

One Journey into and out of the Anarchist...Black!

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2003

Anarchy as a journey in the human story has a long and crazy road. In fact, it is where the Human Story begins. It is the story of human life before the advent, the institutionalization of the Muthafuckas. (Eldridge Cleaverian definition, ha).

Increasingly, anthropologists, archeologists, etc., have been finding pieces to a fantastic set of puzzles. And notice that I used the plural! As they begin to lay these pieces down, pictures are forming of our social beginnings that will shock, surprise and amaze many. Most of us may even find them revolting because these pictures go so extremely contrary to all that we've been raised to believe about the stories of the human species on this planet.

In the beginning was the word? No.

In the beginning was the womb! Hmm?

I remember one of Nikki Giovanni's poems where she took us on a daydream journey into the land of New York City, USA before it was Babylon, when it "belonged" to the Indigenous Peoples; when there were no skyscrapers, cars, pollution, materialism, etc. It made me think how easy it is for us to take urbanism for granted, for the way it is and has always been.

Point: Take things back, devolve in time to simpler realities. Or...minus buildings, minus cars, minus exploiters, protective forces, drugs, churches, marriages, etc. The further back we go, the simpler the ways of living and social arrangements were. Simple questions come to surface, like: If Iroquois didn't have Pentagon, Executive Branch, Coca-Cola, CIA, Cop Joe Pig...then how did they (Iroquois) manage their affairs?

Come to find out that these so-called "savages" had some pretty simple, effective, direct ways of governing themselves and of living off the natural resources of the land ("Turtle Island"). These so-called savages were actually peace loving and democratic in a way Babylon ain't never been. Yet, in terms of written ideals, those White Anglo-Saxon Protestant "founding fathers" stole a lot of their ideas for their wonderful Declarations and Constitutions and Bills from these very human beings they labeled "savages."

Next, I read this book, *When God Was A Woman*. Its title was outrageous to begin with. But I was in a situation where I had the time and the "outrageous" caught my attention, like seeing a porno magazine for the first time when nobody else was around. Again, I had always taken it for granted that this was a "man's world," that "God" was a man (by verbal and painted word-pictures) and that Man was supreme and His top position in society verified it. Or does it? Was it possibly that such ideas and beliefs and practices just being continually reinforced by sexist, male-constructed culture made it seem to be common sense, true? Hmm?

To have a well-researched book challenge age-old ideas and beliefs that I had held about God as this book did, was to question my own sanity. God a woman? Is somebody looking at me? God as a his-torical idea/belief is definitely a short story...in the overall story. Possibly 5,000 to 10,000 years old. Compared to, what, hundreds of thousands and possibly a million years of human communities? Found deep within the earth of an East Afrikan basin, what could Lucy "the Afrikan" ancestor tell us now about our beginnings? What might she startle us with?

The Bible, Quran, and Torah are definitely creation stories. But now, here were the summarized findings of many researchers, or searchers, period, whose collective evidence pointed to societies and communes way, way

older than Adam & Eve and the One God stories we in the West have been spoon-fed. Their living arrangements have been labeled matriarchal, matrifocal, etc. The available evidence points to simplicity and difference in creation stories, in governing and in living off the natural resources of the land. The available evidence also points to little or no violence, rape, rich/poor dichotomies, no pigs enforcing shit; no religious and philosophical rationalizations for accepting one's constructed or contrived powerlessness, one's need for muthafuckas called authorities to lead you, or one's need to restrict the dynamic feel-good of pussy/dick/body/spirit and play... in life.

Even today, we'd even feel crazy or a bit uncomfortable to shit or piss in the open or in an outhouse in the country. So uptight. We're still uneasy about admitting that we masturbate. Lord knows what's going through our minds when we see same-sex kissing and hugging. Arab men do it in greeting. Gay and lesbian people do it in greeting and may do it also in passion. Parents of newborns just do it simply in the spell of joy, greeting and passion. What?! Simple things. Sitting quietly on a Harlem bench and watch the sunrise and feeling at one with the Cosmos.

Point: what happened when society grew so large, so complex, brutal and disorienting that we found ourselves lost? Or: what happened before all this shit happened? How might we have experienced Life before "Civilization?" This is where my mind was leading me, provoking me to not only investigate and explore, but to be imaginative. God? Lemme understand how and why some of these specific ideas about God came about and for whose benefit did they become canonized, organized, and institutionalized? That's why it is so good that people debate religion versus spirituality today. Civilization? What the fuck is so great about it when it has us on the brink of a total planetary pigocracy that is just destroying humanity. Whose idea was "Civilization" and for whose benefit?

So, I had already accepted a new value in my life as being questioning, daring to question, being humble and revolutionary enough to stand up for whatever my new findings and conclusions laid in my lap. It's not an easy process. It's rough. We're all so thoroughly conditioned to perfumed bullshit, to shit that keeps us glued to the very monster that is devouring us.

Many Influences

In the same vein, entrenched in the Nationalist, Marxist-Leninist and Maoist teachings, I had accepted their identification of the enemy, the opposition (Trotsky & the anarchists put in with the kapitalists) without even fully understanding why. In other words, why the hell didn't I check "the other" side of the story?

I had never even availed myself to other Black revolutionary thinkers like C.L.R. James, James and Grace Lee Boggs, Adolph Reed, Pat Robinson, Lucius Outlaw, James Cone, Audrey Lorde and the Combahee River Collective, the Black critical theorists, the Black existentialists, the Black surrealists. Or even "the other" European thinkers like Prince Kropotkin, Simone Beauvoir, Sartre, the Situationists, Rosa Luxemburg, Paul Goodman, Antonio Gramsci, Malatesta, Regis Debray, Herbert Marcuse, etc.

The dialectical method had helped me tremendously in being personally analytical and critical in my thinking and viewing things. I am forever grateful to that skool to this day. But, I wouldn't have put Marx and company and their ideas and prognosis under the same critical, scientific (my best) microscope. (The Panther Party did, in fact, pull my coat to Mister Marx's racism, which told me that he wasn't no perfect mutha...) It had to happen with the interaction and urging of others of my comrades who had already made a similar journey as my own. And it wasn't but two or three! So, when first exposed to anarchist literature, I rejected it with a fascistic boot. At some point, with the help of conversation and suggestions of humility, I relaxed a bit and read some of their shit, as I had read Islamic literature when trying to understand Muslim comrades' beliefs and arguments.

Panther ideology had joined with other revolutionary theoreticians like James Boggs (*Racism and the Class Struggle*) to critique white kapitalist Babylon and the traitorous role of its "working klass and trade unions" towards Black folks' struggle for liberation and revolution within Babylon. My own independent studies, provoked by Panther Frankie Ziths who gave me my first anarchist reading, verified that. Frankie's hand-written notes on the sides of these readings would always relate the "lessons," for example, on the Makhnovists' betrayal by the Russian communists, to our possible betrayal by white communists and other privileged white activists.

So, when I read my first anarchist tract on “unions” and how their hierarchies consistently aligned themselves with patriotic materialism and pig boss management, I concluded that anarchism made some solid critiques. So, it can’t be that bad. But key in the anarchist critique was not so much Labor’s (our “natural ally”) treachery or incorporation into the System. It was Labor’s structure and middle-class goals and capitalist aspirations. But structure and culture was key!

For, regardless of your rhetoric, if your structure and aspirations are basically in line with your enemy’s, then whatever you produce will be basically in line with your enemy. And being that Labor groups’ rhetoric was materialism and amerikan blindness to the root causes of racism, what else could it do but betray its alleged revolutionary potential and its allies...like us nigguhs?

These little anarchist pamphlets were easily available from info-shops in Detroit and Canada, and they were getting to us in the prisons. I was no longer averse to reading and learning from them. But I only saw them as making a lot of good and interesting critiques of kapitalism and authoritarian opposition groups, like unions and vanguard parties. Actually, I was reading and learning a lot from the works of the Frankfort skool of psychology (E. Fromm, Marcuse, W. Reich, etc.) and feminist literature (*The Black Woman* edited by Toni Cade Bambara, Third World Women’s Alliance, Sheila Rowbotham, interviews with women of the national liberation movements, Michelle Wallace’s *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, Merlin Stone’s *When God Was A Woman*, Angela Davis, etc).

These readings eventually led me back to reading and rereading anarchist works as a serious study of their frame of references, their principles, their style, and their contemporary relevance. This was all basically prison-time, thinking time, reflecting time. Rebel philosophy in prison states that you be pro-active when dealing with “kaptured time.” Don’t let time do you—you do time. Do, as an active, aggressive, defiant verb. And as a POW I most certainly did. As POW Sundiata Acoli had said from the beginning of his kaptured time: “Turn prison into your university.” I read till my eyes hurt!

Black Revolutionary Intellectual Daring

Just a quick cruise through some of these major influences. Number one was Huey Newton and Eldridge Cleaver’s intellectual daring and radical application of the Marxist dialectical method of thinking within the context of a highly technological and racist Babylonian empire; the “organic” or public intellectual-activists like James and Grace Lee Boggs, the Black and Asian revolutionary couple out of the Detroit auto plantation. They kept me grounded in the larger meaning and power of Black Revolution. The book, *Racism and the Class Struggle* was required reading when I came into the New Jersey/New York Black Panther Party. They both described themselves as dialectical humanist, and in comparison with nationalists, Marxists, Leninists, Trotskyites, and Maoists, I think they’d be considered “anti-authoritarian” because organizing was about raising the grade of the revolutionary in terms of personal responsibility in creating more democratically advanced, liberatory human and social relationships in governing.

Their thing was in creating ways to challenge people to take responsibility for their own lives and their own communities, from their personal relationships with their loved ones to neighborhood, national, and world issues.

Revolutionary Social Psychology

The Frankfurt skool of critical theory developed out of Freudian psychology. They dug many key limitations with Freud for various reasons. And they tended to be socialist and sometimes movement-involved. They also tended to be critical of the state forms of official socialism that had developed in the Soviet Union and other European nations. Erich Fromm’s works were the first to impact my thinking. *The Art of Loving* was my first socialist-humanist breakdown of love psychologically, romantically, socially and politically. I began to really understand the importance of love as a power for healing and sustaining revolutionary struggle for the long haul. *Escape From Freedom* awakened me to understandings of freedom that I had never grasped in terms of its psychological dimensions.

Like, why were people afraid of freedom, how did this authoritarian mentality he talked about come into being and operate? Fromm also wrote about “socialized technology,” or how to humanize technology in the interest of people, not profits (*Revolution of Hope*).

Bruno Bettelheim and Victor Frankl also dealt with authoritarian fascist mentality. What made their insights particularly powerful for me were their actual experiences under Nazi Europe and in Koncentration Kamps. Here were Victims of that holocaust who defied submission and lived to pass their psychoanalytic insights on to generations to come. Immediately experienced by me were parallels between their predicaments and ours (Black folks and Native folks). Psychology: hmm...powerful tool.

Of all the breakaway students of Freud, Wilhelm Reich captured my attention the most. He was radical in analysis and in practice. He was deeply involved in the revolutionary movement in Europe. Having been run out of Germany by the Nazis, and kicked out of the “hung-up on bourgie morality” German Communist Party and Freud’s Psychoanalytic Society, Reich eventually made his way to Babylon, USA (that’s a whole notha story, so don’t ask me why). He continued his search for deeper scientific insights into the character-structural fear of freedom (deeper than Fromm) and the “essence” of life, of living and free human biological functioning leading to him developing the anarchistic concept of “work democracy,” and what I might call “anti-authoritarian socialist revolution.” I was following that and learning so much about people, personalities, and roles as they held a certain “key” to understanding frustrations in our revolutionary behaviors.

Work democracy, in short, was one of the most revolutionary concepts that I had come to understand. In the midst of European fascism, Reich developed an anarchistic concept without even knowing it. Here he raised some very key things that could, on the one hand, begin to destroy the roots of fascism in the oppressed character-structure of the “mass individual,” and on the other, provide guidance on destroying the social “plague” of authoritarian, fascist order in general.

If George Orwell’s 1984 laid out that dreaded prognosis, then Reich offered us at least one way to un-anchor that shit out of our very souls. It didn’t matter whether this fascism was emanating from kapitalist imperialism or socialist/communist imperialism. Work democracy based itself in the commitment to fact-finding, knowledge or information, through the honest work of scientific pursuit. Reich had this idea of the “human essence” which was basically expressed in his words, “Love, work and knowledge are the wellsprings of life. They should also govern it.” He felt that was the only purpose behind the honest pursuit of understanding life, especially if one wanted to change life. Reich felt that this search for practical, love-oriented knowledge was primary, that not even party or ideological loyalty could stop it or should interfere with the process and/or results being used to further the revolution of life. He said that the revolutionary basis of work democracy was in the free, living functioning of the human organism, which was oriented to pleasure in the biological sense and to the joy of life and life exploration in the social sense. Everyday culture and politics were frustrating that.

In his political experience, Reich found that even the most revolutionary organization which did not challenge its cultural upbringing—which did not concern itself with helping people devise programs that addressed their everyday social and sexual misery, as it related to their struggles for self-determination—would help perpetuate the very society it was trying to destroy. Reich was just as concerned with why the revolutionary was reproducing the same authoritarian, life-negating society oppressing them within their own ranks. And he was onto something very basic to life with this focus on sexuality, the body, and one’s ability or inability to make revolution as desire, desirable, and pleasure-oriented. It was like, if you can’t shake from the hip and let-cha backbone slip, yo’ stiff ass can’t hardly make no revolution that will jingle and tingle with a life-affirming child-like social-ism. In a twist-around of Parliament Funkadelic: free yo’ ass and yo’ mind will follow.

Back to Brotha Fanon

The Frankfurt Skool, Reich—this strong psychological take on oppression and liberation/revolution—led me back to that very book Eldridge Cleaver called the Black Bible for the Revolutionary, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon. Fanon. Fanon.

Read it again, for what, the third time? But why did it seem like the first time? Because my understandings and analyses of things were evolving. Each time I re-read the works of Fanon I was grasping more, and for more. Psychological terms were clearer now. Symbolic cultural terms made more sense now (like the “veil”). Okay, “Concerning Violence”—yeah, I got it. Strike my oppressor and a brick from the wall of fear gets dislodged. I feel better, empowered, etc. But now the chapter on “Colonial War and-Mental Disorders” comes to life! Not just mere warnings against uncritical nationalist trappings (read: European influenced ideas of Nation, Government, Flag, Representative Democracy, etc.)

But now a deeper look at what colonialism has done to us from a psychological perspective. Look at what we have internalized. Look at how we have hidden/covered over our own pain, our own wounds, and come to think of it, our own joys & possibilities for enjoying life. The makings of a nigger. Not only European values and ways of thinking, but also the initial traumas that ingrained within us a fear of “them” symbolically, and thus a fear of striking out for freedom. Fear of freedom...Erich Fromm, Reich, Frankl, Marcuse, Malcolm X, Greir and Cobbs, etc.

Reviewing one’s life over and over again has come to be a necessary practice for a revolutionary dedicated to living revolution to its fullest. You read, you learn; you experience, you learn; you reflect on it all, you learn and hopefully grow or move beyond where you’d just arrived. The analysis of my Panther experience has evolved as my revolutionary concepts have evolved and as I have been exposed to new ways of viewing and analyzing the world.

There is no one all-embracing, all-encompassing concept to contextualize one’s experience. Like a light shining through a prism, it’s important to reflect on experience and analyze it from as many different angles as possible. Or at the least be open to more than just one. I was initially a nationalist a la Stokely and H. Rap Brown.

The Black Panther Party nudged me towards revolutionary nationalism, which was nationalism informed by national liberation movement thinking cutting across Africa, Asia and Latin Amerika, Marxism, Leninism, Maoism, Kim Il Sung’s Juche.

The Boggsses reinforced the creative use of the “dialectical method” and a radical Humanism; Reich’s character-analysis and work-democracy, and finally feminism, radical post-modernism, and anarchism. The last three jarred and allowed me to look at any belief, concept, idea, and practice as temporal and dialectical, to flesh out their hidden and not-so-hidden sexism, authoritarianisms, racisms, eurocentrism, chauvinisms, and hierarchies. Therefore, it is not contradictory for me to say that Anarchism is about opening doors to greater learning and doing, even if it means its own death. That attitude was also a Panther attitude to knowledge and work, which even Mao’s red book reinforced.

Some key words in the debate: The State, The “Masses,” and The Revolutionaries.

The State

I am an anarchist who believes...that the State is inherently oppressive as a mechanism that cannot give, grant, guarantee or preserve freedom, or make revolutionary change. Without the State, anarchy has existed in varying forms since the earliest human social formations, because anarchists believe that people can govern their own lives, individually and collectively, based on commonly worked out and agreed upon visions, interests, mutual aid, non-hierarchical decision-making, codes of conduct, open collaborative theories and plans for direct and democratic control of the means of livelihood, and people’s power to bring about prosperity, peace, harmony, fun, adventure, protection, nurturance and an atmosphere for spiritually wholistic well-being without adherence to private property, money, god, race supremacy, able-bodied supremacy, ageism, imperialism, etc. Belief that organization and structure of any activity must be consistent and identical to that which would characterize the new, free societies envisioned (“prefigurative” as Cindy Milstein would say). These activities, anarchistic or communal, must be the DNA in every social, political, economic, and military endeavor that one or one’s group takes on in the course of the revolution.

If the State, and every institution within that Nation State, is hierarchical, and uncritical hierarchy of any kind perpetuates or aids the oppressive State, then I believe it is a contradiction to the goals of a free society to adopt the same or similar models as the enemies of freedom.

I believe that vanguard parties are the State in embryo and that historically they have led to the betrayal of the very “masses” they initially championed. The only time that a vanguard party has not become The State is when they have lost the battle. This has been so because, in the absence of a critique of culture, organization and the individual, they unconsciously (and not-so-unconsciously, but very clearly) reproduce their internalized oppressions. In this case, I specifically mean the reproduction of hierarchical relationships, elitist assumptions about people and knowledge and traditions within initially or potentially revolutionary formations and individuals. In this sense, the State is everywhere...damn near. But so are free activities, and in many cases both exist in crazy and conflicting ways, side by side within people, communities, organizations, and personalities.

The Masses

Nationalists, Marxist-Leninists, authoritarians in general see people as a “mass body” and believe that the “masses” need an organization of professional revolutionaries to both educate and lead them.

The “masses” need the “science” and the “plan.” They need their consciousness raised. The professionals have both the “science” and the ways and means to consciousness-raising and revolution-making. Thus, the “masses” have to be moved; they are dead, ignorant until the Enlightened Ones give them the breath of life and the light of knowledge. The liberation or the Revolution will be achieved through the Vanguard Intelligentsia For the Perpetuation of Empty Revolutions (the VIPERS)...who proclaim themselves the “representatives of the masses.” The “masses” are seen as in a state of inertia until activated by the professionals.

Anarchists see people as individuals with the will to live, learn, love, work out their own individual and collective destinies instinctively or spontaneously. Human dignity is key. People are their own liberators, foh-real. Anarchists also believe that the “masses” (oh, I hate that term!) are not only their own liberators but that they can discover their own ways to revolution, organization and self-determination (the “science”), spontaneously or organically. In fact they/we are always resisting, fighting back in many hidden and not-so-hidden ways. This means that the same way these “professionals” came to consciousness is open to and possible for all. And there is never only one way to consciousness. So, as long as those who know share (mutual aid, network) and coordinate their visions and plans, then there be no need for the professional or vanguard as authority, and any power won would remain grounded with those who actually fought for and secured it.

The Revolutionaries

Authoritarians see themselves as “vanguards,” leaders. As such, their “job” is to be in the forefront...leading. Leading whom? The “masses.” They uncritically accept the common-sense/place/given that the “masses” are ignorant, stagnant, afraid to move. Therefore, they must be moved, educated, organized. And as possessors of that special body of knowledge called science, revelation, divine wisdom or the dialectical and historical methods of thinking, it is clear that only they can give the “masses” what they need (even if they don’t want it). Like children, the “masses” must be led to power through the leadership of the vanguard or the One who is convinced of its correctness or correct political line on success. They therefore promote correct-line thinking, ideological loyalty, chain-of-command, conquest of political power, class unity, class struggle, race nationalist unity, proper relationships, objectivity in analyzing reality, acting on self-proclaimed representations of the “masses” and you alone being able to clearly interpret their needs and desires for change.

Anarchists see themselves as part of the “masses” or (with more dignity and individuality) the people. Thus, their “job” is to recognize their equal identity with the people as capable of theory and practice, consciousness, self-acting, self-determining. On the main anarchist tenets of mutual aid and collective coordination, you share what you’ve got (knowledge, weapons, expertise, resources of all kinds) to get what you want. This way people at all levels of consciousness and expertise have the opportunity to mix and grow, learn and become empowered revolutionaries within mutual aid formations. “Correct lines” can now reflect true multi-level, multi-faceted, multi-experiential and experimental contributions of all, rather than the elitist “I know what’s best for you.” Anarchists therefore pro-

mote participatory democracy, direct democracy, consensus decision-making, non-hierarchical lifestyles, feminist praxis, organic intellectual daringness, creativity in action, art, carnival pleasure, as well as an ecological connectedness to All and permanent revolution.

Black Anarchists differ from Nationalists and Marxist-Leninists and most all Black community religionists (Christianity, Nation of Islam, Afrikan Islamic and orthodox groups, etc.) in that, with anarchists in general, we reject the need for a state in toto. The State is inherently evil and always leads to corruption, power mongering and oppression of some for the benefit of others.

Nationalists and religionists offer no thorough critique of the State, its history, its historical “necessity,” its contradiction to the very concept and practice of freedom. They may criticize the neo-colonial State, the racist State, the welfare State, the police State, but that is a matter of reforming its behavior and/or replacing these aspects of oppressor States with a “Black” State, a “Black socialist workers” State, or a “United States of Afrika.”

Marxist-Leninists offer a similar critique. They will even admit that The State is inherently evil and oppressive, but they argue that it is a “necessary evil” for the successful transition from defeating kapitalism to constructing socialism, in combating counter-revolutionaries and other plotting, hidden pigs bent on re-kapturing power and restoring things back to the Good Old Days.

I say...fuck that! All power to the people. Through the people. No gimmicks, no fancy public relations. Either you respect people’s capacities to think for themselves, to govern themselves, to creatively devise their own best ways to make decisions, to be accountable, to relate, problem-solve, break-down isolation and commune in a thousand different ways...or: you disrespect them. You disrespect all of us.

After-thought

I don’t wanna give the impression that even all Black anarchists agree on everything. We are as diverse as anybody else. But what we do agree on is true self-determination of the people, respect for the individual involved, real respect. We place a high value on collectivity and communalism and other ways of living and fighting to end these many forms of oppression as “pre-figurations” of the kind of society we want to bring into existence.

This writing will give you an idea of what led me to becoming an anarchist. I want a Black anarchist “take” on things to be more in the mix in our community of communities that are facing genocide. No longer should the prevalent nationalist, progressive, and revolutionary ideologies and organizational approaches hold unopposed court when the rhetoric always says it’s about the people. If it’s truly about the people, then let it be, and let us together find the ways to make that happen so that we can win and be free.

ALL POWER THRU THE PEOPLE!

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This article comes from the website:

<http://www.anarco-nyc.net/anarchistpanther.html>



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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/363-winter-20032004/one-journey-into-and-out-of-the-anarchist-b>
Fifth Estate #363, Winter, 2003/2004

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