I am a university professor who publishes books and is invited to speak to the

²²As illustrated, for example, by this text written in the spring of 2016. URL: www.non-fides.fr.