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Study, Solidarity, Spirit, Struggle

The Anarkata Turn, pt. 2

Nsambu Za Suekama

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10/13/2020

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ment and the Anarkata Turn in general helped provide a space to think about diverse Black Anarchic Radical perspectives on these issues.

Black Radical Traditions as a whole have enough responses to these things, to push us toward Black autonomy. People should ground themselves in these various Black revolutionary tendencies, getting familiar with them. And also, if you are looking for a certain political frequency that helps you pull Black revolutionary alternatives into conversation with each other, for the modern context of struggle, in a way that supports the local/on the ground struggle of Black anarchic radicals — that’s what Afrofuturist Abolitionists of the Americas’ work around “Anarkata” is here to help us do,

And we do it for nobody but the ancestors, the nomads, the priests, the pirates, and for the gworls, the street queens, the maGes, the rioters, the hood niggas, the single mamas, and all the wild Things that Man cannot house.

And for all those forgotten and unprotected
for all those who cannot love or live as themselves freely
all those who fought and died for our freedom,
for all our people, wherever we are, and our homeland, and our planet
and all beings, even those who aren’t human, and all those treated as less than human
for all those whose brains work different and whose bodies work different
and all those in prison or on the street
and for all power to all the people.

formations have to be erected or disbanded based on material conditions.

None of these offerings are exhaustive but they are surely a wide-ranging account of multiple different Black Anarchic Radical methods, principles, understandings being put in conversation with each other. The point of suggesting these forms of praxis is so that, working together, we might catalyze revolutionary activity in the cohesive (rather than atomized) fashion that the simple reminders "study, solidarity, spirit, struggle" signifies. Too much revolutionary community work of today has fallen victim to the capitalist habit of isolating certain variables from the totality they operate in, reducing one factor to a consequential or inconsequential factor they may or may not play. Sometimes this is because people might take a preferred form of praxis they are more skilled for, comfortable with, etc. yet participate in it without linking or coordinating as part of a larger holism. The Anarkata Statement is therefore also asking Black Anarchic Radicals to correct some of our own subjective errors, idealist approaches we might be taking in our immediate work, because none of us have everything, and the atomized, isolated approach hinders our growth.

There are, of course, more ways to catalyze Black Anarchic Radical activity than have been pulled together in the Statement. The Statement is simply an offering. And it has proven useful during the summer of rebellions. When abusers got outed in movements, when Black cis men got called out for jumping a Black trans woman at a demonstration, when other Black trans women continued to be attacked during the uprisings, when the blue check and blavity blacks pulled up to shame rioters and push their opporcoonist bs, when Trump declared illegality of anti-fascism and anarchism, when militias began to invade protests to hurt and let out gunfire on our people, when the liberals came thru to push their Vote Biden and Kamala nonsense, when demonstrators throughout Africa and the Carribbean took to the streets against police brutality, ecocide, and other struggles abroad and in solidarity with us — the State-

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works and strategies, and the Praxis section names a few suggestions:

”... “keep the peace” brigades, domestic violence intervention, communal foster care, emergency shelter for abuse victims, localized emergency response crews, martial arts classes, armed QTGNC brigades, freedom schools that protect our kids from the school-to-prison pipeline, modern underground railroads, and communal arms training... police watch groups, self-defense brigades, martial arts classes, and community arms trainings... [s]ubterfuge...”

Clearly this is a holistic vision of defense, that can be expanded upon to address medicine and food concerns, childcare, and others. In this way, the Praxis section shifts away from the tendency toward fetishizing gun violence in revolutionary circles. But, the Praxis section of the Statement does not shy away from the question of armed struggle: it suggests the need to prioritize giving arms to non-cis men and marginalized genders over cis men. It also affirms the history of blaquilllegalism, where Black folk have turned to means outside the law to pursue liberation, including theft and expropriation of resources from bourgeois institutions to return to the people (on some robin hood type antics), and riots, sabotage. The Statement speaks on armed struggle from a decentralized perspective, rather than a centralized and hierarchical approach; it also highlights why revolutionary leadership has to spread the capacity thereof to others, especially through political education.

Political education encompasses practical, theoretical, and experiential knowledge and can be gained through strategic mobilization or other direct action as well as study. In this decentralized complex, the Praxis section suggests free association, local approaches, horizontalism, direct democracy, cross-regional collaboration, integrated with flexibility to discern when more or less rigid

While doing this, making accommodations for disability, and helping to grow access and accessibility — these become foundational, essential. It is suggested that any spheres of activity that we move on as Black Anarchic Radicals be those affecting disabled Black folk, and that in all our revolutionary movement building, Disabled leadership, care work, and working to meet one another's needs is grounds for our radicalism. Mutual aid, which is now a buzzword, unfortunately, is brought into the equation. Rather than just being a crisis intervention tool, or just a replacement for charity, mutual aid is used in the same vein as "survival pending revolution" programs. With STAR and the Panthers as inspirations, mutual aid suggestions in the Statement has a focus on both solidarity economics and political education. Importantly, mutual aid arises from an understanding that the government's welfare programs are part of, as the BLA noted, the same "protracted war" (with the cops, prisons, hospitals, schools) against our people. Mutual aid in that sense is about demonstrating what we can/need to do in real time, helping us raise our understanding of why we need aid, and showing up for each other concretely (especially those being failed by the system the most).

It is while doing the above — engaging marginal cultures of intervention, community work, self-activity, accommodation, accessibility, and implementing mutual aid practice — that we then begin to talk about militant self defense. Self defense here is framed as guarding against both internal and external threats. The internal threats: bag chasers, entrepreneuroes, clout chasers, boujie niggas, neocolonial puppets, sellouts, "Black faces in high places," and all the abusers, the transphobes and homophobes, violence against children and in the home, predatory gang cultures that betray the proto-revolutionary roots of many Black street organizations. The external threats: of course, the nazis, KKK, neofascists, and related groups, but also the cops and all law enforcement, the military included. Each has to be addressed concretely and through frame-

Yesterday, Indigenous People's Day, was also the one year anniversary since the publishing of Anarkata: A Statement. I reflect on the work of Afrofuturist Abolitionists of the Americas around the Statement. I think about my personal journey from the Black Lives Matter world to the universe of Black Anarchic Radicalism, and what the Anarkata Turn and can offer to BARs during this recent wave of anti-police/anti-cop demonstrations.

Reflection One

During the summer of rebellions, 2020, a group of Anarkatas set a table up on a street corner, hung an RBG/Pan African flag up, pulled out some bats just in case any transphobes wanted to pull up and act funny, then sat a riot shield with the sankofa/”go back and fetch it” symbol on the sidewalk next to us. We started to plop items on the table to pass out: laundry detergent, tissue, water bottles, some food, and of course masks. We poured libations and played some rhythms on a djembe for the ancestors, and we laid a few reading materials called ”zines” out, so people could learn about the mutual aid and revolutionary politics we was moving in. Folk started to come through, to grab the resources we were helping to redistribute in our communities. They would dance to the drum with us, chop it up, rap about radicalism with us, and express a shared belief that this was ”a good thing” to do, and that we had to ”show up” for ourselves, and that in the end ”we all we got.” It was real good vibes, real ”kritical kickback” type antics like my crew often does.

One day, a gentleman approached our distro table, curious to take some of the supplies for himself. Of course, we let him know he totally could because ”these things come from our labor anyway, so we should be sharing them among each other” (as my comrade always says). The man noticed something on the table as he reached for detergent. ”Anti-capitalism,” he said, referring to one of our zines. ”What’s that?” he asked.

”It’s what we’re doing,” one of my SQuADSiblings said. The man did not respond favorably to that. ”Oh, you’re trying to force something,” he replied, seemingly upset. ”Well, no. You’re com-

ward autonomy and guard the lane against integrationist failures, we will need a basis in four things: study, solidarity, spirit, and struggle.

1. We will need to actively develop cultures of learning that strive both to develop revolutionary consciousness while also striving to undermine hierarchy within us at every step. *Study.*
2. And our community work must be grounded in concrete, material support for the most marginal, from our own authority, by us, for us, from below. *Solidarity.*
3. Third, we will need to get somewhat consistent with routines and rituals for rest, recuperation, healing, and wellness because this allows for sustainability and nurturance as we participate in revolutionary activity. *Spirit.*
4. Finally, we must train for and practice various approaches to personal and community defense, striving to integrate militancy with care work and Black feminist/Disability justice as well as transformative frameworks. *Struggle.*

A taste of how to implement these four pathways (study, solidarity, spirit, struggle) can be seen in the Anarkata Praxis section of the Statement. It starts by first naming the organic, autonomist activity already happening among houseless Black trans and queer folk. It suggests that we ground ourselves in what communities are already doing, and it asks us to begin ”consolidating” these ”cultures of opposition” into a ”revolutionary proposition.” This implies relationship building and ideological struggle, from below, but starting with those on the margins. The free initiative and leadership capacity already being catalyzed by Black trans women and other maGes in particular is highlighted first, from radicals or non-radicals, and it is suggested we support and unite there.

Reflection Four

When I'm out doin street work, and I'm building with folk in the shelters or who are housing insecure, and we are chilling and laughing, and we are learning together and thinking about our struggles with property, police, prisons. And we real and serious about some of the ways we can imagine addressing these contradictions. Where there is talks about riots, talks about taking over stuff — about re-appropriating spaces for ourselves. Talks about growing food, talks about educating our kids by our own authority. And talks about fighting rapists rather than bringing sexual assault narratives to police who do nothing about it anyway. Talks about developing safe houses and escape plans for domestic abuse victims. Talks about using *susu* practice specifically to orient resources toward our disabled and elderly community members who often get overlooked. Or talks about forming cooperatives to meet our material needs outside the boujie boss-worker relationship. When we rap about these things, an "Anarkata" wavelength, even if it doesn't speak to all aspects of my Black Anarchic Radical thinking and experience (for example, I am heavily influenced by Third Worldism and Wynterian counterhumanism), it helps me tie together helpful reminders about radical action in one place. So when we rap about these things, an "Anarkata" wavelength, even if it doesn't speak to all aspects of my Black Anarchic Radical thinking and experience, helps me push conversation towards Black autonomy and self determination. Especially for folk who might be completely unfamiliar with Black radical traditions altogether, an "anarkata" wavelength can help me say to folk that I'm connecting with that in whatever we do, however it looks, if we are wishing to move to-

pletely free to take the items without reading our stuff." He was told. Which is true. One of our approaches is that we don't pressure folk about our politics. At the same time, we will make it clear how we roll and why and invite others to work through Black Anarchic Radicalism (BAR) with us. We try not to move "like a Jehovah's witness" (as one of my fellow cats often jokes), pulling a little "bait-and-switch" kind of thing where mutual aid is in forcefully in exchange for either some pamphlet or stated ideological persuasion. Yet, we don't move on a "trojan horse" radicalism either, where folk are not told from the gate what we are about and why we stand in it.

The man proceeded to still argue with us, however. He compared us to dictators. He started to talk about how anti-capitalists have taken away people's autonomy before. He vibed with what we were doing, but he felt like we should have simply been building from "love, like Jesus did," essentially asking us to remove the Black Anarchic Radical politics from the entire activity. This was not shocking to hear. Our people are often being told that it threatens our "freedom" when we move on a political wavelength that consciously and concretely pushes against the dominant system. This is why Black revolutionaries of all stripes often get perceived as people who are angry, vengeful, power-hungry, evil creatures (especially those of us who are disabled or trans). Our politics get called dictatorial, authoritarian, controlling, manipulative, despite all evidence to the contrary, in spite of the fact that it is mainstream ideology/systems which fits all those descriptions. Then, when bourgeois ideals *do* make room for our politics, they always limit us to abstract or affective, empty concepts like "love" or "treating people fairly," to liberalize what we are about (that's what the man did).

Liberalism helps to manage revolution, to scare us from implementing the praxis which we understand helps in our collective journey to self determination. As an idealistic project, additionally, liberal thinking will always reduce things to an very limited

version of what "autonomy" means. Abstractions like love are inspiring, but you cannot exactly implement a praxis that both challenges the enemy and upholds concrete steps for liberation with just love (especially not when ideas of love are commonly informed by patterns of submission, coercion, abuse, etc.) Unfortunately, there are some iterations of anarchism which also stumble into these same assumptions, so that the work which Black Anarchic Radicals do is re-interpreted as us trying to "impose" something on people because we move on revolutionary stuff.

The news media, and religious leadership, and entrepreneegroes and celebrity/bag-chasing activists, they also push this same lie about Black (anarchic/autonomist) revolutionaries. We had a summer of rebellions, where Black people of many persuasions and backgrounds went and burned down precincts, attacked police, looted and redistributed the products, and destroyed property that we do not own yet that is the basis of our life at the brink of survival and destitution. All such activity was framed as having come from "outside agitators" and anyone who encouraged rebellious activity was accused of speaking about things that were not part of or in the best interests of the average Black person. So, Black radicals got painted as malevolent agents obsessed with "forcing an agenda" onto other Black people. People would even go so far as to recast our politics as "white," like as if real Black politics can only ever be pacifist, boujie-aligned, heterosexist, transphobic, and pro-Amerikkka.

How we speak of Black freedom, autonomy must be taken out of a liberal/idealist narrative. At the end of the day, Black people *do* have an interest in anti-capitalist struggles. And we have our own deep and ongoing histories of participation therein. Some of us may not be as familiar with the exact details on why we have these radical tendencies, or why we need them based on the history and material conditions—but that does not mean these wave-lengths don't exist. And those of us setting the record straight about these facts are not imposing anything, but rather we bring

a process I foresee happening again as more unrest and upheavals overtake this kkkountry at the hands of the Black masses.

I believe there were more organized and radical as well as intersectional (margin-centering) upheavals in this 2020 wave of BLM protests than the earlier wave precisely because of the sustained relationship building that Black Anarchic Radicals have continued to do. I also believe that if we merge that necessary local work with some degree of popular education and attempts to build some kind of mass-level autonomist culture, we can really push the struggle forward even more. That is what Anarkata means for me, in an age when anarchism is becoming increasingly relevant to Black rebellion and revolution, but is mystified in the popular imagination.

the Americas helped put out *Anarkata: A Statement* to give us a taste of that approach. As we read in the Statement: "The following document is ... intended to be a jumping off point for anarchic Black radicals to cohere our diverse thoughts together... We hope that [the Statement] is used to better inform and enrich the local Black anarchist work already taking place."

Anarkata is not meant to be a label all Black Anarchic Radicals claim; and the Statement is not a sacred text speaking for all our experiences as revolutionaries. But both the term "anarkata" and the Statement are a launching pad for helping people begin to lean into a Black Anarchic Radical consciousness they may or may not have already been considering, but without the liberal/whitewashed confusion that the word "anarchism" has historically run into. This confusion is what we see, again, when the "outside agitator" narrative is thrown around to discredit Black unrest or when BLM uses the term "decentralized" while still being part of the nonprofit industry and holding onto a de facto hierarchy.

The "Anarkata Turn" is here to play a strategic and popular/mass-oriented role, to help Black Anarchic Radicals already doing the necessary work in our local/organic contexts of distinguishing fake anarchisms from the real deal. This fact is proven not just in my own experience, but in accounts that I have heard from individuals who are not part of the Afrofuturist Abolitionists of the Americas and do not build in our immediate circuits. Most specifically, it is kitties from the rust belt regions of the country who have reported being looked to for some sort of guidance or more clear insights about Black autonomy. Folk are coming to them for support in building radicalism away from the snares of nonprofits, historical "Left" organizations, and other institutions which claim to be Black-centered, or anti-hierarchical, or revolutionary but then end up failing the most marginal of Black, especially trans, disabled, incarcerated, immigrant, working/lumpen class individuals. This happened for my crew all throughout the summer of rebellion and it is

clarity where it is needed or asked for. A revolutionary is no more wrong for sharing the insights of Black radical tradition than a *djeli/griot* would be wrong for delivering sacred knowledge to their community. Both roles are necessary and should be understood as grounded in the life of our people.

I saw this proven during the demonstrations. A lot of people who even now don't consider themselves organizers felt activated by the economic and other violences they witnessed during the pandemic and from the police this year. They decided to lead rallies, speak outs, protests, and get in touch with mutual aid practice, and more. Some of them became frustrated with integrationist and reformist elements in the "activist" world, who seem to want to improve the system and pursue a seat at the master's table rather than burning the master's house and developing a better world in its place. Many people began to appreciate anti-cop/anti-prison struggle and its connections to struggles against colonialism, and sexism, and against transphobia, against ableism, and they even went so far as to call out the hypocrisy of the Left who leaves these questions unaddressed (despite their extreme importance to anti-capitalist struggle).

This did not happen at the same time or same pace or location for all aspects of this year of rebellions, but it *did* happen for many people, for reasons that Black people have a vested interest in: our liberation struggle. And as people developed in these political orientations, some of them encountered Black Anarchic Radicals, like my crew, who could help folk nurture their appreciation of our struggle. Having spent a bit more time in theoretical study and practical experience with revolutionary activity, BARs could support the age of rebellion by providing a somewhat more consolidated entrypoint to anti-capitalist thinking and practices. For me, "Anarkata" is how I help folk focus these political understandings, methods, and understandings, in a way that is:

1) **intersectional**, centering the most marginal, especially Black trans and disabled folk,

2) **anti-hierarchical**, confronting all forms of domination, especially the government/State system

3) **Pan-African**, fighting for all Black lives, throughout the globe

4) **truly revolutionary**, confronting capitalist and colonial society, practice, institutions through class struggle.

All of these stances have become somewhat relevant or important to Black political discussions in some way shape or form, due to the Black Lives Matter age, from 2014 til now. This is true even in the face of certain things about queerness, hierarchy, Black struggle, capitalism that have gotten watered down by the liberal organization which bears the name Black Lives Matter. I have directly witnessed that Black Anarchic Radicals, and the conscious relationship building, education, and support we bring to our communities, is aiding in the process of heightened revolutionary, in bringing clarity and setting the record straight about the real radicalism. That is why one of my fellow kitties once observed: “the 2020s will be the decade of wild things Man cannot house.”

colonial/anti-capitalist struggle looks like. More people will be thirsty to get that clarity anyway, and have been thirsty for it. Because Black people will be trying to take up anarchistic politics for themselves and on their own terms due to the material conditions of today:

”Surface level changes in the laws/politics and even cultural consciousness of global society have failed to fully guarantee us freedom, even if we have a few measures of safety. Over the last few decades, we have begun to experience a wider and wider gap between rich and poor all over the world, and mass environmental destruction, as well as steady genocides against our people through the corporations, prisons, police, hospitals, schools, and the military. Representation of our people within white systems/media has not promised us anything worthwhile at all, and often times our representatives betray the interests of the collective for their own benefit. And xenophobic narratives continue to be sown in our communities in order to divide us so we can throw our most vulnerable siblings under the bus and betray each other. Many legal protections are often denied anyway and even being rapidly taken away. All of this has left our people and the entire planet vulnerable to death and destitution. And meanwhile, the liberatory traditions that were so impactful in the 60s/70s, are still being suppressed and marginalized — labelled ‘terroristic’ and suffering widespread repression.”

That augmenting force, as I understand it, is what the Afrofuturist Abolitionists of the Americas have been calling “*Anarkata*.” But it goes by other names, and could shift and change moving forward as the struggle continues. The Afrofuturist Abolitionists of

Reflection Three

Looking back, I am sure that if I had had a contingent of Black Anarchic Radicals with me, as I was rolling through the Black Lives Matter world, we could have shook things up in my old Black nationalist organization. We would have been able to struggle together with our kin about important ideological questions, and guard the lane against integrationist (both conservative and liberal) practices and thinking. Regardless of my own experience, however, I know for a certain that there were many Black Anarchic Radicals who did shake things up in the BLM world. I can tell from the events I witnessed in this uprising that many Black Anarchic Radicals have been helping make it clear that just because BLM called themselves “leaderful” and “decentralized” didn’t make them anarchist, or just because they had queer women leaders did not make them feminist or queer liberationists, and just because they were critical of socialism did not mean they weren’t actually bourgeois agents.

Even as Black Anarchic Radicals spend time setting the record straight like this, other Black Anarchic Radicals feel that an additional element is needed to further build the movement work we are nurturing. A complementary approach, something that augments, supports, elevates these necessary smaller-scale struggles and upheavals. This approach would add some more *popular* education and mass level activity to the equation. It would hold a mosaic of genuinely Black, anarchistic, and radical understandings, principles, methods in the air for interested people to look to, learn from, adapt, implement, challenge while they are building from/within/against the BLM age. This approach would help with making clear what anti-hierarchical, intersectional, material approaches to anti-

Reflection Two

Now, Black Anarchic Radicals do not lord ourselves over anyone, by the way. We do not elevate ourselves above people, as if we are superior. Like Kwame Ture said, “the job of the conscious is to make [people]... conscious of their unconscious behavior.” When he said this, it was because he was acknowledging that the so-called “unconscious” (those who aren’t considered “woke” or who don’t see themselves as such) will strive for freedom. Our people will quickly mobilize against our oppression, like we have seen with these protests and uprisings. A cop kills a person and boom, folk are out in the streets, and social media really helps get that process going pretty quick. The role of a revolutionary, however, based on Ture’s reminder, was to simply help those mobilized cultures of opposition get organized as revolutionary propositions. We are not imposing, but there is some coordination brought to the constellation of organic subversive activity. The Black radical traditions passed down by our revolutionary ancestors helps us to provide that, and it is important for no other reason than the fact that we have to somehow guard the lane against cooption. Our people’s everyday anti-establishment tendencies are like fire within Black life; and bourgeois/colonial interests are constantly working to douse the flames. Soon as the master sees that the enslaved is ready for smoke, Man will do everything to keep his power, and the main way this happens is by preying on ignorance to our history, the mistakes and victories of the past, or our ignorance to what is really at the basis of our oppression. Distractions and promises for crumbs from the table can get real enticing unless we have a boundary drawn that helps us keep the radical energy, and consol-

idate toward autonomy instead of toward integration/assimilation. In short, there is nothing coercive or authoritarian or brainwashing or evil about certain folk helping to nurture the fires being used to burn the plantation; facilitating a more cohesive understanding of our struggle and what it takes to get free is extremely necessary and completely in line with – essential to – what real Black autonomy is about.

Throughout the BLM age, both within and against the BLM circuit, there was small-scale/localized community building that happened with this in mind. Many dedicated, loving people held ourselves and those around us to a truly revolutionary narrative and called us to a truly revolutionary practice. I remember how I got pulled into this journey.

I was a young, Christian pacifist. I was doing a lot of arts-based advocacy around educational inequity and environmental issues. It was my high school years. And then, one day, I saw a young man named Dorian Johnson crying out for the life of his friend Michael Brown, who the cops killed and left for dead in the streets. Something shifted for me, and I realized that I needed to look more to Black-centered politics outside of the advocacy world. There had long been a separatist bent in my spirit, but it was Ferguson, it was summer 2014, that moved me to listen to it more. I got involved in a Black nationalist organization not too long afterward, and I started to seriously move through the prison/police struggle in a newer, more focused way.

I wasn't necessarily abolitionist at the time, but I certainly understood that the carceral system and the courts were about "keeping poor Black people "in our place" (as my parents put it) – and not about solving crime.

I wasn't necessarily a communist, but I understood that the capitalist economy was environmentally destructive at its root because of its focus on profits, and that it was the basis of Black people's poverty (and wars and violence) all across the globe.

cultures of opposition. To know both what we are fighting against and what we fight for.

us, that we are not failures deserving to be warehoused or killed, but people who get to take the resources we need to live our best lives.

Studying with revolutionaries helped to clarify why trans/queer struggle makes sense for Black liberation. It moves us closer to autonomy and self-determination when we understand that the basis of a community's power is not (hyper)sexual reductions, not making love nor romance either, or any visions of anatomy and biology taught to us by colonizers, but the material organization of society.

Studying with revolutionaries helped to clarify why Pan Africanism makes sense for Black liberation. It moves us to autonomy and self-determination when we remember that our bodily captivity would not be possible without the earthly captivity of our Homeland, and that liberation of both from military rule through communism is essential to the life of our people and our planet.

And studying with revolutionaries helped to clarify why communism makes sense for Black liberation. It moves us to autonomy and self-determination when we make sure that the means of production, how we use and move around the earth's resources, are not in the hands of a ruling few who can force us on a hamster wheel just to survive, all for some market and money that don't really exist.

Finally studying with revolutionaries helped to clarify why anarchism in particular makes sense for Black liberation. Because it moves us to autonomy and self-determination when, as Kuwasi Balagoon said it best, "the society as a whole not only maintains itself at an equal expense to all, but progresses in a creative process unhindered by any class, caste or party."

Now I could integrate my experiential knowledge, and the principles, methods, understandings I already had and had gained – and merge with a vision of where our power lies, how to take it back. Understanding how oppression contradicts the root of our empowerment, and what would ensure our empowerment in its place, is what it means to harness a revolutionary proposition around our

I wasn't necessarily a feminist, but I understood that all kinds of labor in our community was unfairly being pushed onto women and other marginalized genders by cis/het men in our community, often without pay, all while respect and full leadership was being denied to these populations in order to help straight men feel better about their own suffering on the plantation.

I wasn't necessarily an anarchist, but I understood that the government system was not a universal arrangement, that other systems existed outside of it, and that this current system was founded in Europe, on the bones of Indigenous people, and the backs of struggling enslaved African people in particular.

I had a loose, not fully formed constellation of understandings. I still carried it with me into my Black nationalist experience, as we organized phone zaps to yell demands at politicians, as we wrote letters, as we held conference calls, as we snitched on racists to their bosses to get them fired, as we organized relief campaigns in the wake of natural disasters, as we developed educational experiences about food justice and other topics. I have met plenty of Black nationalists who made a lot happen on limited political understanding too. As my understandings began to get informed by the practical work, I realized that I had some studies to do. The organization called itself Black nationalist, but none of us knew what that meant, really. I had to learn. During that time I encountered feminist insights and literature, socialist insights and literature, anti-colonial insights and literature, anarchist insights and literature, abolitionist insights and literature. Practical experience along with study helped my understandings consolidate into principles, and principles began to turn into methods and frameworks.

Eventually, I was being considered for leadership in the organization I was part of, most specifically as someone who could engage in political education. I was bringing Assata Shakur, Malcolm X, and Huey P. Newton into the equation, because I started to notice that, while the organization claimed to be Black nationalist, we needed to get to a cohesive basis on what that was sup-

posed to mean. I wasn't trying to force homogeneity, but I knew that we needed ideological unity to address all of the transphobia and misogyny and the liberalism/reformism that was present in the organization. I could relate to those people who didn't show up with a fleshed out set of principles, methods, understandings about Black radical traditions — because I had not either — but it was also apparent that leadership in this organization wasn't doing a good job helping facilitate that growth for people. I had matured into that process somewhat independently (with help from a few sibs); but a complementary process, an actual implementation of clear revolutionary ideas was missing overall.

This became apparent to me once the organization had to discuss whether we should distance ourselves from the BLM organization or continue to organize through that banner. Some felt like it would be a strategic mistake as BLM's name had a lot of visibility we could use; other people in the organization thought we should because the organization had donations from white rich folk. Disagreement in activism is healthy and vital, but in our formation, the lack of ideological basis meant our disagreement was all over the place and got nowhere, so that some people (mostly straight men) began to identify BLM with right-wing narratives about George Soros and a "gay agenda," while others (mostly straight women) began to link it to politicians and hopes for legislative or electoral gains for us. I realized then that Black nationalism could be simultaneously conservative and progressive, but still not revolutionary, and that gender issues were a central conflict in why that was a problem on either side. I tried to infuse our organization with more political education around both feminism and Pantherism, to address these issues and move us toward a more radical orientation, but ultimately I got burnt out by the cisgenderism/binarism of the organization and the role that played in its bourgeois ideological inertia.

While I had hoped that I could guard the lane against bourgeois tendencies, I could not effectively do so when I also lacked a

thorough basis in revolutionary politics. Yes, I had been studying, and held certain leanings (feminist, anti-capitalist, anarchic, anti-prison), but as yet I had not grown into a materialist proposition to ground these oppositional modes of organizing. I might have been trying to educate about Black radical traditions in the organization, but I also lacked a firmer grasp of what they had to offer, and I lacked a community of folks to study with and arrive at those conclusions with. I also had my own contradictory willingness to build with other bourgeois institutions to some degree (such as nonprofits). This limited my capacity to explain and effectively challenge some of what I was seeing wrong in the Black nationalist organization I was part of.

When I left Black nationalism and moved into Black Anarchic Radicalism, I gained that community of revolutionaries, and it was this move out of political isolation that helped me grow in my principles, methods, understandings. It was Anarcho-Pantherists, Insurrectionists, Pan-Africanists, and Fourth Worldists who taught me, who I learned with and from, who I also began teaching. They introduced me to transfeminism and mutual aid and militancy. We learned about Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, Marsha P. Johnson, Claudia Jones, and Lucy Parsons.

Studying with these revolutionaries helped to clarify why an abolitionist politic made the most sense for Black liberation. It moves us toward autonomy and self-determination when we take charge of our safety from the prisons/police who only exist to suppress us.

Studying with revolutionaries helped to clarify why womanism makes sense for Black liberation. It moves us closer to autonomy and self-determination when we center the overlooked, the vulnerable, the most disrespected, those at the bottom of hierarchy.

Studying with revolutionaries helped to clarify why disability justice makes sense for Black liberation. It moves us closer to autonomy and self-determination when we remember that all our bodies and brains are valid, that it is institutions which exclude