

The Left Cannot Just Denounce Cults/Abuse; We Must Undermine Its Conditions of Possibility

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I will not be naming names in this piece but if you know, you know. My love and solidarity to all movement survivors.

As a Black Anarchist who is both nonbinary and transfeminine, it is incredibly difficult sometimes organizing in my hoods, particularly among trans and queer folk, because the history of the Left has been so rife with hierarchy, especially with white supremacy and patriarchy and abuse. This is so much the case that some working class and Marginalized folk would rather stick with and try to reform the evil they know intimately (capitalism and the State), hence the popularity of representation politics among many so-called radicals, rather than be fooled into trying to join liberatory movements that promise something better but that end up not only being destructive behind the scenes, and completely lacking in accountability processes and avenues for redress on top of it. For these types, at least with the dominant system, when they fuck us over, we have models to deal with it, even if those models are often functionally useless; and while I don't agree with this liberal sentiment at all, I think of these particularly kind of knee-jerk, trauma based counterrevolutionary tendencies from the lens of something Kuwasi Balagoon once said: "To expect people to accept [anarchist ideology], while they are being wiped out as a nation, without allies ready to put out on the line what they already have on the line, is crazy." He was speaking specifically to the Anarchist movement and how it should relate to nationalist and socialist struggle, but I am remixing it a bit. The entire anti-colonial Left cannot expect Black working class, especially marginalized gender folks, to accept any revolutionary ideology comfortably while said communities are faced with unwanton abuse from not just the bourgeois world order but from within national/socialist/anarchist movements. People are traumatized and that needs to be engaged with as if it were a question of militancy.

To demand that the people graduate past a representational politics and overall liberal/conservative investments while allowing the persistence of movement cultures that lead to things such as the murder Black children at autonomous zones, or that render Black maGes houseless and victimized during a pandemic and ongoing climate crisis, to name just two recent and egregious stories, is utter dismissiveness and depravity.

And yet, folks are told to “join an organization,” even as they cry out against the various manipulative and abusive cults and cult-like tendencies across the Left. Folks are asked to embrace communism and decolonization even as Fourth World peoples, which is to say marginalized ethnicities and religious groups and gender/sexual identities within the Third World struggle (this way of theorizing Fourth Worldism was coined by trans/nonbinary comrades Kiksuya and Merricat, a nonblack Indigenous and a Black Indigenous comrade respectively), are continually abused and genocided against in Third World contexts by both self described revolutionary movements and governments as well as neocolonial puppets who simply throw around words like “sovereignty” to hide their bourgeois and Western alignment. Given these very salient histories, in what ways can the average person who is neither given the tools to heal nor ideologically trained in good faith (without pressure to conform to a party line) be reasonably asked to trust that there is a functional, lived, material difference between the Hydra that is racial capitalism and all the various flavors of anti-capitalist/anti-colonial movements?

In an older piece, “Study, Solidarity, Spirit, and Struggle: the Anarkata Turn, pt 2” I once touched on how a man building with us at a mutual aid distro was once hostile to our political orientation a bit, and tried to get us to frame our intention simply behind “love” rather than our commitment to class/anti-colonial, intersectional and anarchic struggle (AID Feedback Loop) as Anarkatas. He expressed feeling like we were being controlling by stating our aims, although for us it is a matter of consent culture for people to clearly know what BARs are about so they can decide based on their own “cognitive and behavioral autonomy” (to borrow a phrase from Wynter) whether they vibe with our principles, methods, understandings, and build together from there. The man’s sentiment was reminiscent of the media narrative prevailing all last summer that ascribed the Rebellions to “outside agitators” as if Black people have no history of radical traditions. But it also made me think about things that I experience in trans community spaces. Due to literal history of authoritarianism, cults, abuse that often uphold white supremacy or class violence along gendered lines within our movements, some people are suspect of any mention of Left ideology. This suspicion puts me at a vulnerable position as a Black transfemme and disabled person because my body is already read as a threat due to those intersections and how narratives from my class enemies and TERFs alike have positioned me. I am constantly both misgendered and framed as authoritarian, elitist, etc in my own community because cishet men, especially white ones, but also abusive and hierarchical people across genders, especially those with petit bourgeois backgrounds (which, to be honest, makes up the majority of the Left) have overrepresented themselves as the revolutionary Canon.

When the ruling class is then already pushing false propaganda around Anarchism, but then anarchism and the Left in general is refusing to deal with intra-mural contradictions, it means that counterrevolutionary ideological policing is weaponized against me along multiple fronts. Literal trauma is being allowed to persist unaddressed, in other words, reinforcing liberalism out of fear, and further isolating revolutionaries because of the projection of those fears, and this is dovetailing with the work the bourgeoisie and the colonizer is already putting in to discredit communism, anarchy, decolonization, and revolutionary transfeminism. Unless cisheteropatriarchy and authoritarian tendencies and abuse particularly against maGes/Fourth World peoples across the Global Left is adequately dealt with, this pattern will continue to drive a wedge that weakens the Third World and Pan African struggles, alienates revolutionaries from our sibs, discourages actual engagement with Left ideology.

Fear and trauma is a powerful thing. Many people are afraid to take up arms against the State because of fear and trauma associated with the decimation of militant movement. This is intensified when the fear and trauma has accrued because supposedly anti-state and anti-capitalist and anti-colonial and anti-patriarchal movement actors have physically and emotionally and mentally abused movement participants and exploited their time and labor for “the revolution.” If the people are made to feel that bourgeois behaviors are actually being redesigned under Left language, and indeed intra-movement abuse and exploitation is bourgeois (hence I am emphatic that petit bourgeois, cishet, privileged and already powerful people overrepresenting themselves in movement are the main culprits, tho not exclusively of course), why should they try to join the unfamiliar when they could just stick to the familiar? As in, why try to represent your concerns within milieus that are not dominant but rife with bullshit when you can just stick to the dominant paradigm and its bullshit and possibly avoid being marked as a BIE/terrorist or assassinated for your involvement in the process? Can we not see how it is that external contradictions and internal ones work together against the revolution? This is no less true regarding abuse, manipulation, and the dynamic which enable it.

I speak of enabling dynamics because abuse is not an atomized phenomenon and to speak of it as such flies in the face of any claim to a material analysis. It is never simply a question of “hurt people hurt people” or else the masses of poor, colonized people would be taking our hurt out on the Man non-stop. Instead what we see is people punching sideways and often times it’s not just punching sideways, it is punching down. Hurt people hurt people but they almost invariably do so in a way that exploit ms existing vulnerability and power dynamics that were imposed from without and developed within. A parent traumatized by parental abuse may take it out on their child and this is enabled by the literal material reliance a child has on the parent, which is sanctioned by a combination of nature, the State, cultural attitudes, and religious beliefs as well as social institutions. Apply this logic to criminals in the community who often rob their fellows, to men who abuse the women and other maGes proximal to them, to abled and neurotypical folk who mistreat and warehouse their MMINDD (mad, mentally ill, neurodivergent, disabled) sibs; to ethno/religious majorities and cisgender heterosexual people who respond to the material and psychic traumas of their oppression by framing minorities and maGes as a threat and thereby enacting Apartheid conditions against us whether legally or extra-legally.

Therefore, I declare—Authoritarian leftists: kill the abuser in your head. And yes, just like Lorenzo’s words included white Anarchists in the original formulation “Kill the Cop in your head”: I am reiterating the same. Kill the abuser in your head. INCITE! was right that misogyny is fed work; abuse is cop shit! (And statistics bear out the way they dovetail to reinforce the project of empire). Kill the abuser in your head, and kill the tendencies which enable abuse. Kill the dynamics that allow the unevenness with which hurt people hurt people to occur.

Kill the obsession with making people into pawns for your top down decided upon revolutionary program. Kill the love for growing an organization membership roster or making a big, Instagrammable turnout at events so much that even if the substance is lackin it don’t matter. Kill the love for trying to rival the mainstream media’s discursive and propaganda apparatus so much that you sacrifice theoretical depth and the patience and capacity building it takes to develop actual analysis of changing on-the-ground conditions because you wanna beat Fox at dropping a good story. Kill the love for strong individual leadership or formations that stand out, that “outorganize” others, that index the Black Radical Tradition as nothing more than an extension of the academic public intellectual economy.

Yes, these are all things that flow from the very class, hierarchical, and gendered investments which enable abuse to persist in movements. So kill them to kill the abuser in your head.

Kill the love for the idea that we as radicals are apart from and above our people and organizing them because the reality is we are all but nexus points for consolidating historical tendencies that a response to certain “cumulative realities” (Marsha) correlating to material conditions (ie, we must together discover the mission of our generations; we do not discover it for the “people” and then proselytize it to them). Kill the need to deny genocide and cape for homophobic State policies and defer to the sensibilities of transphobic colonized majorities because the ease of a comfortable realpolitik rather than something that ruffles feathers through confronting internalized contradictions fits your love for expedience and convenience. Kill the desire to incorporate the scarcity mentality of capitalism into our organizational methodology (relying on individualism and competitiveness) because the reality is the magic hands are that of the people (Fanon) and we need neither a demiurge nor a caste, class, party (Balagoon) to self-actualize as persons, as people, and as a species within the historical process of maintaining our society and nurturing our planet by us, for us, according to each our capacity and unique needs.

Yes, these are all things that flow from the very class, hierarchical, and gendered investments (bourgeois shit) which enable abuse to persist in movements. So kill them to kill the abuser in your head. Kill every way that “dialectics” is never understood to require an actual synthesis of the unique movement histories of Third World and Fourth World peoples with post-60s development in Left ideology. Theoretical stagnation in an age of climate catastrophe, a ballooned and unforeseen carceral/imperial technoculture is foolishness! It is a universalism that accounts for all the particulars (Cesaire) that will get us free. Kill the willingness to allow opportunists and bag chasers and bullshitters to persist all because they are desirable or palatable in other ways, because revolution is neither gonna be televised nor reducible to your fuckable (usually light skinned, thin, cis, dolled up, or pick-me ass, kewn ass, weeb ass) faves. Kill the abuser in your head: as in, commit to destroying the movement cultures which allow abuse to crop up and go undealt with. Yes, these are all things that flow from the very class, hierarchical, and gendered investments which enable abuse to persist in movements. So kill them to kill the abuser in your head.

Revolutionary struggle isn't perfect. Humanity is flawed, and that's not because we are genetically doomed as such. As a Black Radical Ecology nerd, I can with certainty echo what Stephen Jay Gould and even Bookchinists acknowledge about how cooperation and geniality are, empirically speaking, the behavioral traits that have allowed enough cohesion at the daily level for our species to have survived as long as it has. In the midst of emergency, as Modibo Kadalie illustrates within “Pan African Social Ecology,” those same tendencies show up to get us through. All through the pandemic that was clear. I am not fatalistic or misanthropic, both because of my values but also as a scientific observation: Gould is right that it is simply a question of a cognitive difficulty in grappling with probability which makes hostile human behaviors *seem* like the defining “human” trait. Because of a ‘structural asymmetry’ between their effects on the forms of social cohesion we can and do adhere to. We have a range of biological potentialities, Gould argues, which are predisposed neither to supposedly good or bad behaviors, however: the point he emphasizes is for us to develop structures that allow for certain kinds to flourish. And we need to understand the ways those will “neurochemically implement,” in the words of Sylvia Wynter socially-chartered myths and symbols of right vs wrong in order to mystify and reinforce certain behaviors toward certain material ends in our daily praxis. We need to parse how the

prevailing myths/symbols encode Man, and understand that that is a material problem in terms of class, colonialism, ableism, and cisheteropatriarchy as well as anthropocentrism. We need to raise consciousness so that we can rise above our cognitive difficulty in understanding what our lived experience of abuse actually is above structurally reinforced narratives which tell us it is so much a “human” problem that we give up on revolutionary struggle and stick with capitalism. But that struggle of consciousness has to be born in an accompanying material struggle: Wynter is clear that this is the context that enabled a “cognitive hiatus” from Man. And for the Left, if we are to aid in people who are literally traumatized by the structurally asymmetric effect of intramural abuse undermining liberation movements time and again, to get us being able to see and hope conscientiously in our collective power—rather than pivoting to mere representation and liberalism—we need an accompanying material praxis to ground that reorientation. We need a commitment to care work and militancy. We need to be allowing for healing and accountability. We need to be bridging intramural divide in a way that is margin-centered rather than chauvinistic and reliant on a respectability politics that leaves biases unchecked or unchallenged (and this must happen theoretically and practically).

And we need to build power from Below if we gon achieve self determination. It’s time to stop ignoring the mass character of African struggle and the fact of endogenous tendencies toward non-hierarchy and commonality overshadowing those toward centralization and authority in our history. It’s time to stop pretending that the modern State didn’t evolve in a racial capitalism context: ie, it is a tool of the bourgeoisie and it correlates to intra-Western contradictions rooted in ethnocentrism, religious extremism, ableism, cisheteropatriarchy that are weaponized through the “color line” (du Bois). It is time to stop pretending that the latter fact isn’t a cogent explanation for treachery on part of party bureaucrats who may have initially been well meaning in dealing with foreign capital during the course of decolonial development, but were tempted and enticed by material imbalance already buttressed by unchanged social and infrastructural mechanisms that fell along ethnic and gendered and class lines in accordance to divisions imposed exogenously (from without). It’s time to stop acting as though this trend has no implications for the US context where right wing cults framing themselves as Black nationalists continue to position themselves as the only alternative to the mainstream whilst in African nations overseas, conservative legislation that often robs TLBG+ people of our rights is posed as a flex of “self determination” to distract from emmiserating poverty that the local bourgeoisie neglects. Kill the abuser in your head because counterrevolutionary varieties of all kinds, including hierarchy, clout culture, and individualism, enables abuse and a host of other problems to undermine movement and hinder the work of well meaning, principled radicals. Kill the abuser in your head because apart from addressing these, the Black Liberation Movement will stagnate, it will lose solid comrades to burnout and trauma and worse, the bourgeoisie will be able to coopt certain histories to undialectically misrepresent the whole and these narratives will have a neurochemical salience all because we failed to be serious about developing the movement infrastructures and overall philosophy and spirit to truly shift shit and heal our people. You want cults, liberal representationalism, and overall fuckery out the way? Kill the abuser in your head, as in, put to death the authoritarian bullshit (and yes you anarcrackers is included) that enable abuse to crop up and persist in movements as a form of opportunism and compensatory gesture (Wilderson).

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