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ANARCHISM AND FEMINISM: THE CONCEPT OF *AMOR LIBRE.*

1. Introduction.

The aim of this work is to analyze how anarchism treated different issues like love, sex, family, motherhood, or marriage in relation to women. Basically, I will take into account Spanish anarchism from the 1880-90's decades to the Civil War (1936-1939) and Emma Goldman's ideas. I will try to consider not only anarchist theory but also everyday practices. My argumentation will be that libertarian movement anticipated some conceptualizations of sexuality and family that are nowadays prevailing.

2. Amor libre¹.

The concept of amor libre means equality and freedom for both men and women in sexual and affective relationships². It does not mean promiscuity or licentiousness, as conservative sectors of society used to affirm.

Freedom implies two aspects. First, the absence of possessive rights to husbands over their wives. Second, the *dissolubility* of the relationship.

Equality only can be reached by the way of liberating women from fear and guilty feelings in sexual relationships. The importance of conscious motherhood should be remarked too (see point 4). In this way, the use of contraceptives is stressed.

Emma Goldman³ pointed out that women had a primordial role in their own liberation. The removal of *inner tyrants* (mental barriers) was a very important thing. That is why she strongly defended the sexual freedom of women. Therefore, woman independence "must come from and through herself. First, by asserting herself as a personality and not as a sex commodity. Second, by refusing the right to anyone over her body; by refusing to be a servant of God, the state, the husband, the family, etc..." (Rowbotham, 1992: 157).

Goldman's stress on sex collided with prevailing Puritanism, but also had opponents among anarchist comrades. For instance, Kropotkin considered sex as a distraction from real important things. But Goldman viewed sex as a source of creative energy, and criticized sexual repression. Women had to seek their own pleasure in sex -not being an *object*, but becoming an *active subject*.

In Spain, the anarchist discourse about sexuality turned on the New Sexual Morality (*Nueva Moral Sexual*). It was centered on the rejection of traditional sexual morality, which was considered as repressive and distorted. The new morality implied not only a revolutionary change based upon freedom and equality, but also a conceptualization of several sexual issues such as eugenics, sexual education, abolition of prostitution, cohabitation, divorce, birth control, or rejection of religious intoxication of sex. Moreover, this was connected to alternative ways of life, linked to naturism, vegetarianism or nudism.

3. Amor libre and conscious motherhood.

Anarchist movement paid much attention to free and conscious motherhood, which was completely linked to the insistence on the amor libre. In fact, sex and reproduction

(pleasure and procreation) were unconnected by anarchists. In this way, human sexuality could be able to break up the chains of reproduction. And this is too the mode to make procreation to depend on human will.

Birth control was the instrument to achieve these goals. For this reason, anarchists were called "neo-Malthusians", and found the opposition of Marx and Engels, whom were against birth control (more for being in the front of Malthus than for having a coherent position).

French anarchism had a clear slogan -"La Maternité est Libre", which indicates perfectly that "sex and reproduction are not inevitably linked" (Rowbotham, 1992: 157). In fact, they are not linked for men, so contraception or abortion were necessary to enjoy sex for women.

Goldman was one of the most important activists in the extension of contraceptives all over the society. Along with Ben Reitman (the man of her life, although she had several lovers), she distributed propaganda in favour of the use of contraceptives. This was a challenge to Comstock law (which forbade the use of contraceptives) and a good example of the anarchist *direct action*. For this reason, they went to prison and Margaret Anderson could affirm that Goldman had been confined for having said that "women need not always keep their mouths shut and their wombs open" (Rowbotham, 1992: 157).

Otherwise, birth control could be a good instrument to reduce working-class sufferings: "the working-class can take direct action by refusing to supply the market with children to be exploited, by refusing to populate the earth with slaves" (Rowbotham, 1992: 158).

This idea is shared by Spanish anarchism. The paper *Salud y Fuerza* [Health and Strength], edited between 1904 and 1914) holds that it is not necessary a great population to carry the revolution out. This only brings poverty, and famine does not produce revolutionists.

4. Amor libre and the critique to traditional marriage and family.

Traditional marriage and family were the target of very hard criticism. Anarchism tried to reveal the hypocrisy that lay under these institutions.

Goldman affirms that love and marriage have nothing in common. The most remarkable of marriage is its economic nature: it is an agreement between two partners, by which woman begins to depend on her husband, both economically and spiritually. In her opinion, the institution of marriage makes woman to become a parasite. She remains incapacitated for life, gets her imagination paralyzed. It is the opposite to internal realization. Afterwards, marriage sets a protection, but this is only a trap, a parody of human nature.

In this connection, marriage is similar to capitalism, which is alienating for human beings, makes them dependent, and then creates the public charity...

In order to achieve human emancipation, she thinks the eradication of bourgeois family and marriage to be necessary.

Spanish anarchism held similar positions. The libertarian paper *Los Desesperados* defined the family as a group based upon egoistic motivations, but hypocritically covered with a mantle of morality. The selfish organization of society makes so painful to earn a living, that men and women get married not because of love but because of material insecurity.

Two main characteristics of family were the center of criticism: property and authority.

Firstly, marriage is refusable because it is based on the shared property for their members. In this connection, monogamic marriage is considered the most repugnant individual property, and the most denigratory slavery.

Women's conjugal fidelity is the instrument to assure paternity, that is to say, the ownership of father over their descendants. This is the base of heritage, that is, the way "to perpetuate the crime [of property]"⁴. The traditional, selfish marriage was seen as mere prostitution. Secondly, family is based upon father authority and internal hierarchization. This implies that children are socialized by means of a internalization of values of submission and obedience.

5. Conclusions.

Anarchist stress on amor libre should be analyzed like a revolutionary answer to a very concrete social-historical situation. It implies a challenge to traditional values, an alternative conception of family and cohabitation (not necessary materialized in marriage) based upon freedom and equality, love, and reciprocal respect. Nowadays, this ideal of family is shared by the majority of the population of modern societies. It represents the usual and *logical* conceptualization of living together. Therefore, anarchist movement anticipated many ideas that now we see as ours and contemporary. The accent placed on contraception and conscious maternity are clear examples of this. The analysis of family as a reproductive institution of authoritarianism was something that theorists of the Frankfurt School retook later on (e.g. Horkheimer, Adorno,...).

Con formato: Inglés (Estados Unidos)

Libertarian conceptualization of human sexuality supposed too a challenge to conservative and religious values. Sex was considered a creative strength, an energy to be liberated. However, many anarchists described sexuality as a mere biological instinct to be satisfied. Only some of them pointed out the historicity of the category of sexuality, that is, analyzed sex as a social-historical construction. In this way, they anticipated the current approach to sexuality in sociology.

6. References.

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Notes.

¹ Anarchist movement was not the unique to treat this concept and its implications. In fact, other social movements such as suffragism, socialism or communism contributed to the debate in a very important way. For obvious reasons of space, I will not analyze this discussion in this work, but it would be a very interesting direction of future research.

² Discourse about sexual liberation was centered on heterosexuality. Homosexuality was a taboo for certain sectors of anarchism, or simply rejected. Lesbianism was considered something marginal, even an aberration. However, Emma Goldman defended homosexuality arguing that any sexual act voluntarily made did not constitute any vice. Furthermore, she held that neither State, nor Church, nor anybody had the right to intervene in such cases (Osborne, 1989).

Con formato: Inglés (Estados Unidos)

³ Goldman was a Russian Jewish immigrant in the United States. She was to become one of the best known anarchist women agitators and speakers (Rowbotham, 1992: 151-152).

Con formato: Inglés (Estados Unidos)

⁴ The quote belongs to the anarchist M. Martínez: El comunismo conyugal o el matrimonio exogámico. In *Germinal*, 1905. It appears in Alvarez Junco, 1991: 290