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# “The Ballot Humbug”: Anarchist Women and Women’s Suffrage

## ABSTRACT

This article explores how anarchist women viewed the feminist struggle for suffrage in the early 1900s. By focusing on this ostensible historical anomaly—women against patriarchy refuting the call for women’s suffrage—the article ventures into a plural history of feminism. The historiographic wave metaphor, typically employed to portray different stages of feminism, is here reimagined as *radio waves*. Through a variety of publications written by influential anarchist women, the article tunes into a broadcast that airs how *anarchy* expels *patriarchy* through a generic struggle against *hierarchy*. The case of anarchist women and women’s suffrage arguably signposts how to productively invoke plurality in social movement historiography.

Keywords: *Anarchism; Historiography; Temporality; Social Movement; History of Political Thought; Women’s Suffrage; Suffragette; Emma Goldman; He-Yin Zhen*

## Towards a Plural History of Feminism<sup>1</sup>

In a time when nation after nation celebrates the centenary of women’s suffrage, it is indeed tempting to depict feminism as the epitome of historical, cumulative advances in emancipation. Clearly, such an endeavour obscures ideas and actions disloyal to *the* feminist movement; uniform and linear notions of feminist progression eclipse ambiguity and antagonism—the very plurality of history. A most notable historical example is how anarchist women rejected the struggle for women’s suffrage, how they asserted that female participation in elections, or in the government itself, hardly advanced their struggle for emancipation. This article locates that anarchist critique of universal suffrage in a plural history of feminism.

1 Acknowledgments: I have had the privilege to receive the most helpful comments on early versions of this text by Kathy Ferguson, Nancy Hewitt, Martha Ackelsberg, Klara Arnberg, Paulina de los Reyes and Margaret Marsh, for which I am deeply grateful.

Substantial work has been done to expose how notions of singularity and linearity haunt the art of history writing.<sup>2</sup> The historiographic metaphor of oceanic waves, which is still powerful for portraying the history of what is commonly referred to as *the feminist movement*, has been particularly criticised in this regard. Such a periodisation of succeeding stages tends to neglect the interface of multiple temporalities:<sup>3</sup> the continuity, interlinkage, and dialogue between past and present struggles.<sup>4</sup> As argued by Clare Hemmings,<sup>5</sup> if we instead seek ambiguity and antagonism, in the *plural* history of feminism, we can bridge temporal boundaries that hamper us from recognizing certain ideas and actions. For example, what is now commonly, yet debatably, called Third Wave Feminism is often declared open-ended;<sup>6</sup> the ontological embrace of heterogeneity challenges social ascriptions and accentuates instead the continued resistance against the logic of domination.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, as Claire Snyder points out, the Third Wave carries a “feminism without exclusion,” a social movement invoking “the anarchic imperative of direct action.”<sup>8</sup> Yet uniform readings of feminism become disabling when trying to situate such a tendency historically; better then to continue the critical line of the historiography that acknowledges historical multiplicity and allows for past, present, and future to coexist and inform one another. Such a view-

- 2 For an overview, see: Marek Tamm/Laurent Olivier: Introduction: Rethinking Historical Time, in: Marek Tamm/Laurent Olivier (eds.): *Rethinking Historical Time: New Approaches to Presentism*, London 2019.
- 3 Helge Jordheim: Against Periodization: Koselleck’s Theory of Multiple Temporalities, in: *History and Theory* 51:2 (2012), pp. 151–171.
- 4 Kathleen Laughlin/Julie Gallagher/Dorothy Sue Cobble/Eileen Boris/Premilla Nadasen/Stephanie Gilmore/Leandra Zarnow: Is It Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor, in: *Feminist Formations* 22:1 (2010), pp. 76–135; Nancy Hewitt: Introduction, in: Nancy Hewitt (ed.): *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U. S. Feminism*, New Brunswick 2010; Jo Reger: Introduction, in: Jo Reger (ed.): *Different Wavelengths: Studies of the Contemporary Women’s Movement*, New York 2014.
- 5 Clare Hemmings: *Considering Emma Goldman: Feminist Political Ambivalence and the Imaginative Archive*, Durham 2018; Clare Hemmings: *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*, Durham 2011.
- 6 Jonathan Dean: Who’s Afraid of Third Wave Feminism? On the Uses of the ‘Third Wave’ in British Feminist Politics, in: *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 11:3 (2009), pp. 334–352; Stacy Gillis/Gillian Howie/Rebecca Munford: Introduction, in: Stacy Gillis/Gillian Howie/Rebecca Munford (eds.): *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, New York 2004.
- 7 Rebecca Clark Mane: Transmuting Grammars of Whiteness in Third-Wave Feminism: Interrogating Posttrace Histories, Postmodern Abstraction, and the Proliferation of Difference in Third-Wave Texts, in: *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38:1 (2012), pp. 71–98, pp.75f.; Shelley Budgeon: *Third-Wave Feminism and the Politics of Gender in Late Modernity*, New York 2011, p. 21.
- 8 Claire Snyder: What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay, in: *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 34:1 (2008), pp. 175–196, p. 188.

point enables us to recognize how a “feminism without exclusion” airs an anarchist sentiment that has actually surged and surfaced across history.

This article documents how anarchist women have attacked *patriarchy* in their struggle against *hierarchy* and for *anarchy*. It builds on a textual analysis of select movement publications, written by anarchist women who were active around the turn of the twentieth century, to exhibit how these dissident voices add plurality to feminist historiography. This abductive reasoning is much indebted to Clare Hemmings’ polytemporal approach to anarchist/feminist historiography.<sup>9</sup> In *Considering Emma Goldman: Feminist Political Ambivalence and the Imaginative Archive*, Hemmings demonstrates how the ambiguity and antagonism of political thought, instead of being interpreted as mere incoherence, invite us into an “understanding of the present as always containing multiple histories.”<sup>10</sup>

In this historiographic vein, which also includes Reinhart Koselleck’s broader project to “pluralize the temporalities”<sup>11</sup> and to create a *history in the plural*,<sup>12</sup> this article seeks out misfit or silenced voices, in a plural history of feminism, through Nancy Hewitt’s restoration of the wave metaphor. In her renouncement of the notion of oceanic waves, Hewitt suggests a regeneration in terms of *radio waves* “of different lengths and frequencies that occur simultaneously; movements that grow louder or fade out, reach vast audiences across oceans or only a few listeners in a local area.”<sup>13</sup> Hewitt’s reconceptualization offers new avenues to capture the plurality of feminist historiography; by tuning in to dissident radio waves we detect ideas and actions that would have been eclipsed by a unilineal history writing—such as anarchist women renouncing the ballot box when the struggle for suffrage was uniting feminists worldwide. This article tunes in to that broadcast of anarchist women and women’s suffrage.

- 9 Clare Hemmings: *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*; Clare Hemmings: *Considering Emma Goldman: Feminist Political Ambivalence and the Imaginative Archive*.
- 10 Clare Hemmings: *Considering Emma Goldman: Feminist Political Ambivalence and the Imaginative Archive*, p. 27.
- 11 Reinhart Koselleck [2006], quoted in: Helge Jordheim: *Against Periodization: Koselleck’s Theory of Multiple Temporalities*, p. 156.
- 12 Niklas Olsen: *History in the Plural: An Introduction to the Work of Reinhart Koselleck*, New York 2012.
- 13 Nancy Hewitt: *Feminist Frequencies: Regenerating the Wave Metaphor*, in: *Feminist Studies* 38:3 (2012), pp. 658–680, p. 668.

## *Anarchy ≠ Patriarchy*

There is little dispute that the massive women's movement that shook the world around the turn of the past century orbited one political issue above all: "the gain of the Parliamentary vote" as Christabel Pankhurst put it, "the symbol of freedom and equality."<sup>14</sup> However, in this historical moment, we also find anarchist women who diligently accentuated the dangers of state power. *Anarchism*, as a political ideology,<sup>15</sup> is generally understood to have originated in the 1840s following the publication of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's *What is Property?* (1840).<sup>16</sup> Whereas this text articulated anarchy as a political ideal, the anarchist *movement* took off in the 1870s, following a strident break with the state-oriented faction of the First International. The anarchist movement peaked in the early 1900s, but was broken apart after the severe state suppression of the *en masse* anarchist experiment during the Spanish Civil War. Although anarchism continues to infuse political thinking well into the present,<sup>17</sup> this article will focus on its classic highpoint.

The critique of male domination, or *patriarchy*,<sup>18</sup> found fertile ground in the anarchist movement. This line of thought resembled a centennial legacy of Mary Wollstonecraft's thoughts on women in power: "I do not wish them to have power over men, but over themselves."<sup>19</sup> It is precisely this anti-authoritarian notion that became the leitmotif of anarchist women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Anarchism here distinguished itself from other forms of international socialism through an uncompromising critique of *all* forms of domination (including the "people's state"). Hence, the struggle against male domination was soon adopted by the anarchist movement—and this despite the grave misogyny advanced by, ironically enough, anarchism's "founding father." Proudhon understood patriarchy to denote the one legitimate social hierarchy, and his infamous stance has haunted the anarchist

14 Christabel Pankhurst: *The Great Scourge and How to End It*, in: Jane Marcus (ed.): *Suffrage and the Pankhursts*, London 2013 [1913], p. 228.

15 Randall Amster: *Anti-Hierarchy*, in: Benjamin Franks/Nathan Jun/Leonard Williams (eds.): *Anarchism: A Conceptual Approach*, New York 2018.

16 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: *What Is Property?: An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government*, New York 1970 [1840].

17 See for instance: Iwona Janicka: *Theorizing Contemporary Anarchism: Solidarity, Mimesis and Radical Social Change*, London 2017; Jesse Cohn: *Underground Passages: Anarchist Resistance Culture, 1848–2011*, Edinburgh 2015.

18 Gerda Lerner: *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford 1986.

19 Mary Wollstonecraft: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, Cambridge 2010 [1792], p. 134.

movement ever since.<sup>20</sup> But it also invoked critical thought: “Before me, the star of my ideal. Behind me, men,” wrote Blanca de Moncaleano, editor of the anarchist-feminist journal *Pluma Roja* in early twentieth-century Mexico.<sup>21</sup> Proudhon’s and other male anarchists’ failure to acknowledge the syllogism of *anarchy* denouncing *patriarchy* was indeed challenged due to its logical incoherence. The editors of *La Voz de la Mujer*, an anarchist journal circulating in late nineteenth-century Argentina, explicitly spoke out against “false anarchists,” those who failed to see “one of anarchism’s most beautiful ideals—the emancipation of women.”<sup>22</sup> This incongruity was also pointed out by Proudhon’s contemporaries. “Speak out against man’s exploitation of woman,” wrote anarchist Joseph Déjacque in an open letter to Proudhon, “do not describe yourself as an anarchist, or be an anarchist through and through.”<sup>23</sup> The French writer and women’s activist Jenny d’Hericourt similarly pleaded: “You contradict your own principles.”<sup>24</sup>

This invigorating idea, *anarchy* ≠ *patriarchy*, was articulated in various places across the globe. Although anarchism as an ideology emerged from the European Enlightenment, not least through the joint political thought of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin,<sup>25</sup> it grew in the late eighteenth century into an ardent social movement, a rhizome of resistance communities sprouting in each and every corner of the world.<sup>26</sup> Historical records suggest that women were particularly active in

- 20 Sharif Gemie: Anarchism and Feminism: A Historical Survey, in: *Women’s History Review* 5:3 (1996), pp. 417–444; Mary Nash: *Mujeres Libres: España 1936–1939*, Barcelona 1975, pp. 8–11.
- 21 Blanca de Moncaleano [1915], in: Clara Lomas: *Transborder Discourse: The Articulation of Gender in the Borderlands in the Early Twentieth Century*, in: *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 24:2 (2003), pp. 51–74, p. 62. Anarchist-feminism was at this time well-articulated all across Latin America, with key figures such as María Lacerda de Moura, Luisa Rojas, Salvadora Medina Onrubia and María Álvarez. *Colección Libertarias: La Idea. Perspectivas De Mujeres Anarquistas*, Santiago de Chile 2016.
- 22 Editorial [1896], in: Maxine Molyneux: *Women’s Movements in International Perspective*, Houndmills 2001, p. 22.
- 23 Joseph Déjacque: On Being Human, in: Robert Graham (ed.): *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*. Vol. 1, from Anarchy to Anarchism (300ce to 1939), Montreal 2005 [1857], p. 71.
- 24 Jenny d’Hericourt: *A Woman’s Philosophy of Woman; or, Woman Affranchised: An Answer to Michelet, Proudhon, Girardin, Legouvé, Comte, and Other Modern Innovators*, New York 1864, p. 117.
- 25 Peter Marshall: *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*, London 2008 [1992], pp. 196–200; Alice Wexler: Emma Goldman on Mary Wollstonecraft, in: Penny Weiss/Loretta Kensing (eds.): *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman*, Pennsylvania 2007.
- 26 Benedict Anderson: *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination*, London 2005, pp. 1–8; Kathy Ferguson: *Emma Goldman: Political Thinking in the Streets*,

this movement.<sup>27</sup> At the heart of the political ideology advocating anarchy, anarchist women seem to have found a most simple yet difficult idea. Akin to Wollstonecraft's aphorism above, this idea was pointedly summarized by anarchist campaigner Lucy Parsons, who ingenuously declared that "the principle of rulership is in itself wrong; no man has any right to rule another."<sup>28</sup>

This line of thought follows from anarchism's generic, anti-authoritarian orientation, employed to navigate various strains of domination: economic, political, and social. As formulated by Charlotte Wilson, one of England's most prominent late nineteenth century organizers, anarchism targets the sheer logic of domination: "The leading manifestations of this obstructive tendency," Wilson declared, "are Property, or domination over things, the denial of the claim of others to their use; and Authority, the government of man by man, embodied in majority rule."<sup>29</sup> Voltairine de Cleyre similarly defined anarchism as the unpretentious "belief that all forms of external authority must disappear to be replaced by self-control only."<sup>30</sup> Emma Goldman likewise depicted anarchy as nothing less than "the negation of all forms of authority."<sup>31</sup> For these anarchist women, the course toward abolishing authority seems to have translated into a struggle against male domination; they began to target—alongside the powers of capital, state, and church—the institution of patriarchy.

## Anarchists and Feminists

The anarchists typically positioned themselves *against* the feminism of their day. As part of the international labour movement, with its distinct class orientation, many anarchists seem to have found it difficult to join a cross-class struggle for mere female

Lanham 2011, pp. 229–237; Clare Hemmings: *Considering Emma Goldman: Feminist Political Ambivalence and the Imaginative Archive*, pp. 80–86.

27 Kathy Ferguson suggests that "the anarchist's groups during Goldman's time and place were roughly one-third or even one-half women". A list of these anarchist feminists is continuously updated on Ferguson's website: [www.politicalscience.hawaii.edu/emmagoldman/index.html](http://www.politicalscience.hawaii.edu/emmagoldman/index.html).

28 Lucy Parsons: *The Ballot Humbug. A Delusion and a Snare; a Mere Veil Behind Which Politics Is Played*, in: Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (ed.): *Lucy Parsons: Freedom, Equality & Solidarity: Writings & Speeches, 1878–1937*, Chicago 2004 [1905], pp. 96f.

29 Charlotte Wilson: *Anarchism*, in: Dark Star Collective (ed.): *Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader* (third edition), Edinburgh 2012 [1886], p. 90.

30 Voltairine De Cleyre: *The Making of an Anarchist*, in: A. J. Brigati (ed.): *The Voltairine De Cleyre Reader*, London 2004 [1903], p. 106.

31 Emma Goldman: *Some More Observations* (Published in *Free Society*, 29 April 1900), in: Candace Falk (ed.): *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years. Volume 1: Made for America, 1890–1901*, Berkeley 2003 [1900], p. 402.

inclusion in corporate and governmental realms.<sup>32</sup> In the twentieth-century United States, deep concerns emerged among many immigrant and working-class women that feminism in general, and the struggle for suffrage in particular, was little more than a deceptive fabrication of the bourgeoisie.<sup>33</sup> This notion was most pointedly voiced by the Russian-Jewish immigrant Emma Goldman. Despite her fierce attacks on male domination, she could not embrace mainstream feminism for these specific reasons.<sup>34</sup> While suffragist-feminists viewed women’s exclusion from governmental power as the most significant burden on women’s full equality, Goldman and her anarchist comrades understood governmental power itself to be deeply problematic. This type of dis-identification from early twentieth-century feminism also appeared among anarchist women in Chile,<sup>35</sup> Argentina,<sup>36</sup> Italy,<sup>37</sup> and Spain.<sup>38</sup> Federica Montseny, a key figure in the Spanish Revolution and Civil War, declared polemically: “Feminism? Never! Humanism? Always!”<sup>39</sup> This anarchist rejection of feminism was ideologically grounded; the emblematic critique of domination spurred anarchist women to denounce what they saw as mainstream feminism’s chief, political objective: the ballot.

- 32 Linda Lumsden: *Anarchy Meets Feminism: A Gender Analysis of Emma Goldman’s Mother Earth, 1906–1917*, in: *American Journalism* 24:3 (2007), pp. 31–54.
- 33 Jennifer Guglielmo: *Transnational Feminism’s Radical Past: Lessons from Italian Immigrant Women Anarchists in Industrializing America*, in: *Journal of Women’s History* 22:1 (2010), pp. 10–33.
- 34 Vivian Gornick: *Emma Goldman: Revolution as a Way of Life*, New Haven 2011, p. 75; Candace Falk: *Forging Her Place: An Introduction*, in: Candace Falk (ed.): *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years*, pp. 42–45; Alice Wexler: *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*, London 1984, pp. 194–197.
- 35 Elizabeth Hutchison: *From ‘La Mujer Esclava’ to ‘La Mujer Limón’: Anarchism and the Politics of Sexuality in Early-Twentieth-Century Chile*, in: *Hispanic American Historical Review* 81:3/4 (2001), p. 519.
- 36 Maxine Molyneux: *Women’s Movements in International Perspective*.
- 37 Andrea Pakieser: *I Belong Only to Myself: The Life and Writings of Leda Rafanelli*, Edinburgh 2014.
- 38 Martha Ackelsberg: *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women*, Oakland 2005 [1991], p. 23; Temma Kaplan: *Anarchists of Andalusia, 1868–1903*, Princeton 1977, pp. 86f.
- 39 [1924], in Shirley Fredricks: *Feminism: The Essential Ingredient in Federica Montseny’s Anarchist Theory*, in: Jane Slaughter/Robert Kern (ed.): *European Women on the Left: Socialism, Feminism, and the Problems Faced by Political Women, 1880 to the Present*, Westport 1981, p. 133.

## “The Ballot Humbug”

As the broader feminist movement became increasingly articulated in the Global North, with a unifying demand for women’s suffrage, many anarchist women voiced another type of critique, distinguishing themselves from suffragist-feminists by not seeking inclusion in governmental affairs.<sup>40</sup> These ideas were also articulated in early twentieth-century China, where the anarchist movement was particularly strong.<sup>41</sup> Here, He-Yin Zhen asserted that women’s participation in government would only allow a small minority to access “positions of domination.”<sup>42</sup> She argued that women in power “would rule the majority of powerless women and not only would the disparity between men and women continue, a disparity among the different classes would also emerge.”<sup>43</sup> Zhen’s argument—that government power reinforces social hierarchies—has deep roots in anarchist thought, and it is from that ideological starting point anarchists renounced the struggle for women’s suffrage. He-Yin Zhen broadcasted this precise idea: “The ultimate goal of women’s liberation is to free the world from the rule of men and the rule of women.”<sup>44</sup>

The anarchists aired a profound disbelief in the supposed emancipatory outcomes of universal suffrage: “Of all the modern delusions,” Lucy Parsons scorned, “the ballot has certainly been the greatest.”<sup>45</sup> Parson’s essay—“The Ballot Humbug”—was distributed in the United States, where anarchism grew particularly influential in the early twentieth century. Here, women’s groups formed the very backbone of anarchist organizing among the immigrant working class.<sup>46</sup> The single most important theorist and organizer among them, Emma Goldman, offered this sharp critique: “Our modern fetich [sic] is universal suffrage,” Goldman wrote in her essay “Woman Suffrage,” a fetish concealing “what people of intellect perceived fifty years ago: that suffrage is an evil, that it has only helped to enslave people, that it has but closed their eyes that

40 Jennifer Guglielmo: *Transnational Feminism’s Radical Past: Lessons from Italian Immigrant Women Anarchists in Industrializing America*; Martha Ackelsberg: *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women*, p. 177.

41 Peter Zarrow: *Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture*, New York 1990.

42 He-Yin Zhen: *On the Question of Women’s Liberation*, in: Lydia H. Liu/Rebecca E. Karl/Dorothy Ko (eds.): *The Birth of Chinese Feminism: Essential Texts in Transnational Theory*, New York 2013 [1907], p. 70.

43 He-Yin Zhen: *On the Question of Women’s Liberation*, p. 70.

44 He-Yin Zhen: *On the Question of Women’s Liberation*, p. 70.

45 Lucy Parsons: *The Ballot Humbug. A Delusion and a Snare; a Mere Veil Behind Which Politics Is Played*, p. 95.

46 Jennifer Guglielmo: *Living the Revolution: Italian Women’s Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880–1945*, Chapel Hill 2010.



they may not see how craftily they were made to submit.”<sup>47</sup> Goldman situates her categorical understanding of democratic elections as “an evil” in the history of anarchist thought; in this passage, she most probably was referring to Mikhail Bakunin’s notion of universal suffrage as an illusory, viscous route to emancipation.

As anarchism became articulated as a political movement, the critique of representative government—construed as democracy—formed a keystone in its thought. Bakunin in particular voiced this critique: “If there is a State,” he declared in *Statism and Anarchy*, “there must be domination of one class by another. [...] The question arises, if the proletariat is to be the ruling class, over whom is it to rule?” Bakunin further argued that this “ruling class” would “no longer represent the people, but only themselves and their claims to rulership over the people.”<sup>48</sup> For Bakunin, this critical forecast—that states not only maintain, but also produce, social hierarchies—translated into a thorough critique of universal suffrage and the election of governmental representatives:

It was generally expected that once universal suffrage was established, the political liberty of the people would be assured. This turned out to be a great illusion. [...] The whole system of representative government is an immense fraud resting on this fiction: that the executive and legislative bodies elected by universal suffrage of the people must or even can possibly represent the will of the people. [...] Political power means domination. And where there is domination, there must be a substantial part of the population who remain subjected to the domination of their rulers.<sup>49</sup>

This notion would be aired again half a century later, when Emma Goldman, too, declared that domination cannot be cured by inverting social hierarchies. As Bakunin spoke out against the working class overtaking the state, Goldman criticized women’s desire to take part in governmental elections. She disputed the ostensible emancipatory outcomes of women’s suffrage:

I see neither physical, psychological, nor mental reasons why woman should not have the equal right to vote with man. But that cannot possibly blind me to the absurd notion that woman will accomplish that wherein man has failed. If she would not make things worse, she certainly could not make them better. [She] can give suffrage or the ballot no new quality, nor can she receive anything from it that

47 Emma Goldman: *Woman Suffrage*, in: Alix Kates Schulman (ed.): *Red Emma Speaks*, Amherst 1998 [1911], p. 190, p. 92.

48 Michail Bakunin: *Statism and Anarchy*, in: Sam Dolgoff (ed.): *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, London 2013 [1873], pp. 330f.

49 Michail Bakunin: *On Representative Government and Universal Suffrage*, pp. 220f.

will enhance her own quality. Her development, her freedom, her independence, must come from and through herself.<sup>50</sup>

Goldman fiercely disdained the notion of alleged female superiority, also rejecting the notion that women are better rulers than men. In the same vein, Federica Montseny declared that “it is authority and domination that produce the evils in men in government and it will do the same to women. The answer to a better society is not female rulers, but a new society.”<sup>51</sup> He-Yin Zhen put it quite similarly in her essay “On the Question of Women’s Liberation,”: “I would be gratified to see women renounce their desire to mobilize with the objective of governmental rule and begin to look toward the eventual abolition of government.”<sup>52</sup> These anarchist women demanded no inclusion in government; they wanted to abolish state power altogether. An important aspect of their distrust in the state, and in the struggle to overtake it, was the blatant dismissal of the majority’s right to rule over disagreeing individuals and minority groups.

## Against Majority Rule

Goldman’s critique of electoral democracy, and of women’s suffrage, was strongly rooted in egoist anarchism, a line of thought carefully advanced and incorporated into her political theory. In “The Individual, Society and the State,” Goldman rejected “individualism,” defined as “the social and economic laissez-faire,” as a “straitjacket of individuality.”<sup>53</sup> She scolded liberal individualism for being dependent on policed private property, which anarchists found to be the ultimate factory for social inequality. At the same time, Goldman also stressed the notion of individuality and personal autonomy. This eventually led her to assert that “more pernicious than the power of a dictator is that of a class; the most terrible—the tyranny of a majority.” She argued that the very foundation of democracy, majority rule, could only restrain power, including the individual’s power to act according to her needs and desires:

Real freedom, true liberty is positive: it is freedom to something; it is the liberty to be, to do; in short, the liberty of actual and active opportunity [...] It cannot be given: it cannot be conferred by any law or government. The need of it, the longing for it, is inherent in the individual.<sup>54</sup>

50 Emma Goldman: *Woman Suffrage*, pp. 192f., p. 202.

51 Federica Montseny [1924], in: Shirley Fredricks: *Feminism: The Essential Ingredient in Federica Montseny’s Anarchist Theory*, p. 130.

52 He-Yin Zhen: *On the Question of Women’s Liberation*, p. 70.

53 Emma Goldman: *The Individual, Society and the State*, p. 112.

54 Emma Goldman: *The Individual, Society and the State*, p. 121.

Goldman expressed this position most notably in her essay “Majorities Versus Minorities”: “the majority, that compact, immobile, drowsy mass [...] will always be the annihilator of individuality, of free initiative, of originality.”<sup>55</sup> Here Goldman tuned into, as she often did, the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>56</sup> But this scepticism of electoral democracy also resembled the ideas of yet another adversary to majority rule, the German philosopher Max Stirner. Though his work was first published in 1844, Stirner became known to English-speaking anarchists, Goldman among them, through Benjamin Tucker’s translation of *The Ego and Its Own* at the turn of the century.<sup>57</sup> In this book, Stirner aired his “egoist” analysis, which highlighted individual autonomy and exposed the confinements of both state and society. Stirner targeted not only people in power, the established, but “establishment itself, the state, not a particular state, not any such thing as the mere condition of the state at the time; it is not another state (such as a ‘people’s state’) that men aim at, but their union, uniting, this ever-fluid uniting of everything standing.”<sup>58</sup>

Goldman’s row against majority rule thus had ideological roots that sprouted in the historical context of suffragist-feminism. She linked Stirner’s thinking to the critique of morality outlined in Nietzsche’s book *Beyond Good and Evil*.<sup>59</sup> Her belief in individual autonomy, which indeed was a linchpin to her political theory,<sup>60</sup> led Goldman to reject “the clumsy attempt of democracy to regulate the complexities of human character by means of external equality.” She pursued a polity “‘beyond good and evil’ [that] points to the right to oneself, to one’s personality.”<sup>61</sup> Following this firm critique of majority rule, Goldman declared that she did “not believe in the power of the ballot, either for man or women.”<sup>62</sup> However, many anarchist women were not as dogmatic when discussing the tactics used to eradicate male domination.

55 Emma Goldman: *Minorities Versus Majorities*, p. 83, p. 85.

56 Kathy Ferguson: *Religion, Faith, and Politics: Reading Goldman through Nietzsche*, in: Penny Weiss/Loretta Kensingler (eds.): *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman*, Pennsylvania 2007.

57 Saul Newman: *Introduction: Re-Encountering Stirner’s Ghosts*, in: Saul Newman (ed.): *Max Stirner*, Basingstoke 2011; David Leopold: *A Solitary Life*, in: Saul Newman (ed.): *Max Stirner*, Basingstoke 2011.

58 Max Stirner: *The Ego and Its Own*, Cambridge 1995 [1870], pp. 198f.

59 Kathy Ferguson: *Emma Goldman: Political Thinking in the Streets*, pp. 161f.

60 Janet Day: *The “Individual” in Goldman’s Anarchist Theory*, in: Penny Weiss/Loretta Kensingler (eds.): *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman*, Pennsylvania 2007.

61 Emma Goldman: *Jealousy: Causes and a Possible Cure*, p. 215.

62 Emma Goldman [1916], quoted in: Clare Hemmings: *Considering Emma Goldman: Feminist Political Ambivalence and the Imaginative Archive*, p. 44.

## Diversity of Tactics

As we have seen, the anarchist women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century typically rejected the feminist call for universal suffrage and electoral democracy. They wanted no rulers at all, neither male nor female. Yet many of them embraced a diversity of tactics to abolish patriarchy. While anarchists like Goldman ferociously rejected any emancipatory potential of the ballot box, other anarchist women saw suffrage as a useful tactic in their struggle.<sup>63</sup> The early twentieth-century Puerto Rican anarchist Luisa Capetillo is one example;<sup>64</sup> another is the influential UK anarchist Charlotte Wilson who eventually came to join forces with suffragettes in the early twentieth century.<sup>65</sup> We can also recognize such a diversity of tactics among the anarchist in 1930s Spain, where Federica Montseny herself took part in the government.<sup>66</sup> However, in this tactical understanding, the ballot, this absolute symbol of electoral democracy, was hardly perceived as a political goal in itself but rather as a pragmatic manoeuvre to abolish male domination once and for all.

Here, we encounter a view of democracy as a route toward anarchy. In the 1980s, that notion was aired by Uruguayan anarchist Luce Fabbri, who understood anarchism precisely as an urge to move *beyond* democracy. “Democracy and anarchy are not mutually contradictory but the one represents an advance upon the other,” wrote Fabbri, “the difference is, instead, a difference of degree.”<sup>67</sup> She understood democracy as incompatible with, but a step toward, anarchy. In the history of anarchist thought, we find something similar in Errico Malatesta’s understanding view of anarchism as a route rather than a destination. Malatesta declared, in the late 1890s, that what matters for the anarchists “is not whether we accomplish Anarchy today, tomorrow, or within ten centuries, but that we walk toward anarchy today, tomorrow, and always.”<sup>68</sup> Malatesta, while spending his final years in house arrest under Italian Fascism, notoriously stressed that the anarchist struggle actually had little to do with building democracy; it was all about “seeking to reduce the power of the State and of privilege,

63 Margaret Marsh: *Anarchist Women, 1870–1920*, Philadelphia 1981, p. 58.

64 Nancy Hewitt: *Southern Discomfort: Women’s Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s–1920s*, Urbana 2001, p. 216.

65 Susan Hinely: Charlotte Wilson, the “Woman Question”, and the Meanings of Anarchist Socialism in Late Victorian Radicalism, in: *International Review of Social History* 57:1 (2012), pp. 3–36, pp. 32–26.

66 Shirley Fredricks: *Feminism: The Essential Ingredient in Federica Montseny’s Anarchist Theory*.

67 Luce Fabbri: *From Democracy to Anarchy*, in: Robert Graham (ed.): *Anarchy & Democracy: Bookchin, Malatesta & Fabbri*, 2012 [1983].

68 Errico Malatesta: *Toward Anarchy*, in: Davide Turcato (ed.): *The Method of Freedom: An Errico Malatesta Reader*, London 2014 [1899], p. 300.

and by demanding always greater freedom, greater justice.”<sup>69</sup> Six decades later, Luce Fabbri transmitted, while suppressed by the military government in Uruguay, a modified version of Malatesta’s idea; she held that democracy could be a useful experience on the path toward anarchy.

Despite the diversity of tactics employed by anarchist women to abolish male domination, they forcefully aired that the struggle against patriarchy is part of a more generic effort: the struggle against all hierarchy, a struggle for anarchy. And tuning in to these anarchist waves arguably comes with the promising potential to enrich feminist historiography.

## Anarchist Waves

As we now celebrate the centenary of women’s suffrage, there is arguably much to gain by also tuning in to assorted feminist frequencies to receive distant broadcasts.<sup>70</sup> Listening to various wavelengths would arguably limit a uniform and linear historiography of unfolding advancements where one tidal wave of social progression exceeds the other. Instead, we would hear Emma Goldman, He-Yin Zhen, Lucy Parsons, and other anarchist women renouncing the struggle for women’s suffrage, how they did not settle for mere female inclusion in government and corporate affairs, but opted for no less than the end of *all* domination. Tuning in to these anarchist waves makes also audible the voice of Molly Steimer, one of many anarchist women who endured imprisonment, torture, and exile: “I hold fast to my convictions,” an aged Steimer declared when reflecting back on her political life, “only in a society where no human being will rule over another, there can be true freedom.”<sup>71</sup>

Anarchist waves—metaphorically understood in terms of radio waves—broadcast that male domination cannot be fought without simultaneously addressing the parallel and interlinked workings of domination. This uncompromising idea sparks boundless political engagement; anarchism’s black star guides indefinite struggles against the very *logic* of domination. By tuning in to these anarchist waves, our now centennial celebrations of feminist achievements could perhaps better acknowledge the unruly contributions of anarchist women. “You poor judges, poor slaves of the government,” wrote Kanno Sugako from her prison cell, charged with high treason for plotting against the Japanese Emperor. On the eve of her execution in January 1911, Sugako

69 Errico Malatesta: Article Excerpt from *Pensiero E Volontà*, May 16, 1925, in: Vernon Richards (ed.): *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas*, London 1965 [1925], p. 23.

70 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, in: Cary Nelson/Lawrence Grossberg (eds.): *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Chicago 1988.

71 Molly Steimer, quoted in: Margaret Marsh: *Anarchist Women, 1870–1920*, p. 39.

aired a most memorable allegation. “You may live for *a hundred years*,” she informed her executors, “but what is a life without freedom, a life of slavery, worth?”<sup>72</sup>

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72 Kanno Sugako, in: Mikiso Hane (ed.): *Reflections on the Way to the Gallows: Rebel Women in Prewar Japan*, Berkeley 1988 [1911], pp. 67f., my italics.