

The Assumptive Logic of Anarchism

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“William Godwin, Max Stirner, Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Emma Goldman, and Errico Malatesta didn’t really talk about Blackness, were not really concerned with Blackness, didn’t bring Blackness to bear on their thinking, and didn’t think that Blackness’s specificity demanded attention.” — *Marquis Bey, Anarcho-Blackness*

“The world came to a global consensus that blackness must bear the brunt of being an occasional outsider—a being whose inclusion in the group is circumstantial. The human employs black suffering as a form of relief since the black’s lived experience delineates that they are the ones cursed with personifying an abject form of humanity.” — *Anarcha Semiyah, Freedom Fantasies and Failures: Assata, Alby, and The Human*

”Anarkatas seek to abolish the Human construct as the center of empowerment completely, and look towards new ways of understanding being and personhood, and ultimately new ways by which we actively tend toward our collective transformation. In the words of Calvin Warren “as long as we continue to invest in the value structure that renders the human the highest, most important being in the world, we will continue to plead for recognition and acceptance.” — *Afrofuturist Abolitionist of the Americas, Anarkata: A statement*

Distinct from other socialist schools of thought, anarchism asserts that it’s vehemently opposed to all coercive hierarchies as they exist in every aspect of life. Whereas the marxists primarily aims to abolish economic exploitation and destroy the capitalist mode of production, the revolutionary feminists strive to dismantle male domination and eradicate cis-hetero patriarchy, and the post-colonial insurgent seeks to end settler colonialism and imperialist interventions on dispossessed lands, the anarchist primarily begins with the position that all systems of oppression and pyramidal power structures are a threat and the antithesis to the total liberation of all marginalized, poor, and working class people—regardless of race, gender, and sexuality. In this context, to be an anarchist is to be ungovernable and unapologetically anti-statist, anti-racist, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-authoritarian etc. Ideally and theoretically, this should

mean that this decentralized and intersectional ideology should somehow also account for and be attentive to anti-black violence. However, as you'll see this becomes increasingly more complicated when considering the fact that aside from the black anarchist milieu, specifically the second wave, analyses around anti-blackness (which should not be conflated with the catch-all term racism) is hauntingly absent within every tendency and tradition of anarchism. This in and of itself is not surprising when you understand that the inability to genuinely engage with black studies and black radical theories is a historic reoccurrence—a limitation that always shows up across the entire political spectrum.

But what does it mean for the white and non-black (people-of-color) anarchists, who, despite having (what we believe to be) the most flexible, consistent and comprehensive radical analytic to date? What's to be said about our so-called comrades that religiously express the sentiment that at the end of the day all our struggles are analogous because "none of us are free until we're all free"? What happens when they appear to be under the assumption that we're all fighting the same battles and beasts? While we could agree that we do indeed share certain commonalities with other nonblack anarchists and have similar beliefs, values, and approaches, it's important to investigate the human subject and reckon with the often disregarded differences in relation to the paradigmatic positionality of the black slave subject.

And more to the point, although most are not class reductionists or campist, the average modern anarchist, even those that mean well, still tend to think only at the level of political economy and material reality. This explains why so many non-black anarchists remain unequipped to adequately address what is happening on a libidinal, ontological, and psychoanalytical level when witnessing human civil society's regular and perpetual (mis)treatment of black beings. This is why Afropessimism is imperative and indispensable. Afropessimists are primarily staunch critics of all agents and entities that uphold, endorse, and perpetuate anti-blackness. They recognize the state and its entire apparatus not only as main contributors and facilitators of anti-black violence, but all systems of oppression in general as negrophobic technologies that proliferates the continuation of black bondage and terror throughout the diaspora.

In a world, where anti-blackness is foundational, institutional, trans-generational, intercontinental, a global phenomenon and a structural antagonism that maintains the universal master and slave relational dynamic, solidarity around anarchy, mutual-aid, and revolutionary societal transformation is not enough to overcome the absurdity of social death. That is to say, anarchic grand narratives and notions of prefigurative politics, direct action, and horizontalism alone cannot resolve or redress the gratuitous violence that is constitutive of african abjection. In the following examples, we offer an examination of a post-structuralist anarchist text through an afropessimist lens of interpretation to illustrate something that is often overlooked and avoided. At the central part of our black anarchist and afropessimist analysis (our anarcho-afropessimist critique if you will) is the claim that anarchism, whether it be post, social, or individualist, have yet to thoroughly account for the "negro problem" that underpins contemporary anarchic ideologies, which stems from classical anarchism's historical ties to enlightenment humanism.

In Saul Newman's *The Politics of Postanarchism*, he puts forth a generous critique of classical anarchism to interrogate the 17th and 18th century Enlightenment foundations of anarchist thought and explores the limitations of its humanism and rationalism. In his earnest attempt to do so, Newman also admits to his readers (several times) that he's not advocating for a complete doing away with, or an abandoning of the enlightenment application entirely. Instead, as he embarks on his journey to, as he states "move beyond the ontological terrain of classical anarchism,

particularly its organicist vision of social life and its essentialist conception of the human subject”, he wishes to radicalize, rethink, reimagine, and reconsider the paradigm. He even goes as far as to say that “a certain fidelity to key elements of the Enlightenment is more important now than ever.” Essentially, the anarchist is advised to remain faithful to certain aspects of enlightenment humanism, find a way to somehow advance a construct that, at least for us, has always and still til this day, continues to disregard the black slave subject despite what iteration of humanism is presented after its reconfiguration.

As Afropessimists, we agree with Newman that classical and contemporary anarchism(s) are in need of a deconstructive, post-structuralist, and psychoanalytic assessment. We share the same sentiment that one must be able to take into account all metaphysical, psychological, and internal factors. This would mean combating and questioning hierarchy, power, and authority beyond just the material, physical, and external level. However, while the post-anarchist challenges anti-authoritarians to reckon with anarchism’s enlightenment roots, the recurring theme of having no generative analysis on anti-blackness and how it informs that foundation continues to be the philosophy’s Achilles heel. Thus, the average modern anarchist (regardless of what tendency they subscribe to) will continue to consciously or unconsciously thwart the tension that arises whenever black anarchists point out the inevitable pitfalls and shortcomings of the solutions the political ideology attempts to provide. Thankfully, where classical anarchism and post-anarchism falters, black anarchists with an Afropessimist lens of interpretation can fill in the gap. See, we’re not in the camp of being loyal to epistemological frameworks on empiricism and universal humanity that fail to honestly address the African enslavement that took place in the age of discovery, nor are we interested in celebrating the historical accomplishments and victories that were only made possible by, what Frank B. Wilderson described as “the libidinal economy of white supremacy, and its hyper-discursive violence that kills the black subject so that the concept, civil society, may live. In other words, from the incoherence of black death, America generates the coherence of white life.”

Near the latter half of the second chapter in a section called rethinking anarchism, Saul Newman briefly uses German Philosopher Max Stirner and his critique of Ludwig Feuerbach to meditate on the ontological essence of the human subject. Through Stirner, Newman rightfully points out how people had just swapped one master for another. In other words, humanism was not just some philosophical conceptualization that emerged out of the renaissance period, nor was it simply a movement that was later adopted by the Intelligentsia of the enlightenment era. It was a worldview that had essentially exchanged god’s will and authority for man’s law and order; absolutism was traded for statism, the divine right of kings for the social contract theory, and the Christian religion for the “humanist religion”.

In her essay *Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom*, Afro-Caribbean scholar, Sylvia Wynter, confirms this rupture and rift between the early clergy traditionalists and the judeo-christian secularists by saying in order for the human subject to be what it would eventually become “it had been enabled to do so only on the basis of what Michel Foucault identifies as the “invention of Man”: that is, by the Renaissance humanists’ epochal redescription of the human outside the terms of the then theocentric, “sinful by nature” conception of the human.” Having said that, there’s something else Newman doesn’t realize, fully understands, or perhaps even cares to take into account; something that Wynter is already privy to. Which is the fact that the status-organizing principle of whiteness, western civilization, and all classificatory logics of humanism was based on the genetic-racial inferiority of Black people to all others.

Put differently, extremely flawed “scientific” notions and patriarchal thinking posited the white European individual as the quintessential human subject and superior being above all races on the socio-political-economic ladder.

When looking closely at the enlightenment period, it’s European thinkers, its humanist ideas and scientific concepts, the future intellectual movements, systems, and ideologies it would go on to inspire, it’s not difficult to find many contradictions, inconsistencies, and issues within its zeitgeist. From the vantage point of the cotton field, the lynching tree, or the whipping post, we can see clear as day out of the teary eyed black slave subject that political theorists and philosophers of the time were hypocrites and liars, disingenuous frauds and cowards only disguised as do-gooders and righteous men. They spoke of morality while being immoral, they wrote about rationality while being irrational, they discussed the core tenets of humanity in ethics while being unethical, and they advocated for justice while being unjust. For example, as a founding secretary of the Council of Trade and Foreign Plantations, John Locke, the father of liberalism and arguably the most influential enlightenment thinker, helped legitimized the colonial condition of chattel slavery. Indeed, the English philosopher that spoke about natural, inalienable rights and liberty for all was also an architect of The Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina: a governing document that championed monarchical rule, oppressed the Gullah Geechee, and even stated that “every freeman of Carolina, shall have absolute power and authority over his negro slaves.”

It should be noted that our skepticism and critique of the human stems largely from an Afropessimist perspective. Like many 20th century post-structuralist thinkers we are anti-humanists. But unlike Deleuze, Guattari, Foucault, Lacan, or Derrida our anti-humanism directly addresses the racial aporia that is blackness—a maneuver that ultimately exposes how the human subject was built on a conscious and unconscious scandal. That scandal being both the preservation of the white hegemonic order of western civil society and the nonblack’s necessity for sustaining the global racial hierarchy. To be more frank, we are not trying to find ways to fit blackness into the classification of the human because, as Zakiyyah Iman Jackson and Saidiya Hartman reminds us, it already exist there—albeit at the most degraded, fungible, and abject levels due to its elastic, mutable, and stretchable nature.

That particular conceptual dilemma and problem site is what Jackson specifically calls ontological plasticity, “a mode of transmogrification whereby the fleshy being of blackness is experimented with as if it were infinitely malleable lexical and biological matter, such that blackness is produced as sub/super/human at once, a form where form shall not hold: potentially “everything and nothing” at the register of ontology.” In conclusion, it is true that africans came into modernity dehumanized, objectified, animalized, and mechanized; permanent slaves, commoditized property, bestial creatures, and labo(u)ring machines, the literal embodiment of the most subjugated and denigrated beings on earth. But what we must always remember is that under the enlightenment’s bandages of self-actualization, freedom seeking, and autonomous individuality, lies the truth behind the European’s colonial fantasies and genocidal desires. A truth bound up in the false promises of the human subject. A truth that if unraveled would reveal the unstitched gaping wounds of racial slavery. A truth that all anarchists must confront and come to terms with.

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