

What We've Forgotten During the Ceasefire

Social Bonds and Guerrilla Warfare

Anarchist Tranny Against Civilization

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Contents

Social bonds and Guerrilla warfare	4
Problems in Radical Organizing	5
How to Proceed	6
How Social Bonds Allow for Insurgent Movements	7
Then and Now	10

Revolutionary violence is the kindest possible approach to ending gendered violence.

Breaking out of the chains of gender requires alternative ways of relating to each-other, genuine interdependence, community care, and autonomy. That may not scream “advocacy of guerilla warfare” to you, but these are not two poles of a spectrum, they are two halves of a whole. Without strong social bonds and alternative methods of community care there is no sustained insurgency, and without a sustained insurgency any attempts at creating true social autonomy are likely to be crushed. (they might be crushed anyway)

If we are ever to achieve any of the deep social changes that gender abolition requires, even in our own little social milieus, we have to be able to defend ourselves, and create opportunities to explore new ways of being, separate from the hierarchies (formal and informal) of the world at large.

The threat of patriarchal (or any other) oppression won’t be resolved by creating small social changes within the fabric of a deeply oppressive world, or progressing in some piecemeal way. People are still being murdered for their inability to fit within patriarchy, whiteness, or ability. The only thing that has changed with all of this ‘progress’ is the names and outfits of the death squads.

A small minority (trans and gender non-conforming people let’s say) launching a campaign of guerrilla warfare, all on their own, capable of toppling a state is fairly unlikely, but gender is not the only enemy, and gender is a cage for the cis as much as it is for us. Gender and gendered oppression are ever present. Gender has fucked all of us; our potential social base is much larger than just us trannies. It’s not reasonable to expect the most assimilated “queers” to be eager to take up arms; but there are many others of us on the fence, who could be convinced through action. Many things we wish we could do seem so impossible that we become afraid to even try.

People are tired of talk. Saying that I will settle for nothing less than the destruction of cis-society makes for a good pull quote, but it doesn’t give someone a place to go if their partner is hurting them, or they have to get away from the cops. Words won’t put food in the mouth of the queers who couldn’t afford to eat today.

In the creation of an insurgency, the territory that you’re fighting for is the sympathy of the people in an area, not the land itself. These projects start not as armed groups, but as community supports. The community defense they develop, can help determine if they’re able to continue providing that community support.

The activities of a revolutionary project are often describe as either above ground or below ground. Above ground organizing is public, generally legal, or at least carries low legal consequences, and has a focus on providing for the needs of the people, political education, propaganda, recruiting, and resource sharing and coordination. The above ground is the primary visible political arm of an insurgency. Below ground organizing is clandestine, often very illegal, and is focused more on attack, information gathering, and infrastructural preparation for attack.

The idea of survival programs, meeting the needs of those in whatever you consider to be your community, is not just materialist (ideally) it is also about building those social connections, and the insurgent infrastructure needed to begin creating the space free from the incursions of the state and would be masters.

The creation of these social programs serves a set of purposes for any aspiring revolutionary.

- to build social connections
- to build informational and support infrastructure, or get contacts for future building.

- to find new militants, above ground organizers, or people who need specific kinds of help that can't be easily provided by others.
- to act as positive propaganda of the deed, and show people that there is a different way of existing together.
- to meet actual, vital, needs of those around us
- to recruit for the underground

Though these survival programs can take many forms, and primarily serve as mutual aid, they must have some connection to the defensive, the clandestine, and the interpersonal. If these survival programs are providing something not available in cis-ciety as a whole, some degree of political repression is to be expected. An emphasis on security, and caution, even in the 'above ground' work is necessary.

Historical splits in radical groups (at least splits relevant to armed action, rather than internal social conflict) often form along the lines of those who wish to take up arms and prepare for violent confrontation, and those who wish to build the above ground infrastructure. The irony is that we must do both.

Deep social bonds are necessary to bring someone from posting flyers – to taking part in something more risky. The above ground efforts, stand out simply for being public, however, if our social connections within those above ground structures don't connect to some clandestine outlet, it is a glorified charity, serving needs that must be served, without an eye to ending the system that created this suffering.

Social bonds and Guerrilla warfare

Since the fall of the Black Liberation Army, the Weather Underground, and other North American insurgent groups, the North American revolutionary left has periodically returned to some small scale guerrilla tactics (primarily sabotage), as in the work of the ALF and ELF, but open war with the state has not been seen as an option for many after Cointelpro. In this shift away from direct and open war with the state we appear to have forgotten something that openly organizing for revolution forces us to deal with: Theory and ideology only get you so far, and actions too for that matter. All products of a social movement, of human collective action, are a result of the social bonds we create, and the unique, and cliché, ways we relate to eachother.

The force that makes us capable of revolt when the weight of oppression is unbearable, is social cohesion. Alternative ways of relating are our most strategically useful advantage for rejecting hierarchy. America fought to prevent social bonding through the separating of enslaved families and communities in chattel slavery and continues to fight this social cohesion with prison slavery. America did the same thing in the indian boarding schools, and continue to with CPS and ACS and whatever other 'child protective' acronym you can think of. Genocidaires do not wish simply to kill people, but to kill entire cultures and languages, whether they do that through family separation past or present, or through robbing children of their cultural and social bonds past and present, or through state and vigilante violence to reinforce cultural supremacy past and present.

The history of resistance to oppression cannot be understood without thinking about deep social bonds. These social bonds, while sometimes a product of natural affinity or circumstance, are something that we create with our social behavior. There would be no reason to control free assembly through the privatization of public space, to incentivize a certain structure of family, or to lock up parents and take their children from them if there were no threat from the social bonds they've created. From gangs to revolutionary guerrillas, there are patterns of behavior that are used to simulate these social bonds, to manufacture social cohesion. This fact is embedded in how different hierarchical groups indoctrinate their members: boot camp, getting jumped in, and a religious conversion, are all hierarchical ways of simulating true social cohesion, but the simulation is not sufficient.

The need for a fluid organizational structure and bonds stronger than a set of rules can create, is recognized by those in power. They simulate social cohesion because people feel empty without it. That is one of many ways we have an advantage over those who wish to force their will on others from above. Where social cohesion can only be faked elsewhere, our revolution can only succeed if we create space for the real thing.

Problems in Radical Organizing

Social infighting and conflict are major drivers of instability in revolutionary groups. Often, instead of attempting to relate to each other in revolutionary ways, and trying to get rid of the hierarchy in our relationships, 'revolutionaries' re-create the conflict and social alienation that already pervades our lives. Many different problems leak in from outside, be they racism, misogyny and homophobia, or the personal drive for social capital that destroys genuine relationship building.

In radical scenes, particularly in the "US", the tendency towards coldness, scene politics, gossip and strict orthodoxy about what militancy entails are a frequent problem. These social practices represent a rejection of one of our most potent advantages against the state.

To deal with this, we can't just focus on the behavior of individuals, on call outs and recriminations. Treating each individual as a solitary actor hides many of the problems that are endemic in radical groups. Looking only at the individual causing problems in a group tends to leave out the way that our social behaviors and the environment we are creating encourage, discourage, or modify the individually destructive behavior. When we focus on the individual alone, despite our best intentions we are recapitulating the same oppression we claim to be fighting.

Focusing on the individual, especially if you're focusing on an individual's perceived faults, creates a stifling organizing environment, because it reduces the degree to which people feel like they're in this together, and it creates a sense of personal insecurity. If saying the wrong thing is going to result in a call out rather than a conversation, the social safety of being accepted, listened to and treated with kindness evaporates. The punitive logic that leads to imprisonment and abuse, the logic of teaching someone a lesson, is built into the socially stifling practises shared by most western radicals.

In order to be effective, our default approach to our comrades cannot be punishment.

If one finds that their experience is unimportant, their voice is not heard, or their expectation is to be attacked if they fail at something, there is no reason for them to be dedicated to the cause, and every reason for them to be withholding or dishonest about mistakes they actually have

made. Treating human relationships as a matter of comparison and competition, makes cohering into a dangerous and powerful revolutionary threat nearly impossible.

There is a distinction between the way that we treat those who would kill us (we treat them with violence), and how we treat those we are fighting with and for (we treat them/us with transformative justice). Despite call out culture, and typical scene politics, people still find bonds of affection that build them up. Often we mistake the power of our own personal social bonds for the power of our models of organizing. For most radical projects, this social cohesion exists *in spite* of the social practices we engage in while organizing. Social cohesion is an emergent property which can never fully be destroyed. Individuals can be cut off from access to it, it can be rationed, and controlled but it can not be removed from the human experience except by removing a human from experience altogether. So of course we find others who we can build trust with, who we get along with, who's politics resonate with ours in compatible ways; but we are so eager to assume this is a success of the project, rather than a gift of friendship alchemy.

In the last 20 years it has rarely been outside repression from the state that destroyed movements; things fall apart because of social conflict. If we're lucky, we create trust and cohesion in our families and with our friends and comrades. This process is as natural as breathing to us; but this unexamined behavior must be examined, broken apart, and we must integrate what we learn into our revolutionary projects. Unless we begin learning to relate to each other in a different way, we will recreate the hell we currently inhabit. The immediate need for a social environment which welcomes and makes one better is painfully evident, and it is telling of the power of the social baffles placed in our way that this most important aspect of creating a successful revolutionary force has been failed at so often.

How to Proceed

To have a sufficiently resilient organization, it behooves us to accurately know the abilities and desires of those we're fighting with, and to have a sense of support that strengthens our resolve in moments of crisis. If we want to create a model of organizing that inspires people and makes them more whole, we have to find ways to do that here and now. We have to be able to focus on the revolutionary horizon, while also creating a sense of openness, comfort, and trust in our spaces.

Because there is no concrete solution to this problem it's worth examining some of the features that appear to have positive effects on social cohesion. This lack of direct answers is part of the nature of these strong social bonds, and one of their advantages. Social bonds often function as network or environmental effects. Though the ultimate effects of a socially cohesive group are not fully understandable from the actions of the individuals involved, individual action, in strengthening the connections and bonds with others in your group, has direct effects on that cohesive quality.

The society of shallow connections we live in makes it easy to overlook the irreducible aspects of successful resistance and revolution. When we're thinking about the ways that movements have an actual effect on the world, there are aspects of the group as a whole that cannot be explained by the individual parts. Strong social groups create things as complex as culture and language and ideas. It is not possible to reduce some of these cultural products to the individual

people who contributed to them. As with so many complex systems, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Emergence is exhibited in the ant colony which creates dams and defenses collectively, or how a network of neurons creates a mind capable of identity and experience. Amazingly complex behaviors come out of simple interactions between individual units.

As abolitionists we're interested in creating the conditions for these kinds of complex systems of interaction to flourish. The systems of state control that we intend to abolish also emerged from social and capital accumulation, just as bonds of solidarity and compassion have emerged. Distinguishing between both of these network level effects is going to be necessary if we want to figure out how to encourage the pro-social/liberatory emergence and discourage the hierarchy.

It's easy to think of these conditions for social cohesion as 'you'll know it when you see it', because aspects of them are integrated into our culture, family or friendships; but because they are related to actual social practices we're taking part in, they can be replicated and honed.

Groups with strong cohesion are defined by a sense of trust, safety, autonomy, and support. Many of the problems present in activism are examples of these tendencies being absent. Social infighting, tone policing, call out culture, and a tendency towards social capital and prestige make deep social cohesion extremely difficult.

A sense of social safety is fostered by treating people with kindness and autonomy. Social safety is dependent on consent, and respect, which is enhanced by lack of hierarchy. Trying to seek social capital, and constantly jumping from urgent crisis to urgent crisis, can make building these spaces exceptionally hard. Because of the variable needs and abilities of every single person, a set of strict social rules and social policing cannot create a sense of safety or solidarity, it can only crush that difference into a socially acceptable sameness.

For someone to dedicate themselves to the risky and violent destruction of the state they must feel that it is their decision, and within their control. People motivated to fight on their own terms in their own ways will fight more effectively. We fight best when we fight for not only liberation, but also for the people who support and strengthen us.

How Social Bonds Allow for Insurgent Movements

Some of the strong social and cultural bonds that we aspire to creating can be seen in the maroon communities of the great dismal swamp. Isolated geographically and culturally from planter society, they also had links to the outside, allowing for transit of supplies, intelligence, and escapees. The unique geography of the swamp, and the localized knowledge and creativity of the maroons allowed a decentralized and socially cohesive set of communities to persist and strike back against the planter class.

From this space, protected not only by the swamp itself, but also a cultural fear of the swamplands, maroons began to make raids on plantations, freeing enslaved people and retrieving supplies. Their networks of material and social support within maroon communities increased the effectiveness of raids, and information gathering. The importance of those socio-cultural connections, and non-combatants participating in the efforts are essential to successful long term resistance and revolution. The people getting supplies, scouting, sharing information with combatants, or just providing tacit support, are all integral parts of the social fabric that makes for a

successful insurgency. Fighting for people you care about has an amplifying effect. Most people can imagine fighting for their families or friends when they wouldn't lift a finger for anyone else.

The importance of social support, and social agreement to social movements and insurgencies is also recognized by our enemies.

“In revolutionary warfare, strength must be assessed by the extent of support from the population as measured in terms of political organization at the grass roots. The counter-insurgent reaches a position of strength when his power is embedded in a political organization issuing from, and firmly supported by, the population”
Counter-insurgency Strategy and Tactics – David Galula

An insurgency is embedded in a place and social structure, those who support the insurgents are part of a wide and decentralized network of social and material inter-reliance. Among other advantages, this makes it difficult to determine who is taking direct action. To deal with this, the most effective response is to separate people, whether or not they're involved with the guerrillas. Separation is more effective than outright murder because of what former Commander of US and ISAF forces in Afghanistan, US Army general Stanley McChrystal called insurgent math, “for every innocent person you kill, you create 10 new enemies.” If your friend or family member is killed by the occupying forces, then you are inspired to fight, but if you are separated, If the people are afraid to help the guerrillas, think they can profit from the status quo, or are abused by the state, it becomes more difficult for the guerrilla to act.

But isolation and control alone are not enough to prevent people from fighting against their oppressors. In a counterinsurgency “The soldier must then be prepared to become a propagandist, a social worker, a civil engineer, a schoolteacher, a nurse, a boy scout.” — Counter-insurgency Strategy and Tactics – David Galula

Fighting against an insurgency requires a different way of approaching war. Because of the decentralized and socially integrated nature of guerrilla warfare, the state has to be much more flexible, and operate in a more decentralized way militarily. Despite recognizing the need for that flexibility, the need to maintain control inevitably hobbles their efforts to some degree. Even employing the best counter-insurgency tactics, western armies still find themselves caught in lengthy engagements with no clear victor.

In order for the insurgent to lose, the counter insurgent has to partially give in to some of the material demands of the people. While there are always people sympathetic to either side, the largest contingent is usually those who have no natural affinity. Most people are simply living their lives day to day (often because they have little other choice). Winning over these people, even winning their passivity, is also necessary for success.

In a place like north America the trend towards social isolation, over work and mass imprisonment, (not too mention a barely mitigated pandemic) interferes with creation of systems of support. When it is harder to maintain social supports, and material supports, people are less likely to find the strength to fight back, or the tools with which to do so effectively.

This process of gaining support from the populace at large is also one of social cohesion and social change. The social needs of individuals are as fundamental to human existence as food and water. But while food and water will get someone in the door, without a validating social environment the promise of resources does not change minds. The larger project of creating a successful resistance, also requires a cultural shift, one that cannot be made without a long-term

attempt to change the ways that people relate to each-other. Our task is simple, we must begin creating a new world.

These changes in how we interrelate are easier to think about in the context of a small group of revolutionaries than it is in the context of a wider cultural milieu or an entire society. And even at that level, there are small things we do without examination which have larger implications. For example, the tendency to think of survival projects as a service creates a hierarchy of helper and helped, and prevents creating strong connections with the people you're trying to help, and radicalize. The social projects and material support provided to the population must also be a way of bringing people into a new way of relating to each-other. This is enhanced by a group examining the way they relate among themselves, but must also extend to the way they treat the people they help, the people they build with, and the people they are trying to educate.

Along with meeting needs in your community, political education, recruitment for above ground organizing, Survival programs are also a route to finding people who are interested in more martial activities. Perhaps this starts as defending your free food table from pigs or right wingers trying to shut it down, perhaps it starts when someone you've marched with is tired of walking in circles and changing nothing. Someone is more likely to take action if they trust the people they are taking action with, or if they are acting in defense of people they care about. In order for the public parts of a revolutionary project to effectively gain population support, and bring new people into underground activities 'the public' must not only feel welcome, but feel that they are entering someplace that is fundamentally different than the outside world. Revolutionary change requires a trust and confidence in one another that is impossible to create with hierarchy. Openness and safety, are not possible within relationships of domination. While each of us is part of relationships of domination, because of our assigned genders, because of our socioeconomic status, because of our race, we cannot break or challenge that domination without examining the way that these effect not only our relations to each-other, but the way that those relations shape our organizing.

When creating an anarchist abolitionist insurrection, there cannot be a separation between the social environment we want to create in the world and the social environment of our fighting formations. When looking at the strategy of successful revolutions, seeing these social factors as separate from the military ones has traditionally led to authoritarian societies. These hierarchical tendencies can be seen in some historical authoritarian guerrilla struggles. Here's an example, quoted from someone who is the most respected authority (by both revolutionaries and reactionaries) on guerrilla warfare, strategy and tactics.

“With guerrillas, **a discipline of compulsion is ineffective**. In any revolutionary army, there is unity of purpose as far as both officers and men are concerned, and therefore, within such an army, discipline is self-imposed. Although discipline in guerrilla ranks is not as severe as in the ranks of orthodox forces, the necessity for discipline exists. This must be self-imposed, because only when it is, is the soldier able to understand completely why he fights and **why he must obey**.” (emphasis mine)

— Mao Zedong, 'Guerrilla Warfare'

In the above quote, Mao recognizes that a discipline of compulsion rather than of responsibility to ones comrades is ineffective, and then, as if he hadn't said it all, demands that discipline still

be exacted. This discipline, and the hierarchy inherent in it bleeds into the population around the guerrilla, and into the society built by the political order that they create. This is not because less hierarchy would be less effective, but because fighting without hierarchy could lead to a world without masters.

The tactics of the guerrilla are by their nature more effective when implemented in a decentralized fashion. It's far harder to pinpoint the source of multiple attacks when the attacks are not carried out under the direction of a single leader, or sub commander or whatever the fuck else. Guerrilla bands fail if they aren't autonomous, and dedicated to having a self imposed responsibility to each-other. In the case of 'self-imposed discipline', the people in charge are trying to simulate an emergent social condition with hierarchical obedience, playing on that same human need for creativity and social support.

It is not possible to create a liberated world without changing the relationships we have to each other. This social change, driven by both love for those we seek to liberate, and violence against those oppressing us, must be built on the back of deeper personal and social bonds. The act of fighting your oppressors is an act of anger, and an act of love, separating the two from each-other lessens the power of each. The world that we want to build cannot come from our hearts or our guns alone. To create a liberated future we must destroy the social tendencies we inhabit, not just the state and society that reinforce them.

Then and Now

When I first started writing this piece, I was an aspiring revolutionary, and was in a group with comrades who gave me some faith in the ability of a small group of revolutionaries to concertedly eek out freedom, and create a new world in the shell of the old. That group no longer exists, partly because of how hard it is to change the way we relate to eachother. Since then I have less faith in how advantageous the material conditions are, and less faith in the abilities of those few who are currently willing to truly fight for liberation. I am often left wondering how we can build anything new while the most influential mechanisms of social control still stand.

Re reading this text on social bonds and guerrilla warfare, I think past me was overconfident and had too much faith. I've worked on this piece since then, trying to produce the version that best makes the argument past me would make; to force her into conversation with current me on the most favorable terms. I don't want to pick apart the arguments past me made, so I won't.

I think I'll maybe start with what I still agree with.

I still think that Revolutionary violence is the kindest approach to ending oppression

I still think that hierarchies, both formal and informal, make groups less effective and interfere with creating trusting relationships

Since leaving the project I was in when I wrote this, I have periodically asked myself, "If the most, experienced, dedicated, politically compatible, thoughtful, and capable anarchists I had ever met couldn't subvert the social norms of our oppressive society... who could?"

Lately I am more likely to advocate for a less measured approach; No ends, only means. Though this nihilist desire for jouissance suits me better than revolutionary fervor did, I still learned a great deal trying to organize for a revolution I don't think is possible (at least not in the form I'd envisioned). It would pain me to keep this knowledge to myself while there are still others throwing their efforts into the revolutionary faith.

I don't really know what's going to happen, and anyone who says they do is full of shit. I've got some informed guesses. The world is burning, fascism is on the rise, there are multiple simultaneous genocides occurring, and capitalism and the state just keep on pushing forward. I may be, uncharacteristically, optimistic in saying, things are absolutely getting worse, and our structures of power and economy; our machinery of empire; those gears keep turning, but they are covered in rust. Collapse, be it of a climate or of a civilization is both slow and fast. We have limited examples to draw on, but the decline is often looked back on as the fall, when those living it felt, at most, a slow getting worse. But sometimes these things happen all at once.

I find myself mostly hoping for greater disorder, partly because I still think there is some hope for people becoming radicalized through disaster communism and other collective responses to the tragedy that is modernity, and partly because I am more comfortable in crises than in the calm patches.

I know this is not the case for many. I am not particularly happy about how I came to be this way, but it is a great skill, and in other ways a great frustration. Tonight I went to a thing and got overwhelmed by the crowd and the noise. I went off and loitered and grounded myself. It wasn't until police lights flashed and I had the brief thought "Oh shit's getting busted" that I was suddenly calm. The lights meant nothing, but the promise of a situation in which conflict would occur calmed me down. Conflict brings a clarity to things that 'peace' and 'safety' lack.

That goes for our social conflicts too. People are different when shit hits the fan. I have learned to thrive in conflict and sought it out in various forms for my entire life. I had no choice in becoming used to conflict, both social and physical, but where I arrived after developing that familiarity with conflict is likely because I have always had a problem with being told what to do, and I'm not about to take it, or start telling other people what to do. I'm not a fighter by temperament. I generally avoid physical confrontations and yelling arguments. I'm able to fight, I will fight when I need to, and when I fight I don't quit until it is over, but this is only because it has been necessary.

The weapon I've found most useful for stopping a fight? (to my point about social cohesion). The most useful weapon in conflict has been listening. If you listen and understand, at least if you come to blows, you are able to do so on your terms. And if someone feels listened to, especially when they were expecting fright or aggression, they often stop wanting to fight at all.

If I had to write this whole piece again, I might turn it into a one paragraph essay.

Listening is the key. We anarchists need something more than whatever it is we're doing, and if I had to pick one thing that has most held us back, I would say it's social conflict. Not the state, or the pigs, even if they've held us back plenty. Not the propagandized minds of civilization. Not capitalist alienation. We have been held back by conflict, and yet we refuse to listen. If the revolutionary doesn't listen to 'the people', whatever the fuck that means, they do not know the territory of the fight for social support that they are waging alongside the tactical warfighting. What happens if we actually listen? To our comrades, to our partners, to ourselves? Listen to lies, Listen to truth, Listen to the fuzzy stuff between. Listen to learn who your enemies are, and then learn their weaknesses. Listen to your friends, family, and comrades, to learn more deeply who they are, what they think, how they relate to you, and how you treat them. Listen so that you can fucking decide for yourself. Quick, think of a conversation you've had recently, about anything; What did the other person say? Why was that the topic of conversation? How did the setting of the conversation influence it's content? Was there anything 'Unsaid' floating in the air during the conversation? When you listen, when you examine... that's when you are closer to

understanding. Read a book, sure, but while you're at it, listen to your social environment, not just those who you spend the most time with, but the world; your block, your neighbors, your distant friends. Sometimes if you listen you can hear the cracks in the wall. There are cracks everywhere, in systems of power, in the ideas we have, in the ways we behave. If you listen closely enough, you will always be hearing "It's time to act. Here's something to do."

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