

Mutiny at La Mutinerie¹ : The Token Blacks and Arabs' Strike

La Mutinerie is a bar situated in Le Marais² in Paris, which claims to be a political bar : « feminist, antiracist, decolonial, by and for women, dykes, trans and queers »³. It also claims to be a political horizontal and participative collective. With cheap (give what you want/can) workshops, with movie screenings, debates, events including reflections on dominant/dominated dynamics.

Us - coming from neo-colonial immigration and slave trade, coming from the inner cities and the country side, all of us poor and thus without inheritance, in precarious job and housing situations with our rents plus our families who depend on us, without our own networks, without the time necessary to getting cultural or militant and so on... capital – are employed at La Mutinerie.

Yet, at the risk of putting ourselves in an even more precarious situation, we are now denouncing publicly the sexist racist and classist organisation and exploitation going on in that bar. With this text, we're denouncing the domination of the boss over his employees, the domination of white folks over *the others* and the reproduction of heterosexist and neocolonial norms.

Considering that the bar is now internationally renowned thanks to its use of our image and our struggles, we have chosen to circulate this text as widely as possible so that everyone can be aware of what is at stake there.

That bar claims to « refuse to ignore classism », yet since the beginning :

Wage difference : We're paid between 200 and 400 euros a month without being declared when the running team earns between 5 and 10 times as much as we do, minimum.

Absence of labour law : Some get the possibility to have cab fares payed, to have real payed lunch breaks, to have paid leaves, to be able to close earlier, to get sick leaves, extraordinary advances, to be paid by the bar and the NHS during their leaves (which is a good thing) when one of us sees her days not paid after being hospitalized. Based on classist domination, the richer's privileges are reinforced and above all, **if it is refused to take some away from them, it is in the name of a fair distribution that would benefit to the ones whose inferior condition is considered as normal.**

Difference of treatment : Some performers, especially the ones employed by the staff, can be payed up to 200 euros for 15 minutes, which represents a month's salary for most of us. For equal service/performance, different pay is allocated. Also, when they paid themselves helping themselves directly in the till, we had to beg for our dues to a point where we didn't feel legitimate.

Real economic exploitation : the vagueness around the status of the bar (political collective or commercial place ?) allowed the boss to maintain different privileges and to exploit us. Making everybody believe that the bar was at risk to close down, making us do « volunteer » work to allow it to survive, going as far as organizing a call for donations on the internet to « save the bar » (the amount of money thus obtained is still unknown). We've found out that he bought the place under his name about a month ago. He's in charge of the bookkeeping of the bar...

Yet , at the week-end, it is us who make for the main source of income that he used to become the owner of the bar. The person who acted as guarantor for the lease, did so thinking he was involved in a horizontal bar. Now, as a mark of support to us, he distanced himself from the project until further notice. Our work made for the durability and good reputation of La Mutinerie ; after a year, what was supposed to be a collective project, a self-organised bar turned out to be no more and no less than a regular capitalist bar of which **the boss has become the owner.**

¹ « mutiny » in English, *translator's note*

² Mainstream commercial (rich) LGBT neighbourhood in the center of Paris, *translator's note*

³ <http://www.lamutinerie.eu/projet.html>

That bar markets itself as « antiracist decolonial », yet we're subjected to :

Racial Stigmatization : unfounded rumours on collective work lists naming some as thieves (the *arabs*), considering others as too slow (the *blacks* of the staff)

Racial distribution of chores: in a general way, the cleaning and the deliveries were only taken care of by us. The running team refused to do the cleaning of the toilets which became a fresher initiation for some of us as soon as they joined the staff. No decision-taking responsibility was ever conceded to us, not even the possibility to consult our own schedules.

Racial distribution of working time : *blacks* and *arabs* only work together at the week-end because the *white* refuse to work with us (too slow, too violent). Besides, the pay for the week-ends is not higher than the one for week days...

How do we become aggressive ?

Racialized people therefore, only work with each other and only at the week-end in these conditions and for these reasons. Those are the days when there is the most people, work (do the cleaning and take care of the deliveries which piled up during the week..). The week-end is also when the bar gets the most money in and when we have to handle more violent people (drunk, on drugs, racist, sexist, lesbophobic...). It also means having to deal with the cops (several times our identities were checked when we're not even declared as working there), several of us have been assaulted (torn clothes or underwear) , touched (buttocks, breasts...)... And all of this in the most utter indifference, and even the contempt of the running team who was, on the other hand, showing an excessive attention to comfort whims⁴. **The assaults we had to put up with have as consequences, beyond the indifference, to make us violent people.** Mirror of society...

That bar fights against heteronormativity and likes to think of itself as feminist, yet we're subjected to :

The notion of consent : That place claiming to be feminist, tolerates people with dubious or abusive behaviours to take up a lot of space, visibility and power. More generally, they ignore those behaviours according to the popularity of the people involved.

Gender domination : The boss owns us. He - white, socially visible as a hetero man, bar owner, having intimate interactions with the primarily concerned – offer jobs to the ones - *women, arabs, blacks*, coming from the *inner cities*, without a *job* – that he emotionally covets. He has (hidden) sexual intercourse with (at least) four of his employees, none of them has a declared job and more broadly with several others part of the Mutinerie's *collective*. Thus, he puts into place a relation of domination/privileges on his employees/lovers.

The creation of a sexist competition : Lies and big financial favours creating competition amongst the employees (declared/not declared, *black/white, upper class/working class...*) and the lovers (amongst the employees, members of the collective, patrons... official/not official...). Divide and rule, the bar has become a real capitalist harem. Everything becomes a favour granted by the nice boss within a network of influence and conflicts of interest motivated by money, sex and pride, in one word : careerism.

Silence and Violence : Many are those who knew but chose not to say anything or worse to hide

⁴ Swapping working hours at the last minute, taking other people's chores as they pleased according to their hardness, never work alone. Even worse, when we come as patrons, asking us to cover for them several times in the same evening, changing the beer kegs or handling deliveries in their stead... It's the culture of the inner-feelings that only applies to some people, selective empathy.

the truth and lie. Letting go of one's privileges is no easy thing : being the boss's favorite, having your rent paid, no longer having debts, being a manager, a performer, a graphic designer or something else for La Mutinerie, having a pick up place where you can go for a drink, giving yourself a good conscience when right under your nose is the most direct manifestation of economic exploitation and neo-colonial throwbacks. Even if our many remarks and criticisms have always been ignored, distorted, invisibilised or reduced to personal conflicts and therefore depoliticised, we are now being reproached with not having « dared » to talk sooner.

Slander and exclusion : Some of us have confronted how the place functions for months. Also the attempts to buy the silence of some were rejected⁵. The boss then tried to fire one of us. First using the competition between employees-lovers that he created. Then organising a real sexist⁶ slander campaign, made of racist⁷ rumours and accusations, all of it in order to organise a vote within the running team to exclude her without even mentioning it to her/us. The campaign to destroy the credibility of the person to fire was punctuated by the hiding of the minutes of the meeting. It's in that atmosphere that the « employee to fire » felt forced to leave (unpaid leave).

Others supported her and created solidarity also regarding their own situations. This was the beginning of an organised and public stance and the end of the illusory belief in internal arrangements. The real « Mutiny » is finally starting !

We are denouncing this neo-colonial system⁸

How could they deny the profits created by our work ? How could they not see the privileges they enjoyed ? And, of course, how could they not see such an usurpation ? Their material comfort was directly connected to our precarity for months. Their standard of living has considerably changed while we were being humiliated and politically as well as professionally exploited. Now we can only state **the illegitimacy of their being there**. That bar, neo-colonial and capitalist, uses the exoticising appeal of its waitresses for the trendy week-end nights and the image of our struggles **to exploit us better**.

Besides, the token *blacks* and *arabs* who are used as puppets, who still believe in the republican illusion, who hope for assimilation or perform their races in a depoliticised folklore can in no way be used as evidence for equality, nor be used to contradict us. Indeed, we don't all think the same...

Now that the situation is known, off the record, in the larger collective of La Mutinerie, we can only note the self-centered and inconsequent reactions of *white* people, worrying about their reputations because they were involved. Conniving and silent majority who see, say nothing and cover up, take part in this system.

We are aware that these oppressions also exist in all the white left wing activist scenes we know, since we've been involved in the feminist movements, far-left movements, antiracist movements... These observations are still painfully valid today in many scenes which claim to be militant.

Therefore, we're going on unlimited strike, without conditions and starting now.

We demand an immediate change in the legal status of the bar, that the running and the business be collectivized, as well as the resignation of the racist members of the staff. We want to be an integral part of the rebalancing of the bar and the redistribution of decision-taking roles.

We demand the adjournment of all political events until further notice. The charter must be taken away from the bar and from all the websites referring to La Mutinerie. We also want this text to be

⁵ Personal allowances, extra work for some, pseudo DIY, tidying, cleaning jobs...

⁶ One of us was falsely accused of having sex in the storing space while the police was searching the bar and/or of giving up their position at the counter letting the patrons help themselves...

⁷ To this day, some members of the running team still refuse to talk to some of us. To support those false accusations : threats to call to so-called « eye-witnesses » of thefts, assault on a member of the staff, bad work, unprofessionalism and even accusations of abusive behaviours !

⁸ A. Memmi «*Portrait du colonisé, Portrait du colonisateur*», Edition Corr ea, 1957.

put up in the bar as soon as it is published.

We demand the payment of all our arrears, sick leaves and regular leaves, as well as the retroactive payment of our working week-ends, time spent shopping and cleaning since the beginning. The ones among us who will refuse to re-integrate the place should get substantial unemployment allowances.

We demand the official recognition of the damages inflicted to the people concerned as well as the recognition of the reproduction of race, class and sex oppressions going on in that place. Last but not least, we want a public apology.

The Employees of La Mutinerie and their allies

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