How Utopianism Disappeared from Dutch Socialist Feminism (1970-1989)

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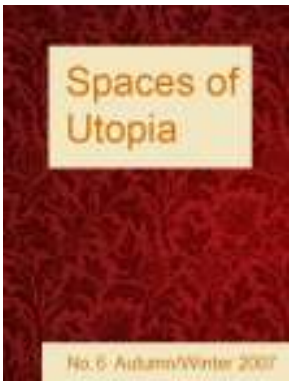

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In this paper I will analyse, based on primary sources – *i.e.* the three most important socialist-feminist Dutch journals of that time – how the strategy of socialist feminism has changed from working from below in autonomous groups into a strategy directed at the government. I want to show that in this process socialist feminism lost its utopian potential. I will begin by considering the idea of utopianism and then briefly describe Dolle Mina and the way feminist-socialist movement dissociated itself from the beginning of the Dutch women's movement. My analysis of the primary sources starts in the year 1975 and ends in 1989, when the last issues of the socialist-feminist journals were published. In my concluding remarks I will explore some developments within socialist feminism that have contributed to this change of strategy.

1. Utopianism, Including Utopian Movements

As a core definition of utopianism I resort to the idea that utopianism is the expression of a desire for another way of being and/or living together (Levitas 1990; Poldervaart 1993). Lyman Tower Sargent has convincingly argued that utopianism has three faces: utopia as design/theory, utopian movements and

utopian studies (Sargent 1994). So utopianism is more than “hope”: it has to be expressed in a design or in a movement, and utopian studies elaborate on both. However, as I have noted before, in utopian studies very little attention is given to utopian movements. Most publications on utopian studies describe or analyse utopian designs, or they are case-studies of intentional communities. These intentional communities are rarely compared with each other and placed in their socio-political and historical context. They are not studied as belonging to movements, resulting in a lack of analysis of their differences or similarities to other social movements. Another result is that most of the time people are not aware of the fact that many utopian movements are not based on a clear utopian design; besides, not all utopian designs were and are meant to actually be put into practice.

After studying social movements for a long time, I concluded, stimulated by the analyses of Zablocki (1980) and Lent (1999), that social movements resort in general to three different strategies (Poldervaart 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b):

1. The utopian strategy (or, as we currently say, “do-it-yourself” (DIY) or “prefigurative politics”) (Graeber 2002). This strategy focuses on organising from below. It is based on the notion that individuals who are discontent with the existing conditions have to try to live according to their ideals in their daily lives, and that this will change them and their immediate environment. Within this strategy activists disregard the existing power structures and the state. The changes aspired to are based on a re-organisation of everyday life, on self-reliance and self-respect. Most of the time, people seek allies who are also

discontent with the way things are. Together, they endeavour to put into practice alternatives for their existence, mostly in a sort of intentional community. This strategy of social movements has a very long history although social scientists have largely neglected it in their research until today. However, as I will show, in the 1960s socialist feminists considered this strategy as "their" own and also as the most important way to distinguish themselves from Marxist activists.

2. The revolutionary strategy. Adherents believe that fundamental changes are needed before a movement can put its ideals into practice (Zablocki 1980). A common enemy (such as capitalism or the state) must be defeated before one can conceive ways of living according to one's own ideals. In this strategy it is the aim that counts, not the process. Therefore, strong leadership is needed. Although one can see many violent revolts in history, in Western history revolutionary social movements did not occur before the sixteenth century, when disparate farmers, sometimes stimulated by heretic groups like the Anabaptists, fought against the power of the church and nobility. Famous examples are of course the American and French revolutions (although "revolts" would be a better word); later this strategy is emphasised by Marxists and revolutionary anarchists. Because of this different strategy, I don't think of Marxism as a utopian movement (but I will not elaborate on this point now).

3. The negotiating strategy. In this strategy activists seek to directly influence the existing power structures. Historically, it is the most recent strategy of social movements; in fact, it could have only arisen after the development of the Nation-State and the concept of citizenship. Although this

pragmatic strategy has brought about significant changes in laws, it has scarcely changed dominant values and norms (Lent 1999). Nonetheless, this strategy has always been the primary interest of social sciences (see Tarrow 1998). In this strategy, representation is needed (with the danger of losing the grassroots support).

In this paper I will show how the Dutch socialist feminists, slowly and almost unnoticed, moved from a utopian strategy to a negotiating one, and how they have lost their socialist feminist ideals during this process. I will begin by describing the famous socialist feminism of Dolle Mina, who was more Marxist-like organised, and from which the later socialist feminists have dissociated themselves.

2. Dolle Mina (1970-1975)

When in January 1970 the first actions of Dolle Mina (Wild Mina) started, it seemed as if everybody in the Netherlands had been waiting for them: the many, playful actions this group performed, particularly during the years 1970-1972, were positively and enthusiastically received by the media. I quickly became involved and was on television or mentioned in the newspapers almost every week. All the attention was really amazing. In retrospect, I understand that this happened because Dolle Mina embodied something totally new: young, uninhibited and progressive women whistling at men or disrupting a gynaecological conference with slogans written on their bodies: “[We are] Boss in our own womb”. For the founders – mostly socialist men and women who belonged to the student movement –, this was really the beginning of the

socialist women's movement. This was particularly true for men, who thought that they had the moral duty of helping women to organise such a movement, which should be different from the more liberal women's movement that had emerged two years earlier in the Netherlands (MVM: Man, Woman, Society) but that until then had refrained from undertaking public actions.

Nobody had expected the playful public actions of Dolle Mina to be as successful as they were, and the Marxist inspired men and women who had initiated the actions quickly became overwhelmed. Just a few weeks after the beginning of the public actions, thousands of women and some men indicated their desire to join up as members of Dolle Mina. In response they were told to start a Dolle Mina group themselves! After three weeks, there were Dolle Mina departments in fifteen towns and, one year later, they could already be found in 35 cities (Bogers 1982). All these groups started to organise autonomous actions that varied from place to place. Having realised that the whole Dutch society was male-dominated, they felt that everything had to change! The divergence of these actions, however, bothered the more socialist initiators, who were hastily searching for one uniform ideology and organisation model.

At the first Dolle Mina conference (April 1970) a big struggle arose between the socialists who wanted a clear organisation and the more anti-authoritarian activists who rejected the idea of a top-down organisation with formal membership and a socialist ideology. At the time this conflict remained unsolved, but during the second conference (April 1971) the socialists won: feminism was not only about male-female relationships, it should also be considered as part of the class struggle. In the meantime, however, the

consciousness-raising groups were formed – a concept that departed from American feminism – and some important women left Dolle Mina to organise such groups themselves. They wanted to talk about their own experiences without male leadership. After the second conference, more Dolle Minas went to these consciousness-raising groups. The rest of Dolle Minas carried on, organising study groups about Marxism and continuing to mount public actions, until around 1975, when most activities of the Dutch socialist women's movement started to be held under the umbrella of the "femsoc" (feminist-socialist) movement. Dolle Mina succumbed then and became part of this movement.

3. The Beginning of the FemSoc Movement: Building on and Rejecting Dolle Mina

The rise of the femsoc movement was partly granted on the positive reception of Dolle Mina, even though the femsoc women seemed to reject this movement. The reason for this negative appraisal was twofold. Firstly, the concept of feminism had gained a positive meaning due to the consciousness-raising groups. Before 1972 the word feminism was not used: when someone defended women's rights she or he was a Dolle Mina, not a feminist, because feminism had the dusty image of the old suffragettes. Secondly, feminism had now acquired the meaning of being the struggle of women without men. Dolle Mina was associated with dominant men against which the femsoc movement opposed because of their emphasis on "being feminist" (although after 1972 Dolle Minas started to call themselves feminists as well). However, the "feminist" label had a deeper meaning: Dolle Mina pursued a movement to

emancipate other women (and men), but from 1972 on feminism was something that had to do with one's self, with one's own experiences as a woman. That was an almost unnoticed, but very important change, which also influenced the organizational structure and the aim of the movement: one had to live feminism in his or her daily life, and that meant changing oneself and trying to re-organize private life. This idea was expressed in the slogan "The personal is political".

In 1973, some feminists connected with Dutch colleges started courses for women, relating female experiences with their position in society. As with Dolle Mina, the idea that the whole society had to change soon emerged, and therefore a socialist society looked the most logical. These courses stimulated the idea of the creation of a feminist-socialist network and, after a long preparation, some women organized a full-day platform discussion in April 1975. They invited all women who were presumed to have a socialist vision (also Dolle Minas) and formulated three starting points for the femsoc network: 1) the situation of women within this capitalist society cannot change in its essence; 2) the socialist society is the best known answer but does not give a complete solution because within socialism the problem of equality of women is not considered as a specific problem. We have therefore to look at this solution critically; 3) the problem should be discussed with women only, at least at the very start of the discussion.

In the accompanying reader prepared for this Platform gathering, the organizers also formulated their ideas about organisation and strategy:

> The organisational structure should be as minimal as possible, because the power of the women's movement consists of basic groups who organize themselves for their own purposes and who develop their own strategies based on their own situations. It is not good to create an artificial unity or a general strategy. Every femsoc woman has to

> choose her own femsoc practice; the platform is an umbrella for activities to be done somewhere else. The only central point is the national femsoc **secretariat**, consisting of women who volunteered and who have one and only task: to organise the contact addresses and the Newsletter of the platform. This secretariat has not a substantive but just a facilitating task, to avoid the impression that a right policy exists that could be formulated from the top down. Therefore, another group, the **Platform group**, will take care of the organization of the study days twice a year; only on these days something *on behalf of the platform* can be decided.

As mentioned earlier, this kind of organisational strategy may be considered as being typical of utopian movements. However, the concept of utopia was never used in the feminist movement: the members were too much influenced by Marxism to consider utopianism as a positive concept. Although their type of organisation had much to do with anarchism, this concept wasn't used either: for years, socialist feminists considered their way of organisation and strategy to be a typical feminist invention.

4. Analysis of the *Newsletter of the Feminist-Socialist Platform* (1975-1979)

From October 1975 to September 1979, 21 issues of this Newsletter appeared – and 8 readers for the Platform study days. Besides a very divergent action agenda in every issue, substantive articles were also published in the Newsletter. Analysing these articles, there are two phenomena that strike us: in the first place, the fact that much attention was given to, and discord existed about, the organisational structure. Secondly, the fact that there were many articles about housework and feminist courses for housewives; it was clear that girls and women with less education belonged to their target group towards which these feminists directed their socialist involvement.

The discussions about organisational structure in the Newsletter can be divided into **three discourses**[1]: the first was a plea for more structure; the

second was an argument against structure; and the third was a request for a combination of “our” nonstructural organisational principles with more strategies at the same time.

In the second issue of the Newsletter arguments **against** the femsoc ideas about organisation and the need of a real structure were put forward, connected with arguments for a bundle of demands and for chosen representatives. Influenced by the article “The Tyranny of Structure Lessness”, by the American feminist Jo Freeman, the defenders of more structure argued that the movement had to represent itself to the outside world and had to undertake actions in the name of femsoc. This group also emphasized that the movement should try to make connections with official politics. Without doing so, the relationship between feminism and socialism would be devoid of content.

Most arguments, however, were *pro* “our” organisational structure, because the Femsoc Platform should not degenerate into an imitation of the Left movement. The defenders of this discourse wrote in *Newsletter* 2 “that a programme by itself does not accomplish anything, women have to organise themselves, from below; it is more important to listen to the problems of women and to know what they want than to ply them with just a nice program”. They also argued that “nothing is so disruptive for a movement as the attempt to force an artificial unity”. In the reader entitled *Organization Discussion* of the Platform day in February 1977 it is stated that “the most important achievement of the women’s movement is to work on what you yourself think is the most important, in a group or structure in which you feel comfortable and which you have helped

to build up". But also: "Our autonomy is our power, as well as our loose organisational structure. The traditional Left doesn't recognize our organisational forms. (…) *Democracy* means that people can think and decide about their own things and that is only possible in a big system of decentralisation". One year later, in issue no. 12 (January 1979) the importance of decentralisation is again emphasized, now against the Dutch government that presumably tried to take over the organisation of the women's movement by forming subsidized emancipation bureaus which had to connect all the different women's initiatives: "If we go with the government, then our struggle will get a partial technocratic character; it means that we have to unify ourselves in one arrangement, that we have to make compromises and in the end all it will do is lead to apathy".

The third discourse about organization was brought in by the women who had until then defended "our feminist organisational principles". In the Platform reader of February 1977, these femsocs began to argue in favor of the use of more strategies at the same time. They emphasized that

> the situation is now different from the beginning of the movement: nowadays there is high unemployment and a policy of retrenchment, and that demands another strategy: we have to work with others and try to hold on to what we have already achieved. (..) As an action group we have not yet been admitted to the groups that make decisions, so we must try to sit in these clubs too. We have to organise a politics of alliances and see the Platform as a refuelling station.

In issue no. 19 (May 1979) the famous Dutch feminist Anja Meulenbelt pleaded for "small groups that can create a feminine culture as a kind of training-place for other ways of relating with each other, another image of yourself, to develop an image of the future". However, she stated, "we cannot permit ourselves

merely to sit and talk in small groups and leave the struggle against the demolition of our collective provisions to political parties". She pleaded to combine different forms of strategies and organisation.

Although the Dutch feminist movement was at its height during the years 1976-1979 (sometimes with, for example, 15,000 visitors on their yearly Women's festivals) (Newsletter 16 and 21), it seemed, according to a research done by the editors of the Newsletter in 1979, that there was not much sentiment left in favour of the Platform nor much support for the national secretariat of the femsoc movement. Therefore, the editors decided to stop publishing the Newsletter even though they appealed to their readers to think of another journal. This has led to the creation of the (socialist) feminist journal *Katijf* (which means a strong woman), which started in 1981. In the meantime, however, a more academic journal was also set up by the women who had pleaded first for no structure and later for a combination of different strategies: *The Socialist-Feminist Texts*.

5. The Socialist Feminist Texts (SocFem: 1978-1989)

Eleven issues of this more scholarly journal were published annually as a kind of yearbook. The editorial of the first issue explained why socfem is a better term than femsoc: "We place ourselves within the tradition of the femsoc stream of feminism, but our first loyalty is to the autonomous women's movement. (...) This means that the women's movement performs an anti-capitalist struggle starting from the position of women" (Sevenhuijsen *et al.* 1978a: 14). In a joint article in the next number they added: "Because the situation of women/of

ourselves comes first, we emphasize 'feminists'. Because we cannot achieve our aims in the capitalist system, we have to be socialists too" (Sevenhuijsen *et al.* 1978b: 216). Yet I have to conclude that this journal has never elaborated a clear connection between feminism and socialism.

Besides all kinds of scholarly articles concerning divergent topics, in the first issues of this journal some important analyses of the women's movement were also provided, in which sometimes a glimpse of its utopian desires were revealed. In the first issue, in a long article about the women's movement, the editors concluded that

> consciousness-raising and working in small groups continue to be necessary. Although society is becoming more and more conservative, we have to emphasize our autonomy, but we should not choose one strategy only. We can use the existing niches in the parliamentary system without falling into an unjust loyalty to political parties and governmental bodies. We have to remain suspicious of the Left as long as these groups consider the performance of hierarchically organised mass actions behind prescribed slogans to be of greater importance than the small-scale revolutions at home. (Sevenhuijsen *et al.* 1978a)

The same plea for combining different strategies and simultaneously being wary of parliamentary politics is done in the same issue by Sevenhuijsen, who stated:

> We must not make an opposition between parliamentary politics and politics of small groups. We have to recognize the contradictions of the parliamentary politics and we must not give our whole soul and blessings to this type of politics. Feminism can then only be partially translated in terms of parliamentary politics. Translating feminism to a package of demands fails to appreciate that we have to work for our liberation ourselves. (Sevenhuijsen 1978: 16-66)

Yet she pointed out that we can expect something from parliamentary politics: it can give us rights tied up in law legislation.

In *Socfem Texts* 2, Anja Meulenbelt pleaded for more feminist dreams:

> We have to develop a women's culture. In such a culture it is recognized that time, space and normal daily life are connected. Old images have to be broken down and

> images of the future built up. *It is a misunderstanding that it is the analysis that mobilises people.* People are rather mobilised by the idea, the feeling, the experience *that life can be different.* Only after this, comes the need for analysis of why it isn't as we want. (…) Dare to dream loudly, make dreams visible, bring dreams into practice. (Meulenbelt 1978: 207-213)

She criticized the culture of the Left: "Battle songs, musical slogans. The message comes first, only later the forms of struggle. Muscular language. Once a year the fist up. Grim. One may not think that we are here for pleasure. Forms of one way traffic" (*ibidem*). With this manly, weightlifting culture she juxtaposed the culture and strategy of the women's movement: "The leaderless group and the non-hierarchical structure are perhaps the most important contributions of the women's movement" (*ibidem*). She requested that women look for new forms of struggle, and for a *language* that fits us.

In the same issue the editors analysed the Dutch women's movement again. They noted it would be foolish to ignore parliamentary politics, although they identified the problems this kind of politics poses: if one works in vertical organisational structures with representatives, one runs the risk of losing grassroots support. Working within the hierarchy of the political parties can never replace the groundwork of the small groups. Parliamentary politics is only one of the means, never the ultimate goal of feminism, they stated. "Self organisation can never be replaced by some kind of organisation structure" (Sevenhuijsen *et al.* 1978b: 214-244).

In *Socfem Texts* 6 (1981) Korten and Onstenk criticized the supposition that socialist and feminist struggles are connected. Stimulated by the book *Beyond the Fragments*, by Sheila Rowbotham *et al.,* the Dutch authors warned

that when the socialist and feminist struggle aligns itself in an unproblematic fashion, feminism always becomes subordinated:

> Feminism is different from socialism, because feminism means: unfolding your activities yourself; taking your life in your own hand; developing your own truth. Making politics yourself. Accepting that there is no just theory about how you have to organize yourself. Creating another culture and alternatives that anticipate another society and other relationships between people (...). Against a politics of postponement: things have to change *now*. The struggle of the women's movement is not a *single issue*, because women are also young, black, gay, working-class. Therefore, the feminist struggle has consequences for almost all forms of struggle. (...) But do we want to talk about *power* in the same way socialists are doing? (Korten / Onstenk 1981: 81)

No, they concluded, because we emphasize rotating tasks (chairpersons, spokeswomen), cleaning turns and we reject a central institution. The strategy and organisational structure of the traditional Left and the women's movement differ too much and we should not waste our energy in changing the Left.

This was the last article about the women's movement, its desires and differences from the socialist movement that appeared in the *Socfem Texts*. One of the editors of this journal, Joyce Outshoorn, later wrote that, in the 1980's, the women's movement had consolidated into more and more professionalised organisations, which had conquered a fixed institutionalised place within all kinds of negotiating structures and with this had directly gained admission to diverse governmental bodies. The majority of the women's movement was integrated into the political system through subsidies and, at the time, only the anarca- and lesbian feminists strove to create a feminist culture. One may ask, she concluded, whether the women's movement has now ceased being a social movement and has been transformed into some pressure- and interest group (Outshoorn 2000).

However, Outshoorn did not analyse how this transformation happened. Therefore, in the next section, I will analyse the socialist feminist journal that was considered to be the successor of the *Newsletter.* In this journal, *Katijf*, one can recognize the transformation of the socialist feminism strategy from a utopian one, aimed at autonomous self-organisations, to a pragmatic one, directed at negotiations and obtaining political power.

6. *Katijf*, a Socialist-Feminist Vision (1981-1983); a Feminist Vision (1983-January 1989)

In the eight years of *Katijf,* the volunteers of this bi-monthly journal published 48 issues. According to the first editorial, the aim was to stimulate discussions about feminism and socialism in practical as well as theoretical terms and to devote attention to all kinds of developments, national and international, that are important for women. No attention was given to the label femsoc or socfem except for an opening statement which announced that "We are socialist feminists". In the very first number, the strategy of the femsoc movement was criticized:

> It was never possible to say something in the name of the femsoc, and women who were not active outside their own femsoc group wanted to organise actions in the name of the femsoc movement. These women did not like all the discussions about organisational structures. *Katijf* wants to make possible discussions about the longing for power and our attitude towards the subsidy policy of the government, discussions that never took place in the *Newsletter*.

In my analysis of all the discussions about the strategy of the socialist feminist movement in *Katijf*, I recognize **5 dominant discourses and 1 non-dominant warning discourse**. I will formulate these discourses in more or less the same chronological order as they appeared in *Katijf*. In every discourse one can

summarize one specific slogan/message, or what may be called "storylines" in discourse analysis.[2]

a) the discourse of the connection with the emancipation policy of the government. Storyline*: we have to influence governmental bodies.*

In *Katijf* no. 1, it is argued that we cannot ignore the emancipatory policies of the government. Therefore, "the best thing we can do is to work with the government in our own ways: to articulate our own demands for control every three years if we really need the money from the government". But in no. 4 someone else pleaded for more women in government institutions, without stipulating conditions beforehand. In no. 10 it was not only argued that "in the end all our actions are dedicated to the purpose of influencing the policies of the government", but also that "we have to think more in legal terms: we have to use more legal processes as a method of reaching particular goals". In no. 12, the last issue with the subtitle "socialist-feminist", the traditional women's organisations were mentioned for the first time. These organisations used to be viewed as non-feminist, but were now seen as important ones because of their capacity to influence the government. It was suggested that by cooperating with these organisations we, feminists, could also probably acquire influence. Two years later, in 1985, the feminists succeeded in forming such a coalition: The Association Distributing Paid and Unpaid Labor. In no. 29 this coalition, consisting of 16 feminist and traditional women's organisations and all political parties, was criticized because the breadth of this umbrella implied too much political neutrality and entailed the risk of losing its political sharpness.

However, in a subsequent issue, the critique of the Association was rejected: "pragmatism is not a dirty word and collaborating with divergent women's organisations provides play for women within and without official politics". And in one of the last issues (no. 45, June 1988), Joke Swiebel, who served as a member of parliament, concluded with satisfaction that

> ten years ago the emancipation policy of the government was considered to be one big conspiracy to suppress women, but nowadays this has changed thoroughly. The fear for encapsulation seems definitely over. Women's groups lobby in The Hague with concretely formulated demands.

Forgotten was the warning, made 5 years before in *Socfem Texts*, stating that feminism could not be translated into a straightforward package of demands.

b) the discourse of criticizing "our" organisational principles and equality.

Storyline: *we need a stronger organisation and leadership to become more effective.*

As mentioned before, in the very first issue of *Katijf* the non-representational orientation of the socfem movement was criticized. No. 2 pleaded for more extra parliamentary power of the movement and in no. 3 it was stated that such power needed a higher level of organisation. Yet in the first issues there remained some feminists who defended "our" organisational principles. In no. 5 it was argued that the most important strategy of the women's movement is "the challenge to show that you can live in another way" and someone else emphasized that "feminism is the need to politicize private life and to struggle for changes in all societal structures". This author emphasized that

> feminism wants more than mere extra-parliamentary power because this means it would become effectively political only in one front, namely in what concerns our success in the visible public sphere, and our relationship with state institutions and with the media. But feminism is also about making political those questions that are never considered

> as such, like motherhood, sexual violence, relations between women, etc. Feminists are people who *make* political problems.

However, nobody responded to these statements. On the contrary, in the following issue (no. 6, December 1981) a fierce attack on "our" organisational principles was launched. The idea of **autonomy** was criticized because it implied that we, feminists, could not make decisions and formulate a global policy and because we failed to learn from each other. The **horizontal organisational structure** was defined as ineffective for acting adequately. And the idea that **all women are equal** was also described as a trap: "competence, division of tasks and leadership are connected and we have to learn how to handle these things. We have to accept differences between women. When we stick to our three principles we risk of becoming paralysed". After this article scarcely anybody wrote something positive about "our" organisational principles.

c) the discourse of making an individual career. Storyline: *women have to get higher/the highest positions.*

No. 18 of *Katijf* argued for the first time in favour of pursuing an individual career; no. 22, again, put forward the idea that by networking women can help each other in fulfilling career goals. This indicated a big difference from the beginning of *Katijf*: no. 2 had stated that when an individual woman achieved a power position, she was not the right woman for the movement any longer. The change not only entailed the acceptance of women in higher positions, but this was now considered as a desirable goal for all feminists. This was probably

connected with the abandonment of the "socialist" label. Typical of this change is the fact that, in contrast to the *Newsletter*, *Katijf* devoted very little attention to the labour situations of the less-educated women.

d) the discourse of the (non-existing) relationship between feminism and socialism. Storyline: *disconnecting feminism and socialism gives feminists more freedom.*

In no. 2, a group of authors called for a redefinition of the concept of socialism, because of all the misery and bureaucracy in socialist countries. However, nobody actually formulated such a redefinition. When the editors of *Katijf* no. 13 (May 1983) dropped the term "socialist" from the magazine's subtitle, they did so not because of the negative situation in the "real existing socialist countries", but because of the changes in the Dutch feminist movement. Previously, the editors stated, Dutch feminism was divided into three "streams": radical feminism, emancipation feminism and socialist feminism. But now

> these divisions do not exist any longer; there are many forms of feminism. Moreover, the Left movement has shown little solidarity with feminism. The strategy of feminism is first and foremost directed at the power inequality based on gender. It is true that our analysis goes further, but therefore we don't need the term socialism any longer.

Nobody protested against the disappearance of the term socialist. Yet, many issues later (no. 29, October 1985), Jet Bussemaker – currently the undersecretary for Health and Human Services – wrote that "the disconnection between socialism and feminism has created more freedom, but (…) by this the all-embracing vision of life that lays behind our acting has disappeared". She stated that the left parties had translated feminist demands in concrete policy,

"although these parties only focus on feasibility". The last time that the relationship between the left parties and feminism was discussed in *Katijf* was in no. 33 (June 1986), in which the author concluded that the social economic demands of feminism were picked up and supported by the left parties, but that they scarcely reflected on masculinity and femininity. However, she wondered whether party politics could change ideas and practices of male- and femaleness. And this remained an unanswered question in *Katijf*.

e) the discourse of happy-go-lucky and the rejection of feminist morals.

Storyline: *I, my career, you, your witches, let 1 000 flowers blossom.*

As mentioned, the argument for abandoning the term socialist in 1983 (no. 13) was justified on the grounds that at that time feminism had many forms. In number 25 the editors stated that contemporary feminism included spiritual, career, anarca, political, black, peace and other feminists. In an overview of 25 numbers of *Katijf* an author pointed to the happy-go-lucky idea of feminism: "I, my career, you, your witches group". She stated that you can see this trend in *Katijf* too, and she considered this as being positive: "The journal has evolved along with other trends in the women's movement". However, in the same issue, someone else pointed to another aspect of the notion that everything was permitted:

> The feminist morals, the images as to what is good and bad constituted a cohesive element in the movement. Nowadays the oppressive "we-feeling" is over for most feminists. Consciousness-raising groups are replaced with networking, individual careers are accepted, girls do what they want to do. This development was needed because prescriptions as to how to behave is opposite to what feminism advocates. But the all-encompassing nature of feminism makes it very difficult to decide what should be the effort of the feminist struggle nowadays.

In no. 35 (October 1986) the editors stated that “the” feminist struggle doesn’t exist any longer, that feminism is a landscape consisting of many little and big streams. How to go further?”. This question remained open too.

f) the non-dominant discourse of warning for the liberalisation of feminism. Storyline: *professionalism, the translation of the principle of equality in emancipation policy and the use of legal procedures undermine the political power of feminism.*

In *Katijf* no. 25 (February 1985) the academic feminist Judith Vega elaborated on the question “Has feminism become liberal”? Yes, she concluded:

> Nowadays there is much attention to appearance, to style and a real politics of difference has arisen with different feminist identities. The happy-go-lucky attitude has made of feminism a liberal movement, one that has forgotten *to organise boldness.* This has undermined its political power. (…) The movement is further liberalized by the emphasis on careers and networking with the aim to entrench women in higher positions. Working with paid labourers and the declining trust in self-help also fit in this development like the **individualisation** in social security does. With regard to sexual violence the demands are directed at legal procedures and at the police, by which the judge acquires a more central role. The idea of “asserting your rights” has an individualizing and isolating effect. Troublesome is that the Left has also become liberal, because the State gives women more grip on the means of coercion of politics than the negotiated freedoms of the social partners.

In number 27, Vega repeated her warnings, but her cautionary insights were not acknowledged.

One can, with Vega, conclude that in the 1980s socialist feminists went along with the neo-liberal flow, just as the Left did. This flow reflects and enables the middle-class idealisation of self-reliant upward mobility. At the same time, it indicated the end of self-organisation and solidarity and, simultaneously, the end of socialist feminism. In 1989 not only the *Socfem Texts* came to its end, but also *Katijf* disappeared.

Concluding remarks

What kind of developments within socialist feminism have contributed to the change of this movement from a utopian "we-do-it-ourselves" strategy to a pragmatic negotiating stance? In the first instance, this development was due to the relationship between feminism and socialism, which was not elaborated above and beyond dissociating itself from Marxism. In the beginning of the femsoc movement, the term "socialist" was used to indicate that the whole society and not only the gender relations had to change. At the same time, the socialist feminists were so influenced by Marxism's rejection of utopianism, that they did not permit themselves to conjure up an image of their ideal society. Yet, as in some of Marx's own work, it is possible to identify in the socialist feminist journals an occasional glimpse of an idealized future. In the first issues of the *Texts,* for example, a vision of a women's culture was formulated in which it was recognized that time, space and daily life were connected and linked to new images of the future: people must embrace a feeling that life can be different. Therefore, as it was argued, feminists have to dream loudly, make dreams visible, bring dreams into practice. However, with the abandoning of the term "socialism" in *Katijf*, in 1983, utopian dreams and the feeling that life can be different disappeared. Instead, the conventional idea of politics arose: the aim of feminism was then to influence governmental bodies. Because the Dutch government became more and more neo-liberal and because feminism had not developed a (utopian) vision of society, feminists went along with this flow.

A connected development in socialist feminism was that only at the beginning it advocated in favour of the strategy of working in autonomous small groups without hierarchical structure and that feminists had to formulate their political problems themselves. This strategy, expressed in the slogan "The personal is political", had much to do with the utopian strategy of bringing into practice your ideals into daily life. After some years, however, the defenders of this (utopian) strategy stated in the *Newsletter* that it was necessary to **combine this strategy** with other strategies that enabled alliances with other groups in order to hold on to what had already been achieved. However, no attention was devoted to the difficulty of combining the "we-do-it-ourselves" strategy with the negotiating one. The utopian DIY strategy entails a reliance on autonomous self-organisations in which dreams become visible in order to reveal that you can live in another way and make your own politics. The negotiating strategy, in contrast, required adjusted language, the appointment of special spokespersons in order to work within representational politics. It also implied accepting the hierarchical idea of more or less important people and allowing the government to decide who feminists had to collaborate with. There is a big difference between autonomously formulating political problems in feminist groups and granting the government the right to do this for the groups, and that's really what has happened. In this way, not only the strategy of working in autonomous small groups disappeared from (dominant) feminism, but the same also happened to the slogan "The personal is political".[3]

With all this I do not want to argue that the negotiating strategy is always a bad strategy. Social movements need all three strategies. But without a

utopian vision and without the utopian strategy, movements can no longer provide an alternative model of society. Regretfully, this is what has happened in Dutch socialist feminism.

Notes

[1] A short definition of discourse is: an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to phenomena (see Hajer 1993: 45).

[2] Discourse analysis belongs to the social-constructivist approach and this approach is one of the four theoretical approaches of studying social movements. In the social-constructivist approach one is not interested in the success of movements but in its problem solutions, its producing of knowledge and presenting alternatives (see Eyerman / Jamison 1991). Because discourses are very difficult to analyse, one uses "storylines" as a kind of summary (slogan/message) of the discourse. "Story lines are the medium through which actors try to impose their view of reality on others, suggest certain social positions and practices and criticize alternative social arrangements" (Hajer 1993: 47).

[3] At the moment, the utopian strategy is again being used in (a stream of) the alter-globalization movement (see Poldervaart 2006b).

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