Betrayal

A critical analysis of rape culture in anarchist subcultures

Disclaimer:

We're fucking sick of disclaimers. We resent having to provide apologies and justifications for our words before we even speak them. We're bitter about how specialized discussions of rape, sexual assault, and abuse have become. We feel insulted and embarrassed that we have to constantly point out that we aren't speaking on behalf of all survivors, as though that were even possible. Sure, we appreciate a well placed trigger warning. It's just good etiquette. But when fanatical attempts to avoid triggering each other serve as tools to relegate discussions of interpersonal violence to the margins, to wrap the issue in a neat little box which is only brought out on special occasions, when an illusion of "safety" can be guaranteed, well…then we start to get pissed. If we only speak of our oppression from the position of safety, we'll be forever silent. If we can't learn to work through being triggered amongst friends and comrades, we'll be ill equipped to work through it in their absence. An atmosphere of nervousness permeates the discussion, and we confer to the advice of specialists partly out of fear of saying the wrong thing. But all we're talking about are our own experiences, a topic on which we are all experts. So we long for the day when we won't need to place ourselves under disclaimers, or any other banner for that matter.

But at the same time we recognize that we're not there yet. These topics are still so charged, and the support available still so sparse, that our words hold the tremendous potential to do harm. So in the meantime we must take care when we speak, so as to not become inadvertent allies of the forces we mean to oppose. With that in mind, we offer a few clarifications before we begin…

Some of the authors of this piece are survivors, others are reflecting on their own role as people who have been abusive in the past, but they all share a commitment to the struggle against a Culture of Rape. When we say "we", we are not referring to "survivors", or even to the authors, but to everyone who agrees with the statement made, and perhaps more broadly, to everyone who sees themselves a part of this struggle. There are surely survivors whose experiences will seemingly contradict the arguments made here. But of course the examples cited throughout this text

are not meant to be exhaustive or all encompassing. We do not see our own experiences as exemplary of the experiences of all survivors, or even most survivors. They do, however, provide examples of how Rape Culture has materialized in our own lives, a point we thought worth sharing.

We would be rightly criticized for focusing so heavily on the anarchist milieu, which of course most survivors will not identify with. But we saw little use in trying to extend ourselves beyond our own experiences in the hopes of becoming more "relevant". It is also our hope that an anarchist analysis of both Power and struggle provide a useful framework for deconstructing the functioning of Rape Culture, and could perhaps provide insight even to those who are unfamiliar with the anarchist subculture. It is our belief that the dynamics we described will be echoed in other milieus as well.

Our gentle reader will also notice that we have chosen to use gender neutral language throughout. Of course the majority of survivors are women or people who don't conform to patriarchal gender identities, whereas the majority of perpetrators are cis gendered men. The neutrality of our language obscures the systemic nature of not only this, but also the way that interpersonal violence has consistently been a tool of colonial invasion, imperialist occupation, and the maintenance of white supremacy. It obscures the way in which organizing against interpersonal violence has historically been co-opted by white middleclass feminists, leaving women of colour, poor women, queer and trans folk with less access to support resources. It was not our intention to depoliticize the nature of interpersonal violence with language that is gender neutral (certainly, when it comes to gender, we are not neutral!). But having said that, we also wanted to recognize that people of all identities, from all walks of life, can be both survivors or perpetrators, or even both at the same time. We didn't want those whose experiences don't fit neatly into oppressive binaries to find themselves even further marginalized here.

Finally, we offer a few definitions, not so that we can dictate how these words must be used, but so that it can be understood how their use was intended here:

Rape Culture - A culture which seeks to excuse, condone, normalize and encourage interpersonal violence.

Interpersonal Violence - A catch all term commonly used to describe different forms of violence which are inflicted on an interpersonal basis, yet have their roots in expansive systems of power. Rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, as well as sexual, physical and emotional abuse within relationships are all examples of interpersonal violence.

Survivor - A person who has experienced or is experiencing interpersonal violence, as defined by the survivor themselves.

Perpetrator - A person who has inflicted interpersonal violence onto another person or persons, as defined by the survivor(s).

Survivor Autonomy - The theoretical foundation upon which most radical support work is based. Survivor Autonomy is the concept that a survivor should be given the power and autonomy to decide for themselves how to deal with their own trauma, and that the role of supporters is to empower and encourage this autonomy. This stands in contrast to other approaches which do not see the survivor as having the best understanding of their own needs or recognize each survivors needs as truly unique and different, but instead seek to impose the "proper" way to heal upon them.

Apologist - Those who, through action or inaction, seek to uphold either the power of a perpetrator(s) and/or the disempowerment of a survivor(s), thus reproducing Rape Culture.

Accountability process - A process through which a perpetrator attempts to be accountable to the people they've hurt, and engages in self reflection with the ultimate goal of making long term changes in behaviour.

It would seem that throughout the anarchist milieu, wherever you turn, there is a community being ravaged by rape, by sexual assault, and by abuse. These cycles are neither new nor unique to anarchists. At first glance it seems surprising that our communities find themselves at least as vulnerable as any other to interpersonal violence. After all, don't we begin from the starting point of opposition to domination, without which interpersonal violence could not exist? And yet, the one thing that ties these communities together, a supposed shared politics or political analysis, is often the weakest point in anarchist responses to interpersonal violence. Despite being a community which is explicitly political in nature, anarchists often depoliticize interpersonal violence and divorce it from its roots in systemic power. For instance, the need for good consent practices becomes confused with the belief that informing people about consent will transform our communities, as though rape were the result of ignorance and misinformation, rather than deeply entrenched structures of power. Strategies that anarchists have adopted, such as the accountability process, more often than not fail to address the interpersonal violence in our midst.

The apparent failure of the accountability process to transform our communities is usually viewed outside the context of that failure, without examining the broader social forces that contributed to it. This oversight is a result of the accountability process and also a precursor to it. The accountability process narrows our focus; it both confronts us with expansive systems of power while reassuring us that dealing with individual instances will deconstruct them. We speak of patriarchy, colonialism, heterosexism, but we deal only with a perpetrator. In our casual conversations, we agree "power concedes nothing without the threat of force", yet our attempts at accountability usually take the form of moral suasion, relying on liberal-bourgeois notions of choice. As if our choices were more than a calculated reaction to the material conditions we find ourselves in. Of course a perpetrator chooses to pursue or reject accountability, but what makes this choice possible? What conditions fostered their feelings of entitlement over another person? It is these conditions that, when viewed from the terrain of struggle, must be recognized as what they are: enemy territory. It is from this realization that we attempt to launch our attack.

The insistence that interpersonal violence is perpetuated by more than just the actual perpetrators is not meant to shift accountability away from those perpetrators. On the contrary, it's a recognition of the many factors that entitle them to sidestep accountability. Just as the suburban yuppie requires a vast and complex social system to mask the negative consequences of their destructive lifestyle, a perpetrator who refuses accountability is often enabled by a similar social network. Such networks aren't only comprised of those who explicitly defend a perpetrator, but of all those who ensure the balance of power remains tipped in their favour. What this looks like in practical terms will vary. Silencing, repression, recuperation, or most often combinations of several of these methods are used against survivors and their struggle. The defining factor will always be what most effectively reproduces Rape Culture.

SILENCING THE STRUGGLE

"In the end, it won't be the words of our enemies we remember, but the silence of our friends."

The term "silencing" has been popularized in our communities, but only with a limited definition. Calling a survivor a liar, conjuring their sexual experiences, deviancies, or style of dress to shift blame, or otherwise insinuating that they were "asking for it", are all behaviours most anarchists would frown on, though they rarely bother confronting them. This hypocrisy hints at a larger problem, revealed by a closer look at our conception of what is "silencing". The aforementioned examples only apply to the survivor who has called out their perpetrator, or else talked openly about their experiences. But of course many survivors never get even this far.

So what silences them? Is it the other members of their affinity group, who maintain a false separation between the struggle against the state and the struggle against other systems of Power (especially the ones they benefit from)? Is it the roommates who never acknowledge fucked up dynamics for fear of "triggering" someone, as if an offer of support would be more triggering than total isolation? Is it the other show goers who write

off the struggle as petty, too personal, or mere "drama," as if a survivor who struggles against their oppression is being dramatic? Is it the fellow collective member who regrets that they are "not in the place" to offer support, while still being in the place to hang out with a perpetrator on a regular basis? Is it the acquaintance who claims to be in no position to confront a perpetrator because they are not even friends, or is it the acquaintance who claims the same because they are? Is it the people who organized that event, the ones who say they know nothing about the situation, while doing everything in their power to make sure they never do? Is it the band mate who claims they can see "both sides", or eschews sides altogether, as if this wasn't a fucking war? We've even seen rape apologists turn survivor autonomy on its head, claiming that they'd received no explicit instructions from a survivor, so of course they had no choice but to carry on a completely uncritical friendship with their attacker! Perhaps it is not the silence of survivors, but of those around them, which is truly revealing. With no one to say otherwise, a survivor can only assume that they will be given the same treatment as every other survivor before them.

If we broaden our definition of what is "silencing" to mean everything that works to maintain silence, then we aren't merely defining a few grossly insensitive remarks. Instead, what we've implicated is the totality of our culture.

So what then, of accountability? Abuse, assault, a total lack of accountability; all are business as usual in the world as we know it. But normalcy is more effectively maintained through the complacency of masses than through the brutality of their masters. While violence provides the foundation upon which Rape Culture reproduces itself, it also poses certain risks; that it's shared experience can create bonds of solidarity, that lines of conflict will be drawn more clearly, that people will fight back. The process of normalization seeks to undermine these risks by making violence invisible. The obvious apologists, the goons who say "slut" like it's a bad thing and think the perpetrator is the victim, don't do nearly as much to further normalization as their more subtle accomplices, the ones who maintain complete silence on the subject. These more sophisticated apologists share space with the perpetrator; they march alongside them at

demonstrations and dance alongside them at parties, without ever uttering even a single word about interpersonal violence. When forced to speak on the subject, they sigh and say "it's complicated…" They may even claim to be disgusted by the violence, though mostly they're sad that you had to disrupt their event to confront it. They lament, "If only I had known!", while keeping their heads planted purposefully in the sand.

UNLEASHING REPRESSION

This conspiracy of silence seeks not only to end a survivors struggle before it even begins, but also to provide the back drop for what will happen to the few survivors who refuse to be muzzled. For a survivor to speak openly of their experiences in such a climate can only be understood as an act of resistance, and as with all acts of resistance, repression is a likely outcome. This repression is more nuanced than the clubs of police officers or the guns of soldiers, though these too have been turned on survivors. The repressive forces are more likely to be mentally and emotionally devastating. The agents of such repression are not familiar to us through uniforms or badges, but as our supposed comrades and former friends. Many of us are accustomed to seeing only the police in this repressive role[1], and of course they have their part to play in the reproduction of Rape Culture as well. But in our own radical communities, the state's role in this reproduction seems downplayed. After all, there's little point in the state expending the resources while so many self-described anarchists are willing to do the job for free.

Those who doubt the brutality of this internal repressive apparatus have likely never been on the receiving end. The "communities" that are so often turned to with the expectation of support are more often mobilized

[1] Amongst most anarchists, at least, the police are a faceless enemy. We don't have to see them tuck their kids in at night, they don't tell us jokes over beers, they do not confront us with the contradiction of their own humanity. This is not the case for those who are called out for assault or abuse within anarchist circles, a reality which many perpetrators use to their full advantage.

against the survivors on behalf of their perpetrators in a stunning counter attack. It's difficult to properly illustrate what so many survivors have had to endure at the hands of their supposed anarchist comrades. To call it a smear campaign hardly does it justice. Of course speaking generally will never fully encompass all the complexities of a person's experiences, but there are many patterns we can identify within the anarchist milieu, all of which faithfully reproduce the patterns of the broader culture.

One glaring example is the character assassination of the survivor. No aspect of their life is spared from scrutiny, all in search of any detail that can be used against them. These details, whether genuine or fabricated when necessary, are often used towards invalidating their experiences of violence and valorizing the perpetrator. Few will be so clumsy as to blatantly accuse a survivor of lying, though there are more self described anarchists willing to do this than even we care to admit. Instead, most will utilize any number of slight variations as a way of saying the same thing. Perhaps a survivor gave no clue of abuse as they endured it, perhaps they consented to certain sexual activity but not all of it, perhaps they felt the need to disclose certain experiences and withhold others, perhaps they needed time to process their trauma and only revealed it gradually, perhaps they have their own issues with power or boundaries. We could go on, but of course what's important is not the details themselves, but how they can be twisted, taken out of context, or else used to undermine a survivors credibility. Past histories, addictions, coping mechanisms, debts, insecurities, even a survivor's political identity, all are fair game[2]. When this strategy is successful, survivors are villainized and their attackers are recast as the victims of lies and manipulation. But even if the apparent objective of discrediting a survivor in the eyes of community fails, the process itself can still be effective at forcing survivors out of that community. Knowing that

[2] This same process is often extended to a survivor's support network as well. In fact, focusing mainly on supporters sometimes allows the agents of repression to continue posturing as being supportive of the survivor, while at the same time sabotaging any genuine support. Such thinly veiled attacks, though possibly devastating to supporters, must still be understood primarily as attacks on the survivor, however indirect. In worst case scenarios, such attacks result in a degenerated conflict between the accomplices of Rape Culture and a support network, once again leaving the survivor sidelined and disempowered.

simply walking into an anarchist space means that nearly everyone there has discussed your personal life at length creates a tremendous barrier, regardless of the conclusions people may have reached. Survivors may feel compelled to pre-empt this dynamic by engaging their critics. Often, this plays into demands for "proof" or details of assaults or abuse. The retraumatizing aspect of this is yet another further attack on the survivor, and often feeds rather than undermines the conflict.

As tensions grow, it begins to spill over into new arenas. Previously uninvolved parties who may not even know the survivor or perpetrator become caught up in the mounting bedlam, and organizing becomes disrupted. Of course, at this point normalization has been broken, and the repressive apparatus no longer has anything to lose by not holding back. Anarchists who would otherwise scorn the politics of liberals now turn to their ideology for reinforcement. "These divisions are hurting us!" they cry. Of course, such divisions are never blamed on the perpetrator or their actions, but on the survivor for insisting that the trauma they've experienced cannot go unanswered. They are blamed for tearing the community apart and ultimately for undermining "the struggle". The importance of this last point cannot be overemphasized. The previous dismissals of the broader community, which hinted that "the struggle" merely excludes survivors and their needs, are now clarified to reveal that in fact these struggles are diametrically opposed. To be perfectly clear, anarchists who feel their struggle is undermined by a survivor are in fact engaged in a struggle against survivors, they are active defenders of a Culture of Rape. They will often liken the survivor's struggle to a "witch hunt", when they themselves share more in common with the executioners than with those who burn at the stake.

As mentioned earlier, if a survivor can be silenced, and their experiences normalized into a culture of Rape, repression will become redundant. It follows that the lack of such outright repression, when paired with a lack of support for survivors and a lack of accountability for perpetrators, is not indicative of an absence of Rape Culture, but the opposite; it reveals a Culture of Rape that is totally ingrained, like an occupation that has become so entrenched as to render the tanks and soldiers unnecessary.

IF YOU CAN'T BEAT 'EM

As alluded to earlier, these repressive measures can actually split the ranks of the more moderate rape apologists, undermining the common front against the survivor. At the same time, repressive measures are deemed necessary at the very least when the usual process of normalisation is broken. This points to one of the biggest contradictions within Rape Culture: that the very violence it relies on to reproduce itself also reveals its true nature for all to see. This contradiction is resolved by recuperative forces within radical communities which seek to co-opt support for survivors and redirect it against them. Many will claim to support a survivor while actually undermining their autonomy. This is usually done by limiting the possible scope of a survivor's response to exclude anything that might further upset the social peace. These false supporters work to uphold the image of a supportive community, and in the process prevent any truly critical engagement with community. Their tools are the language and organizing frameworks which were forged by survivors and their supporters, appropriated for the purpose of disempowerment and twisted to usurp the survivors' struggle.

Initially, the creation of words and new frameworks to use them was necessary, as the language for survivors to even talk about their experiences did not exist. Unfortunately, words are easily recuperated, and we can now see the inevitable limitations of relying on them so heavily. Once upon a time, radicals championed the use of the word "perpetrator" as an attempt to sidestep the stigma of harsher words. The once prevalent framework of Restorative Justice emphasised a person's ability to change. "Rapist" or "abuser" hardly underlined these values, and many felt it kept the rapists and abusers locked in those roles, just as referring to survivors as "victims" potentially kept them locked in a moment of subjugation rather than underlying their strength and perseverance. Of course now we are faced with a new wave of anti-violence activists, who lament the stigmatized nature of the word perpetrator, and now advocate the even more watered down term "person who causes harm". Perhaps it's time to realize that if a perpetrators capacity to change is not broadly recognized, that is a result of their own actions more so than the words we use to describe them. This is

not to say that we should not choose our words strategically, or that we should not use them with strong intention, but only that our apparent obsession with language has serious drawbacks. At best, it leaves us caught in a never ending loop to find the right words rather than addressing our more meaningful shortcomings. At worst, it preserves the power dynamics of Rape Culture by attributing fault to survivors and their supporters rather than perpetrators and their apologists.

This bizarre reversal, where a perpetrators refusal of accountability is viewed at least partially as a result of flaws in a survivor's response, is a common pattern seized upon by the recuperative forces of Rape Culture. Zines and pamphlets list strategies towards accountability which seek to avoid making a perpetrator defensive, which are perhaps better understood as strategies towards accountability which seek to accommodate a perpetrators defensiveness. The only thing such an approach avoids is a recognition that being defensive is not something forced on a person by others, but a reactionary response which must be realized and worked through for any genuine accountability to be possible. Many will use the term defensive without ever asking, "in defence of what?"

Of course many survivors who anticipate defensiveness and the repressive apparatus activated by it have made good use of such strategies in the short term to initiate dialogue, or else to make demands concerning immediate safety without the goal of transforming a perpetrator. We have no interest in questioning the choices survivors make or discouraging the dissemination of potentially useful strategies (because, of course, how useful any given approach might be can only be decided by survivors themselves). Our concern is when the accommodation of defensiveness or the strategies implied by it become a tool of false supporters to limit the possible choices available to survivors, or to criticize those choices they disapprove of after a survivor has made them. Discussions of how to call out a perpetrator rarely centre on the survivor's needs. "Avoiding defensiveness" provides the pretence to shift the discussion back to the needs of the perpetrator. Once a perpetrator has been called out, a similar framework is used to undermine support for a survivor. The false supporters endlessly reassure us that they are not angry that a perpetrator was called out, it's only *the way* they were called out. The fact that a survivor would speak openly about their

experiences is seemingly taken as more violent and controversial than the violence of those experiences themselves, which warrant very little discussion by comparison. How a survivor's public response might reflect their needs does not seem to occur to the false supporters as they are so preoccupied with their need to preserve an artificial social peace. Again we see liberal tendencies rearing their head, as the false supporters' insistence on denouncing the resistance of survivors, on claiming to also despise the Culture of Rape while simultaneously diminishing any fight against it, is reminiscent of liberals who claim to agree with the grievances of protesters and yet condemn any actions they might take to address them. The liberal complains that intensity and ferocity sabotages the struggle, but of course the anarchist knows the real problem is that we haven't gone far enough.

As mentioned earlier, this is all part of a larger pattern to maintain the power dynamics that Rape Culture relies upon. There are countless other examples. The accountability process itself can be a double edged sword. Radical communities often divorce the accountability process from its place within the broader Restorative Justice framework, offering it as the sole response to intimate violence while simultaneously avoiding any further attempts at pre-empting violence before it happens. This false support places the needs of the survivor secondary to the question of how to deal with a perpetrator, once again prioritizing the needs of the perpetrator and maintaining the pattern of domination. What little support is offered survivors often replicates this same dynamic. One of the most common models of support used, that of making demands of the perpetrator[3], once again leaves all agency in the perpetrator's hands, especially when there is no contingency plan if the perpetrator should refuse. Survivors who become emotionally invested in such models as a path for healing are often devastated when the demands yield nothing, or worse, when they incite a new barrage from the perpetrator and the repressive forces. In the anarchist milieu, where it is widely recognized that demands are mostly useless when not accompanied with the threat of force, it is quite revealing that such models prevail.

[3] In some instances demands are made of the broader community as well, often to the same effect.

In addition to its role in the wider context, the internal workings of the accountability process itself have the potential to be hijacked and used against a survivor. The concept of Survivor Autonomy, which once formed the theoretical foundation of the accountability process, is often discarded, transforming the process into a toothless form of liberal conflict resolution. Without being informed by a clear analysis of the power dynamics at work, of course the default power of the perpetrator is upheld. The goal is still the rehabilitation of the perpetrator, and most likely their continued participation in the community, but the false supporters who have hijacked the accountability process can now do so at the expense of the survivor, selfishly defining the perpetrators "rehabilitation" in any way that is convenient for them. In the most extreme cases, accountability processes will be initiated against the explicit wishes of survivors, as an attempt to legitimize the perpetrator in the eyes of others. The pretence of making it a "community issue"[4] allows the false supporters to not only take control out of the survivors hands, but also to portray survivors who refuse to cooperate with their own disempowerment as a barrier to accountability. The embarrassingly common farce of false supporters informing a survivor that actually, their perpetrator has "worked on their shit" stems from this or similar dynamics.

In less extreme cases, the survivor's participation will be permitted but only so long as it falls within parameters set by their false supporters. Reprisals against a perpetrator, physical or otherwise, are completely off limits. Even questions of immediate safety, such as sharing space with a perpetrator, are subject to the discretion of false supporters. Again we see radical language turned against survivors, as their demands for space within their community are twisted by false supporters and likened to the prison system (for not making rehabilitation the only goal, or "punishing" a perpetrator) or openly referred to as an attempt to "banish" the perpetrator.

[4] This is not to say that issues of intimate violence are not community issues, but that a genuine community will seek to empower its survivors and encourage their autonomy. Aspects of a community that find their own interests in conflict with that of survivors are revealed to not be part of an anarchist community at all, but of an enemy garrison in our midst.

Of course the insincerity of these concerns are revealed as they provide the pretext to banish the survivor from the community instead.

The perpetrator's role in the hijacked accountability process[5] also reproduces their power. In some cases they are allowed to make demands of the survivor or else place criteria on their own participation. Perpetrators, or their apologists, all too commonly respond to being called out by making defensive "callouts" of their own. As discussed earlier, they will accuse the survivor of any wrongdoing they can think of, or else make some up when actual misdeeds are not forthcoming. Rather than recognize these pathetic attempts at slander as the manipulative transgressions they are, the false supporters usually join the perpetrator in absurd calls for "accountability" from the survivor[6]. From this newfound position of righteousness, and with the complicity of the false supporters, the perpetrator is free to alter the very character of the accountability process. What began as a callout becomes more like a negotiation, as a perpetrator's cooperation becomes contingent on the survivor addressing their concerns. Perhaps some of these concerns might even be valid, but of course what's important is not their validity but their role in undermining the survivor's struggle. The survivor must now earn not only the accountability they get from the perpetrator, but also the support they get from the community. Those survivors who are unwilling or unable to jump through all the hoops will be written off. In a final perversion of the accountability process, the survivor will be the one blamed for its failure, the one who was unwilling to "work things out". By this point the so-called "Restorative Justice" framework has been so distorted that it succeeds only in "restoring" the power dynamics of a Rape Culture which had been otherwise compromised by the survivors' struggle.

[5] Of course once hijacked it is no longer a process towards accountability, and whatever words the false supporters use to describe it, whether it's a mediation, a conflict resolution, or a healing circle, the result will not be accountability.

[6] Meanwhile, the repressive forces are not so conciliatory, and instead use the defensive allegations solely to attack the survivor. Perhaps this explains why so many survivors engage with the charade of the false supporters, if only because they don't seem so bad by comparison.

BAD APPLES

In radical communities especially, apologists will not always rally behind a perpetrator. In certain cases the contradiction of doing so would be so blatant that even their own self image as "anarchists" would not survive it. Once again, liberal ideology comes to the rescue. Just as apologists for police brutality will insist that it results only from a "few bad apples" as a plea to avoid any structural analysis of the police or their role in society, the Rape apologist will attempt to scapegoat the individual perpetrator, sacrificing them to the altar of Rape Culture. They may reference their own disgust with a perpetrator, or brag that they no longer talk to them, as though these things were proof of how "supportive" they are. Of course, disapproval of a perpetrator's actions does not automatically equal support of a survivor. In some instances vilifying the perpetrator will contradict the survivor's wishes, while in others the perpetrator and survivor can be ostracized simultaneously, as the repressive apparatus carries on the patterns of domination in the perpetrators absence[7]. The mere ostracization of perpetrators as the only response has been heavily critiqued elsewhere, but we'd like to emphasize that such an approach serves to protect Rape Culture by avoiding direct confrontations with it. In doing so, apologists can externalize the negative aspects of Rape Culture as something separate from themselves. By projecting everything onto a lone perpetrator (or perhaps all perpetrators) the apologist can deflect any analysis of the social relations that produce perpetrators, especially their own role. By singling out a few bad apples, they distract from the fact that the whole bunch is rotten.

Of course this also avoids the whole question of support for a survivor, and seeks a resolution (for example, getting rid of the perpetrator) that does not address the needs of the survivor. This is revealing of Rape Culture's true priority, as scapegoating a few perpetrators will still leave oppressive social structures intact, whereas survivors who are able to

[7] That being said, sometimes survivors will want their perpetrators ostracized. This is both a valid and understandable response and should be respected. There's nothing mutually exclusive about analyzing power systems and rejecting perpetrators.

struggle successfully against those structures threaten their very foundation. The Culture of Rape values the perpetrator about as much as any imperialist army values its foot soldiers. It will happily sacrifice them if necessary, because of course it is the subjugation of the survivors, their perpetual state of victimhood, which must be maintained at all costs. Just as with Empire, it is only through this subjugation that the Culture of Rape can reproduce itself.

WAGING WAR ON CULTURE

The functioning and reproduction of Rape Culture is too complex to be fully explained or documented. The crude generalizations and caricatures we've laid out here are too simple to faithfully recreate the dynamics we experience in our daily lives. While we've tried to categorize and define for the sake of clarity, to assign shape to oppressive structures with the hope of making them recognizable, in reality most individuals will oscillate between roles. Even those who at times may step outside social confines to provide genuine support may in other instances serve as Rape Culture's most brutal shock troops. Even survivors themselves can take on repressive roles towards each other, seduced by the prospect of being one rung higher on the social hierarchy rather than offering solidarity to their peers. People's roles are not static and systems of oppression are not congealed. The interplay between the silencing, repressive and recuperative forces of Rape Culture is not conspiratorial. These sometimes separate but always collaborative elements do not meet to strategize or divvy up the tasks. But of course, collaboration is not so contingent on actual associations as it is on a shared interest. Those with shared interests will reach similar conclusions or else work towards similar goals without ever having to interact. Through this Rape Culture is revealed as being not merely a vague concept, but the concrete material conditions which lead people to conclude, consciously or not, that their interest lies in silencing a survivor, in being complicit in their continued subjugation, or in actively countering a survivors struggle.

The complaint that people "just do the easy thing" partially articulates this problem, but also attributes it only to moments of moral

weakness amongst individuals. This sidesteps the more obvious question; why are our radical communities still structured in such a way that supporting a survivor is not "the easy thing"? What makes it difficult? A more materialistic view of our responses to interpersonal violence, one that looks not to someone's politics or sense of decency, but instead to material conditions such as their social dependencies (for example, who are they close with, who do they live with, who do they organize with, what are their support networks, what do they depend on and how would these things be affected by genuinely supporting a survivor?) could provide more insight into how our own interests are controlled and shaped by a Culture of Rape.

Perhaps the most significant mitigating factor of these conditions is Power. Both the power a survivor holds in the community as well as the corresponding power of a perpetrator are key to shaping that community's response. When a perpetrator holds very little power in comparison to a survivor, or when the perpetrator is not even part of the community, a token show of support costs little and helps maintain the benevolent veneer of Rape Culture. Of course, this is rarely the case. It has commonly been urged that support of a survivor should not be hindered by a perpetrator's position of power in the community, but the position of power itself receives little scrutiny, as does any possible correlation between that position of power and interpersonal violence (which is itself a brutal expression of power). The failure to establish this link is like asking what came first, the chicken or the egg, and then insisting that the chicken and the egg have nothing to do with each other. This blind spot is especially curious amongst anarchists, who claim to oppose all forms of hierarchical power.

It follows that a genuine analysis of the functioning of Rape Culture must also include an analysis of the relationships of Power that govern our lives. This implicates not only the hierarchies, formal or otherwise, which persist even in anarchist spaces, but also the larger systems of power which inform them, such as Patriarchy, White Supremacy, Colonialism, Ableism and so on. We must acknowledge Rape Culture's rightful place within Capitalist society. Through this we can recognize Rape Culture as a mechanism for social control, as it reinforces these systems of Power and domination which in turn reproduce it as well. It then becomes

necessary to undermine the hierarchical divisions which serve to both facilitate interpersonal violence itself as well as shape the interests of those in a position to respond to it. Many anarchists rightly reject the navel gazing of identity politics, but a sharp analysis of systems of Power, the ways in which these systems offer privilege to some of us, yet oppression to others, and the ways in which our experiences of these systems of Power influence the ways we fight against them, is crucial to genuine resistance. To successfully attack a Culture of Rape, we must strike at the roots of this Power.

THE IMAGE OF COMMUNITY

Many anti-violence activists begin from the precarious presumption of community; that a survivor has a social base they can turn to for support, or else a support network that escapes the influence of the Power we just discussed. Here community is defined rather nebulously or not at all. Is your community a geographic space, such as the neighbourhood you live in? Is it a shared identity or experience, such as being queer or black? Is it the people you spend your time with, such as your family, coworkers or friends? A community may be a combination of all these things, yet none of these things point to an inherent position of support.

What is often referred to as "the anarchist community" is perhaps more accurately described as a youth subculture[8]. It's transient and temporal nature make it ill equipped for the long term project of healing from trauma. Furthermore, both the reliance and the reinforcement of Rape Culture by other systems of Power pose a particular challenge to the predominantly white, middleclass and often male dominated anarchist communities of North America. It's not uncommon for such communities to be so compromised by their own positions of privilege that they end up far too subservient to various systems of Power to risk any meaningful attack against them. In such cases, the anarchist "community" is revealed

[8] That is, if we are willing to describe it as it actually exists, rather than defining it according to our fantasies.

not as a radical space from which to attack, but as a reactionary body meant to squash these attacks. It is "anarchist" and a "community" in image only.

Many anarchists do not even realize the importance and interconnections between building community and attacking systems of oppression, and those of us who do rarely make use of this realization beyond our rhetoric. And, perhaps more to the point, we often make the mistake of assuming that the targets of our "attack" only lie outside ourselves. Here, attack is not understood as the near militaristic approach that relies solely on the destruction of property and physical battles, a position put forth by many anarchists. Rather, attack is the process through which we recognize the forces which oppress us and seek to destroy them. The question of violence, of what it will take to destroy systems of Power, is largely out of our hands. Capitalism, with its standing armies and myriads of prisons, has made its own position on the matter perfectly clear. Those comrades amongst us who inevitably carry the baggage of white supremacy, patriarchy, and colonialism, those who find themselves in the position of the apologist, can hopefully exercise a wider range of choice. They can choose to join with us. They can choose, as we have, to attack those aspects of themselves which recreate the old world, and to bolster the attack against those who choose otherwise. It should be this choice that defines the anarchist, which sets us apart from our enemies and guides us to our comrades. It is from this choice that all genuine struggle becomes possible.

“Damaged people are dangerous. They know they can survive”

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