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The Voice of an Especificismo Militant

A Response to Daniel Rashid's "Popular Power or
Class Power"

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Ideas move, especially influential ones. Translation is part of this movement, as is education. Of course, some ideas end up "lost in translation". But there's also something gained from this movement. Militancy is about inserting, defending, and refining certain ideas to ensure their coherence over time. As an especificismo militant, I'm often tasked with moving a specific set of ideas into anarchist, socialist, and activist spaces. This has meant translating between English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Catalan. But this isn't simply translation work; it's militancy.

Militancy is about assuming the responsibility to progress a project into new terrains, but in the recent article "Popular Power or Class Power?"¹, the author, Daniel Rashid, never mentions militancy. This is indicative of a larger problem in the

¹ <https://www.redblacknotes.com/2025/02/13/popular-power-or-class-power/>

English-language conception of revolutionary politics. Without an understanding of militancy as a fundamental force moving revolutionary ideas around the world, politics seems like it's just about selecting the best ingredients for the perfect political concoction. This reduces political education to an eclectic, and often personal, conglomeration of references to either be rejected or added to the soup. But who's articulating the consistent line, the line that goes through study groups, debates, and writings and still comes out the other side? Without militants maintaining these lines over time, there would be no revolutionary corpus to pick and choose from.

When it comes to inserting the ideas of *especificismo* into the Anglosphere, there's more to it than just putting words from another time or place into 21st century lingo. For example, in the "Anarchist Digest"², the Center for *Especificismo* Studies (CES) gathered notes from seminars with hundreds of participants over multiple years in an annual event called Militant Kindergarten. These documents speak with a collective voice made up of 3 elements: the participants in Militant Kindergarten, the militants of CES, and the international current of *especificismo*. This means these texts, like everything produced by the organization I'm a part of, are products of our effort to move ideas from an international level, down to an actual group of people in dialogue, and back out again to an expanding international level. These ideas are coming from a variety of sources, both current and historical, and the participants are also coming from different places, geographically and ideologically.

I say all of this to point out the organic production of theory involved in the movement of *especificismo* around the world, but also to make clear that, like Rashid, I'm writing this using my own voice. As a tool, my voice is different from my organization's voice, but both have in common the undeniable in-

² <https://especificismostudies.org/the-anarchist-digest/>

fluence of *especificismo*. For me, this is not about identification; it's about militant formation and political education. Moving *especificismo* ideas from one language to another, from one continent to another, has shaped me in such a way that I'm not choosing *especificismo* and leaving behind platformism or anarchist communism or even Marxism. Rather, it's from *especificismo* that I have received a political education which allows me to understand and learn from other currents, whether anarchist, Marxist, or something else.

Critiques of *especificismo* sometimes assume a kind of exoticism related to Latin America, but the boundaries between the different "Americas" aren't as neatly delineated in practice as they are on maps. In the US, social life happens in Spanish or English depending on your locale, your job, your school, your family, etc., something which is evidenced by Black Rose/Rosa Negra's bilingual name. In this context, *especificismo* has become a natural conduit for the arrival of a certain style of revolutionary militancy to North America because Latin America and the Spanish language aren't exactly foreign. For people like me, it's through *especificismo* studies that we come to communism as committed militants, not the other way around.

Moving now to the content of the article, it seems to me that critiquing political currents based on the idea that "mass organisations do not have [to have] a specific class basis" can become an excuse for not engaging with working-class movements as they form. *Especificismo*'s strategy is explicitly to defend a class bias in mass organizations, but to do it as rank-and-file participants, not from positions of leadership. Some organizations have referred to this as "dual militancy"³. Social insertion like

³ "We are committed to a strategy of dual militancy, implying active political participation on two levels, so from a specifically anarchist platform we organize ourselves to intervene in mass movements." (See: "Texto Fundacional" by Liza, self-described as "a revolutionary organization of anarchist socialists" [translated from Spanish]) <https://lizaplataformaanarquista.wordpress.com/2023/05/22/liza-texto-fundacional/>

this is obviously necessary since, today, not even all unions have a working-class bias much less a combative character or a revolutionary program. It's not the "kind" of organization that determines its position in class struggle or the content of its politics. The same goes for the phrase "actor in struggle" which is meant to refer to people involved in an unfolding conflict. These actors have the potential to organize and order themselves into any number of different configurations. So, like social movements and mass organizations, on their own, there's nothing about "actors" that makes them revolutionary or working class.

I generally disagree with the use of the term "class reductionism". Though I've definitely used this term before, I've come to see it as an insult thrown at people from any number of different sources without a lot of meaning to it. Nevertheless, I agree with BRRN that class is not the only "locus of domination". Specifically, it's the locus of exploitation, what is referred to as the economic sphere or what some Marxists call the base or infrastructure. By rejecting the theoretical separation of the economic, political, and ideological spheres of society, Rashid reduces the State to a simple arm of capitalism and limits class power to the economic realm. But BRRN is right to point out the double game of the State, even if its not always "a reflection of class struggle".

Domination clearly extends beyond class. Rashid seems to agree on this point but misunderstands BRRN's political practice in so far as it's focused on different forms of domination. The especificismo argument against domination and oppression is that these factors cannot be overlooked by a revolutionary project, the same as factors of exploitation. They all have to be considered because they're conjunctural conditions of political practice. So, if we all agree about engaging in struggles beyond the workplace, the difference really is in "how we should do it". Considering this, it's not only dogmatic to talk about "the secret of abolishing white supremacy", but also un-strategic to

But you don't just "organize" violence, the way it's always proposed to "organize the working class". There's no reason to assume that an armed syndicalist movement or army of workers would be strategically prepared for or personally committed to a prolonged fight against the national forces of a modern military. What could be thought of as "popularly acceptable violence" is the result of political practice. It's the result of a popular movement's expression of revolutionary politics in every sector of society, every single day. It's the result of political militancy.

Politics is a fundamental element of power, whether dominating and exploitative or self-managed and federalist. Dual power, class power, Popular Power, with capitals or without, hyphenated or not, they're all built by the political practice of committed participants, aka militants. Following from the Carl von Clausewitz idea that war is politics by other means, Abraham Guillén makes clear that revolutionary war requires popular support⁷. This is the preoccupation of especificismo militants and their political and educational organizations.

⁷ "[...] because a favorable population hides, protects, and covers for the liberating army's fighters" (See: p. 205–206 of "Teoría de la violencia" by Abraham Guillén [translated from Spanish]) <https://www.marxists.org/espanol/guillen/teoria-de-la-violencia.pdf>

communists prefer to militate around a different term, that's a decision to be made collectively by their organizations. I will only caution them not to forget that whatever modifier goes before power, to be revolutionary, it will have to be popular, not only in a technical sense but in a vulgar way too.

What would it even mean to consider the dominated classes without the working class? Obviously, that wouldn't leave enough of the workforce to be the basis for socialist politics, much less a revolutionary project of Popular Power. So, it should be clear to comrades that when *especificismo* organizations refer to the dominated classes that they're never excluding the working class. To the extent that it means more than just the wage-earning, able-bodied, legally eligible workforce, it's wrong to assume this is only a consequence of *especificismo*'s definition of class or anarchism's ethical lines. Including the oppressed and dominated is also a priority of a working class looking out for itself and fighting to win. Workers also have ethical values and dynamic definitions of class. Were the actors in revolutionary Spain "CNT-led workers" or were they workers rebelling on their own terms? How could you ever conclusively say that a certain reform was in favor of workers, and not tenants or "the lower class"? Social conditions like rent aren't just reducible to wages. Surely, everyone can agree that it wouldn't be enough to just lower rents to levels that workers could afford.

The entire system must be abolished, not least of all because housing is a human right. Finally, BRRN doesn't address violence per se, and definitely not at a tactical level. But it would be wrong to assume that *especificismo* is disconnected from military strategy, especially when compared to other anarchist currents. In fact, armed struggle is an overlapping factor in the historical development of both platformism and *especificismo*. While they may differ on the specifics, they agree on the necessity of a violent rupture with the forces of capital brought about by armed struggle.

claim this hidden treasure can only be discovered by looking to "class origin, or class basis". I don't think this is the how we should settle on.

I agree that anarchism shouldn't be "a simple moral ideology". In fact, a lot of my engagement with anarchists is making exactly this argument against the moralization of political practice. But this is a strategic argument, not an ideological one. I don't think anarchists should question their most basic moral values and ethical practices. This brings me to another important aspect of *especificismo*: the differentiation between ideology, theory, and political practice. This means *especificismo* brings together the doctrine of anarchism (ideology) with an always expanding scientific understanding of the world (theory) and collective activities based on strategy (political practice). The practices of an organization aren't the same as its ideal objectives or the tools and techniques used by its members. So, in *especificismo*, the political organization combines these elements to produce strategy, meaning an analysis, a projection, and a plan.

The BRRN program "Turning the Tide" does overemphasize "balance" when defining power⁴. The concept of "contested sites of power" portrays power as a zero-sum game, rather than a project of increasing the capacity of social movements outside of the State. This ends up blurring Popular Power with dual power and relies a lot on the "asymmetric" aspect of relations of power between any and all possible groups. I don't think it's wrong to say this has effects on their understanding

⁴ "Many anarchists, past and present, see power as synonymous with the state, as equivalent to exploitation and domination, as something that needs to be destroyed. Instead, we understand power as a relationship, shaped by the ongoing struggle between social forces in society, particularly between the dominant and dominated classes. The balance of power between these conflicting classes varies by time and place depending on which side has the capacity to achieve its goals despite resistance from opposing forces." (See: p. 5 of "Turning the Tide" by BRRN) <https://www.blackrosefed.org/about/program/2-structural-analysis/>

of strategy and of class. But a lot of this has already been written about by BRRN militants themselves⁵, implying these positions are argued for from within BRRN, even if they don't yet represent the unified theoretical line of the whole organization. The same is true for CES, where we continue to have discussions about a lot of the same critiques brought up in Rashid's article. The externally recognizable theoretical unity of an organization doesn't represent the full scope of militant formation and theoretical development happening behind the scenes, in militant seminars, in debates, and in one-on-ones. In *especificismo*, the political organization is a station in the struggle to learn about new ideas and form opinions about them. It's the backstage to the drama that is the class struggle, a rearguard support for front line confrontations.

Theoretical unity, like political analysis, should always be produced in context, from a certain perspective. This is both a methodological and ethical imperative that is avoided by overly broad statements about "society today" as if contextual specificity and politics have nothing to do with class struggle. When Black Rose/Rosa Negra (BRRN) refers to mass organizations as "big and broad", "oppositional", and "identifiable with one or another dominated group", they're presenting a working definition that's been articulated collectively using their organization's voice. The Ideological and theoretical lines of an organization might not reflect anyone's personal opinions since they're conceived and realized as a group. This ensures a high degree of unity which in *especificismo* is the basis for not only a political program but for the organizational platform itself. Still, over time, even that unity must be refined

⁵ "Tipping the Scales: Popular Power in an Age of Protest and Pandemic," by Enrique GuerreroLópez and Cameron Pádraig <https://www.blackrosefed.org/tipping-the-scales-popular-power-in-an-age-of-protest-andpandemic/> "Clarifying *Especificismo*: A Response to DSA-LSC's 'Letter to the Libertarian Left'" by BRRN <https://www.blackrosefed.org/clarifying-especificismo-lsc-response/>

If the conjunctural analysis of an organization has led them to the conclusion that the class struggle isn't split into fronts or types or modes or whatever they want to call them, then it wouldn't make sense to insert their militancy into multiple struggles. But if this is a conjunctural reality recognized by collective analysis, it would be dogmatic to continue to act based only on a structural analysis of class. It would be the same as only having a general strategy and no specific strategy. For me, this is exactly what turns political practice into an effort to convert people to the cause because it needs to convince them to ignore the reality right in front of their faces, in favor of some grand ideas that are supposedly more important. More important than keeping your job? More important than keeping your housing? More important than not getting deported?!

As I've already said, there are multiple points of view from which the working class can see what's happening around them, and things look pretty different from these different perspectives. This isn't standpoint epistemology or some other academically derived post-class theory; it's politics. To be relevant and influential politics have to be formed, propagated, and defended. This is true of bourgeois politics, fascist politics, and working-class politics. Just "knowing there is something behind it" is a way of ignoring the political work necessary to develop a program that could actually support a revolutionary movement, and not just a theoretical one.

Admittedly, the Front of Oppressed Classes isn't a concept that's been discussed much at CES. While I agree that theoretically it "represents the bringing together of a number of different social causes", I don't think it's correct to say this fits within "one broad movement". The unification of disparate struggles into a single movement will be the result of federalism, not of watering down working-class politics. The path to Popular Power can't be overly broad or it won't bring an end to class domination. Only a working-class understanding of this power can be the basis for a communist society. So, if some anarchist-

However, there's definitely still a debate to be had about whether LATU is really representative of a larger tenants' movement or just an example of an effective working-class organization in a contemporary American city. In Washington state, for example, tenants have legal rights that go beyond the municipal level and are unique in the US, but since they aren't the result of mass organizing and fighting for reforms, there's no tenant movement interested in continuing to gain strength and bring in more people. On top of that, because tenants have certain guaranteed rights regardless of how individualistic their politics might be, there isn't even an obvious role for tenants' unions to play. This means there aren't any organizations ready to defend these rights if (or when) they're challenged. All of this points back to how contextual and situated revolutionary politics have to be because there are no structural truths that will solve conjunctural problems once and for all.

Popular Power is an objective of *especificismo*'s general strategy, not a way of understanding what politics are in general. It's part of a process of forming the Popular Organization of society, something which is similar to what I think Rashid means by "the organised working class". If "working-class power" is the name for a kind of politics, in *especificismo* discourse, I think we would just say working-class politics. However, in *especificismo*, specific strategy is based on conjunctural analysis because class society has forced the class struggle to take multiple forms depending on any number of different factors, from race and legal work-status to the cost of living and the effects of climate change. The specific strategy of *especificismo* organizations isn't to divide into fronts or to develop different fronts independently of each other. It's about overcoming the fact that the working-class today is fractured and dispersed throughout society, making the class struggle a difficult thing to recognize everywhere and forcing people to wrestle with what are sometimes contradictory priorities.

and added to. So, while there may be ideological, theoretical, and strategic critiques to make of BRRN's understanding of mass organizations, their political program shouldn't be read as the final word on *especificismo*. I'm sure they would agree. The same should be said for other programs you can read from other orgs. *Especially* is an international current, not a political organization or instance of political practice. By articulating an organizational understanding of their own political practice, BRRN is adding to the international current. I see it as an example of their militancy that they want to share documents like this publicly and not just internally. It's related to what's called a "model of performance", a term from the FARJ and from Militant Kindergarten that refers to showing by doing, convincing through action, demonstrating commitment and responsibility.

The article says that "what is most vital is not that things are interacting in general – that is meaningless – but that they're interacting as features of a rebellion of the working class, and that their struggles only make sense in this light". For Rashid, this "light" is a structurally grounded class analysis. I agree and would go so far as to say that the structural primacy of class isn't something that should be questioned within any socialist project. However, I also understand "in this light" to be referring to the conjunctural aspects of a rebellion of the working class. So, following from McCarthy and Desan⁶, I would say that *especificismo* is a form of class analysis that maintains the structural primacy of class while not assuming its political primacy. This is related to conjunctural analysis and *especificismo*'s emphasis on prefigurative politics over prefigurative forms and predetermined actors.

The context of a rebellion is more than the context of class struggle generally, since again that would be "meaning-

⁶ "The Problem of Class Abstractionism" by Michael A. McCarthy and Mathieu Hikaru Desan https://epublications.marquette.edu/socs_fac/356/

less”. Just consider the specific antagonists present during a work-place action, these aren’t “capitalists” in an abstract sense; they’re real people making real decisions. Overlooking the necessity of conjunctural factors means conceiving of strategy as something that makes sense universally rather than something that fits within a certain paradigm, or stratagem. This confuses strategy with ideology which isn’t characterized and shaped by immediate conditions. It pretends that strategy is just about our own plan, not about our enemies plans.

Social-level actors are often driven by need, but because they’re limited by will and organizational capacity, the objectives should be short-term gains won through combative shows of strength. But political-level actors are militants. Their organizational forms are based on unity, and like I already said, the content of that unity depends on the specific organization. To build Popular Power, militants coming from different tendencies must combine and coordinate their efforts with sociallevel protagonists who have more immediate priorities as well as activists who might not be committed at all to long-term struggle.

Especifismo places an emphasis on both the political as well as the conjunctural aspect of class struggle because “the workers’ movement”, just like “the tenants’ movement” or “the students’ movement”, isn’t a pervasively present, uniformly constituted feature of people’s lives. Plus, working-class people aren’t stereotypes void of any context or background. They’re bringing their own baggage with them... This is why it doesn’t make sense to say a tenants’ union is definitively “not organized with tenants as the actor” when sometimes, in some places, it’s precisely in the tenants’ movement that people are able to see a place for all their shit.

Take for example the Los Angeles Tenants Union (LATU) which combines federalism and selfmanagement into a genuinely combative organization. And these are definitely people “mobilized as tenants”. In fact, it’s by organizing as tenants to

specifically address problems facing tenants that they’re able to effectively mobilize around issues like rising rents, immigration policy, climate change, international solidarity, and disaster response, just to name a few.

This means that workers from multiple sectors, with multiple identities, speaking multiple languages, are all able to see themselves in the fight against landlords. This is why I suggest that instead of saying “in isolation” to describe these varied cultural and situational factors, it’s better to refer to “multiple points of view”. In a mass organization, this is a feature not a bug. LATU is an organization where workers join up with other dominated classes engaged on a tenant front. The same framing could be applied to the Barcelona rent strike and student organizing mentioned in Rashid’s article. Working-class students and tenants need to be able to see their actions as part of a larger social movement. It’s from within that context where politics can develop around issues like the exploitative class character of student life and the struggle for housing.

A mass organization like LATU is able to bring together the social force of lots of different kinds of workers, including undocumented immigrants and, not only the paid but also the unpaid, “carer workforce”. It reaches parts of the working class that don’t have direct contact with bosses, coworkers, or traditional workplaces. There are houseless and unemployed members, and even the potential to bring incarcerated people into the org. It’s way more than just a “tenant union in a block of flats”. In the fight for housing, the working class of Los Angeles has articulated its own collective tradition of struggle. This history shouldn’t be criticized or looked down upon. Steadfastness like this deserves respect and support. LATU is an asset of the working class, outside of bourgeois institutions. I would go so far as to say that if your revolutionary politics don’t have a place in an organization like LATU, it’s because they’re not mass politics.