



Women in certain periods of history have been taken out of the public sphere and oppressed by societies that were governed by patriarchal systems. Of course, throughout these periods, resistance has always been present. One of these forms of resistance to the establishment of society is anarchism. In the following paragraphs, I will give you a brief overview of the role of some women in this movement.

When we look at the definition of anarchism in the “Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary”, it is said to be a political theory holding all forms of governmental authority to be unnecessary and undesirable as well as advocating a society based on voluntary cooperation and free association of individuals and groups. It is no wonder why some women throughout history have turned to anarchism as a form of protest against the patriarchal system but also other forms of injustices.

One of the most famous anarchist women is Emma Goldman who was born in 1869 in Lithuania. She emigrated to the United States in 1885 and quickly became involved in all sorts of radical anarchist actions. In 1892, she conspired to assassinate a union-busting manager in Pennsylvania but failed. While others served time in jail for that assassination attempt, “Goldman emerged as the foremost anarchist in America (Avrich).” However, Goldman also spent some time in jail. She was convicted for one year behind bars for inciting unemployed workers to steal bread if there was a need to. After her year in prison, Goldman started to work as a nurse and toured the United States and Europe giving anarchist lectures. However, in 1901, someone who had attended one

of her lectures murdered President McKinley. She was then arrested, mistreated and imprisoned again. When she came out, she lived in temporary seclusion under a pseudonym. However, five years later she started giving her lectures again throughout the country, on issues such as free speech, libertarian education and birth control, for which she spent fifteen years in jail. After the first World War, she was deported to Russia by the American authorities where she realized that the country was run by a totalitarian state. She later moved to the United-Kingdom where she gave lectures against Soviet Totalitarianism. She also worked in the Spanish Civil War against General Franco and his Fascist movement, and helped Spanish refugees in Canada. She died in 1941.

As mentioned in the last paragraph, Goldman worked in Spain against the Fascist regime of Franco in the Spanish Civil War. Other women also joined the anarchist movement during this war. This is the case of the “Mujeres Libres” which means “Free Women”. These women “were a group of women anarchists who organised and fought both for women's liberation and an anarchist revolution during the Spanish Civil War” (O’Carroll). These anarchist women rejected the notion of women in a secondary position in the libertarian movement. They organized meetings for women on how to deal with sexism, they were involved in union activities, they produced journals for women, stood against prostitution and organized campaigns to insist on the fact that women can be both mothers and revolutionaries at the same time. The role of women as strictly reproductive was contested. Since most of the population was illiterate, they set up literacy programs where 600-800 women were present each day in 1938. The “Mujeres Libres” also organized support for women in the militias, but the ultimate goal was more than to

defeat the Fascists. As stated by O'Caroll, their ultimate goal was to build a society which cared for the needs of the whole population.

Of course, these are just two examples of the involvement of women in the anarchist movement. These days, a lot of women are still active as anarchists and as free women. For a lot of these women, anarchism was and still is a response not only to gender oppression but to all other forms of oppression as well.



Interesting links:

http://www.struggle.ws/women_write.html

A selection of modern anarchist writings by women.

http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/ws98/ws54_mujeres_libres.html

Interesting article on the "Mujeres Libres".

http://increvablesanarchistes.org/affiches/aff1936_45/36mujeres_libres.htm

A Web page featuring propaganda posters of the "Mujeres Libres".

Works Cited:

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Struggle Site. "A Selection of Modern Anarchist Writings by Women" The Struggle Site,
< http://www.struggle.ws/women_write.html>.

O'Carroll, Aileen. "Mujeres Libre" flag.blackened.net,
<http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/ws98/ws54_mujeres_libres.html>.

Increvables Anarchistes. "Affiches de la Révolution Espagnole 1936-39 : Mujeres Libres (Femmes Libres)" Increvables Anarchistes,
<http://increvablesanarchistes.org/affiches/aff1936_45/36mujeres_libres.htm>.