

Camping at the Crossroads: Introductory Essay to a Special Issue on Antiracism and Anarchism

Jakub Burkowicz¹

Introduction

By way of introducing this special issue of *Affinities*, I would like to ask, what can anarchism and antiracism learn from one another? Attempts to critically reflect on the two traditions have certainly been made in the past (Ervin 1993; Adams 2000; Alston 2003; Aragorn! 2007). As writers who have pursued this task point out, a crossing-over of the two currents of thought makes certain intuitive sense: the anarchist tradition of kicking against every imposed hierarchy is incomplete without a challenge to racism, and, in the same vein, antiracism can only go so far without approaching racism as a problem of authority. And yet, it seems that the task of having both traditions learn from and challenge one another has hardly gotten off the ground.

It is still too easy to devote oneself to anarchism without seriously considering antiracism (at least for the majority of white anarchists within the movement) just as it is also possible to commit oneself to antiracism without encountering anarchism. As a number of social movement theorists and activists point out, despite a commitment to ending oppression wherever they see it, anarchists have largely ignored racism and, by extension, antiracism (Ervin 1993; Day 2005; Olson 2009; Evren 2012). Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, who to my knowledge attempted the first explicit cross-mapping of anarchism and antiracism in his *Anarchism and the Black Revolution* (1993), observes that “[h]istorically Anarchists have not even brought up the matter of ‘race politics’ ” (15). Indeed, one has only to consider how rarely the topic of racism comes up in early European anarchist literature and how much more comfortable and passionate Mikhail Bakunin, Pyotr Kropotkin, and Emma Goldman have been about confronting relations of oppression like the state, capitalism, and religion. To be certain, some progress has been made since Ervin changed the conversation. We may optimistically note that anarchists have slowly begun to incorporate antiracist concerns into their activism and that anarchist collectives like the U.S. based Love and Rage, Bring the Ruckus, Anarchist People of Color, and the more North American/ European-wide No One Is Illegal and Anti-Racist Action attest to the existence of an antiracist practice within anarchism; however, the consensus is that antiracist concerns are still not foregrounded in anarchism in the way they deserve to be. As Richard Day notes, current anarchist analyses lack “adequate attention to axes of oppression based on practices of division”

Jakub Burkowicz, “Camping at the Crossroads: Introductory Essay to a Special Issue on Antiracism and Anarchism.” *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action*, Volume 8, Number 1, Summer 2014, pp. 1-22.

(2005, 178) – that is, to practices like racism, sexism, and homophobia.² Süreyya Evren likewise observes that “[t]oday, colonialism/anti-colonialism and imperialism/anti-imperialism both hold a secondary place in contemporary anarchist studies” (2012, 306).

It is in the interest of ending the divergence of the two traditions, while also supporting the efforts of those who have already set out to combine insights from both, that this issue camps at the point at which antiracism and anarchism intersect.

Contemporary Theoretical Developments in Anarchism and Antiracism

If we were to listen to judges, police officers, bosses, and politicians, anarchism would describe the disastrous results that follow from a distrust, absence, or abuse of authority. In the popular imagination, the anarchist is one who resists – usually by wreaking havoc – the established social order, and anarchy denotes something like an unwelcomed disruption of organized social life. Anarchists, however, hold a contrary view. Rather than viewing anarchism as *misrule*, anarchists view anarchism as the radically democratic possibility of *self-rule*. The anarchist goal, which Bakunin enthusiastically describes as one of seeking nothing less than “the unrestricted manifestation of the liberated life of the people” ([1869] 1972, 152), is antithetical to the idea of a social order maintained through the creation of “obedient subjects of a central authority” (Kropotkin [1927] 1970, 137). Anarchists favor a social organization that maximizes individual and group autonomy and one that aims to emancipate actors from oppressive social relations. The anarchist thus aspires to live without the familiar hierarchies of bosses and workers, teachers and students, priests and congregations, and political parties and citizens – in short, without rulers and their subjects.

In place of stratified social relations, anarchists propose and work to create non-hierarchical social institutions and practices. To this end, much of the work that anarchists do involves not only openly protesting and subverting the established forms of central authority but also what some have begun to describe in terms of prefiguring alternatives to dominant social arrangements (Franks 2006; Jun 2012; Wilson and Kinna 2012). *Prefiguration* should not be approached as something new to anarchism. Rather, it frames in a new way what was always present there. The concept designates “a pragmatic and procedural theory of action” (Jun 2012, 129) that implies resistance carried out through the development of various forms of self-organization. It suggests that rather than waiting for an emancipatory stateless anarchist utopia to emerge, anarchists must, in the here and now, construct affinity based institutions and practices as a way of realizing anarchism (Day 2005). A key component of prefiguration, as Benjamin Franks explains, is that anarchist actions cannot be justified with

recourse to ends-based, consequentialist doctrines. That is, anarchist tactics cannot be defended on the basis of the future society they aim to secure but instead must be based on a recognition that “tactics embody the forms of social relation that the actors wish to see develop” (Franks 2006, 114). The means, as Niccolo Machiavelli’s teachings maintain, do not justify the ends; rather, the means are synonymous with the very ends we seek. Prefiguration stresses the idea that a match between the two must exist as non-hierarchical social arrangements can only be arrived at through non-hierarchical methods of struggle.

Anarchist prefigurations can be said to be today underway in practical and unglamorous experiments that attempt to construct the basis of an anarchist life. These attempts include everything from worker owned and run workplaces to community soup-kitchens, radio stations, free schools, gardens, and social centers, all organized according to such anarchist values as mutual aid, solidarity, voluntary cooperation, and non-coercion. Such prefigurations demonstrate the feasibility of the anarchist idea as anarchists and many other anti-authoritarians continue to work on alternatives to the present order within its very coordinates.

Today, as always, the anarchist movement is dispersed and ephemeral. While the movement has overtime waxed and waned, anarchism has steadily over the course of its history developed and expanded critiques of hierarchy and oppression. Drawing on Bakunin who observes, “[if] there is a devil in human history, that devil is the principle of command” ([1871] 1972, 245), it may be said that what all anarchists share is a suspicion of compulsive and iniquitous social relations and that the history of anarchism is one of uncovering the principle of command, along with the social relations that allow it, wherever possible. Importantly, however, while the principle of command is something of a central preoccupation for anarchism, anarchism does not specify its foundational basis. Early European anarchist thinkers certainly placed a premium on “smashing the state,” but they have never approached the state with the same reductive spirit as Marxists approach the economy – that is, as the privileged source from which all social horrors pour out. Nothing like a fountainhead of every system of oppression can be said to exist for anarchism. As Todd May recognizes, “power relations are everywhere” (2009, 14), permeating and disseminating through everything we can call “social.” Rather than attempting to eliminate power at some presumed centre, a significant component of anarchist work involves identifying and analyzing oppressive relations and studying the links between them.

This is to say that anarchism has – despite often being depicted as a political philosophy whose core consists of anti-statism – continuously cast its gaze beyond the state. The anarchist author Aragorn!³ accounts for this tendency by

observing that “the principles that would lead one to conclude that the state was oppressive naturally led to the conclusion that those same systems also exist in other arenas of the human experience” (2007, 14). For anarchists, everything from technology, civilization, and capitalism, to sexuality, sports, and nationalism is subject to critique. Contemporary anarchists continue to unearth such oppressive relations by alerting themselves to *micropolitics*. The concept designates informal relations of power within a broad range of social interactions. To attune our analyses to micropolitics is to recognize that macrostructures such as the state, capitalism, and religion have, as Day puts it, a “capillary nature” (2005, 70). Micropolitics, in other words, signifies an awareness that routine, mundane, everyday processes are deeply political and that it is through micro-processes that macro-level political structures are created and maintained. As such, today’s anarchism seeks to eliminate or minimize oppression within small scales and to examine its associations to other large-scale institutions. Anarchist analyses of micropolitics demonstrate that we are still learning to uncover Bakunin’s principle of command and, since power has no centre, that such work is potentially endless.

Prefiguration and micropolitics attest to the fact that contemporary anarchism has developed a certain affinity with poststructuralism. Currently, with the renewed interest in anarchism in the academy, we are witnessing an innovative pushing of Foucauldian and Deleuzian insights into the analysis of the microphysics of power (May 1994; Newman 2001; Day 2005). If power, as micropolitics maintains, is indeed everywhere, the implication is a break with the longstanding leftist fantasy of the totalizing event we call revolution. A micropolitical understanding of power rules out the concept of revolution given that “there is no building one could seize, no leader one could assassinate, in order to eliminate power effects and achieve a transparent society” (Day 2005, 133). As a result, some anarchists have come to reject all macro-level action. As Lewis Call rightly warns us, “[t]he Left must learn once and for all the lessons of Lenin, Stalin, and Mao: macropolitical action, however well-intentioned, does not produce meaningful liberation. The attempt to seize control of the state, to direct the flow of history in the name of some ill-defined class of supposedly rational proletarian subjects, is doomed to failure” (2002, 51). Day develops this line of thinking into a productive enquiry in support of non-hegemonic modes of social change that break with the goal of a complete transformation of the social order (2005). Meanwhile, others have driven poststructuralist insights on power into a critique of representation (May 1994; Cohn 2006; Jun 2012) and argue that anarchism should not be seen in opposition to any specific hierarchical institution, or to power per se, but “to practices of telling people who they are and what they want” (May 1994, 131). Importantly, micropolitical analyses of power open up the anarchist terrain of struggle to prefiguration. Contemporary anarchist theory tells us that we need not await the crumbling of empires before we can construct alternatives to them; rather, it is by

constructing alternatives that we may in fact help various relations of oppression teeter. Once the search for the source of iniquitous relations of power has been abandoned, it becomes possible to learn to see power itself as immanent to every sphere of social life from which, in turn, it can be challenged.

Unlike anarchism, antiracism cannot be so easily described as a movement or theoretical tradition. While there certainly have been many self-identified antiracist activists and movements, most have attached their projects to other struggles (for example, to national liberation, desegregation, and anti-poverty). One is of course also a certain type of anarchist and anarchism itself can be split into many different schools of thought and approaches (a feminist, adult worker residing in the overdeveloped North will, for example, engage in a different kind of anarchism than a gay, homeless youth in the overexploited South); nonetheless, there is something much more variegated and uncertain about antiracism as a social movement tradition when compared to anarchism. One has to approach antiracism much more carefully because unlike anarchism, antiracism does not always speak in its own name.⁴

On rare occasions that it does, antiracism suggests opposition to racism. For Alastair Bonnett, “[a] minimal definition of anti-racism is that it refers to those forms of thought and/or practice that seek to confront, eradicate, and/or ameliorate racism” (2000, 4). No tightly defined list of authors or movements make up what may be called a canon or even tradition of antiracism. Antiracism is better thought of, as Pierre-André Taguieff maintains, as “a *war machine* in the everyday sky of ideologies” (2001, 15, emphasis in original) that emerges whenever we see a principled stand taken against racism. For this reason, one could include under the banner of antiracism the U.S. based liberal democratic National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which was born out of the fight with Jim Crow segregation and disenfranchisement; the scientific antiracism of anthropologists Franz Boas, Bronisław Malinowski, Margaret Mead, and Claude Lévi-Strauss; the contemporary academic organization Engage, which conducts research in the UK on anti-Semitism; the Copwatch community organizations, which across North America document and act against police brutality; state-based policies like affirmative action or multiculturalism; and even “diversity training” courses and workshops in business and government sectors.

Antiracism, just like anarchism, is malleable. The fact that it gets attached to state and corporate power in a way that anarchism does not and cannot, should not, however, strike us as strange. After all, racism is a much more acceptable target than authority. As a target, racism can be approached as a special disease of power, leaving centralized relations of power themselves off the hook. In this way, as Taguieff notes, racism in fact legitimates various forms of authority that enter into struggle with it (2001). Because proponents of authority

and political centralization imagine that they can overcome racism, everyone from business organizations, which may see racism as a costly impediment to profit, to Marxist-Leninist parties, which may regard racism as an ideology serving the interests of the ruling class, can potentially don the antiracist mantle.

An overview of antiracist thought and practice suggests that broadly speaking antiracism engages with racism in at least four ways: 1) By identifying the *levels* at which racism takes place. Antiracist literature examines everything from interpersonal and psychological forms of racism (Jensen 2005), to racism that is embedded at the macro-level of social structure (Omi and Winant 1986), to racism that emerges specifically from capitalist economic arrangements (Cox [1948] 1970); 2) By identifying the *targets* of racism. This involves examining the various logics that guide racial thought toward an adversary. For example, whether we are speaking about anti-black racism (Gordon 1995), or of a more general anti-immigrant racism (Bannerji 2000), or of the racialization of such identities as “white trash” (Newitz and Wray 1997), antiracism offers us rich insights into particular formulations of racism; 3) By identifying the *strategies* of racism. Antiracists have named at least two strategies of racism – colourblindness and colourconsciousness – and most antiracists devote themselves to conceptualizing racism according to one of these. In fact, the broad division within antiracism is not in terms of levels or targets of racism but in terms of conceptualizing the strategies of racism. On the one hand, antiracists have placed their wager on fighting racism as a colourconscious system of classification, as the use of racial categories, and as racial consciousness itself (Miles 1993; Malik 1996; Gilroy 2000; Taguieff 2001). On the other hand, antiracists denounce and contest racism as colourblindness, as systemic racism, and as the refusal to recognize particularity or difference (Omi and Winant 1986; Bannerji 2000; Calliste and Dei 2001; Bonilla-Silva 2006); 4) By formulating *resistance* to racism. Forms of resistance answer the need for a response to racism and cover a breadth of approaches. Based on the analysis of strategies, levels, and targets of racism, antiracists attempt to challenge racism variously by participating in national/anti-colonial movements; by participating in “new” social movements like No One Is Illegal and Anti-Racist Action; by acting as allies to people of colour; and by formulating various state-based demands through unions, NGOs, religious and pressure groups.

Anarchism vis-à-vis Antiracism/ Antiracism vis-à-vis Anarchism

There are a number of ways in which the more established, larger tradition of anarchism can contribute to and learn from the leaner, more transideological, war machine-like antiracism. As I already noted, despite the mutual neglect, anarchism and antiracism are not only compatible, but complimentary. We may very well consider that anarchism, in its opposition to all forms of oppression, would extend its horizons by including antiracism. Paying attention

to antiracism can help anarchism be more consistently anti-authoritarian. The task should come somewhat easily. As Joel Olson notes, “anarchist theory has the intellectual resources to develop a powerful theory of racial oppression and strategies to fight it” (2009, 35). By listening to antiracism, anarchists stand to gain knowledge of various practices of racial oppression. Whether it identifies the levels at which racism can be practiced, the targets and strategies of racism, or the forms of resistance to racism, antiracism generates important critiques of racism and the entrenched social hierarchies of race.

Similarly, antiracism can be said to already covertly contain anarchism in its challenge to racial hierarchy. Certain currents of antiracism have something of an anarchist streak, and antiracism would be more effective if it approached racism as a problem of Bakunin's principle of command. After all, an antiracism that struggles against racial stratification challenges norms, values, and knowledges that maintain the dominant social order. Just by defying the very logic and discourse of racism, does antiracism not also challenge social arrangements themselves? By debunking popular (mis)conceptions that inform social processes regarding race, antiracism already in part carries out the anarchist task of disassembling unequal social relations and uprooting asymmetrical relations of power. Furthermore, paying attention to anarchism could very well spur antiracism to revamp its tactics and to reorient its struggle. Prefiguration holds much promise for antiracist activists who are no longer interested in appealing to state or corporate power. Such a possibility was acknowledged by a Huston conference for anti-authoritarian people of colour that invited its participants to consider that “[a]narchism offers a dynamic ideology and methods of struggle against racism, poverty, police brutality, and other issues affecting people of color” (Ajani 2005). Additionally, anarchists have experience in developing security cultures, carrying out direct action, and conducting anti-gentrification and anti-poverty campaigns, all of which potentially overlaps with the work of antiracist activists.

Antiracism and anarchism stand to strengthen and expand each other if we allow them to crossover and if we nurture them in this effort. The success of such an endeavor depends, however, as much on our efforts to note the similarities and points of contact between them as it does on our response to the way that both traditions in crossing-over challenge each other.

Antiracist Ruminations on the Anarchist Path

A number of critical antiracist currents have not incorporated anarchism into their practice even as they wade through the authoritarian waters of racism. There are three possible ways that antiracism stands to benefit from considering what it lacks in terms of anarchist practice.

1. Antiracist reflection inspired by anarchism ought to consider that it undermines its own goal of eradicating or diminishing racism by appealing to the very structures that are fundamental to racial hierarchy. From an anarchist perspective, many antiracist actors unfortunately engage in what Day calls the “politics of demand” (2005) – that is, a politics that aims at a bigger piece of the proverbial pie by asking those who slice and serve it for concessions, rights, and privileges. To engage in a self-defeating antiracist politics of demand is to request from white settler-states in Canada, U.S., or Australia that they be less white and less settler-like. It is to ask and then to wait for colonial powers to enact anti-colonial measures, thereby legitimating and further reinforcing institutions that have a vested stake in racism. As Day observes, “every demand, in anticipating a response, *perpetuates* these structures” (2005, 89, emphasis in original). Anarchism is too cynical to go that route. To demand a non-racist response from a racist, colonial settler-state is for anarchists an impossible demand.

The alternative is to turn to direct action and prefiguration. Here antiracists stand to learn from anarchists who have already done so. The antiracist movement, and not the state, must prefigure the various forms of relations, subjectivity, and identity that can inhabit a post-racist world. The task, if Michel Foucault is correct, is “not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state’s institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries” (1983, 216). This would, in part, involve refusing the very racial categories that have been fabricated for us by state agencies in favor of an antiracism that uses categories that are illegible to the state, thus evading the state’s attempt at representation. An example of such a strategy can be found in the preference among anarch@indigenists for conceptualizing their identity as “Indigenous” and not, as Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel counsel, with recourse to state-based labels like “First Nation” or “aboriginal” (2005). Similarly, the ex-Black Panther-turned-anarchist Ashanti Alston urges a rearticulating of the identity of the black community away from singular, “monolithic”, “ethnic category”-based notions, preferring instead to see it “as an oppositional force... a community of communities with many different interests” (2003, 5). Such rearticulations refuse the techniques of representation through which the state legitimates itself. In so doing, they constitute a prefigurative step in the construction of non-statist, post-colonial identities and relations.

2. Antiracism can also afford to open up its critique of racism in order to appreciate that there is more than one form of racism and, equally, that there is more than one form of antiracism. Anarchism provides a clear lesson here as anarchists are generally much more comfortable with internal divisions than are antiracists. Consider, for example, the perspective known as *anarchism without*

adjectives, developed by Cuban anarchists in the 1880s, which maintains that various currents of anarchism (mutualism, communism, syndicalism, individualism, etc.) are legitimate in themselves and that neither should be privileged as the more fundamental or pure form of anarchism. The perspective makes sense given that the history of anarchism is not one of a grand unified opposition but rather of “an infinite series of disparate movements” (Aragorn! 2007, 17). To my knowledge, such healthy respect for factionalism is largely absent in antiracism. Bakunin's principle of command read micropolitically, however, implies that we need to take account of racist oppression wherever it may emerge in daily life, and that our opposition to it must be as varied as racism itself. An antiracism that has learned to see racism micropolitically (that is, as multiple, diffused, and decentered) is in a better position to struggle against racism without attempting to hegemonically confront it according to only one “correct” antiracist strategy. Racism must be seen as operating everywhere – from capitalist workplaces, patriarchal households, authoritarian educational systems, to compulsory heterosexual romance, mass culture entertainment, and even social movements – variously according to colourblind and colourconscious strategies. This is something of a difficult recognition for antiracism despite its rich work on recognizing various levels and victims of racism.

In other words, what antiracists have largely neglected to consider is that neither opposition to colourconsciousness nor opposition to colourblindness is *the* correct antiracist strategy. The use of either approach is rather context-dependent on the particular configuration of racism. This is something that anarchists who are involved in antiracist work have been beginning to figure out, as different anarchist groups attempt to confront various forms of racism without upholding their struggle as the central one. For example, systemic racism might very well be met by an antiracist response that speaks in the name of those excluded (i.e. color-consciousness), while in the face of white supremacy, or of apartheid, antiracist movements might very well echo the humanist distaste for the fetishism of racial difference (i.e. color-blindness). The task, it seems, is to identify racist strategies, levels, and targets, and to respond directly by dismantling and prefiguring alternatives to them.

3. To proceed in this way is to see racism as one hierarchy among many. It means seeing racism as shaped and as something that also shapes other relations of oppression. This implies refusing the longstanding orthodox Marxist claim that race and racism are simply epiphenomena that will disappear like bad symptoms once the capitalist virus that is causing them is eradicated. Oliver C. Cox exemplifies this reductionist line of thinking by theorizing “racial exploitation... [as] merely one aspect of the problem of the proletarianization of labor” ([1948] 1970, 333). It follows that for Cox, “racial antagonism is essentially political-class conflict” ([1948] 1970, 333). An antiracism inspired by anarchist

analysis would rather situate racism relationally – that is, as neither derived from a more fundamental source (like capitalism in the typical Marxist formulation) nor as more fundamental itself than other forms of oppression. Thus, along with refusing the reductionism of Cox, we must also refuse the privileging of race (however tempting) by sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant who openly advocate for “the treatment of race as a *central axis* of social relations” (1986, 61, emphasis in original). The point is that both Cox as well as Omi and Winant are in some sense potentially right. A relational and micropolitical reading of racial power allows that at certain points in time and in certain places racism might very well be structured by capitalism or that, in turn, it might itself structure class relations. The problem is, however, that both cannot be right at the same time and that fidelity to either framework is unwarranted. Rather, it is up to us to determine the nature of relations of oppression without posing a fundamental axis of oppression (race, class, etc.) as the *a priori* structure. “Our project,” as Roxana Ng observes, “is not to determine whether gender, race/ethnicity, class, or the economic system is the primary source of our oppression. The task is for us to discover how sexism and other forms of gender oppression (e.g., compulsory heterosexuality), racism, and class oppression are constituted in different historical conjunctures” (1993, 195). By making an absolute claim that race is essentially reducible to class conflict (a la Cox), or that class conflict rests on the central axis of race (a la Omi and Winant), we end up suffering from a lack of attention to context, supplanting context itself with the myth of a fundamental oppression. Relatedly, both antiracist theories exclude ahead of time the role that other axes of oppression might play here.

Anarchism suggests that racism must be seen as a discourse whose formations span various social institutions and practices and that operates according to various strategies. Racism is embedded in the state, capitalism, culture, modernity, as well as the psychological makeup of authoritarian personalities, but it is not *always* solely reducible to any one of them nor is it *necessarily* the central axis upon which these rest. Instead of reducing or privileging racism, we need, in light of micropolitics, to learn to talk about *racisms* and to recognize that the symbolic universes that they inhabit and engender can overlap in space and time. Only by doing so will we be able to more effectively prefigure any alternatives and overcome the bad habit of appealing to those responsible for racism to change.

Anarchist Ruminations on the Antiracist Path

Anarchist reflection inspired by antiracism arrives at an invitation to further self-criticism. There are three antiracist lessons for anarchism here.

1. To hear an antiracist voice in anarchism is to hear the onerous fact that anarchism has remained largely a white movement. Many antiracist activists are

struck by how “overwhelmingly white” (Ervin 1993, 8) the anarchist movement is in terms of its demographics. The activist Victoria Law probably speaks for many people of colour when she observes that anarchism in the U.S. establishes “almost all-white spaces” (2010) while Ervin describes it primarily as “a White youth counter-cultural scene” ([ca. 1990], 1). If it can serve momentarily as an illustration despite the fact that it was not explicitly “anarchist,” the Occupy movement, according to findings of the Occupy Research and DataCenter, was 81% white (Schewidler, Mazón, Waheed, and Costanza-Chock 2012, 70). The imbalance is glaringly obvious: The 2010 U.S. Census reports that 72% of the population identified itself as white (Hixon, Hepler, and Kim 2011, 3). A proportionate representation would reflect the U.S. Census number and should be expected especially in a movement that dared to openly identify itself as “the 99%.” In fact it would not be unreasonable to expect that at Occupy whites would have made up less than the Census figure of 72% given how much more disproportionately poor people of colour are and how much more likely they are to experience oppression. Yet instead, Occupy overrepresented white people and underrepresented people of color. How much worse must the picture be for anarchist movements that do not reach the size or “mainstream” popularity of Occupy?

The overrepresentation of whiteness is peculiar given that anarchism should, as many have noted, appeal to marginalized communities. Against the great horizon of ideologies, anarchism is itself a minority movement proclaiming minoritarian values. People of colour who have joined anarchist groups and movements offer valuable insights as to why, despite its potential, anarchism continues to alienate them. Law recalls the barriers that keep people of colour, like herself, out:

I remembered past conversations with radical women of color – women who shared anti-authoritarian ideas and beliefs but who didn’t want to be identified with a movement that they saw as white brick throwers. I thought about the woman of color who had attended a few different anarchist meetings and been turned off by white male anarchists’ dismissal of race issues. I thought about the woman of color who had posted that article, “Where was the color in Seattle?” Her concerns had been dismissed as unimportant; what really mattered were class differences. I thought about the radical women of color who had the perception that anarchists were either unwashed, smelly white punk kids or white academics. Both had the option of renouncing radical politics and rejoining the mainstream world. This was what the word anarchist conjured up for them. (2010)

As Law's account indicates, unacknowledged, normalized white privilege functions as a structural barrier that prevents people of color from joining or seeing anarchism as their own movement.

The history of anarchism further compounds the problem of the dominant status of whiteness within the anarchist movement. It informs even this editor's approach. When I first thought about this special issue, I admit that I initially considered how one might very well proceed with a call for papers that would solicit manuscripts that mapped the common terrain between anarchism and antiracism. I was specifically excited by the prospects of fleshing out what the early European anarchists had to say about race and racism. It is certainly possible to argue that in their work one finds the germs of, if not at least an early sensibility inclined toward, antiracism. The Spanish Civil War, waged by anarchist workers, was after all substantially an antifascist revolution. This way of proceeding, while certainly valuable for anarchist studies, misses the point, however. It reproduces a blind spot that prevents anarchists from seeing "their" movement as anything other than a European one. This way of presenting anarchism is in fact endemic to the literature on anarchism. As Olson aptly observes, "American anarchists know more about the Paris Commune, the Kronstadt rebellion, the Mexican Revolution, the Spanish Civil War, Paris 1968... than they do about the abolitionist movement, Reconstruction, the Sharecroppers Union, the civil rights movement, or the Black/Brown/ Red power movements" (2009, 42). The constellation of anarchist thought revolves for many anarchists around European-based movements, figures, places, and events. Eurocentric frameworks imply that most anarchist texts refer to Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Goldman, and not Nat Turner, Angela Davis, Andrea Smith, or Bhagat Singh. In doing so, they construct a European orientation to anarchism as if it was the major or only orientation to anarchism. All of this comes at a cost that is measured by the detectible presence of racism within the movement as well as a compromised ability to confront racism outside of the movement. It, furthermore, potentially alienates non-white, non-European anarchists. As Alston points out, in anarchist literature there is "an overwhelming emphasis on those who became the anarchist founding fathers – Bakunin, Kropotkin, and some others – but these European figures, who were addressing European struggles, didn't really speak to me" (2003, 4). There is, however, some hope. Olson's observation betrays the possibility of realigning the anarchist milieu and refiguring it according to parameters that lie outside of Europe and the West. This possibility must be pursued if as anarchists we are to decentre whiteness.

2. The overwhelming white demographics and Eurocentric history of anarchism indicate that anarchists are not adequately in solidarity with racialized communities. White anarchists have not yet done all they can to offer support and ally themselves with people of color. Part of the problem can also be attributed to the fact that some anarchists, as Law's reflection indicates,

privilege class hierarchy over an interlocking analysis of class, race, and other forms of oppression. To privilege class hierarchy as the fundamental source of oppression is to ignore the myriad points at which class can only be understood through its relationship with race. For it to bring race into the picture anarchism must thus be willing, as Olson indicates, to “modify its critique of hierarchy” (2009, 42). Another part of the problem of inadequate solidarity can be attributed to the fact that some anarchists have also failed to develop a micropolitical analysis of how their own white privilege functions within the anarchist movement. As Law points out, white anarchists have the capacity to shed the black mask and rejoin the mainstream world. It is possible for them to not face the very barriers that people of color face daily. Furthermore, without a micropolitical analysis, white anarchists can operate under the belief that their movement is inherently progressive and that it functions as a genuine space of resistance simply because it confronts the state and other oppressive institutions. That is, by fighting the state and sometimes its racism, many white activists think that they play no part in the same set of relations they oppose. As the activist freelark points out, “white activists have the impression that they have arrived” (2010). Micropolitics, of course, rules this easy exist-strategy from racism out by asking us to rethink the way that small scale practices link with larger trends and by considering the way that our own racialized identities are positioned in sets of relations that in many settler-states privilege whiteness.

There are at least two ways that an antiracism coupled with anarchism can help us develop better practices of solidarity. First, it can help white anarchists assume the role of the ally and not to the role of the vanguardist who leads people of colour toward their own liberation. When the goal is prefiguration and not the overthrowing of the state, white antiracists must learn to take a back seat and to “let” people of colour develop their own alternatives. A politics of prefiguration teaches white anarchists that there is no one here to be led as we cannot know the goal in advance but must learn to see it in the act of implementation. Such an experimental understanding of prefiguration implies that we ought to enthusiastically support recent attempts by people of colour to self-organize as anarchists and to create their own anarchist movement(s). It implies active solidarity with such groups, networks, publications and communities-in-resistance as Anarchist People of Color, The Ovarian Psycos Cycle Brigade, Anarchist Panther, and Occupy the Hood. To overcome what Lester Spence and Mike McGuire call “white left colorblindness” (2012, 56) – which I read to be an inflexible commitment to colourblind antiracism – white anarchists must learn to appreciate that these movements work best when they are respected as people of colour only movements and spaces. As such, these movements constitute a legitimate branch of colourconscious antiracism within anarchism.⁵

Second, to be an ally is also to realize that in white supremacist societies, white people are racist. In other words, white allies must recognize that for them no permanent absolution from racism can exist. It is not that racism is somehow essential to whiteness or that white bodies emanate racism; rather, it is that it is impossible for white people – even antiracist white people – residing in white settler-states to stop benefiting from racist relations that privilege whiteness and that work to the detriment of non-whites. Such privileges are automatic, and they extend to the anarchist movement itself. As Ervin knows very well, “[n]ot all the racists wear sheets” (1993, 12). White anarchists need to know that they routinely benefit from racism even without subscribing to it and that they cannot simply give up their privileges. The understanding that whiteness lands white people in the camp of the oppressor does not, however, preclude whites from engaging in antiracism. White activists, as many activists of color point out, can use white privilege in antiracist ways. Rather than bemoaning their whiteness and reveling in white guilt, which itself is another manifestation of privilege, white anarchists must further develop micropolitical analyses of racism in order to consider how they may lend support to antiracist people of colour and how they may challenge racism on their own. These two points – not steering non-white anti-authoritarian movements and not assuming that you are in the clear simply by virtue of aligning yourself with progressive people of color struggles – is the starting point for any meaningful antiracist anarchist solidarity.

3. Anarchism must also be willing to confront the fact that at its worst it reflects and reproduces practices of racist division. In other words, uncritical and un-reflexive anarchism perpetuates racial hierarchy, and the anarchist movement must today be seen as a racist node in relations of power. This of course comes as no surprise. Those of us who entertain micropolitics readily conclude with the Anarchist People of Color that “[w]hite supremacy plays a role in everything. The anarchist scene reproduces the same oppressive social relationships we face throughout society” (People of Color Organize! 2011).

A lesson that illustrates this point can be drawn from an event that took place in July 2009, in Pittsburgh, USA, involving the well known anarchist collective CrimethInc. The collective, made up of mostly white activists, typically hold their annual convergences in wooded areas. That year, however, the collective decided to hold the convergence in a poor, urban neighborhood. From CrimethInc.’s own perspective, the event was “an awesome, performative disruption—a reclamation of space, an expression of anger, an opening up of dialogue” (P 2009). The event, however, turned acrimonious during a radical cabaret performance when another anarchist collective, the Anarchist People of Color, moved in to evict CrimethInc. Anarchist People of Color interrupted the “reclamation of space” by, in turn, reclaiming CrimethInc.’s space. The actions of Anarchist People of Color consisted of reading “An Open Letter to White Radicals/Progressives” that explained the reasons for the eviction; gathering

and packing the attendees' belongings; and shouting for them to get out. Anarchist People of Color carried out these actions on the grounds that CrimethInc. constitutes a "gentrifying force" and that "this particular [convergence] took place in a poor, black neighborhood that is being pushed to the borders by entering white progressive forces" (People of Color Organize! 2011). Such lessons are significant. However, as accounts from participants illustrate, many white anarchists felt personally attacked and trivialized the situation in a manner characteristic of white left colourblindness by variously proclaiming that "race doesn't matter" and that "we're all from Africa" (People of Color Organize! 2011). CrimethInc. failed to realize that this disruption of anarchism-as-usual was really a free lesson for them in white privilege and that the Anarchist People of Color had done them a favor. Had they not been in need of this lesson, it is safe to say that they would have, as Anarchist People of Color observe, "obtain[ed] the consent of any of the relevant communities before arranging for a convergence" (People of Color Organize! 2011). They would have, in other words, taken the necessary steps as allies by communicating their intentions, requesting permission, and building consensus with members of the community.

I have here pointed out how the anarchist movement is demographically segregated and how it presents its history as primarily a European one. Its lack of attention to micropolitics does not allow it to see that it too can be a site for racist practices of division. Furthermore, the anarchist movement's inadequate commitments to solidarity do not support anarchist people of color in prefiguring their own spaces beyond the anarchist pale. Much of this can be attributed to the fact that a certain counter-hegemonic, anti-state anarchism is still at work today, thwarting and obscuring the currents that I have outlined in terms of prefiguration and micropolitics. The anarchism that assumes that power can be eliminated once and for all, that something like a complete flowering of freedom is possible, that holds on to the belief "that overthrowing the capitalist system will... automatically address the institutional and internalized struggle, or oppression" (RACE 2004), is the same kind of anarchism that fails to acknowledge the internal hierarchies and power relations that underlie not only social relations but also anarchism itself.

Lessons from the Contributors: Prefigurations at the Crossroads

I enthusiastically welcome the contributions in this special edition and trust that the small collection makes a pertinent advance in terms of crossing antiracism with anarchism. In various ways, the authors here speak to the important and newly emerging theme of prefiguration not only in the sense of acknowledging and utilizing it as a concept but in the sense that their work can be regarded as prefiguration in the literary sense – that is, as cultural and intellectual work that establishes antiracist anarchist theory and practice.

In “Black Flag White Masks,” Süreyya Evren takes up the antiracist challenge to the anarchist canon. Evren makes a strong case for realigning the anarchist tradition outside of its comfortable Eurocentric frame. And he does so immanently. He critiques contemporary anarchism in light of its own history and logic. Evren shows us how anarchism has always prefigured itself as an international and global movement of flows, exchanges, and contacts. According to him, encounters between anti-authoritarian exiles, travelers, revolutionaries, and immigrants in many varied locations shaped late 19th and early 20th century anarchism in such a way that it is impossible for us today to speak of a “single beginning, [a] point of origin for anarchism.” Anarchism, Evren argues, has to be approached as a cross-continental network and as a movement that truly traverses national borders. Given this, he encourages us to jettison anarchism’s Eurocentric frame that presents it as fundamentally a European export in favor of an anarchist historiography that learns to see anarchism as “a combination of ideas and practices constantly reshaped in various locations according to local problems, local priorities, and local conditions.” A crucial point of Evren’s argument is that the reorienting of the anarchist canon away from its Eurocentric frame cannot be accomplished by simply adding into the mix a few non-European figures, movements, and ideas. To do so would be to still preserve and even legitimate anarchism’s privileged European core. Rather, what is necessary is for us to undertake the task of “changing the form of the canon and representation in general, changing its pyramidal form and axial structure into a horizontal, network-like, rhizomatic narrative.” This does not mean saying forever goodbye to European figures like Kropotkin or Landauer; rather, it means that Kropotkin and Landauer must themselves be read as nodes in a rich anarchist multiplicity. Our challenge is to learn to see them not as founders but as key figures alongside, and in relationship with, other (currently) lesser-known voices.

In “Anti-Fascism and the Ethics of Prefiguration,” Benjamin Franks examines the ethical commitments of antifascist actors in the United Kingdom. He shows us that while antifascism is a reactionary ideology (in the sense that it attempts to prevent and, therefore, react to fascism) it is also one that is deeply varied – encompassing everything from the politics of authoritarian communists, like Leon Trotsky, to social democratic, autonomist, and anarchist approaches. In order to tease out the anti-authoritarian currents in antifascism, Franks focuses on prefiguration as “both a core principle of tactical choice and organisation that unites autonomism and anarchism.” For Franks prefiguration is the ethical orientation that clearly “demarcates [anti-state radicals] from Leninism and social democracy.” It does so, as he shows, by specifically rejecting universal goals, vanguardist politics, consequentialism, and totalizing claims to knowledge. Equally important, Franks shows us that in their practice of prefiguration, anti-authoritarian movements are themselves not truly reactive: they are

constructing alternatives to the fascist life. To stress this, Franks develops a useful distinction between “external” and “internal” prefiguration. He argues that both are at play as antifascist social movements do not only attempt to externally eradicate fascism but also turn inwardly in order “to further develop radical social practices that were based on different, inclusive and anti-hierarchical values. These activities included union-building and developing community events like free festivals, film and cultural nights with egalitarian socio-economic and multi-ethnic emphases.”

Lastly, “In Defense of Counterposed Strategic Orientations” illustrates various strategies at work in anarchist groups today. I show how both colourconscious and colourblind approaches are already part of anti-authoritarian movements in North America and Europe. Examining the colourblindness of such anti-fascist groups as Anti-Racist Action and the colourconsciousness of Anarchist People of Color, I illustrate how both constitute vital prefigurations of antiracism in the anarchist scene. Anarchist People of Color do so in terms of offering micropolitical analyses of racism within anarchism. What the group teaches us is the importance of being aware of how racial categories, even as social constructs, continue to operate in favor of white supremacy within and outside of the movement. On the other hand, groups that orient themselves in terms of anti-fascism contribute to anarchist antiracism by providing crucial resources in the struggle against fascism. They show us that certain forms of racism can only be overcome by downplaying racial difference. By focusing on both tendencies, I argue that anarchism is not suffering from an impasse due to any contradictory strategies but is home to a species of what I call strategically flexible antiracism. Such an orientation to antiracist strategy provides the antidote to Omi and Winant’s Gramscian-inspired theory of racial formation. What contemporary antiracist anarchist movements show us is that it is possible to confront different manifestations of racism without a unified theory or front. In fact, the confrontation with racism proceeds better without large-scale unity or any other “solutions” prescribed by hegemonically inclined theories.

Endnotes

¹ **Jakub Burkowicz** is a PhD Candidate in Sociology at Simon Fraser University. He is currently completing his dissertation entitled: “Peripheral Europeans: The History of the (De)Racialization of Slavs in Canada.” Burkowicz’s research and teaching interests include sociological theory; sociology of knowledge; sociology of race focusing on racialization and the history of Slavic immigration in Canada; and social movements with emphases on anarchist and antiracist approaches.

² Day distinguishes practices of division from practices of capture (e.g. the state) and practices of exploitation (e.g. capitalism) (2005). His point, which I wish to echo here, is that only the last two receive extensive attention in anarchist literature.

³ Aragorn! is a nom de plume.

⁴ The collection of antiracist literature is fairly slim – in fact much slimmer than anarchist literature in most academic libraries. Writing on its history in the U.S. context, Herbert Aptheker noted in 1992 that “there is no single book devoted to the subject” (xiii). Historians who have made any contributions to antiracism have rather done so “incidentally, as it were, in works that concentrated upon other subjects” (Aptheker 1992, 1). Bonnett (2000) similarly observes that although antiracism is “a global phenomenon” (2), it has not been approached “with the historical and sociological seriousness it deserves” (1). Some of this silencing and omitting of antiracism has to be attributed to the left, which has not adequately reflected on its own complicity in racism or its lack of attention to antiracism. As Paul Gilroy notes, “[t]he formation of a mass anti-racist movement in this country [England] has passed largely unacknowledged by left writers” (1987, 134).

⁵ This recognition leaves colourblindness open as an antiracist strategy. Movements like *Anti-Racist Action*, *Antifa*, and *Arm the Spirit* are made up of what they call “multiracial crews” (Staudenmaier 2009). In such collectives collaboration between white and non-white activists is commonplace and differences are often downplayed. Such collectives are guided by the belief that we are all equal members of a single human race, and this seems to be an important intellectual resource for them as they confront fascist, neo-Nazi, and white supremacist forms of racism.

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