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Revolution or Reification?

A Critique of FRSO's Political Program

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A Critique of FRSO's Political Program
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build power-*with* (and thus power-*to-do*). Only this (anti)power can actualize revolutionary change. We will not find solutions within the architecture of our prison—we must dismantle it brick by brick and escape its grasp, or we will perish within it.

A Marxist Party of a New (Old) Type

In the current evolution of the so-called radical left in the so-called United States, one concerning trend is the growing popularity of Marxist-Leninist organizations, particularly among newly-activated young people. One organization that has been a major beneficiary of such a surge has been the Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO), which, though around for decades, has become more visible and active on the ground and online in recent years. FRSO's article on their 2022 congress states that "[r]eflecting the rapid growth of FRSO over the last four years, this was the first congress for most attendees. While some of the participants were veterans of the communist movement with many decades of experience, the overwhelming majority were under 35 years old."¹ This trend has continued.

FRSO's program presents their goals and principles in an easily digestible format, divided into six sections. It is a quite basic Marxist-Leninist program and, as such, contains the flaws inherent to this organizational model, making for an uninspiring document outdated in its ideas and of little use. Fundamentally, it is stuck in a fetishized statist framework that conflates socialism with a planned state-capitalist economy, reinforces the colonial foundations on which the so-called United States is built, and spreads false information about its populations. We should criticize this anti-revolutionary program and challenge its growing influence.

At the root of the falsehoods that FRSO presents as objective truths is a bourgeois positivization of science and a twisting of Marx's understanding of scientific inquiry. The introduction to their program claims that it is "a product of FRSO's collective efforts at applying the science of revolution, Marxism-Leninism,

¹ N.A (2022, June 5). 9th Congress of Freedom Road Socialist Organization: Seize the time, the future is bright! — Freedom Road. Freedom Road Socialist Organization | FRSO. <https://frso.org/congress/9th-congress-of-freedom-road-socialist-organization-seize-the-time-the-future-is-bright/>

to the day-to-day struggles we build and lead.”² The idea that Marxism-Leninism is an immortal science is a belief upheld by such organizations, but as John Holloway reminds us in his *Change the World Without Taking Power*:

For Marx, science is *negative*. The truth of science is the negation of the untruth of false appearances. In the post Marx Marxist tradition, however, the concept of science is turned from a negative into a positive concept. The category of fetishism, so central for Marx, is almost entirely forgotten by the mainstream Marxist tradition. From being *the struggle against the untruth of fetishism*, science comes to be understood as knowledge of reality. With the positivisation of science, power-over penetrates into revolutionary theory and undermines it... [emphasis added]³

By turning Marx’s demystification of fetishisms on its head and presenting Marxism-Leninism as a prescriptive “science,” FRSO is able to paint any narrative but theirs as based in a misunderstanding of reality. This positivization is the source of their dogmatic chauvinism and why their political program should not be taken seriously.

If revolution is the opposite of reification—a process of negating oppressive social relations rather than of externalizing and taking them for granted—then the fetishism by organizations like FRSO only serves to obfuscate the reality that the political and economic complexes of the United States are but two aspects of the same social web. The state cannot and will not save us; as much as groups like FRSO like to believe that “political power—our collective ability to dictate what is and will be—lets us effectively attack every

² N.A. N.D Freedom Road Socialist Organization. Program. <https://frso.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/frso-program.pdf>, pp. 1–3, 6–17, 19, 29, 31

³ Holloway, J. (2010). *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today*. Pluto Press (UK), pp. 118, 144

a universalized historic progression. Instead, an affinity for affinity grounded in interrelationality and a rejection of so-called progress should guide our critical praxis.

If we take up Nitzan and Bichler’s framing and apply it to the United States, it becomes clear that this megamachine has adapted and evolved in ways that have moved beyond previous fetters limiting its growth. From the seeds of slavery and colonialism, it has continually warped and evolved into the ultimate form of Leviathan. Its universal, ever-expanding, and absorptive qualities make it the most flexible power structure in history. This is our enemy.

For a future of liberated living in harmony with each other and existence more broadly to be possible, we must slay this monster. We cannot simply remove capitalism from the equation and maintain the modern state; at this point *it is the state*. There can be no co-opting of an apparatus that feeds on the living; to attempt to do so is to be co-opted and corrupted oneself.

“Apocalypse is the self-fulfilling prophecy of the civilized”⁸⁷, says Benally. We look around and see that statist-colonial-capitalism is spiraling wildly towards devastation and mass extinction; it is death; only through its abolition do we stand a chance of preserving life. If there is such a thing as a “transition period,” then we are living in it. We must unlearn and let go of rotten social relations. This means to forgo class war for *social war*—our goal being total social rupture. Though negation is not an end in itself, it is the impetus for creating something outside the options already mapped out, options that inescapably lead to genocide and ecocide. Social rupture itself does not imply a utopian “clean break” of sorts but an aspiration that orients our critical praxis towards self-determined doing and the negation of that which negates it. It is through this struggle against power-over that we

⁸⁷ Benally, K. (2023). *No Spiritual Surrender: Indigenous Anarchy in Defense of the Sacred*. Detritus Books, pp. 233–234, 306, 351, 356

in a society of unequal individuals.⁸⁴ This bourgeois conception of equal rights is in no way eliminated with the replacement of private (individual) property with state property but is strengthened by its illusion of having moved beyond capitalist relations and achieved true proletarian equality through the so-called socialist state. Nationalization in the USSR and the Soviet Constitution of 1936's inclusion of a supposed "[e]quality of rights of citizens... irrespective of their nationality or race, in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life"⁸⁵ did little to abolish oppressive (bourgeois) social relations.

Marx and Engels themselves say in *The German Ideology* that:

the proletarians, if they are to assert themselves as individuals, will have to abolish the very condition of their existence hitherto (which has, moreover, been that of all society up to the present), namely, labour. Thus they find themselves directly opposed to the form in which, hitherto, the individuals, of which society consists, have given themselves collective expression, that is, the State. *In order, therefore, to assert themselves as individuals, they must overthrow the State* [emphasis added].⁸⁶

In destroying the conditions of our oppression and reclaiming self-determined doing, there is no statist path. In contrast to the Marxist view, however, we must reject the Hegelian assumption of

⁸⁴ Marx, K. (n.d.). *Critique of the Gotha programme*. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/>

⁸⁵ Stalin. (1936, December 5). *Constitution (Fundamental law) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1936/12/05.htm>

⁸⁶ Marx/Engels Internet Archive, Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1932). *The German ideology*. In T. Delaney & B. Schwartz (Trans.), *Marx/Engels Internet Archive* [Book].f https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_The_German_Ideology.pdf

kind of injustice and inequality"⁴, the reality is that the very existence of the state is an injustice that breeds inequality. The modern state came into being side by side with capitalism; this isn't to say that they are one and the same, nor that contradictions can't exist between them, only that they are so deeply bonded that one cannot be abolished in isolation from the other. In the context of the United States, we must extend this analysis of social relations further to include the structures of colonialism. The state, capitalism, and colonialism are threads twisted and tied together in a convoluted knot of violence and exploitation, a Gordian knot that cannot be untangled, only destroyed.

Building an Edifice on Weak Foundations

The introductory section of the FRSO program displays a blatant confusion as to what capitalism is and a misreading of how oppressive institutions developed within the so-called United States. FRSO's prescription to resolve the problems brought on by capitalism is an alternative they call "socialism," despite it being but state-capitalism. Rather than strengthening the struggle *against* labor, FRSO leans into a struggle *of* labor wholly grounded in the capitalist system. Like all Leninists, FRSO also has a tendency to erroneously subsume all forms of oppression into a totalizing class struggle. If a political program begins by misidentifying the nature of the problems it seeks to respond to, it's impossible for what follows to be truly helpful.

According to the analysis under the subsection "Capitalism must go!":

Capitalism is a shortsighted, unplanned system that has one aim: the achievement of the highest rate of

⁴ N.A, N.D Freedom Road Socialist Organization. Program. <https://frso.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/frso-program.pdf>, pp. 1–3, 6–17, 19, 29, 31

profit, which in turn concentrates wealth into fewer and fewer hands. Systematic and ever-present inequality is a built-in feature of capitalism. The oppression of women, the inequality faced by oppressed nationalities, and class exploitation, extend into the foundations of capitalism. Nothing about this society is just or fair.

This isn't the worst place to start; yet this analysis leads them to the conclusion that "our class needs to take power by revolutionary means. We need socialism, *where the commanding heights of society are occupied by the working class, placing all political and economic power in our hands*" [emphasis added]. In other words, rather than suggesting that, as originally claimed, "Capitalism must go!", FRSO instead thinks that it should instead simply be placed in the hands of "the working class," and things will figure themselves out. We find very similar language in Chapter 30, "What is Neo-colonialism?" from J. Sykes' *The Revolutionary Science of Marxism-Leninism* (a book published by FRSO consisting of articles from their "Red Theory" series, whose content builds upon their program). Sykes claims that:

In the case of Cuba, Vietnam, China, Laos, and the DPRK... *the working class controls the commanding heights of the socialist economies of these countries and operates them in a planned way to benefit the people first and foremost* [emphasis added], they have been able to develop their productive forces, expand their economies and improve the conditions of their people.⁵

So, to Sykes and FRSO, "socialism" is but a synonym of a planned state-capitalist economy; they look to nation-states like

⁵ Sykes, J. (2023). *The revolutionary science of Marxism-Leninism*. FRSO, Ch. 29–30

Contrasted with the typical definition of the state, their notion

is broader and more flexible... [and] transcends the analytical distinction between economics and politics... [which] may be valid when viewed from below and at lower levels of abstraction... [but can] be very misleading when considered from above and in relation to the overall architecture of power."

Thus there is no sharp distinction "between 'economic power' and 'political power', between 'exploitation' and 'oppression', or between the 'power of the market' versus the 'power of the state'." And although the forms of power can vary, all hierarchical power structures ultimately constitute "a single nomos of power." Crucially, this "nomos of power is not fixed. It changes as the social order evolves..." The state should not be thought of as an abstract "eternal Newtonian space" whose actors are simply replaced over time. Rather, it is a "historically constituted Leibnitzian space," a structure of power that itself constantly evolves and is shaped by the "concrete entities and relationships that comprise it." The state is far from just "a special organization of force" as Lenin claimed⁸²; it is not a thing to be wielded but a *condition* to be overcome.

According to Bonefeld, the modern capitalist state "is charged with depoliticizing" the relationships between oppressors and oppressed by "concentrating the political character of bourgeois society."⁸³ Essentially, the "state is no independent being... [but] the political form of the bourgeois relationships of coined freedom... The political state is the state of social depoliticization." In recognition of this reality, Marx argues in his *Critique of the Gotha Program* that the idea of "equal rights" can in truth only be "a right of inequality"

⁸² Lenin, V. I., Lenin Internet Archive (marxists.org). (1917). *The State and Revolution*. <https://www.marxists.org/ebooks/lenin/state-and-revolution.pdf>

⁸³ Bonefeld, W. (2014). *Critical Theory and the critique of political economy: On Subversion and Negative Reason*. A&C Black. (pp. 222–225)

group, of judging its general trend, by the intentions or motives that the group claims for itself. Such judgment is worthless. The road to hell—as was said long ago—is paved with good intentions.

*It is not a matter of intentions, motives or words but of the objective situation, independent of them, that determines the fate and significance of slogans, of tactics or, in general, of the trend of a given party or group [emphasis added].*⁸⁰

Clearly this is not an issue specific to early 20th-century Russia. Lenin was correct in his assessment, somewhat ironically, given the course of Soviet history and its judgment by most Leninists. It matters little that FRSO claims their program is a product of applying a “revolutionary science”; the slogans, tactics, and general theses of the organization do not serve to advance a revolutionary cause. The FRSO program is one (un)grounded in fetishism, blind to its obvious flaws; as such, it is a dead end.

Nitzan & Bichler propose in *Capital as Power* that we should reframe our understanding of capitalism as being a *mode of power* rather than simply a mode of production.⁸¹ They say that hierarchical social orders are better understood this way, that “[e]very mode of power, whether based on slavery, feudalism or capitalization, has its own particular configuration,” and though it is true that each of these “depends on production... production as such is merely part of the story of power.” In this analysis, “The capitalist mega-machine defines the capitalist mode of power; and a mode of power... constitutes the ‘state’ of society.” Capitalism has thus penetrated, altered, and become the state, what they call “the state of capital.”

⁸⁰ Lenin, V.I., Lenin Internet Archive (marxists.org). (1913, July 16). Lenin: Word and Deed. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1913/jul/16.htm>

⁸¹ Nitzan, J., & Bichler, S. (2009). *Capital as Power: A Study of Order and Cre-order*. Routledge. (pp. 17, 280, 281)

“Cuba, Vietnam, China, Laos, and the DPRK” as models and inspirations of what can and should be implemented within the United States. Setting aside this idea until the analysis of the program’s section titled “Socialism,” it is clear that any goals whose baselines are the achievements of currently existing self-proclaimed socialist nations cannot be truly revolutionary. This is not genuine socialism, only a fetishized and uncreative illusion of it where rule by a Marxist-Leninist party is equated with social revolution. Likewise, FRSO’s conception of the working class is a fetishized one, one that assumes the relations between capital and labor to be pre-constituted. Returning to Holloway, this conception of the working class fails to see that “[w]e do not struggle as working class, we struggle against being working class, against being classified. Our struggle is not the struggle of labour: it is the struggle against labour.” Furthermore, “in this sense working class identity is not something ‘good’ to be treasured [or ‘proud of’], but something ‘bad’... to be fought against... Or rather, working-class identity should be seen as a non-identity: the communion of struggle to be not working class.”⁷ By turning “working class” into just another fetishized identifier, the core of what revolutionary social relations could be is removed as an option; possibilities are once more caged within the currently existing relations of capitalist society. We will return to this idea of self-limiting identities later on.

The subsection that follows, titled “Proud history, bright future,” draws a chronological history of the so-called United States. The very first sentence states that “[t]he history of the U.S. is a history of class struggle,” setting the stage for an analysis that subordinates all to the hegemonic “class struggle.” It goes on to say that according to Lenin, “the American Revolution of 1776 was a

⁶ N.A, N.D Freedom Road Socialist Organization. Program. <https://frso.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/frso-program.pdf>, pp. 1–3, 6–17, 19, 29, 31

⁷ Holloway, J. (2010). *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today*. Pluto Press (UK), pp. 118, 144

‘great war of liberation’ that was part of the era’s wave of progressive democratic struggles against the landholding autocracy and feudal reaction that dominated Europe.” No following analysis that might acknowledge the realities of colonialism within the so-called United States can undo or outweigh honestly believing that there was anything liberatory about the “American Revolution.” It is only a reductive linear narrative about some sort of progressive march of history that can lead one to subscribe to such an outlook; it again guarantees that the solutions proposed and the future envisioned fail to look beyond existing social relations and simply mean to reform the systems that exist within them. It does not matter what Lenin, Marx, or anybody else might have to say about the “American Revolution” when a more nuanced understanding can better inform us and our goals.

Despite saying that from “its onset, capitalism in the U.S. was based on genocide, directed against the Native peoples, and fueled by slavery,” the struggles against statism, capitalism, colonialism, etc. are reduced to a history in which “[t]here were constant attempts by working people, in the cities and on the farms, *to fight for their own interests*” [emphasis added]. This flattening of diverse struggles to the singular economic-class struggle ignores the existence of a more complex history, particularly the way “working people” with a stake in the colonial project of the United States have been historically motivated to perpetuate oppressive social relations rather than advance a revolutionary cause seeking to abolish them.⁸⁹ “Their own interests” has meant very different things to different people. There is also an attempt to draw a contrast between the “rise [of] one [of] the world’s first trade union movements” and “the genocidal westward expansion” when these were both the result of the same capitalist social relations. It is not help-

⁸ Sakai, J. (2014). *Settlers: The Mythology of the White Proletariat from Mayflower to Modern*. Kersplebedeb.

⁹ Schuhrke, J. (2024). *Blue-Collar Empire: The Untold Story of US Labor’s Global Anticommunist Crusade*. Verso Books.

stages [emphasis added],”⁷⁸ an inherently linear framing. We must reject this narrative that embraces the progress of civilization, one whose history has proven that, in all its forms,

Civilization has no relatives, only captives... It fashions its years and seconds into an anemic prison. It has shaped time into the most exquisite of weapons, obliterating memories, killing cycles. Its essence is time. The temporal and spacial imposition of awareness is the oblivion that is modernity and linear, or one-way time.⁷⁹

To reach a world beyond existing social relations, we must manifest a rupture with them. Like Benally says, our choice today is between “either liv[ing] as translucent characters in colonial fantasies, or outside of the temporal constraints of settler time, where we are most whole.” It is not a matter of transcending to a higher stage but of rejecting a formula of stages outright. We fight for a life worth living, not more efficient productive forces. If we hope to ever see a world not defined by the destructive logic of statist-colonial-capitalism, it is necessary to look beyond vanguardism and positivism, towards a world of unknowable possibilities.

Beyond Vanguardism

FRSO’s program shows us that more than a century on from the October Revolution, many Marxists have yet to learn basic lessons. Lenin, in a 1913 article, stated:

We are constantly making the mistake in Russia of judging the slogans and tactics of a certain party or

⁷⁸ Sykes, J. (2023). *The revolutionary science of Marxism-Leninism*. FRSO, Ch. 29–30

⁷⁹ Benally, K. (2023). *No Spiritual Surrender: Indigenous Anarchy in Defense of the Sacred*. Detritus Books, pp. 233–234, 306, 351, 356

nal goal is to replace one hegemon with another, then the continuum of history will never be broken. Within the recipes of domination, we will never find a “secret reality that points beyond the existing social relations... The resolution to the dialectical context of immanence is that context itself.” As Bonefeld plainly states, “*‘The whole is false.’ The whole has to go*” [emphasis added]. Only with the absolute negation of oppressive relations can we build something truly new and liberating.

Notably, Bonefeld himself claims that “the proletariat is the name of the oppressed class of our time” and that the end of “progress” can only come once this class ceases to exist, as “[f]or Marx, the struggle against oppression is the struggle of the last oppressed class.” While I agree that “the whole [of society] must go,” Bonefeld’s proletarian class-centrism too finds itself ensnared within a hegemonic logic that exists within this whole, despite its negative formulation. Letting go of Marxism’s limited conception of oppression-as-class is also a prerequisite for liberation and the negation of *all* forms of dispossession. As Benally says in a previously quoted section, to focus on the economic is to fail to “indict the consolidation of power as an expression of modernity”⁷⁶ more broadly.

FRSO claims their chief aspiration to be “a society without classes—communism,” this “classless society [being] a long-term project”⁷⁷; yet it is clear that however long this term might be, their purported goal is located somewhere along the continued progression of history. Though Sykes denies believing that “every society should proceed everywhere in the same linear way, through the same set of metaphysically distinct, predetermined stages,” at a higher level of abstraction, FRSO still holds it to be true that “socialism has to be understood as developing *through*

⁷⁶ Benally, K. (2023). *No Spiritual Surrender: Indigenous Anarchy in Defense of the Sacred*. Detritus Books, pp. 233–234, 306, 351, 356

⁷⁷ N.A, N.D Freedom Road Socialist Organization. Program. <https://frso.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/frso-program.pdf>, pp. 1–3, 6–17, 19, 29, 31

ful to ignore material conditions for the sake of trying to force history to align with dogma.

It is also this introductory section of the program that first mentions the ideas of a so-called “Chicano nation” of “Aztlán” and the “African American nation in the Black Belt South,” but we will set these aside for now; we’ll first take a look at FRSO’s analysis of “monopoly capitalism,” their identified enemy, and their proposed economic model, what they call “socialism.”

Real Problems and False Solutions

The second and third sections of the FRSO program, titled “The Enemy: Monopoly Capitalism” and “Socialism,” serve to paint a picture of the existing present and an ideal future, according to FRSO. Instead of looking beyond capitalist production and towards liberated forms of living, FRSO relies on the precedent set by so-called socialist states in their imagining of a “revolutionary” alternative. The concentration on class struggle leads FRSO to fail to contend with the U.S.’s colonial and slave heritage and thus to refuse to abolish all that comes with it. They also offer a reductive analysis of oppressed groups, which limits our ability to move beyond the reproduction of legalistic and patronizing models.

The program states: “Exploitation, inequality, and oppression are not things that ‘just happen.’ Everything that is wrong with this country is the product of a system: monopoly capitalism.” Remaining consistent, FRSO’s flattened approach identifies monopoly capitalism (which they call the highest and *final* stage of capitalism) as the source of all oppression and so the enemy that must be fought through class struggle. This is the basis for FRSO’s analysis wherein contemporary capitalism is defined as a system “characterized by an incredible concentration and centralization of wealth, where big banks become intertwined with industry, creating a financial oligarchy”; thus equating capitalism generally with private

corporate capitalism specifically. This allows them to call their alternative to capitalism socialism, which in truth is but state capitalism (if we are to define capitalism as a set of relations of production in which individuals sell their labor to employers in exchange for wages within an economy based on commodity production).

As mentioned earlier, capitalism did not materialize in the United States in a vacuum and henceforth shaped all social relations through the vector of production; it was settler colonialism and the slave trade that set the stage and then contributed to the growth of capitalism here. As Gerald Horne states when analyzing how the British became the reigning global superpower over the course of what he calls the long 16th century, “any explanation that elides slavery, colonialism, and the shards of an emerging capitalism, along with their handmaiden—white supremacy—is deficient in explanatory power.” The course of history later led the British to pass “the baton to its revolting spawn, the United States, which has carried global dominance into the present century.”¹⁰ Though this does not contradict what is stated in the program’s introduction, it highlights the rupture in logic evident within it. Contemporary capitalism is so deeply imbued with that inherited from slavery and settler colonialism that it cannot be redirected from the top into a system that will “open the road to freedom for working and oppressed people... [create] endless possibilities for humanity to work collectively to solve the great challenges of the economy, health, science, culture, war, and the environment” and empower us to “have lives with purpose in a healthy, productive society that benefits all people.”¹¹ To sincerely believe this is to be satisfied with appropriating a megamachine built off the backs of enslaved Africans and Natives that continues to commit genocide

¹⁰ Horne, G. (2018). *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism: The Roots of Slavery, White Supremacy, and Capitalism in 17th Century North America and the Caribbean*. NYU Press, p. 7

¹¹ N.A, N.D Freedom Road Socialist Organization. Program. <https://frso.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/frso-program.pdf>, pp. 1–3, 6–17, 19, 29, 31

of events... This appearance is real but by itself, devoid of meaning. What does it really mean to say that history is a sequence of events? Events of what, and what was so eventful? History appears as a transcendent force of progress only when one abstracts from it, leading to its description as a sequence of events, for which the terms ‘historicity’ provides the name. Historicity comprises the idea of history without history. That is to say, in order to comprehend history, one needs to ‘crack’ the appearance of history as a sequence of events.

One needs thus to think out of history, out of the battles for freedom, slave insurrections, peasant revolts, the struggles of Les Enragés, working class strikes, riots, insurrections and revolutions, to appreciate the traditions of the oppressed, recognize the smell of danger and the stench of death, gain a sense of the courage and cunning of struggle, grasp the spirit of sacrifice, comprehend however fleetingly the density of a time at which the progress of the muck of ages almost came to a standstill. History does not lead anywhere; it has no telos, no objectives, no purpose and it does not take sides. At its worst, it continues on the path of victorious progress under darkened clouds and smoke-filled skies. At best, its progress will be stopped. Such history has not been made yet, though it has often been attempted.⁷⁵

If we dare attempt to stop this progress, we must acknowledge that the oppressed don’t “struggle for the progress of oppression—this really is the business of the ‘overlords’ of history.” If our cardi-

⁷⁵ Bonefeld, W. (2014). *Critical Theory and the critique of political economy: On Subversion and Negative Reason*. A&C Black. (pp. 222–225)

In contrast to this, FRSO's historical materialism leads "practice [to become] nonconceptual... a piece of the politics it was supposed to lead out of; it [becomes] the prey of power." We cannot appropriate the tools of oppression and expect them to lead us somewhere beyond it; such is a logic based on non sequiturs. We aim for revolution, not reification.

Bonefeld says that "[o]nly a reified consciousness" can claim to have the proper knowledge to solve the crises wrought by capitalism and further to do so *on behalf* of those deprived of self-determined doing. In truth, this reified consciousness' "grasp of reality is entirely abstract and its assertion to know what to do is groundless." Vanguardism is but another deprivation of the self-determination that we seek. A reified consciousness abandons the possibility of revolutionary change and with it the insight that oppressive hierarchies can never be negated "by means of state." Resulting from this failure to reject reified consciousness, FRSO's program suggests that statist intervention in the economy will somehow lead to a society of human purpose, despite the reality that within any commodity economy, human needs are never the fulcrum upon which resolutions rest. We cannot have faith in political parties, in historical progress, or in any revolution defined by programs; to do so is to once again set ourselves up for disappointment. We must only follow the call of our resounding "No!"—our rejection of reification, our demand for an end to progress and modernity as we have known it.

In painting a picture of the pitfalls of historical continuity, I find it helpful to quote at length from Bonefeld's conclusion to his exploration *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy*:

History does not unfold. It takes no side... The purpose of capitalism is the profitable accumulation of abstract wealth for its own sake. The commune of human purpose is not an existing human purpose. Its reality is entirely negative. History appears as a linear sequence

(and ecocide) today. It is choosing to reform white supremacy rather than rejecting it.

The subsection titled "Socialism in the U.S." claims that:

We will end the anarchy of production and replace it with *a rational, planned economy, where working people come first... Work itself will be transformed. With the working class in charge of society, workers will have a real say in how our workplaces are run* [emphasis added]. Under capitalism, we face the despotism of foremen and supervisors who make us toil for exploiters. Socialism means we will have a real interest in the goods and services we produce.

In revisiting FRSO's judgment of contemporary nation-states as examples of real existing socialism, these claims ring hollow. Describing these identified model-nations as ones that put working people first is to dismiss the diverse struggles within them. FRSO conflates the idea of a working class with the Marxist-Leninist party in power that claims to represent it; their revolution is in no way socially revolutionary; it does not mean to destroy existing oppressive social relations and create new libertarian ones but simply to reform the inner workings of the current system. To take the example of China, by far the most populous nominally socialist nation in history, either the largest or second largest economy in the world (if measured by PPP GDP or nominal GDP, respectively), and to many the bulwark of socialism in the 21st century, calling it a place where working people come first and despotic workplaces have been transformed into ones where laborers are free from foremen and supervisors would be laughable if the reality weren't so tragic. Honest accounts expose the lie in this. [8–11] Ivan Franceschini and Christian Sorace in the introductory essay to the collection *Proletarian China: A Century of Chinese Labor* unambiguously write:

This century has seen what is now one of the largest and most powerful political parties on earth transform from a revolutionary organisation whose foundations were built on the promise of the emancipation of the working class and pursuit of an alternative to capitalist modernity, into a capitalist machine decorated with socialist ornamentation that violently crushes any expression of labour organisation and working-class solidarity.¹²

This is an accurate representation of the current conditions in the People's Republic of China, a reality nothing like the imaginary one that FRSO seems to inhabit. Not to mention the history of "China" and the fact that it only encompasses the territory it does today after centuries of displacement, ethnic cleansing, and ongoing settler-colonialism¹³¹⁴¹⁵¹⁶¹⁷¹⁸; nor that China's economic accomplishments can only be seen as a success in isolation from

¹² Franceschini, I., Lin, K., Sorace, C., & Loubere, N. (2022). *Proletarian China: A Century of Chinese Labour*. Verso Books, p. 2

¹³ Fischer, A. M. (2013). *The Disempowered Development of Tibet in China: A Study in the Economics of Marginalization*. Lexington Books.

¹⁴ Byler, D. (2021). *In the Camps: China's High-Tech Penal Colony*. Columbia Global Reports.

¹⁵ Leibold, J. (2024, November 13). The Tibet-Aid Project and Settler Colonialism in China's Borderlands. *Made in China Journal*. <https://madeinchinajournal.com/2024/11/12/the-tibet-aid-project-and-settler-colonialism-in-chinas-borderlands/>

¹⁶ Xiaocuo, Y. (2020, August 27). Recruiting Loyal Stabilisers: On the Banality of Carceral Colonialism in Xinjiang. *Made in China Journal*. <https://madeinchinajournal.com/2019/10/25/recruiting-loyal-stabilisers-on-the-banality-of-carceral-colonialism-in-xinjiang/>

¹⁷ Hostetler, L. (2001). *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China*. University of Chicago Press.

¹⁸ Setzekorn, E. (2015). Chinese Imperialism, Ethnic Cleansing, and Military History, 1850–1877. *Journal of Chinese Military History*, 4(1), 80–100. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22127453-12341278>

According to Adorno, "to negate a negation does not bring about its reversal... What is negated is negative until it has passed."⁷³ Negation is not a method to be applied to existing relations in hopes of reforming them: the negation of negation does not lead to positivity; negation must mean to move against-and-beyond. For us, this means that capitalist relations and identities, bounded as they are by what we are *not* (able to do), cannot be transformed into positive and liberatory ones. As such, "[t]here is no vantage point [within existing relations] from which to launch the society of human purposes [emphasis added]. The society of human purposes is not the hidden secret of the capitalist social relations. Rather, its hidden secret is the force of the law-making violence of expropriation that divorced the mass of the population from the means of subsistence."⁷⁴ FRSO's vanguardism *cannot* lead to a dignified life; their perspective too represents this expropriative violence that deprives us of self-determined doing. We must turn to a critical praxis that

rejects the idea of revolution as a revolution for the freedom of labour as regressive, denies that bourgeois society contains within itself the necessity of human emancipation, opposes the notion of historical progress for the benefit of the working class as a 'conformist rebellion'... that... instead of ending slavery, seeks a new deal for slaves.

Capitalist society does not find its positive resolution "in better-paid and fully employed producers" but only in the dissolution of property and alienating means of production in themselves. Critical theory is not a "theoretical expression of the soul of the social forces" but instead "aims at these forces themselves" in order not to positivize but to abolish them.

⁷³ Adorno, T. (2003). *Negative dialectics*. Routledge. (p. 160)

⁷⁴ Bonefeld, W. (2014). *Critical Theory and the critique of political economy: On Subversion and Negative Reason*. A&C Black. (pp. 222–225)

and in distinction to the idea of labour as the natural necessity of social wealth and conception of the economic as an economy of labour, *it follows a completely different entelechy of human development – it seeks the society of human purposes, universal human emancipation* [emphasis added].⁷²

Reflecting this contradistinction: “The wealth of the communist individuals and the wealth of capitalist society belong to two different realities. For the society of the free and equal *social wealth is free time*” [emphasis added]. Whether we call this source of social wealth “time for enjoyment” as Marx does or “freely disposable time” like Adorno, the wealth of communist society is above all characterized by self-determined doing and the satisfaction of human beings. It is because of this key difference that “[t]he society of human purposes stands *in opposition to all hitherto history. Its achievement entails that the progress of this history comes to a standstill so that society can be found anew*” [emphasis added]. No matter the language chosen to describe it, such a condition can undoubtedly only exist *outside* of history as we know it. The problem with “revolutionary” perspectives rooted in positivization is that they are inherently incapable of halting such an ostensibly progressive march of history. In absolute contradiction to their proclaimed purpose, they cannot manifest a society that hinges on human needs—on dignity. These perspectives perpetuate the false promise that proper economic planning and development will liberate us from the dispossession of our doing. Critical theory and praxis is only critical as far as it “resists this falseness, refusing to be taken in by a philosophy of progress that in its entirety is tied to existing social relations”; it cannot enable and legitimize things to continue as they are. Above all, our critical theory’s conception of society must be **entirely negative**.

⁷² Bonefeld, W. (2014). *Critical Theory and the critique of political economy: On Subversion and Negative Reason*. A&C Black. (pp. 222–225)

the reality of uneven development and overproduction.¹⁹ Perhaps FRSO’s ignorance of a foreign country shouldn’t be surprising given their analysis of the one they live in.

The “Monopoly Capitalism” section of the program describes the destruction wrought upon the world by American capitalism: on women, [2S]LGBTQ+ individuals, foreign nations, and the planet itself; and the ways that the American state serves the wealthy and their corporations while also creating laws that target marginalized groups.²⁰ Only intense cognitive dissonance could lead one to ignore the important similarities between the American Empire and the Chinese—or the Soviet one before it—that place them firmly within the category of anti-revolutionary.

Though this is not the place for a more detailed analysis of the political and economic terrains of current “socialist” nations, suffice it to say that taking a stance like that of FRSO exposes one as not only historically illiterate but also unfathomably chauvinistic—it is an injustice to those within these nation-states who yearn for genuine liberty and self-determination. It is often easier to be reductive than to learn and understand history. Why bother when you’re a disciple of the revolutionary science?

Stuck at Bird’s-Eye

In general, the “Socialism” section exposes a naive and simplistic understanding of how societies reproduce themselves. There is a tendency to be restricted to a top-down view, thus missing many nuances. As a result, FRSO fails to grasp that liberated communities can never spawn from simple legal reforms and good intentions.

In implementing FRSO’s suggested policies for the self-determination of “oppressed nations” and sovereignty for

¹⁹ Hart-Landsberg, M., & Burkett, P. (2005). *China and Socialism: Market Reforms and Class Struggle*. Monthly Review Press, pp.87–114

²⁰ N.A, N.D Freedom Road Socialist Organization. Program. <https://frso.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/frso-program.pdf>, pp. 1–3, 6–17, 19, 29, 31

Indigenous peoples, not only is the existence of a ward-guardian relationship with Indigenous peoples maintained, but their supposedly sovereign territories overlap with that of the Chicano and African-American nations. Graciously *granting* liberty to oppressed peoples and independence to colonies (while seemingly maintaining colonial borders, both national and between US states) are not the revolutionary actions that FRSO believes them to be. It is also noteworthy that the Hawaiian Islands are recognized as an internally oppressed nation and not a colony, seemingly because of their current status as one of the fifty states as opposed to a territory. The concepts of Indigenous peoples “sovereignty,” the “African American nation” in the Black Belt South, and the “Chicano Nation” in the Southwest will be revisited further on.

FRSO claims that their model of socialism would open the door to “a more harmonious relationship with nature... [allowing] us to systematically raise our standard of living, while getting rid of all that is *wasteful and irrational* [emphasis added],” yet their suggestion of an industrial state-capitalist economy cannot lead to this, only to continued ecocide. Then again, states do tend to set their own standards and bend the meaning of words to their convenience. Nevertheless, less vicious and destructive capitalism is still capitalism, an inherently vicious and destructive system.

The suggestion that “for socialism to advance, the oppression of women needs to be pulled up by its roots” is correct, but the solution of “attacking inequality in the economic base... the realization of democratic rights, including reproductive rights, and developing ways for women to be able to participate fully in all aspects of political and social life” is not pulling up the roots of patriarchy; it is pruning. In a world where liberties exist for women, it would not be necessary for any political entity to grant them as legal rights—which, if given, can always be taken back away, as exemplified by the right to abortion in the USSR and later the US—they certainly cannot exist within the colonial and capitalist social relations that FRSO is so keen on maintaining. The same can be said about the

identities [and the world of hegemonic power]... It is much more a question of drawing out that which is already present in repressed and contradictory form... This implies a politics not of talking, but of listening, or, better, of talking-listening ... This is a dialogical politics rather than the monological talking-politics of the traditional revolutionary movement.⁷¹

Describing what a revolutionary future looks like is not simply unproductive; it is in no way able to inform us on the subject. In the world we have grown up in, it is impossible to even fathom what we as individuals and as collectives might be capable of. It is certain that no enlightened minority can simply lay this out for us in a political program.

Self-liberation is just that, a liberation of the self, an internal process. Critiquing our fetishized identities is not about denying the way we have been shaped by our lived experiences within capitalism, but about taking this power away from it. As Marx says, we live in a “topsy-turvy world,” one in which our subjectivity is concealed by reified relations. Our goals must be informed by those practices that can lead us from fetishized identity to a dignified existence outside any hegemonic system.

Against His-story, Against Positivation

According to Werner Bonefeld,

The difficulty in conceiving of the society of the free and equal has to do with its very idea. In distinction to the pursuit of abstract wealth, of value in process, money in process and as such capital, and in distinction to seizure of the state, pursuit and preservation of political power, economic value and factor efficiency,

⁷¹ Holloway, J. (2010) *Crack Capitalism*. Pluto Press. (pp. 43, 76, 85, 159, 225)

orientation towards the state and the idea of influencing the state or taking state power.⁶⁸

In FRSO's praxis, not only do these go fundamentally unchallenged, but in a way they are strengthened by their ability to attract self-proclaimed radicals to their banners, convincing them that maintaining their own (and more importantly others') oppression is in some way revolutionary.

It is not a matter of denying the centrality of oppressed groups/identities in anticapitalist struggles, but rather about what perspective one approaches struggle with. This is why the necessity of action based in negation must be stressed. Simply put, "The difference is between an identification that stops there and an identification that negates itself in the process of identifying." Just as Stirner claims: "I am really Man and the un-man in one; for I am a man and at the same time more than a man,"⁶⁹ we should strive to continually break down all normative logic embedded in our identities.

Thus: "To say 'we are indigenous' in a society that systematically denies the dignity of the indigenous is a way of asserting dignity, of negating the negation of dignity, of saying 'we are indigenous and more than that'."⁷⁰ Taking this a step further:

The drive of anti-identity is a constant movement beyond the concept [the content going beyond the phrase, in Marx's words], it constantly goes beyond our conscious knowledge... [Revolution] cannot be thought of in terms of the bringing of consciousness to people... The politics of bringing consciousness is part of the world of character masks, the world of

⁶⁸ Holloway, J. (2010) *Crack Capitalism*. Pluto Press. (pp. 43, 76, 85, 159, 225)

⁶⁹ Stirner, M. (1995). *The ego and its own*. Cambridge University Press. (pp. 97, 117)

⁷⁰ Holloway, J. (2010). *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today*. Pluto Press (UK), pp. 118, 144

full liberation of 2SLGBTQ+ individuals: liberation does not mean replacing old laws with new ones; it means ridding the land of colonial laws at a minimum.

I believe it is worth noting that there is no mention of freedom for children and teenagers in the FRSO program, when the liberation of minors from oppression would undoubtedly be an important element of a true social revolution. This is yet another example of allowing currently existing oppressive social relations to make one blind to possibilities.

The proclaimed goals of "a foreign policy that promotes peace and relates to other countries with the aim of achieving mutual respect and common benefit... [built on] working class internationalism" as well as that of "[aiding] other revolutionaries who are struggling against monopoly capitalism and oppression" seem incompatible with not only the maintenance of colonial structures but also the proclaimed alignment with nations like the PRC, a state that has historically maintained ties with feudal monarchs and military dictators²¹ and whose economy depends on the continued oppression of laborers internationally.^{22,23} Conflicts of the 20th century, like the Sino-Soviet split and the Sino-Vietnamese war, also show how even relations between Marxist-Leninist states have the potential to turn sour.

Blinded by fetishisms, FRSO believes that they will "continue the class struggle until there are no more classes," yet deny even the possibility of dismantling the statist-colonial-capitalist super-complex. Suggesting that Marxism-Leninism is necessary to liber-

²¹ Meisner, M. (1999). *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic*, Third Edition. Simon and Schuster, p. 388

²² Hart-Landsberg, M., & Burkett, P. (2005). *China and Socialism: Market Reforms and Class Struggle*. Monthly Review Press, pp.87–114

²³ Central Committee, Communist Party of India (Maoist). (n.d.). China – a new Social-Imperialist power! (First Edition: July 2017, Second (Amended) Edition: 2021 January). <https://bannedthought.org/India/CPI-Maoist-Docs/Books/China-Social-Imperialism-CPI-Maoist-2021-Eng-view.pdf>

ate the so-called United States can be called nothing other than chauvinism. The goal of a classless society can never and will never come as a result of Leninist (counter)revolution; this is especially true here. Ironically, this part of the program ends with the following paragraph:

When people change the world, they themselves are also changed. To change the world positively, then, in pursuit of justice for the majority of humankind, is to change humankind itself. Only through the struggle for socialism can this bright future be ours. The present is the battlefield where control over the future is fought for and won. There's no better time to join that fight than right now.

This is a beautiful message, one I wholeheartedly agree with, though an important nuance is left unspoken—means must always match ends. Humans (societies) reproduce themselves, and thus a world healed from injustices cannot be born from dictatorship. To change the world, we must engage with it in ways that change us to our core, digging beneath and uprooting the ingrained fetishisms of a corrupted world. It will always be true that even more important than what we achieve is *how* we achieve it.

Class Divisions and the “National Question” Question

The three final sections of the program, “Class in the U.S. and our Strategy for Revolution,” “Immediate Demands of Labor,” and “Immediate Demands for U.S. Colonies, Indigenous Peoples, and Oppressed Nationalities,” present FRSO’s analyses of class-based and national identities in the United States and their proposals stemming from these analyses. Regarding class, FRSO takes the

centuries of capitalist domination “we are being left with nothing. Except rage. And dignity... [These] *are our bridges, our languages*” [emphasis added].⁶⁵ If rage and dignity are bridges, then programs based in fetishisms are broken tracks leading nowhere. This does not mean

that there is some trans-historical quality of dignity: dignity is nothing other than the struggle against and beyond its own negation... [It] does not mean that we hope one day to arrive at a pre-existing dignity, but that dignity is itself an exploration, a shifting process of creating social relations against-and-beyond capital.⁶⁶

In demanding dignity, we demand self-determined doing. Taking dignity and interrelation as the bases of our anticapitalist movement(s) means to take our poetry from the future. We must not cling to a world which leaves no room for true agency, because quite simply, as Marcos says, “[i]f this world doesn’t have a place for us, then another world must be made.”⁶⁷

In their calls for the building of a new movement that plainly asserts the goal of preserving fetishized identities and of subordinating all to the hegemonizing class-struggle, FRSO ignorantly promotes goals that entrap that movement within the existing logic of capital and, by implication, perpetuate

the reification of social relations, the reproduction of the hierarchy between men and women and the dimorphisation of sexuality, the objectification of nature, the acceptance of the capitalist concept, and above all, the

⁶⁵ Marcos, Subcomandante Insurgente. (2018) *The Zapatistas’ Dignified Rage: The Last Public Speeches of Subcommander Marcos*. AK Press. (pp. 20–21)

⁶⁶ Holloway, J. (2010) *Crack Capitalism*. Pluto Press. (pp. 43, 76, 85, 159, 225)

⁶⁷ Marcos, Subcomandante Insurgente. (2018) *The Zapatistas’ Dignified Rage: The Last Public Speeches of Subcommander Marcos*. AK Press. (pp. 20–21)

shape.”⁶¹ An affinity for affinity in conjunction with a framework of anti-identity allows us to move beyond a politics of demand, one that seeks to improve our lived experiences “by appealing to the benevolence of hegemonic forces and/or by altering the relations between these forces”⁶², and towards communities that empower us to *choose*. This also avoids the class-centrism of organizations like FRSO, which precludes the conditions necessary for a groundless solidarity.

We can extend Day’s politics of affinity both in breadth and depth by considering Benally’s previously mentioned interrelationality, through which “our solidarity is projected out from our relationship with the Earth.” This way “[o]ur solidarity focuses on more than just intersections” with each other, going beyond the anthropocentricity of intersectionality and also considering our relations with “non-human beings, spirits, and Mother Earth.”⁶³ Dissolving those parts of our identities that prevent us from relating enables us to build communities that draw strength not just from each other but existence more broadly, expanding possibilities far beyond our imaginations and existing models rooted in domination.

When we accept ourselves as truly and totally bound by the identities that capitalist society has branded us with, we remain unable to move beyond their limits. Holloway posits “dignity” in contrast to reified identification, calling it “a leaping, gliding, swinging, dancing, never a marching: and that, for capital, is hard to follow and absorb.”⁶⁴

Capitán Insurgente Marcos (formerly known as Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos) once said in a speech that in the wake of

⁶¹ Holloway, J. (2010). *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today*. Pluto Press (UK), pp. 118, 144

⁶² Day, R. J. F. (2015) *Gramsci Is Dead*. doi:10.2307/j.ctt18fs4xw. (pp. 8, 9, 17, 80, 188)

⁶³ Benally, K. (2023). *No Spiritual Surrender: Indigenous Anarchy in Defense of the Sacred*. Detritus Books, pp. 233–234, 306, 351, 356

⁶⁴ Holloway, J. (2010) *Crack Capitalism*. Pluto Press. (pp. 43, 76, 85, 159, 225)

standard Marxist approach of deducing class from relations of production strictly, rather than relations of power more holistically. The primacy that they place on this economic class struggle leads them to treat what FRSO members like Sykes refer to as the “National Question” as but an appendage of the larger class struggle.²⁴ The very framing of national liberation as but a corollary “question” that must be answered for the sake of class struggle highlights a tendency to reduce real living struggles to theoretical points. As for their supposed demands, those related to labor amount to a more “progressive” and benign capitalism, while those related to “U.S. Colonies, Indigenous Peoples, and Oppressed Nationalities” are ill-informed and high-handed, ultimately reinforcing colonial-capitalist social relations.

For FRSO’s plan of revolution to become a reality, “[w]orking and oppressed peoples need political power.” To them, this “power is the means to reorganize society in our own interests and dictate our terms to all who stand in the way,” thus their basic strategy is to build “a united front against the monopoly capitalist class, under the leadership of the working class and its political party, with a strategic alliance between the multinational working class and the oppressed nationalities at the core.”²⁵ As noted before, the so-called “leadership of the working class and its political party” should be read as the leadership of a communist party, a party that seeks to take power and afterwards, as they say, “dictate [their] terms to all who stand in the way.”

We will eschew a more detailed evaluation of FRSO’s list of restrictively defined class categories for the single reason that such reductive and specific identifiers largely serve as another reason for self-described revolutionaries to treat social change as if it were an algebraic equation. As for their labor demands, I will only say

²⁴ Sykes, J. (2023). *The revolutionary science of Marxism-Leninism*. FRSO, Ch. 29–30

²⁵ N.A, N.D Freedom Road Socialist Organization. Program. <https://frso.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/frso-program.pdf>, pp. 1–3, 6–17, 19, 29, 31

that for an organization that claims not to be a party but is rather making efforts to build a new (future) Communist Party, their list reads much like a political party's electoral platform; there is also a tendency of turning to economism. We will shift our focus to their demands for Indigenous Peoples and Oppressed Nationalities.

Fetishized Indigenous Sovereignty

When it comes to the so-called "United States," the primary struggle, or if one prefers to borrow terminology from Mao Zedong Thought, the primary contradiction, is colonialism. To begin to imagine a possible future where communism can exist anywhere within this territory, decolonization is a requirement. Since the institutions of settler and resource colonialism have developed from the moment Europeans first landed in what is now the so-called United States, the resolving of this contradiction would mean the absolute and total destruction of the United States as an entity. Nothing can change this reality. This is not a matter of debate or compromise; turning the United States into a supposed worker-led "socialist state" (if one can even seriously imagine such a scenario) would not undo the structures of colonialism. A refusal to accept this reality is likely the most blatant failure of the FRSO program.

Klee Benally, author of *No Spiritual Surrender*, brilliantly critiques the methods and ideology of Marxist parties from an Indigenous perspective. It is helpful to quote this at length:

Marxism's theoretical inadequacy as a strategy for Indigenous autonomy and liberation lies in its commitment to an industrialized worker-run State as the vehicle for revolutionary transformation towards a stateless society. Forced industrialization has ravaged the Earth and the people of the Earth. To solely focus on an economic system rather than indict the consolidation of power as an expression of modernity has resulted

ciency."⁵⁸ The large focus in this essay on critiquing FRSO's ideas regarding those identified as workers, Black, Indigenous, Chicano, etc. does not originate in a want to make these connected yet distinct struggles the be-all-end-all of our politics, but rather in seeing these (anti-)identities as springboards for building a new and better world—a world with dignity, a world where we can choose what we do. As Day points out,

a politics of affinity... is not about abandoning identification as such; it is about abandoning the fantasy that fixed, stable identities are *possible and desirable*, that one identity is better than another, that superior identities deserve more of the good and less of the bad that a social order has to offer, and that the state form should act as the arbiter of who gets what [emphasis added].⁵⁹

It might be helpful to consider here the difference between what Max Stirner calls *qualities*, which are the "property" of the self, owned and defined by us, and *essences*, "something alien" that "exists above and behind things," an externalized regulative power.⁶⁰ Though while Stirner seems to suggest that the individual is the source of unique qualities, it might be better to think of qualities as continually (re)cultivated through self-determined doing and interaction. Where essentialist identities prescribed onto us by a "normalized world of self-referentiality" tend towards staticity and negate our ability to self-determine, owned qualities, on the other hand, are "continually reinvented and restated so that they do not become hardened and frozen into a recuperable

⁵⁸ Holloway, J. (2010) *Crack Capitalism*. Pluto Press. (pp. 43, 76, 85, 159, 225)

⁵⁹ Day, R. J. F. (2015) *Gramsci Is Dead*. doi:10.2307/j.ctt18fs4xw. (pp. 8, 9, 17, 80, 188)

⁶⁰ Stirner, M. (1995). *The ego and its own*. Cambridge University Press. (pp. 97, 117)

While it is true that the deprivation of self-determined doing is what we struggle against, this process can be attributed to an even more fundamental dichotomy than that of abstract labor and concrete labor, one of *dispossessed* doing and self-determined doing. Misogyny, heterosexism, and enslavement are only some examples of dispossession that long predate the capitalist abstraction of labor and its current function as social mediator. Put simply, dispossession is the negation of self-determination—the creation of hierarchy. Holloway’s description above accurately describes the dynamic of the capitalist economy and our compulsion to labor within it, but he goes on to claim that it is this abstraction of labor that is the source of *all* other identities as we know them. Though contemporary identities all bear the scars of centuries of forced integration into the capitalist system, and it is only within this context that we have all experienced identification, it is to the more general process of dispossession that we can credit their origin. Being rooted in non-hegemony doesn’t mean rejecting or diminishing the need for class struggle, but recognizing that while it is an essential axis of struggle today, it is not the central axis—there is no such thing. What Holloway calls doing isn’t limited in its scope to pushing back against the abstraction of labor but more broadly against the reified hierarchies that all negate self-determined doing.

Understanding that identification is a process of negation allows us to consider how this negation might itself be negated, beginning the restoration of our dignity. What is significant about our identities is not the way that they define what we are, but how they, above all, define what we *are not* (and cannot *do*). The ability of hierarchies to endure demands that this be the case. And so in aiming to negate these, we should “start not from the stillness of identity but from the moving of non- or, better, anti-identity. We start dialectically, but not with a dialectic understood as interaction but rather as the negative restlessness of misfitting, of insuffi-

in the predictions of anarchist critics (like Bakunin) to come true; the ideological doctrine of socialists tends towards bureaucracy, intelligentsia, and ultimately totalitarianism.

...

To be required to assume a role in a society that is premised on colonial political and economic ideology towards the overthrow of that system to achieve communalization is to require political assimilation and uniformity as a condition for, and of, revolution. Marxist and Maoist positions demand it which means they demand Indigenous People to reconfigure that which makes them Indigenous to become weapons of class struggle. The process inherently alienates diverse and complex Indigenous social compositions by compelling them to act as subjects of a revolutionary framework based on class and production. Indigenous collectives exist in ways that leftist political ideologies refuse to imagine, as to do so would conflict with the primary architecture of “enlightenment” and “modernity” that their “civilized” world is built on.

This is why we reject the overture to shed our cultural “bondage” and join the proletarian dictatorship. We reject the gestures to own the means of production with our expectant assimilated role of industrial or cultural worker. Any social arrangement based on industrialization is a dead end for the Earth and the peoples of the Earth. *Class war on stolen lands could abolish economic exploitation while retaining settler-colonialism. We have no use for any politics that*

calculates its conclusion within the context of these kinds of power relations. [all emphasis added]²⁶

Beyond the fetishization of the state that Marxist-Leninist organizations are all prone to, to suggest that a “dictatorship of the proletariat” is the appropriate solution in a settler-colony like the United States is to map colonial political geography onto Indigenous social relations; it is authoritarian temporality locking possibilities within a modern framework.

As Benally likewise speaks about, the very idea of Indigenous sovereignty is colonial in its origin—before the arrival of Europeans, Indigenous peoples did not need any state to grant them sovereignty, the same way they surely wouldn’t in the aftermath of a genuine social revolution. FRSO says that such sovereignty would include “upholding past treaties and abolishing the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the exercise of local political power.”²⁷ What legitimacy is there in treaties signed under coercion? What is the meaning of local political power still within the settler-colonial structure of the United States? To make it worse, what they call the “right to national development” means “gaming and especially the return of indigenous peoples’ *land and natural resources to make their sovereign areas economically viable*” [emphasis added]. This doesn’t sound much different from existing dynamics where recognized tribes are legally considered domestic dependent nations, have centralized tribal governments unlike social structures that existed before colonialism, with some created specifically for the intention of extraction through the signing over of access to natural resources.²⁸ The term “economically viable” implies a

²⁶ Benally, K. (2023). *No Spiritual Surrender: Indigenous Anarchy in Defense of the Sacred*. Detritus Books, pp. 233–234, 306, 351, 356

²⁷ N.A, N.D Freedom Road Socialist Organization. Program. <https://frso.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/frso-program.pdf>, pp. 1–3, 6–17, 19, 29, 31

²⁸ Benally, K. (2023). *No Spiritual Surrender: Indigenous Anarchy in Defense of the Sacred*. Detritus Books, pp. 233–234, 306, 351, 356

all superstition about the past. The former revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to smother their own content. The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content. There the phrase went beyond the content—here the content goes beyond the phrase.⁵⁶

All one needs to change is the century, and this quote remains as relevant today as it was then. Our revolutionary poetry cannot limit itself to that which stems from existing relations—it must be found in social rupture, which seeks to move, as Holloway says, against-and-beyond them.

For Holloway, the key to this is understanding the difference between the abstract labor (or simply “labor”) that capitalism is built upon and concrete labor (or “doing”) and why we must free the latter from the former. Though both are forms of doing, they differ immensely in their substance:

One form of doing, labour, creates capital, the basis of the society that is destroying us. Another form of doing, what [Holloway calls] simply ‘doing’, pushes against the creation of capital and towards the creation of a different society. In both cases, our doing [human creation] is at the centre. By focusing on doing, we put our own power at the centre of our understanding of society: our power-to-do (and therefore, our power not to do, and our power to do differently)... [This argument] is not for ‘more democracy’ but for a radical reorganisation of our daily activity, without which the call for ‘more democracy’ means nothing at all.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Marx, K. (1869) *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Edited by Engels, Translated by Saul K. Padover, Uploaded by Zodiac et al. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/18th-Brumaire.pdf. (p. 6)

⁵⁷ Holloway, J. (2010) *Crack Capitalism*. Pluto Press. (pp. 43, 76, 85, 159, 225)

praxis and its theoretical heft [must be] a ruthless interrogation of the established and institutionalized.”⁵⁵ In this way, “[c]ritical praxis becomes a radical invitation to *not only do but to be done* by the undercommon insurgency that makes its own demands [emphasis added].” Fundamentally, such a praxis must suspend the presumption of an end goal. In aiming to create self-determined communities, we cannot restrict ourselves to replacing one hegemon with another:

Because we cannot, and must not assume that the logics and rubrics we have when moving within the maelstrom of the hegemonic—radically altered as they may be—can operate to our benefit... We will need new rubrics and metrics, *unrubrics and unmetrics*, because a radically other-world requires radically other means to love it, to caress it, to be all the way in it [emphasis added].

The unrubrics and unmetrics of non-hegemony, an affinity of affinity—these are the means to the end of revolutionary possibilities. Only through them can we shed the traditions of dead generations that weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living and find a new source for our revolutionary poetry.

Identity and Dignity, or Taking our Poetry from the Future

Marx states in his 18th *Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that:

The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped away

⁵⁵ Bey, M. (2020). *Anarcho-Blackess: Notes Toward a Black Anarchism*. AK Press. (pp. 14–15)

continuing exploitation of Native peoples and lands for the sake of industrial production, which, as Benally says, is a dead end for the Earth and all of us who live through her.

FRSO’s plan for Indigenous sovereignty is chauvinistic and colonial in nature. It is only by destroying the settler-colonial state that Indigenous peoples can begin to reclaim liberty. What hope can come from an organization that praises powerful men and power itself?

The 12/4/24 Article

During the process of writing this essay, J. Sykes of FRSO published an article on fightbacknews.org titled “Marxism-Leninism and the theory of settler-colonialism in the United States,” the stated purpose of which was to “challenge and correct theoretical errors,” specifically the “tendency from some on the left to argue that the United States should be understood today as a settler-colonial state.”²⁹ He summarizes this tendency as one that believes that

The United States remains today a settler-colonial state. People of European descent, regardless of their actual class position, are settlers, and are seen as continuing to benefit from and perpetuate a colonial system. In other words, the people of the United States are divided into two camps, with the colonized in one camp, and the settlers in the other. Some even go so far as to say that this makes up the principal contradiction in the U.S. This is furthermore viewed as a fundamentally antagonistic contradiction.

²⁹ J. Sykes (2024, December 4). Marxism-Leninism and the theory of settler-colonialism in the United States — Fight Back! News. <https://fightbacknews.org/articles/marxism-leninism-and-the-theory-of-settler-colonialism-in-the-united-states>

He contrasts this with “the Marxist-Leninist view, which recognizes the United States as an advanced imperialist country” and also views it as divided “into two camps”: the capitalists being one and an alliance of the working-class and oppressed nationalities the other. Sykes goes on to acknowledge that if the United States continues to be a settler colony today, then FRSO’s thesis has “no basis whatsoever upon which to build a multinational working class communist party in this country.” This is ultimately what it comes down to—an arrogant obsession with state power, being unable to see past fetishisms, and thus clinging onto existing anti-revolutionary social relations.

Sykes says that while the United States might have begun as a settler colony, to suggest it remains so is “metaphysical thinking.” According to his application of dialectical materialism, settler colonialism was but a transitional period in the development of capitalism. As mentioned earlier, in truth, settler colonialism and slavery built the skeleton of American capitalism that allows it to continue standing. To Sykes, settler colonialism was but a limited period that led to competitive capitalism, which then led to monopoly capitalism, the primary contradiction today and the enemy of the working class. This strange line of thinking exposes the inconsistency of FRSO’s rhetoric, who, though able to recognize Israel as a settler-colony, deny the United States’ status as one. Are we to then assume there are scenarios in which, through the simple passing of time, Israel can one day cease to be a settler-colony?

Sykes’ article lists the Hawaiian, Chicano, and African American nations as the three oppressed nations within the United States, explicitly differentiating them from colonies; thus, doubling down on Hawaii not being a colony and the seeming importance of maintaining the integrity of the United States’ borders.

He goes on to say that “[s]elf-determination is a democratic demand. It means that the oppressed nation ought to democratically determine its own destiny. *Historically imposed obstacles to genuine political power must be systematically dismantled* [emphasis

posits replacing capitalist hegemony with its own as both desirable and revolutionary.

According to Day, the only way to break out of the trap of hegemony is to operate *non-hegemonically* as opposed to counter-hegemonically.⁵² In contrast to approaches that describe a revolutionary future community in monolithic fashion, we should “think instead of the coming *communities*, in the plural, but not in the form of liberal pluralism”; as such, “we need to guide our relations with other communities according to interlocking ethico-political commitments of *groundless solidarity* and *infinite responsibility*.” Upholding the hegemony of hegemony cannot lead to the death of capitalism and the creation of better alternatives; only self-determined social relations can. Day calls this negation of hegemony an *affinity for affinity*: a championing of “non-universalizing, non-hierarchical, non-coercive relationships based [on] mutual aid and shared ethical commitments.” A logic of affinity stresses building solidarity between struggles without making any one subservient to another—without creating a hierarchy of hierarchies.

The fundamental flaw of FRSO’s program is its presentation of a supposedly revolutionary goal under the guise of objective scientific analysis, which is at its core based in the fetishisms of existing social relations and a logic of hegemony. If one truly wishes to “change humanity itself”⁵³, one must think non-hegemonically, or alternatively, as Jason Adams says, *post-hegemonically*.⁵⁴ We seek to change forms, not just content.

Marquis Bey says that if we are to operate in the vein of Marx’s call for a “ruthless criticism of all that exists,” then our “critical

⁵² Day, R. J. F. (2015) *Gramsci Is Dead*. doi:10.2307/j.ctt18fs4xw. (pp. 8, 9, 17, 80, 188)

⁵³ N.A, N.D Freedom Road Socialist Organization. Program. <https://frso.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/frso-program.pdf>, pp. 1–3, 6–17, 19, 29, 31

⁵⁴ Adams, J. “The Constellation of Opposition.” *Post-Anarchism: A Reader*. (2011) Rousselle, D., & Evren, S. Pluto Press. (p. 109)

from their program in the face of more nuanced ones speaks to the danger of deluding oneself with an illusory “scientific” reasoning. The building of a better world cannot be achieved by advocating for models and practices rooted in the current one. We must look beyond the promises of counter-hegemony, let go of fetishized identities, and look to the future as the source of our poetry; to once and for all move beyond positivist-vanguard fantasies that cannot help us construct alternative and liberating communities. Only in negation may we find our liberation.

Negating the Hegemony of Hegemony with an Affinity for Affinity

FRSO’s definitions and analyses of “Socialism” and “Monopoly Capitalism” lead them to believe that a so-called dictatorship of the proletariat is the only possible solution, the scientific solution, to global oppression. The danger in this is that such an argument amounts to seeking to replace one form of hegemony with another. To do so is to perpetuate what Richard J. F. Day calls the “*hegemony of hegemony*... the assumption that effective social change can only be achieved simultaneously and *en masse*, across an entire national or supranational space”⁵⁰. This assumption places a hard limit on how truly revolutionary FRSO’s program can be.

Gramsci describes hegemony as a process that “manifests itself in two ways, as ‘domination’ and as ‘intellectual and moral leadership.’ A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to ‘liquidate,’ or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups.”⁵¹ This certainly describes the goal of any statist model, including the Leninist one—proletarian dictatorship being a synonym for proletarian (party) hegemony. Leninism

⁵⁰ Day, R. J. F. (2015) *Gramsci Is Dead*. doi:10.2307/j.ctt18fs4xw. (pp. 8, 9, 17, 80, 188)

⁵¹ Gramsci, A., et al. (2015) *Selections From the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA03625916. (p. 57)

added].” The irony is extraordinary; his dedication to this narrative is one that itself excludes the possibility of self-determination for Indigenous peoples, which would require an (anti)politics that first of all recognizes that the United States is a settler colony that must die for Indigenous peoples and cultures to live.

Like the FRSO program, Sykes’ article states that “in the era of imperialism, the national question is bound up with proletarian socialist revolution,” the supposedly correct position, which he contrasts to the “theory of U.S. settler-colonialism” that originated among “petty bourgeois radicals [who] pride themselves on taking the most outwardly revolutionary position, regardless of whether or not it holds up to scientific analysis.” It would do Sykes good to reevaluate his framework that singles out relations of production as the source of all oppression, as would it for him to reassess Marx’s category of fetishism and negative conception of science.

According to Benally, “[t]he colonial logic of futurity is only concerned with the reproduction of settler society.” A refusal to reject a stagist understanding of history and its narrative of progression means to stand for this violent settler reproduction. It seems to me that FRSO’s denial of the reality of ongoing settler-colonialism is largely rooted in settler anxiety, an anxiety about their own status and potential role in a decolonized space. On the topic of what decolonization means and looks like, Benally states:

Since settler identity only can exist without consent, it would follow that re-connecting through non-dominating means, or establishing interrelationality, would be the response. But the preconditions for agreement demand destruction of the settler self, all that it represents, and all that it upholds. The proposal of auto-settler destruction, which is another way of saying social war, *is not a civil war or a revolution* [violent insurrection], *but boundless social rupture*. In

other words, power with colonizers has reasonable prerequisites. [emphasis added]³⁰

In my own experience, many non-Native people have a strong and reflexively antagonistic response to the thought of decolonization. Without much (or often any) consideration of actual Indigenous perspectives, there is a fear that decolonization means a sort of mass deportation or even race war. Social rupture means to destroy the settler *as a subject* and everything that upholds it. Decolonization doesn't mean the violent extermination of settlers as individuals; yet for the descendants of settlers to exist on decolonized lands requires a wholesale buying into the idea of auto-settler destruction. Benally's concept of interrelationality is fundamental to this, this being a solidarity "predicated on building and tearing down direct spatial and temporal relationships."³¹ Interrelationality recognizes that pivotal to advancing decolonization is breaking those cycles of power-over (other humans, non-humans, the Earth, existence, time itself...) which both those who advocate for reform and revolution rarely reject. Moving beyond colonial arrangements of domination can only happen through interrelation, a form of creative destruction.

I find it appropriate to insert here the following quote by Fanon, keeping in mind his attention to decolonization:

To educate the masses politically does not mean, cannot mean, making a political speech. What it means is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them... that there is no famous man who will take the responsibility for everything, but that the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the hands

³⁰ Benally, K. (2023). *No Spiritual Surrender: Indigenous Anarchy in Defense of the Sacred*. Detritus Books, pp. 233–234, 306, 351, 356

³¹ Benally, K. (2023). *No Spiritual Surrender: Indigenous Anarchy in Defense of the Sacred*. Detritus Books, pp. 233–234, 306, 351, 356

incorporate the reclaiming of lost ancient ways," our own struggle for liberation "cannot overtake the struggle of Native peoples who have managed to maintain a direct connection to their deep past & present." Fundamentally, we must recognize that "*Indigeneity is more than genetic heritage, it is a real cultural link* [emphasis added]."⁴⁹

Ultimately, Aztlán nationalism is not a movement for liberation; it is just another obstacle in the way of ridding ourselves of oppressive social relations. It is an excuse for Chicanos to adopt colonial narratives and seek to "decolonize" them, ignoring that to decolonize colonialism is an oxymoron.

The Chicano-nationalist obsession with the "Chicano homeland" of Aztlán is one that denies the primacy of the struggle for decolonization and Indigenous peoples' obviously central role within it. As for FRSO, promoting an unfounded narrative like that of Aztlán is just another example of buying into the fetishisms rooted in our society rather than working to eliminate them. The (once again) growing popularity of the Aztlán narrative and its pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric is one we must actively push back against in order to advance the decolonial struggle.

A Revolutionary Alternative

As stated at the beginning of this essay, the FRSO program does not challenge but instead perpetuates colonial structures, conflates socialism with state-capitalism, and generally promotes flawed anti-revolutionary narratives. The resurgence of Marxist-Leninist organizations like FRSO forces us to contend with the influence they might hold and the implications of the dogma they preach. That FRSO members continue to espouse the deficient analyses

⁴⁹ EDICIONES INÉDITAS. (n.d.). Contra Aztlán: A Critique of Chicano Nationalism. https://ia904709.us.archive.org/1/items/ediciones_ineditas_2020_contra/ediciones_ineditas_2020_contra.pdf

prioritized recuperating their own indigenous past instead of supporting Indigenous peoples struggling in the present; a fetishized indigeneity means that Chicano nationalists place their own biological lineage above existing cultural ones. As Alberto says, it is “[p]recisely because the apparatus of indigenism remains a threat to indigenous culture, indigenous history, indigenous epistemologies, and indigenous self-determination [that] by adopting indigenist poetics, Chicanos’ and Chicanas’ uses of indigeneity [are] viewed as an extension of a colonial practice.”

As Chicanos, we must realize that

In mestizaje, we are reduced to searching for signs of our indigenous past and, more significantly, for a collective political future in some inherent tie to the land... *To recognize this process is not to deny our indigenous ancestry; rather, to recognize this is to refuse to reduce indigenous subjectivity, and indeed Mexican mestizo identity, to biologicistic representation that, in discursive and political terms, always already places the Indian under erasure* [emphasis added].⁴⁸

Thus, looking beyond an identity that temporally restricts us to a modern framework of colonial borders and an overemphasizing of biological heritage, we as Chicanos must extend solidarity to Indigenous peoples *across* the Americas who practice and maintain (continually evolving) cultural traditions that date to a time before European property relations.

Noche succinctly states in “Contra Aztlán” that though “Chicanxs are the historical product of colonialism, racism, capitalism, slavery, genocide and cultural erasure,” and that “[p]art of the struggle to liberate Chicanxs (and all people) would inevitably

⁴⁸ Saldaña-Portillo, J. (2001). Who’s the Indian in Aztlán? Re-Writing Mestizaje, Indianism, and Chicanismo from the Lacandón. In Duke University Press eBooks (pp. 402–423). <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822380771-020>

of the people. In order to put all this into practice, in order really to incarnate the people, we repeat that *there must be decentralization in the extreme* [emphasis added].³²

It is only decentralized, self-determined, and consciously decolonial praxes that present any hope for us in the so-called US. Though Fanon goes on to say that the “movement from the top to the bottom and from the bottom to the top should be a fixed principle,” I believe it is better to picture decentralization not as an alternative form of hierarchy but rather as an approach grounded in *networks* of solidarity; in other words, grounded in relationality as described by Benally. This framing goes further in establishing deep solidarity between heterogeneous groups than either strictly top-down or bottom-up approaches.

More than anything, we must realize that it will not be—cannot be—Sykes, FRSO, or any other self-identified vanguard party that will teach the masses what revolutionary change means. In the end, Sykes’ article does nothing to strengthen FRSO’s thesis but rather exposes the chauvinism inherent to it. FRSO’s program is not one that can be improved through internal advocacy from members; it is rotten to its core.

Mapping an African-American Nation

Similar to FRSO’s idea of Indigenous sovereignty, that of the “African-American nation of the Black-Belt South” fails to move beyond the existing social relations of capitalism-colonialism. Instead, the logic of statism & settler-colonialism is mapped onto the Black population of the United States. I find it essential to consult the analyses of Black anarchists and abolitionists to expose the flaws in FRSO’s line of thinking and show why Black liberation can only exist outside of statist models.

³² Fanon, F. (2004). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press, p.138

FRSO's demands for the "African-American nation" include:

- Reparations for the descendants of African slaves in the United States
- Political power through regional and local autonomy for communities of African Americans outside of the African American nation. End gerrymandering of political districts that reduce African American political representation.
- An end to the war on drugs targeting the African American community, police brutality, killer cops, and all-white juries.
- Expansion of affirmative action programs and an end to discriminatory testing and entrance requirements for colleges.
- Increase funding for schools in African American communities
- Political asylum for African and Caribbean people fleeing repressive governments³³

This set of demands also reads much like a party's electoral platform, a "progressive" one to be sure, but one that is reformist and not revolutionary. It is unclear how such reforms would eventually lead to breaking the reification spiral of white supremacist institutions. Similar to the impossibility of Indigenous self-determination within the settler-colonial United States, the Black population of the United States cannot be truly free without the abolition of this country—one built on African slavery that continues to benefit from this legacy every day that goes by.

Reforms like "an end to the war on drugs [legalisation?], police brutality, killer cops, and all-white juries" are nothing more

³³ N.A, N.D Freedom Road Socialist Organization. Program. <https://frso.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/frso-program.pdf>, pp. 1–3, 6–17, 19, 29, 31

ernization."⁴⁶ This critique necessitates that we "reconsider first the national deployment of *mestizaje* as a trope for citizenship, and second, the transnational deployment of *mestizaje* as the presumed intersection between Mexican indigenous identity and Chicana/o identity." This mapping of *mestizaje* exposes the major contradictions that exist between contemporary Indigenous peoples and Chicanos, highlighting the need to move beyond a deeply problematic Chicano nationalism.

Within the United States, the Chicano movement in the early 70s appropriated the discourse of *mestizaje* at the same time that *Aztlán* was claimed as an indigenous nation that existed prior to the founding of the United States. In that period, *Aztlán* was a place from which to critique the discrimination against Chicanos within American society. This new nationalism

functioned as succor for Chicanos within a U.S. ethnoracial framework that had enacted a long history of violence against Mexican Americans, including mass deportation, lynching, quotidian racism, land dispossession, language elimination, nativism, and police abuse. While Chicano nationalist discourses resulted from strategies of empowerment, nationalism gathered its rhetorical legitimacy from indigenist practices.⁴⁷

This movement was formulated under the specter of indigenismo's complex history; thus, by adopting the tropes of *mestizaje* and indigenismo, Chicanos continued to operate within the logic to which these belong. As a result, Chicanos have often

⁴⁶ Saldaña-Portillo, J. (2001). Who's the Indian in *Aztlán*? Re-Writing *Mestizaje*, Indianism, and Chicanismo from the Lacandon. In Duke University Press eBooks (pp. 402–423). <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822380771-020>

⁴⁷ Alberto, L. "Nations, Nationalisms, and Indígenas: The 'Indian' in the Chicano Revolutionary Imaginary." *Critical Ethnic Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, Jan. 2016, (pp. 107–127), doi:10.5749/jcritethnstud.2.1.0107,

This is where it is important to stress that though many, perhaps even most, Chicanos are indeed partly Indigenous by blood, **heritage does not imply a connection and therefore a legitimate claim to land.** This is true even if one can trace their own family back to the Southwest pre-annexation (though most Chicanos today descend from people who migrated north of the current borderline beginning in the early 20th century, anyway).

It is also of chief importance to understand the place of mestizaje and indigenismo [an ideology emphasizing the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the nation-state] as concepts within the Mexican nationalist project of the 20th century and trace this to its contemporary implications.

As Saldaña-Portillo points out in her article “Who’s the Indian in Aztlan?,” in the context of a developing post-revolutionary Mexican identity, “the ‘black’ and ‘yellow’ aspects of the cosmic race [a theorized race resulting from the agglomeration of all others] were systematically forgotten as mestizo identity was reduced to a Spanish and Indian binary,” an identity that “remains disturbingly hierarchical.” Within the mestizo identity, “it is always Indian cultural traits that are negative [and] must be eliminated or subsumed to the ‘national’ culture of mestizaje.”⁴⁴ According to Lourdes Alberto, indigenismo and the mestizaje it laid the groundwork for “ultimately ensured the disappearance of contemporary indigenous populations, as they were no longer seen as a part of Mexico’s present and future; rather, they were frozen in an ancient past symbolizing Mexico’s raw ethnic roots.”⁴⁵ In other words, “the current ideology of mestizaje incorporates the historical figure of the Indian only to, in effect, exclude contemporary Indians from mod-

⁴⁴ Saldaña-Portillo, J. (2001). Who’s the Indian in Aztlán? Re-Writing Mestizaje, Indianism, and Chicanismo from the Lacandón. In Duke University Press eBooks (pp. 402–423). <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822380771-020>

⁴⁵ Alberto, L. “Nations, Nationalisms, and Indígenas: The ‘Indian’ in the Chicano Revolutionary Imaginary.” *Critical Ethnic Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, Jan. 2016, (pp. 107–127), doi:10.5749/jcritethnstud.2.1.0107,

than empty words. These systems cannot somehow be made just through decrees; they must simply cease to exist. It does not matter how enlightened reforms sound when they’re reforms within a system that has never recognized Black people as equal citizens.

As Zoé Samudzi and William C. Anderson point out in *As Black as Resistance*:

Because Africans were forcibly removed from the continent and trafficked to the United States and did not largely participate in the European process of domination (with, of course, notable exception made for the so-called Buffalo Soldiers...), Black people cannot be considered as settlers in the United States. Though we may participate in ongoing settler processes and ultimately benefit from the elimination of Indigenous people and the expropriation of their land, we are not settlers.³⁴

Yet despite this historical exclusion from the settler-colonial project, FRSO’s suggestion of “the creation of a Black majoritarian nation-state, where the fate of Indigenous people is ambiguous at best, *is an idea rooted in settler logic* [emphasis added].” In critiquing the confounding of self-determination with the adoption of settler logic, Samudzi and Anderson ask, “Is settler adjacency what a truly intersectional framework and multifaceted approach to Black liberation entails?” The only reasonable answer to this is a thundering no.

According to the example of Israel, the opportunity to become a colonizer *is* “the ultimate reparation for historical violence.” Because

³⁴ Anderson, W. C., Samudzi, Z. (2018). *As Black as Resistance: Finding the Conditions for Liberation* <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/zoe-samudzi-and-william-c-anderson-as-black-as-resistance.pdf>, pp. 16–17

Although popularly positioned as a kind of reparation for... the German Holocaust, the creation of Israel was as an act of European antisemitism in the eyes of some... The establishment of a Jewish homeland meant that antagonistic Western governments—states such as the United States and Allied Powers that were aware of the genocidal violence of Adolf Hitler’s Final Solution but stood idly by and even sought to appease the Nazi government—would not have to receive as many Jewish refugees. Mirroring this in the United States, white supremacists have historically supported the separatist politics of the Nation of Islam. They have seen Black separatism as analogous to the white nationalist “self determining politic” of the white majoritarian United States. Of course, these logics of racial self-determination do not operate the same in reverse.

Advocating for an African-American nation in the American South does not actually uproot white supremacy, and in a scenario where the United States is not fully dismantled, it is *guaranteed* that white supremacy’s roots will remain deep in the cultural soil.

It is vital to understand that “[i]f land-based reparations were to be actualized for Black people in the United States, *models for land-based liberation that are not both mindful and critical of settler colonialism would perpetuate the expropriation of land from Indigenous communities...*” [emphasis added]. A recognition that revolutionary “land politics cannot simply be built on top of centuries-old exterminatory settler logic of Indigenous removal and genocide” points to the need for a total rupture with existing society. The liberation of both Black people in the so-called U.S. and of the land “*can only come about through dialogue and co-conspiratorial work with Native communities and a shared understanding of land*

and economic success were certain roads to improved status. The transitory stature of Indian and genizaro [detribalized Native] classifications indicate a highly effective means of Hispanicizing, Christianizing and ultimately incorporating native peoples into New Mexican society.⁴²

This reality of ties to indigeneity and their place within society in the northern borderlands was incompatible with the American white supremacist understanding of citizenship. To the Americans annexing this territory, “Mexicans could not be Indians and Indians could not be Mexicans.”⁴³ It was this rupture that later produced a condition that Cotero and Saldaña-Portillo call “mestizo mourning,” the mourning of the loss of a historical relationship with Indigenous people. Mexican-American mestizos in the United States mourn this ancestry “foreclosed to them—not by biological relationship... but by U.S. statecraft and racial nationalism.” And so when Chicanos claim to have an indigenous heritage, they do so “not merely as an appropriative gesture of Native tribal identity, but rather as a psychic restoration of an indigenous past denied to them by exigencies of U.S. colonial history and law.”

Due to these experiences, it is not surprising that Chicanos would turn to a historical relationship with indigeneity in an effort to address the reality of being a product of multiple settler colonial projects. Cotero and Saldaña-Portillo go on to point out that “Chicana/o indigenism cannot be reduced to a settler fantasy” given its original impulse of mestizo mourning.

⁴² Archibald, R. (1978). “Acculturation and Assimilation in Colonial New Mexico.” *New Mexico Historical Review* 53, 3. <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol53/iss3/2>, p. 214

⁴³ Cotera, M. E., & Saldaña-Portillo, M. J. (2014). “Indigenous but not Indian? Chicana/os and the politics of indigeneity.” *The World of Indigenous North America*. Taylor and Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203122280-42>, (pp. 549–550, 552–557, 561–563)

and now by *national*” ties.⁴⁰ This can largely be traced back to the fact that

unlike their British counterparts... Spanish colonizers invariably settled adjacent to indigenous villages and towns, grafting their own forms of government atop indigenous governments, their own economies atop indigenous economies, and seeking out close associations with indigenous peoples.

Mestizaje was not only the invariable outcome of this mode of colonial space-making along the northern frontier; it was also the condition of possibility for its conquest. *Mestizos* and *afromestizos* from Mexico’s interior participated in the conquest of the entire northern frontier in great numbers, making up between 10 and 40 percent of most of the conquering population. They correctly perceived the outposts as a space where the *casta* system [the racial and social hierarchy of the Spanish Empire] would not be so rigidly observed...⁴¹

Robert Archibald points out that

Despite seemingly arbitrary ethnic classifications and an economic hierarchy which roughly followed ethnic lines, colonial New Mexico [where most inhabitants of the region lived] was not a closed society. Marriage

⁴⁰ Cotera, M. E., & Saldaña-Portillo, M. J. (2014). “Indigenous but not Indian? Chicana/os and the politics of indigeneity.” *The World of Indigenous North America*. Taylor and Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203122280-42>, (pp. 549–550, 552–557, 561–563)

⁴¹ Cotera, M. E., & Saldaña-Portillo, M. J. (2014). “Indigenous but not Indian? Chicana/os and the politics of indigeneity.” *The World of Indigenous North America*. Taylor and Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203122280-42>, (pp. 549–550, 552–557, 561–563)

use outside of capitalistic models of ownership [emphasis added].”³⁵ It is irrelevant what intentions might motivate FRSO when their proposals are premised on genocidal settler logic.

Simply put, it is not and can never be up to the government of the United States to actualize Black liberation; to believe so is both ignorant and racist. FRSO’s fetishism of the state does not allow them to understand such a blatantly obvious truth, despite (or perhaps because of) their claims of strictly following the revolutionary science of Marxism-Leninism.

Anti-Blackness is a global scourge, and envisioning a nation whose borders reflect those of the slave-holding American South creates an unnecessary split in the African diaspora. This fact cannot be reconciled by promises to offer asylum to refugees and local autonomy to those outside the borders of the “African American Nation.”³⁶ As Anderson states in his aptly titled *The Nation on No Map*:

The people being forced to leave their homes around the world that are a part of the African diaspora pay the price of empire and state violence. People leave the African continent and experience terrifying voyages by boat and otherwise, trying to reach Europe, a region that has, through extraction and plunder, created the intolerable conditions they are fleeing. While the meddling exploitation of states destabilizes, people die in great numbers just trying to survive inside and outside of borders. This forced movement, all of these deaths in the mountains, oceans, seas, and deserts, are not simply news stories that don’t concern

³⁵ Anderson, W. C., Samudzi, Z. (2018). *As Black as Resistance: Finding the Conditions for Liberation* <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/zoe-samudzi-and-william-c-anderson-as-black-as-resistance.pdf>, pp. 16–17

³⁶ N.A, N.D Freedom Road Socialist Organization. Program. <https://frso.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/frso-program.pdf>, pp. 1–3, 6–17, 19, 29, 31

us. We are connected to them not just because we're Black people but also because our respective pasts and oppressed existences share commonalities. *These shared understandings of how we're being exploited are what we need to build from in order to create a global push for a revolutionary uprising. Our continual, global displacement forces our movement in this sense as well* [emphasis added].³⁷

It is only Black people themselves and those they recognize as accomplices that can create revolutionary change to secure their liberty *everywhere*. Anderson goes on to soberly explain in the concluding section of this work why it is that genuine Black liberation is inherently antithetical to state power and how it is only possible by looking beyond its fetishisms:

Understanding the need to confront the white supremacist state and understand our position as Black people within its confines does not mean we seek out nationality or nationhood. We don't need to know our exact ancestral origins to know we're Africans. *We don't have to centralize anything or homogenize ourselves to confront the tragedy that we know as the United States. Be wary of any one-size-fits all rhetoric that glosses over the unfathomable diversity of Black people. Absolutist approaches destroy possibility.* Europe drew the map of the world as we know it—a ranked array of nation-states—using the tools of white supremacy and capitalism. *We don't have to use nationhood or nationalism to try to find ourselves on their map. The map, the nation, and the state must go. We did not draw them, and they do not serve us. They*

³⁷ Anderson, W. C. (2021). *The Nation on No Map: Black Anarchism and Abolition*. AK Press, pp. 104, 183–185

nic' Chicana/o subject relie[s] on an implicit acceptance of the borders of the nation-state, effectively ignoring the complex lived realities of indigenous communities whose nations have historically crossed the U.S./Mexico border." By naming the existence of a tribal government (and thus official recognition by the US federal government) as one of the qualifiers of being a tribal community, this framework is one that not only incorporates settler-colonial structures but also recognizes their ultimate authority. Furthermore, the authors state that these "standards do not necessarily concord with understandings of indigeneity in Quito, Huehuetenango, or Oaxaca," where "the assimilative directives of colonial regimes and, later, national projects, have resulted in very different formulations." Chicanos are not a case of outright inventing a historical connection to indigeneity but rather the product of a long history of racial mixing resulting in genetically indigenous subjects who came to identify with the Mexican nation-state instead of with any particular indigenous community.

And yet, Mexican mestizos maintained real existing connections with Indigenous communities; self-identification with post-Independence Mexico did not in itself "preclude a psychic and cultural connection to indigeneity." Cotero and Saldaña-Portillo conclude that Chicanos occupy "a complex position between 'settlers' and 'Indians,' or, perhaps... a position as *both* indigenous and settler." This reality of existing at both ends of the settler/indigenous binary is a result of the history of not only so-called Mexico generally but also what now constitutes the space claimed as Aztlán more specifically.

By the time of the US-Mexico War, mestizos in the northern borderlands would have identified with their Indigenous neighbors, to whom they were related to through "familial, economic, political,

(TTA), called for a boycott... A statement, read by Mairis Chino (Acoma Pueblo)... drew boundaries of demarcation between legitimate indigenous subjects and those who sought to claim Indigeneity to further their own political claims for state and international recognition... While the TTA statement acknowledged that ‘there were honorable indigenous Brothers and Sisters’ participating... it also questioned the inclusion of Chicanos... who, the statement claimed, were ‘opportunisticly’ deploying ‘a false representation of Indigenous values and issues’ in order to ‘promote their personal political self interests to the detriment of Indian land, culture, and communities.’³⁹

The TTA went on to state that to them,

Indigenous means the original inhabitants of North, Central and South America who continue to exist as a tribal community with a land base. Existing as a tribal community includes language, *tribal government*, and recognition as Indigenous People by other indigenous people and non-indigenous people. *By these terms the Indo-Hispano, Chicano, Mestizo do not have identity as Indigenous People* [emphasis added].

Though in the context of the UNM symposium these remarks were powerful and likely necessary, it is also true that this definition of indigenous outright opposes the notion that Chicanos can claim *any* relationship with indigeneity. As Coteri and Saldaña-Portillo recognize, “[t]his formulation of the non-indigenous ‘eth-

³⁹ Coteri, M. E., & Saldaña-Portillo, M. J. (2014). “Indigenous but not Indian? Chicana/os and the politics of indigeneity.” *The World of Indigenous North America*. Taylor and Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203122280-42>, (pp. 549–550, 552–557, 561–563)

never did. To exist on their map in any way can only diminish us and undermine everything that we’re capable of.

The U.S. state isn’t killing us simply because it’s white supremacist: killing is part of the power granted to states, *it’s what states do*. It’s what they are built for. It’s what their police do, what their militaries do, what their borders do, and what their political parties do. All these things are structured according to the ideas of hierarchical organization and leadership and governance. *There is a deadly potential buried in all of them that we must reject. To try to make use of them for “revolutionary” purposes means running toward goals that have nothing to do with true liberation*. We must not remain trapped on this map; we must try to draw new lines to sketch out a life for ourselves that their borders, their states, and their map cannot hold.

Our task is to shape a new society, a world we want to live in. In order to do so, we have to do away with the old one. The state will never end state violence, nor will any politics that relies on it.

...

There’s no avoiding it, the fight that’s all around us. This is a time that requires us to choose freedom from all oppressive formations. The new, liberated future we hope to grasp comes closer to us through the willingness to first hold the truth of where we are now and where we have already been. [all emphasis added]

When it comes to the question of Black liberation, the FRSO program isn’t just useless; it’s anti-revolutionary. By mapping a defined African-American nation, possibly well-intentioned but naive self-proclaimed radicals only preserve the social relations

built on slavery and settler-colonialism. It's clear that abolition is the only revolutionary option there is.

A Critique of Aztlán & Chicano Nationalism

An essential part of FRSO's program and its demands for what they call oppressed nations is the recognition of a so-called Chicano homeland in the Southwest, also known as Aztlán. To subscribe to this narrative and suggest that this territory (roughly comprising that which so-called Mexico lost with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo) should be considered a Chicano nation is to spread ideas that are detrimental to the struggle for Indigenous peoples' self-determination all under the guise of decolonial solidarity. As an anti-nationalist Chicano, I believe it is important to critique the narrative of Aztlán more broadly.

The so-called United States and so-called Mexico are both products of genocidal settler-colonialism. Any project whose basis hinges on the borders, current and/or previous, of settler colonial states restricts itself to the framework and the social relations of the systems that bred them. Many Chicanos cling to their mixed heritage as a biologicistic representation of their indigeneity, failing to see that such a heritage in no way legitimizes claims to land in the Southwest. For us Chicanos, it is important that we not only understand our history but are also able to place it within a larger context; to deny Aztlán nationalism is not to deny one's indigenous ancestry outright but to reject the maintenance of social relations that deny self-determination for Indigenous peoples today.

FRSO's adoption of the Aztlán narrative speaks to the fact that much contemporary Chicano cultural production has focused on the topic of decolonization, taking as a starting point the belief that we as Chicanos are a colonized people. Sanchez and Pita remind us that though it is true that we are the product of colonial

projects, these discourses forget (extremely ironically so) the role that our ancestors played as colonizers. It is a historical fact that

Whether the colonizers in what is now the US Southwest were Spaniards, criollos, mestizos, or even Indigenous peoples like the Tlaxcaltecas, they all came from the interior of New Spain (now Mexico) in the name and in the service of the Spanish crown... to dispossess the natives of what would become the US Southwest.³⁸

Even if we have eventually found ourselves on the receiving end of subsequent dispossessions, "we have developed a selective amnesia for our role in the colonization of the native people of the Southwest; our own role in the subjugation and exploitation of Indigenous peoples and, in some cases, [their] massacre." Though it is true that the three successive settler-colonial projects in this region (the Spanish, Mexican, and American) each have their own particularities, we cannot ignore the basic commonality of their motivations—exploitation and dispossession—simply because we find ourselves being victimized by the contemporary American colonial project.

Maria Eugenia Coteria and Maria Josefina Saldaña-Portillo's essay "Indigenous But Not Indian? Chicana/os and the Politics of Indigeneity" recounts how

In the Fall of 2005 the University of New Mexico hosted an international symposium, 'Indigenous Peoples of the Americas: Conflict, Resistance, & Peace Making'... to find solutions to the 'problems faced by Indigenous Peoples in areas such as culture, education, health, human rights, environment and socio-economic development'... [Some] local Native peoples, led by the Tricentennial Truth Alliance

³⁸ Sánchez, R., and Pita, B. (2020). *Spatial and Discursive Violence in the US Southwest*. Duke University Press, p.15