Create Two, Three, Many Parties of Autonomy!

Counterpower Communist Organization

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Preface

Our time is one of significant political crisis. The façade of the neoliberal consensus manufactured by the imperialist ruling class has shattered and through the cracks has poured a renewed interest in left politics, both reformist and revolutionary. This renewed interest has helped to reinvigorate the revolutionary left, with a groundswell of independent socialist and communist groups forming across the (so-called) United States. With the rise of this new generation of revolutionary groups comes the return of old questions regarding communist political organization. In particular, the question of the party has again come to the fore. As revolutionaries in the 21st century we return to the subject of the party to ask some fundamental questions: What is the party and why is it necessary? Who belongs to it and who is excluded? What is its role in the revolutionary movement? Should we relate to the party differently today than past movements did? The following essay is derived in part from a forthcoming book written by members of the Organization for a Free Society (OFS), an affiliate of the Marxist Center, to be published by Common Notions in 2020. It is an attempt to address "the party question" with a suggestion that the problem of political organization will not be solved by the emergence of a singular mass party. Rather, at our current conjuncture we see a solution to the problem of political organization as being the formation of multiple "parties of autonomy." Through the historical process of revolutionary struggle, we see the proliferation and networking of these party organizations culminating in the creation of an "area of the party." It is in relation to the development of this area that we see the potential for a successful movement for communism to emerge in the 21st century.

Create Two, Three, Many Parties of Autonomy!

From strike committees to workers' councils, tenant unions to neighborhood assemblies, the disparate forms of organized autonomy that arise in the midst of a protracted revolutionary struggle will not automatically fuse with communist politics to create a cohesive system of counterpower. Nor will a majority of workers and popular social groups automatically unite with the communist movement. The social forces of heteropatriarchy, capital, colonialism, and the state exert tremendous pressure against the organic emergence of a communist worldview on a mass scale. Meanwhile, reformism, authoritarianism, bureaucratism, and various forms of social chauvinism within the ranks of the movement itself can divert grassroots struggles away from the path to social revolution. What organizational form can co-facilitate the political development of the mass movement in a communist direction? How can communists foster communication, cooperation, and coordination among the emergent forms of organized autonomy across multiple fronts of struggle and sectors of the movement? We believe the answer is found with the construction of independent communist political organizations, or *parties of autonomy.*

This is not a call for a party in the bourgeois sense of the term: social revolutions are made by the autonomous initiative of the masses, not by counting votes or *coup d'état.* For bourgeois society, the distinguishing feature of a party "is its willingness or constitutional ability to take power; to achieve its desired ends through the given structure of political power in society." (Nettl 1965: 65) We reject this conception of an "inheritor party" which aims to take control of the existing state machinery, "whether by voluntary handing over of power or as a result of a cataclysm."

(67) In contrast to a bourgeois party, Rosa Luxemburg identified that a revolutionary party of autonomy "is not a party that wants to rise to power over the mass of workers or through them." (Luxemburg 2004: 356) Rather, it "is only the most conscious, purposeful part of the proletariat, which points the entire broad mass of the working class toward its historical tasks at every step," always linking its grassroots political work to the ultimate goal of communism at each phase of the protracted revolutionary struggle. It is a *connective party,* establishing linkages between different fronts of struggle and sectors of the movement, connecting local and national concerns with an analysis of the world situation and the tasks of the world revolution (Porcaro 2011; 2013). Such a party upholds, defends, and advances the autonomy of grassroots social struggles at the base, recognizing that the multitude of workers and popular social groups come to act as a collective revolutionary subject only through the self-management of the revolutionary struggle itself.

A party of autonomy does not stand outside or above the revolutionary process. Rather, such a party is internal to this very process, as an integral and complementary part of a complex and dynamic whole:

> The party is a dialectical product of the development of class consciousness and therefore an active factor in this process. The party arises as a necessity in the development of class consciousness. Although the party and the class are related organically, and are complementary, they are not identical, and must not be confused with each other. The party is the highest expression of the consciousness of the proletariat, in both its historical and political dimensions. The party of the proletariat is only one part of the class, and precisely that part which carries out the clearest analysis of the situation. Or, expressed in even simpler terms: the party is nothing but the necessary organization of the revolutionaries; and for that very reason, in a revolutionary situation different organizations, tendencies, or affinity groups of the proletariat appear, which in their totality constitute the party of the proletariat, in antagonistic struggle against the party of capital and the state (which is also constituted by different groups and organizations).
>
> – Guillamón 2013

Thus a party of autonomy has a dual character: (1) as a constellation of multiple organizations, tendencies, and affinity groups that emerge directly from within a protracted revolutionary struggle, discovering particular organizational forms corresponding to the prevailing social, technical, and ecological composition of a given historical-geographical conjuncture (such formations could be referred to as *formal, contingent,* or *ephemeral* parties); and (2) as the fusion of these independent communist political organizations with the movement for the self-emancipation of the oppressed, thus constituting *the historical party of communism* as a system of counterpower engaged in antagonistic struggle against the historical party of imperialism (Bordiga 1965). This dual character was grasped by the anarchist Errico Malatesta, who described the historical party as including "all who are *on the same side*, that is, who share the same general aspirations and who, in one way or another, struggle for the same ends against common adversaries and enemies. But this does not mean it is possible—or even desirable—for all of us to be gathered into one specific association." (Malatesta 1927) Indeed, the diversity of situations encountered by revolutionaries and the prevailing fragmentation of the working class and popular social groups

demands a high-degree of organizational flexibility and adaptivity, and thus a multiplicity of parties

The Party as Fractal: Molar and Molecular Politics

The formation and development of a party of autonomy is a process that embodies both micropolitical or "molecular" *and* macropolitical or "molar" dimensions (Deleuze and Guattari 1991: 105-106). The choice is not micropolitics *or* macropolitics, for there is "no choice between the *two poles,* because one can only ever choose *in between* them." (Nunes 2010: 120) The organized interventions of a revolutionary party thus take place "in the middle," as mediations between the micropolitical *and* macropolitical. This has been a distinguishing feature of successful revolutionary parties, as in the example of the Russian Revolution of 1917, when clusters of Bolshevik party activists concentrated in workplaces, recognizing that the participatory councils (*soviets*) emerging from grassroots proletarian struggles embodied the nucleus of an alternative social system (Gluckstein 1984). Thus the party's organization at the point of production enabled revolutionaries first to link workplace struggles against exploitation with the struggle against imperialism, and then to link the emergent councils with the insurrectionary struggle to establish a system of territorial counterpower: "The presence of such militants in nearly all the soviets, and the role that they played in them, show that the movement, while certainly corresponding to an aspiration on the part of the revolutionary masses to organize themselves for action, assumed the scale that it did as a result of the work of political activists." (Bettelheim 1976: 73)[1]

For Deleuze and Guattari, the distinction between micropolitics and macropolitics is not rooted in size, for "although it is true that the molecular works in details and operates in small groups, this does not mean that it is any less coextensive with the entire social field than molar organization." (Deleuze and Guattari 1991: 215) Thus effective revolutionary parties are simultaneously micropolitical *and* macropolitical organizations, expressing molecular *and* molar dimensions. A party organization is a complex system—a relational network and process—consisting of "flows, becomings, phase transitions, and intensities." (Guattari 2006: 418) Thus integrating a micropolitical perspective allows us to grasp the formation and construction of a party of autonomy as both an emergent organizational form rooted in a particular context, and as a historical social force engaged in a permanent process of becoming. If in previous cycles of struggle it was theorized that a centralized party must build a network of cells, today "the networked cells must create the party." (Dyer-Witheford 2015: 203)

In past cycles of struggle, many revolutionary parties were trapped in "the molar landscape, where positions are easily mapped, ambiguities and variations ignored, common sense prevails, and 'everybody knows' that communism is an enemy of difference." (Thoburn 2003: 9) This purely macropolitical or molar conception of the party laid the basis for *sectarianism,* or the practice of "engaging with others only to persuade or defeat them, rather than to learn from them. It leads to a winner-take-all style of argument, in which contending positions are cast as either wholly correct or completely wrong-headed." (Sears 2014: 13) Within the sectarian party, "the purity

[1] It is a world-historical tragedy that the regime to emerge victorious from the Russian Civil War shared little in common with the revolutionary movement of 1917: "During these tortured years, the democratic character of the Bolshevik Party was lost; the independence of the soviets was destroyed; an oppressive, centralized bureaucracy was reimposed throughout the country; and Russian political and economic life became harnessed to the dictates of the Bolshevik leadership." (Rabinowitch 2004: 310)

of the organization was seen as a crucial indicator of its potency," thus creating a communist movement "that was plural but not pluralist, as organizations, each claiming to represent the whole truth," competed with each other for influence and control (13). This yielded a form of party organization that was dogmatic, bureaucratic, and messianic, in which the party substituted itself for the development of the revolutionary consciousness, self-organization, and self-activity of the masses. The more a party clings to such forms of praxis, "the less attentive it is to the real developments within the wider society, the more it is prone to mistrust any social movement it does not control, the less capable it is of learning from new developments, the more closed off it is to influence and reshaping by emerging radical forces." (McNally 2019) In accordance with our vision of a communism of associations, we believe room must be made not only for multiple factions and caucuses within a singular party of autonomy, but also for multiple parties within the broader communist movement: "Let a hundred flowers blossom, let a hundred schools of thought contend." (Mao 1957)

A party of autonomy fuses with grassroots fighting organizations, alternative institutions, and popular defense forces, and participates in forming tactical and strategic united fronts with the aim of articulating a system of counterpower that can contend with the imperialist state for territorial control. It takes combat positions on the terrain of everyday life—the workplace, barrio, school, prison, or barracks—and moves within the flow of emergent processes and relational networks.[2] All this is not to "deny the need for coordination between groups, for discipline, for meticulous planning, and for unity in action. But [we] believe that coordination, discipline, planning, and unity in action must be achieved *voluntarily,* by means of a self-discipline nourished by conviction and understanding, not by coercion and a mindless, unquestioning obedience to orders from above." (Bookchin 2004: 139) At all scales of operation, a party of autonomy "presents the most advanced demands: it is prepared at every turn of events to formulate—in the most concrete fashion—the immediate task that should be performed to advance the revolutionary process. It provides the boldest elements in action and in the decision-making organs of the revolution." (140)

We can further conceive of a party of autonomy as a *fractal party.* According to adrienne maree brown, "[a] fractal is a never-ending pattern. Fractals are infinitely complex patterns that are self-similar across different scales. They are created by repeating a simple process over and over in an ongoing feedback loop." (brown 2017: 51) For a party of autonomy, "*what we practice at the small scale sets the patterns for the whole system.*" (53) From the smallest to the largest units of a party organization, the micropolitical relations of each fractal necessarily codefine the macropolitics of the communist movement as a whole: "When we speak of systemic change, we need to be fractal. Fractals—a way to speak of the patterns we see—move from the micro to the macro level. The same spirals on sea shells can be found in the shape of galaxies. We must create patterns that cycle upwards. We are microsystems." (59) Each unit of a revolutionary party can be conceived as such a microsystem, from local branches and clusters to organizational congresses and coordinating committees. In aggregate, the interlocking of these microsystems produce the

[2] According to Slavoj Žižek, Lenin succeeded in February 1917 in winning the masses of workers, soldiers, and peasants to the Bolshevik program of social revolution precisely because his perspective "found an echo in what I am tempted to call revolutionary micropolitics: the incredible explosion of grassroots democracy, of local committees sprouting up all around Russia's big cities and, ignoring the authority of the 'legitimate' government, taking measures into their own hands. This is the untold story of the October Revolution, the obverse of the myth of the tiny group of ruthless dedicated revolutionaries which accomplished a coup d'état." (Žižek: 2004: 7)

party and movement as a macrosystem: "How we are at the small scale is how we are at the large scale." (52)[3]

Articulation and Fusion: Functions of the Party

What are the functions of a party of autonomy? According to Salar Mohandesi, revolutionary parties operate as *articulators* of a communist world-praxis. Concretely, such organizations help to articulate: (1) the communist content implicit in grassroots social struggles by means of militant social investigation, combining a practice of inquiry with relentless agitation, education, and organization informed by a communist worldview; and (2) an area of autonomy composed of heterogeneous—and at times contradictory—social forces, reaching an organizational apex first with the formation of a system of counterpower, and later with the establishment of a territorial commune. The work of articulation performed by a party of autonomy is thus twofold: "On the one hand, to articulate is to communicate, formulate, or express a given content by moving it to a different register. On the other hand, to articulate is to join separate elements together, and the articulator, in this sense, can be understood as the joint itself." (Mohandesi 2012) A few historical examples may serve to elucidate the role and function of a party of autonomy as an articulator of a communist world-praxis.

Throughout the Great Depression, the Alabama Communist Party performed the role of articulator through its political work of fusing Marxist theory with local cultures, articulating the communist content implicit in Southern Black resistance to racial and class oppression, and articulating an area of autonomy consisting of Black rural sharecroppers, industrial workers, the unemployed, women, poor whites, and radical youth. It achieved this through organizations such as the Trade Union Unity League, Sharecroppers' Union, National Committee of Unemployed Councils, Young Communist League, and Alabama Farmers' Relief Fund; campaigns for Black self-determination, anti-racist class unity, unemployment and underemployment relief, eviction and foreclosure defense, rank-and-file unionism, wage increases, public education, and voter

[3] It is worth noting that Deleuze and Guattari's conception of micropolitics arises from a critical analysis of twentieth century fascism. They argue that the unique danger posed by Nazi fascism is its micropolitical character: "Even after the National-Socialist State had been established, microfascisms persisted that gave it unequaled ability to act upon the 'masses.' Daniel Guérin is correct to say that if Hitler took power, rather than taking over the German State administration, it was because from the beginning he had at his disposal microorganizations giving him 'an unequaled, irreplaceable ability to penetrate every cell of society,' in other words, a molecular and supple segmentarity, flows capable of suffusing every kind of cell." (Deleuze and Guattari 1991: 214) Thus anti-fascism must wage a struggle on a micropolitical or molecular level: "It's too easy to be an anti-fascist on the molar level, and not even see the fascist inside you, the fascist you yourself sustain and nourish and cherish with molecules both personal and collective." (215) Leftist organizations and movements are not immune to microfascisms. We periodically witness their emergence in our ranks with news of sexual assault scandals, transmisogyny, white chauvinism, national chauvinism, and authoritarianism. Evidence of microfascism can be found in the organizational dynamics of "little big men" gone mad with power, consumed by fantasies of leading their microsect to conquer first the movement and then the state, thus acting as the "representative" of the people or proletariat. To wage an anti-fascist struggle on the micropolitical terrain is to decolonize our minds, bodies, organizations, and movements, and to destroy the inner fascist. This critique does not aim to dismiss the necessity of a revolutionary party, nor of the conquest of power from below by the working class and masses of oppressed people. Rather, it aims to produce a sober recognition that the self-organization of revolutionaries and the fusion of communist politics with grassroots social struggles is an immense task that requires arduous work at multiple scales.

rights; and the local units of the Communist Party and their publication, *Southern Worker,* a regional communist newspaper with a focus on Black liberation and proletarian class struggle:

> The Party offered more than a vehicle for social contestation; it offered a framework for understanding the roots of poverty and racism, linked local struggles to world politics, challenged not only the hegemonic ideology of white supremacy but the petite bourgeois racial politics of the Black middle class, and created an atmosphere in which ordinary people could analyze, discuss, and criticize the society in which they lived.
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> – Kelley 1990: 93

Another historical example is the Iberian Anarchist Federation (*Federación Anarquista Ibérica,* FAI), which according to Roberto Bordiga embodied "one of the few examples of a genuine *party of autonomy.*" (Bordiga 1976: 83) The FAI formed in 1927 with the aim of establishing a symbiotic relationship with the National Confederation of Labor (*Confederación Nacional del Trabajo,* CNT), working to unite anarcho-communist forces throughout the Iberian peninsula of Spain and Portugal, and among comrades of the Iberian diaspora, in order to struggle against reactionary currents internal to the CNT, articulate the communist content implicit in proletarian class struggle, and accelerate the development of a revolutionary situation.

> The *raison d'être* of the [founding] meeting was: to aggregate, formally, into one peninsular association, the anarchist affinity groups of the three parent organizations, the exiled and dispersed anarchist groups of the Iberian peninsula – Spain's National Federation of Anarchist Groups, the Federation of Spanish Speaking Anarchist Groups in France, and the Portuguese Anarchist Union; to propagate anarchist ideas among the people. But most important of all, for the majority of those present, was the need to promote the Libertarian Communist vision of society through the CNT, the parent body to which most of those present belonged, and defend its [autonomist] and direct actionist principles from the reformist threat presented by union leaders such as [Ángel] Pestaña.
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> – Christie 2008: 39

All FAI cadre were expected to agree with anarcho-communist principles and join a local union (*sindicato*) of the CNT (Bookchin 1998: 198). The objective of FAI cadre within the *sindicatos* of the CNT was to establish a *trabazón* or "organic link" between the two organizations, effectively fusing anarcho-communist vision (embodied in the FAI) with the anarcho-syndicalist strategy of rank-and-file class struggle unionism (embodied in the CNT): "This link would be achieved by the formation of a series of joint councils in areas of mutual interest to both the FAI and the CNT, thus guaranteeing that close relations between anarchism and syndicalism in the country were maintained." (Garner 2016: 214) These joint councils operated as hub or point of convergence for both the CNT rank-and-file and FAI cadre, "composed of an equal number of representatives from both the unions and anarchist groups." (222) These councils would in turn create commissions and action committees for mutual projects in areas such as agitprop and political education. This trabazón did not aim to subordinate the CNT to the FAI. Rather, the aim of the project was to cultivate a symbiotic interdependency within a broader system of

counterpower, in which each organization retained a relative degree of autonomy in pursuit of a common objective: social revolution for the establishment of libertarian communism (*comunismo libertario*) on a world scale. This was a pedagogical relationship, whereby the FAI sought to unleash the emancipatory currents within the CNT, and to push back against conservative elements within the revolutionary workers' movement.

In the case of the FAI we observe the formation of a revolutionary party of autonomy of a specifically anarchist character, an independent communist political organization that achieved a symbiotic fusion with the broader mass movement—the local organs of the CNT—operating as a counter-hegemonic force opposed to reformism and authoritarianism, and advancing a libertarian communist vision and social revolutionary strategy of rank-and-file proletarian class struggle. The achievements of the proletariat and peasantry in the Spanish Revolution of 1936 are partially attributable to the immense effort and sacrifice of FAI cadres to rebuild the CNT in the face of state repression and reformist deviations, and to advance a specifically anarcho-communist vision of social revolution. It was precisely the FAI cadres within the CNT who ceaselessly worked to initiate a rupture with the old society, emphasizing that the counter-hegemonic communal governance of the working class could only be established by means of the most thoroughgoing grassroots participatory democracy via federations of sindicatos, assemblies, committees, councils, and collectives. However, while the FAI embodied a party of autonomy in its historical functioning, its lack of political cohesion around a developed platform and program, combined with a propensity to engage in reckless armed actions, limited its effectiveness as an articulator of communist content and counter-hegemonic blocs, especially as the Spanish proletariat and peasantry stepped onto the battlefield of civil war.[4]

Similar to the *trabazón* or symbiotic relationship established between the FAI and CNT, the Communist Workers' Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands,* KAPD) grounded its revolutionary praxis in workplace politics, developing a symbiotic relationship with the emergent workers' councils (*Arbeiterräte*) initially formed during the German Revolution of 1918, and later with a network of factory organizations (*Betriebsorganisations*) which united to form the General Workers' Union (*Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union,* AAU). The KAPD recognized that the liberation of the working class could only be a project of self-emancipation: this meant the formation of autonomous grassroots fighting organizations at the base (the factory organizations of the AAU), which could prefigure the institutional foundations of a communist social system (a territorial commune governed by workers' councils). The KAPD upheld internationalist principles and linked its everyday work to the perspective of world revolution, arguing that while the social revolution necessarily begins within the territorial boundaries of the nation state, "the building of the world commune is absolutely necessary for its survival." (KAPD 1921)

The KAPD recognized that the social revolution is a struggle for political power, and that the proletariat must discover organizational forms corresponding to the prevailing composition

[4] Following the restructuring of the CNT-FAI during the Spanish Civil War and subsequent capitulation of the CNT-FAI leadership to the reactionary forces within the anti-fascist camp (i.e. bourgeois republicans and Stalinists), a force did emerge that attempted to provide a greater degree of political consistency: the Friends of Durruti Group (La Agrupación de los Amigos de Durruti). The Friends of Durruti worked to rearticulate the communist content of the CNT, constitute a counter-hegemonic bloc with their allies—specifically the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista, POUM)—and establish a system of counterpower based on workers' councils (Guillamón 1996: 107). Unfortunately, the efforts of the Friends of Durruti proved to be too little too late: the POUM was violently suppressed by Stalinists, and the CNT-FAI leadership abandoned any pretense of waging a protracted revolutionary struggle for communism under the auspices of committing to "win" the anti-fascist war at any cost.

of the class. For the KAPD's conjuncture, the organizational form through which the seizure of power from below was to be accomplished was not the party, but the autonomous mass organizations of the class itself (i.e., factory organizations and workers' councils). What then was the role of a party?

> The main task of the communist party, just as much before as after the seizure of power, is, in the confusion and fluctuations of the proletarian revolution, to be the one clear and unflinching compass towards communism. The communist party must show the masses the way in all situations, not only in words but also in deeds. In all the issues of the political struggle before the seizure of power, it must bring out in the clearest way the difference between reforms and revolution, must brand every deviation to reformism as a betrayal of the revolution, and of the working class, and as giving new lease of life to the old system of profit.
>
> – KAPD 1921

The KAPD envisioned and worked to build a revolutionary party of autonomy: an independent communist political organization that could nurture, strengthen, and generalize the forms of organized autonomy that emerge in the course of the protracted revolutionary struggle. From the factory organizations and their amalgamation into the AAU, the KAPD envisioned a process whereby the masses would create action committees and later workers' councils that would constitute both means of class struggle against capital and the infrastructural foundation of a communist alternative. The cadre of this party of autonomy participate as equals within these organizations throughout all phases of the struggle, always agitating, educating, and organizing for the mass movement to take the path of social revolution.

In order for the party to fulfill this role, it should intentionally work for the qualitative growth and development of its members. In particular, "it should never allow its membership to expand faster than is made possible by the power of absorption of the solid communist nucleus." (KAPD 1921) This does not mean that a revolutionary party of autonomy does not aspire to achieve mass membership. For example, the KAPD had approximately 40,000 members at the time of its first regular congress (CWO 2000), while the FAI had approximately 39,000 members on the eve of the Spanish Revolution and Civil War (Bookchin 1998: 198). However, a party of autonomy differs radically from the mass party model in its conception of organizational growth and development, favoring patient qualitative growth as the path to meaningful quantitative growth, rejecting the assumption that a rapid influx of new members necessarily yields a qualitative transformation in the political work and cultural dynamics of the organization. While in certain conjunctures, the growth and development of collective consciousness is accelerated on a mass scale, thus demanding for a revolutionary party to adapt by "opening the gates" (Lenin 1905), this does not negate the principle that membership should not expand faster than the organization's capacity to train new cadre.

A Party of Autonomy in Revolutionary Chile

In Chile, the Revolutionary Left Movement (*Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria,* MIR) exemplified a party of autonomy, operating as a catalyst in the construction of an autonomous

popular power (*poder popular*), which included grassroots fighting organizations, alternative institutions, popular defense forces, united fronts, and a nuanced relationship with electoral politics. Founded in 1965 at the *Universidad de Concepción* by a diverse mixture of political militants, by 1973 the MIR would grow to have more than 10,000 members engaged in organizing students, staff, and faculty on university campuses, the urban poor (*pobladores*) in shantytowns, peasants in the countryside, rank-and-file industrial workers in the unions, and soldiers in the armed forces. During the presidency of Salvador Allende, the MIR was responsible for radicalizing the grassroots base of the Popular Unity coalition (*Unidad Popular,* UP) coalition, and subsequently led the anti-fascist resistance against the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. In their grassroots political work, the cadre of the MIR emphasized popular self-organization and self-activity through expropriations (*tomas*), the formation of communal workers' councils, and the construction of a revolutionary people's army.

The nucleus of the MIR emerged from the Left University Movement (*Movimiento Universitario de Izquierda,* MUI), which was based on popular assemblies and, like their New Left contemporaries in other countries, demanded that the university be opened to all and democratically governed by a community of students, staff, and faculty (Schlotterbeck 2013: 19). From the initial struggles of the MUI, this nucleus of revolutionaries would go on to form the collective leadership and organizational core of the MIR, which combined participatory democracy via popular assemblies and communal councils with militant direct action via occupations and expropriations. In the battles to come, the MIR would replicate the assembly-based model initially developed by the MUI, extending it beyond the city of Concepción to Chile as a whole, encompassing a multitude of grassroots social struggles.

In its everyday praxis, rank-and-file MIR cadres did not see a conflict between a revolutionary party and mass participatory movements. To the contrary, the MIR was conceived as a party of autonomy, a catalyst of popular power. The success of the MIR in this regard is illustrated by a chance encounter between two student *miristas*—Gonzálo and Marcelo—and a fisherman, *poblador,* and future *mirista*—Carlos Robles (Schlotterbeck 2013: 62). The two hungry miristas wandered along the beach, and approached Carlos Robles to purchase some fish. He told them to take as much as they could, and when they asked how much they owed him, Robles replied: "No, don't worry about it, you can just take it." The miristas then struck up a political conversation with Robles, and returned the initial gesture of mutual aid by organizing a study circle on Marxist theory. As leading mirista Carmen Castillo argued, the MIR provided a political and cultural center for the oppressed, and operated as a "school for the people." (Lazzara 2012: 5) From a chance encounter to a lasting comradeship formed between the students and the poblador fisherman, the MIR acted as an articulator of a communist analysis, vision, and strategy, connecting personal problems to world politics and the question of social revolution: "Through his discussions with the MIR students, Carlos Robles began to see the obstacles he confronted as part of larger problems in the existing social, political, and economic order. His family's lack of adequate housing was something he himself could change" (Schlotterbeck 2013: 63-64).

> The MIR's approach to organizing its social base incorporated consciousness-raising into direct action politics. To this day, many of those organized by the MIR identify the lasting lesson of their political education as an analytical ability to diagnose problems. Through conversations with *miristas*, individuals like Carlos Robles began to see the systemic inequalities that marginalized them and, once recognized, to pursue

> the path of action the MIR offered. Action took diverse forms. In the case of those without homes (*los sin casa*), it often began with urban land invasions (*tomas de terrenos urbanos*) to create encampments (*campamentos*). The struggle then pivoted to demand recognition from the Chilean state and access to services to transform the squatter settlements into working class neighborhoods (*poblaciones*). Through their participation in direct actions, the urban poor (*pobladores*) came to see themselves as subjects invested with rights, capable of making demands upon the Chilean state. In direct negotiation with state officials, pobladores sought to defend their place in the city and to define the terms of their participation in society. Through hundreds of land invasions, pobladores radically remade Chile's urban landscape, literally "taking their plots" and building their own communities one nail and one fence at a time. The MIR's organizing efforts in shantytowns precipitated wider discussions over the position of the poor in the city and in the countryside. They challenged the Chilean political system to take seriously the inclusion of all Chileans and to distribute limited resources more equitably. Just as Carlos Robles showed the students there was plenty to go around, the students and soon Carlos Robles too would persuade others that all Chileans should have a home.
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> – Schlotterbeck 2013: 64-65

One of the MIR's most important projects was *Campamento Lenin,* an occupation encampment in Concepción that served as a home for 3,000 pobladores. While many organizations of the Chilean Left fought for housing justice, the MIR was unique in its approach, which emphasized direct action and the prefiguration of communism. The MIR "promoted direct actions in the form of *tomas de terrenos urbanos,* literally taking unoccupied urban lands, as a means to create territorial expressions of popular power." (Schlotterbeck 2013: 71) Following the expropriation and occupation, the MIR assisted the creation of communal forms of governance based on autonomous popular assemblies, thereby developing a minor communist politics understood "as participation, as liberation, and as a means to equality." (67) Through Campamento Lenin, the MIR articulated a communist content and a counter-hegemonic alliance by organizing the mass expropriation of land for housing, bringing together pobladores, students, labor unions, and communist political organizations into a solidarity committee, which "reflected the MIR's strategy in this early phase to promote spaces of convergence and exchange between different sectors." (83)

The origins of Campamento Lenin can be traced to militant social investigations conducted by local miristas—who in Concepción were primarily students—in the form of surveys to assess the everyday problems faced by pobladores in the shantytowns, to build an initial network of contacts, and identify prospect plots of land for expropriation. Upon completion of a survey, miristas would synthesize the information collected to formulate a programmatic orientation for popular mobilization:

> The MIR in Concepción used the information from surveys to compile lists of people without homes. They met with interested participants, identified lands, selected a date, and coordinated the arrival of *pobladores* during a nighttime land invasion. Often compared to evangelicals in their tactics and determination, these young *miristas,* many barely out of their teens, turned out to be incredible community organizers. They spoke with actions. Through their continued, dogged presence in shantytowns

> and outside factories, they made inroads into organizing Chile's most humble citizens.
>
> – Schlotterbeck 2013: 73

From its initial base among students in the MUI to organizing pobladores and Campamento Lenin, the MIR laid the groundwork to expand its infrastructure and build grassroots fighting organizations among industrial workers in the coal mining and textile industries through the Revolutionary Workers Front (*Frente de Trabajadores Revolucionarios,* FTR), among rural workers through the Revolutionary Peasant Movement (*Movimiento Campesino Revolucionario,* MCR), and the "creation of a Popular Assembly—proletarian, revolutionary, and democratic—that will be the true expression of the will of the majority of the exploited classes, granting power to the workers and campesinos to put an end to capitalist exploitation." (Schlotterbeck 2013: 242)

The local branches of the MIR were called Politico-Military Groups (*Grupos Politicos-Militares,* GPM), which were organized on a territorial basis (Schlotterbeck 2013: 60). Once formed, the GPM would create "bases," or clusters of approximately 4-5 members who met on a weekly basis for political education, critical assessment and summation, and the coordination of political work in various sectors of grassroots struggle (142). Veteran mirista Jorge González explains how the MIR bases functioned:

> First you started with a political discussion, an analysis of the national political situation and each person had to say what [they] thought about the current political reality. That's how we started learning to do political analysis. Then we talked about the work we had done as a base in our specific front. Each militant had a specific task and had to account for what [they] had done. Then new tasks were assigned for the coming week.
>
> – Schlotterbeck 2013: 142

Through MIR bases, miristas at the grassroots were able to develop as effective cadre. According to mirista Carlos Robles: "The base's work included the responsibility to politically prepare ourselves. It wasn't just show up and do some activity—like pass out pamphlets or sell *El Rebelde*—no, there was a space for reflection. A space for everything because it wasn't just politics that we had, there was also personal growth (*formación humana*)—this is important—the development of the individual as such." (Schlotterbeck 2013: 143) MIR bases advanced a communist world-praxis that prioritized full human development and the politicization of everyday life, pushing the boundaries of what constituted the political: "The meetings covered more than 'just politics.' Their transformative potential rested on how, through participation, MIR militants began to think of themselves and others differently." (143) The MIR's holistic communist world-praxis enabled them to overcome class differences internally, despite the organization's initial base among students and faculty at a single university: "The investment the MIR made in forming militants was also an investment in forming people—instilling a sense that each voice mattered and each person had something to contribute to the revolutionary struggle in Chile." (147) It was this dialogic pedagogy that the MIR bases practiced which enabled them to win the trust of the urban and rural poor, peasants, and industrial workers who went on to join the MIR and make it their own

The Role of Cadre: Collective Responsibility, Initiative, and Base-Building

These historical case studies provide inspiring examples of the concrete operations of a party of autonomy. With minimal personnel and resources, and initially concentrated in limited geographic areas and among particular social groups, through patient grassroots political work these organizations were able to assist the construction of an area of autonomy informed by a revolutionary vision of communism and a strategy of protracted revolutionary struggle, effectively inspiring masses of people to fight for radical change. In all of the above examples, victories were made possible by the conscious recruitment, development, and coordination of *cadre,* understood as "active worker-organizers" (Faulkner et al. 2013), or "a multilayered stratum of activists committed to the movement's continuity through the ups and downs of its daily routine." (Wright 2005: 75) The word *cadre* is of French origin, meaning "framework." Thus parties of autonomy can be understood as *cadre organizations,* assembling frameworks that inform the everyday political praxis of communist partisans operating in a variety of contexts. Such a framework should include: (1) a *platform* articulating an analysis of the imperialist world-system from the standpoint of the multitude of workers and popular social groups, a vision of a communist alternative, and a strategy of protracted revolutionary struggle; (2) a *program* that emerges from militant social investigations, articulating the concrete tasks of cadre in symbiotic relationship with emerging grassroots struggles concentrated in specific social locations; and (3) an *organizational culture and style of doing politics* that is collective, participatory, creative, humble, patient, militant, reflexive, and permanently open to refinement and transformation.

Reflecting upon the legacy of the New Communist Movement (NCM) in the U.S. during the 1970s and '80s, Max Elbaum concluded that one of its enduring legacies was the recognition of cadre organization as crucial to the growth and development of a mass movement for communist social revolution:

> Revolutionary spirit, hard work, personal sacrifice, and the willingness to subordinate individual interests to the political tasks at hand are all crucial qualities for a successful radical movement. So too is the commitment to sink roots among the exploited and oppressed and to struggle within the movement over inequalities of class, race, and gender. And—whether or not they are now in fashion—so are organizations capable of functioning on the basis of well-worked out strategies, unity in action, and a measure of collective discipline.
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> – Elbaum 2006: 180

While today the communist movement must seek a new theoretical grounding calibrated to the particularities of our situation, the NCM nonetheless "achieved remarkable results in stimulating cadre to study and organize; in providing recruits with many new skills; in building solidarity among activists across class, racial, and gender lines; and in building organizations able to exert influence far beyond their numbers." (Elbaum 2006: 180) As cadre organizations, parties of autonomy should take measures to ensure all members have the capacity to directly participate in the planning, implementation, assessment, and summation of the organization's program.

Functioning as a catalyst or crystallization point within a rising cycle of struggle, a party of autonomy works to accelerate the pace of developments towards the next phase of protracted

revolutionary struggle, nurturing communist counter-tendencies immanent to the mass movement, fighting relentlessly for the expansion of the area of autonomy and its consolidation as a system of counterpower: "If there is a role for a dedicated, interventionist proletarian fraction within the revolution, it is in creating the initial conditions under which communist relations and further communist measures might be undertaken." (Bernes and Clover 2014) Thus a party of autonomy aims to "construct focal points of insurrectional struggle around which the masses of the exploited can reassemble." (Negri 2005: 35) A party of autonomy doesn't tell the masses what to think or what to do, but utilizes dialogic methods and techniques of militant social investigation to create collective processes of knowledge production and coordination of the protracted revolutionary struggle, self-managed directly by the masses via participatory democratic forms. Thus a party of autonomy operates as a "communist center of initiative," clearing obstacles to the self-emancipation of the multitude of workers and popular social groups (CoCoRi 1977; Wright 2005: 82).

Cadre *organize,* which "means helping others develop their own potentials, and participatory social forms are a key part of that process." (Payne 1996: 84) However, what distinguishes a party of autonomy's cadre from other types of organizers is that they have a common political platform and program towards which such organizing work is oriented, an organizational center to which they are accountable, and "together they form the skeletal structure around which a larger organization can be built." (Mann 2011: 71) Specifically, a party of autonomy should focus on producing and circulating the knowledge and skills needed for the multitude of workers and popular social groups to build the forms of organized autonomy, including grassroots fighting organizations, alternative institutions, popular defense forces, and united fronts, culminating in the formation of a system of counterpower.

The three critical elements that define the role of party cadre in relation to the movement as a whole are: (1) *organizational discipline and collective responsibility,* which mean abiding by the rules, procedures, and expectations established by the party organization *and* the area of autonomy to which it belongs, and a willingness to do what's asked of us by our comrades; (2) *initiative and sacrifice,* which means doing the spadework that needs to get done without being asked, making time in our personal lives to focus on building the communist movement (which includes dedicating time to holistic personal development), and taking risks when necessary; and (3) *base-building,* which means cultivating popular support for communist social revolution through the development of successful projects, campaigns, and organizations that expand the area of autonomy, primarily at the local level (Mann 2011: 71). A party organization functions as a hub for the coordination of the protracted revolutionary struggle within a particular territory, a communications network for geographically dispersed local groups of cadre, a space for critical assessment and summation, and a community of care formed on the basis of common affinities: "It is the center from which [we] go outward and to which [we] return. It produces the framework within which [we] can be continuously reevaluating [our] theory and practice and continuously transforming [ourselves] so as to be better able to live up to the historic task for which [we] accepted responsibility." (Muntaqim 2010: 154)

Black Liberation Movement organizers like Septima Clark, Ella Baker, and Myles Horton tested "the limits on the ability of the oppressed to participate in the reshaping of their own lives." (Payne 1996: 68) Through their organizing experiences, they articulated many of the core features of a party of autonomy and the role of party cadre:

> All three espoused a non-bureaucratic style of work, focused on local problems, sensitive to the social structure of local communities, appreciative of the culture of those communities. Above all else, perhaps, they stressed a developmental style of politics, one in which the important thing was the development of efficacy in those most affected by a problem. Over the long term, whether a community achieved this or that tactical objective was likely to matter less than whether the people in it came to see themselves as having the right and the capacity to have some say-so in their own lives. Getting people to feel that way requires participatory political and educational activities, in which the people themselves have a part in defining the problems—"Start where the people are"—and solving them. Not even organizations founded in the name of the poor can be relied upon. In the end, people have to learn to rely on themselves.
>
> – Payne 1996: 68

Cadre work to develop such participatory social forms—organs of mass counterpower—that encourage people to learn to rely on themselves, practicing autonomy within solidarity.[5] This requires conscious forms of *collective leadership,* which for Ella Baker meant "leadership that helped people to help themselves and allowed ordinary people to feel that they could determine their own future." (Ransby 2003: 167) The forms of organized autonomy that were created in past cycles of struggle that allowed masses of people to exercise self-management, self-government, and self-determination did not emerge spontaneously, but were built through the conscious initiative of cadre who exercised collective leadership by assisting their initial formation and guiding their development towards social revolutionary objectives in symbiotic relation with the masses (Bookchin 2015: 181).

Anatomy of the Party and the Development of Cadre

The basic unit of a party of autonomy at the level of a municipality or neighborhood could be the *local branch,* functioning as a *hub* for the organization's activities within a circumscribed geographic area: "Hubs are points of aggregation, centers of activity. Creating a hub is the logical next step to finding each other. We need dedicated spaces to get organized and to give ourselves time together. Hubs bring together the people, resources, and shared spirit necessary to create the foundation for a life in common." (Inhabit 2018: 34) Each local branch of a party—and indeed, the party as a whole—can be conceptualized as such a hub: a point of convergence, aggregation, and center of activity. The local branch could convene meetings of members on a regular basis, collect dues, organize political education workshops and skillshares, and conduct social investigations to inform the initial selection of sites of struggle where the party organization focuses its time, energies, and resources to build the area of autonomy and a system of counterpower. At the territorial level, a party could convene organizational congresses consisting of delegates

[5] Antonio Negri articulated a complementary perspective: "In all probability, the party will be able to be born again only as the organizer of [counterpower], and thus as the collective social agent of communist organization. In any event, the establishment among the masses of proletarian organizations and opening of [counterpower] and proletarian institutional structures which lead towards communism, is the party's sole present-day task. As an instrument of the transition, the party must disavow any role as a representative of the general interest of the class, and instead must assert itself as the capacity to organize and satisfy particular class interests." (Negri 1989: 184-185)

from each local branch, which could in turn elect a coordinating committee to maintain the day-to-day operations of the party, encompassing communications, publications, finances, and the intentional cultivation of comradely relations and alliances with other revolutionary organizations and sectors of the movement.

As a local branch grows in size and capacity, it could create *clusters* or smaller fractions of comrades formed on the basis of common affinities, technical functions, and areas of focus (such as a project, campaign, or social institution, be it a workplace, school, neighborhood, prison, or barracks), maintaining communications with the membership as a whole through reports to the regular meetings and coordinating committee of the local branch. Each cluster could function as an intimate space for political education, mutual aid, and the forging of a shared political praxis. This is a *cellular* organization, as advocated by Ella Baker who "envisioned small groups of people working together but also retaining contact in some form with other such groups, so that coordinated action would be possible whenever large numbers really were necessary." (Payne 1996: 369)

As a member of the Alabama Communist Party from Birmingham once remarked: "There ain't one of us here who was born a communist; we learned it and it ain't easy to learn." (Kelley 1990: 93) A party of autonomy functions simultaneously as a school, workshop, and laboratory for learning, testing, and refining the *craft* of revolutionary organizing. A party organization is thus an instrument for aggregating, collectivizing, and circulating knowledge co-produced through past and present cycles of struggle in order to strengthen the possibilities for future victories. It is an organization of *revolutionaries by trade* and, as with any trade, the grassroots political work conducted by party cadre requires time, patience, commitment, openness, and reflexivity:

> A trade implies a set of skills that need to be learned in order to do a good job. Someone who is outstanding at their trade probably has special aptitude for it but even more crucial to their success is the seriousness with which they seek to acquire the necessary skills. Long experience is also needed for true excellence. A trade is a full-time occupation, as opposed to an amateur diversion. Being good at one's trade is a source of pride and of esteem both from self and others.
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> – Lih 2008: 459

A key part of the craft learned by cadre is of a pedagogical character, whereby the party organization develops political education programs that embody in content and form the features of communal education and collective leadership development. It cannot effectively agitate, educate, and organize for communism if it lacks a sufficient base of trained partisans who—with time and experience—are transformed into battle-hardened veterans of the protracted revolutionary struggle:

> Cadre must be good at teaching organizational skills to others. They should also be conscious to set the best possible examples in character and conduct at all times. This is important because our role is not to exercise political power over the masses but to empower them. Our example must be of selfless dedication to the masses and their best interests, helping them to create and build institutions of people's power in the communities and programs to serve their specific survival needs, enabling them to solve problems in their daily lives.

– Rashid 2015: 304

During the initial process of formation, a party organization will need to focus on *internal programs:* "That is to say, they should be consciously aimed at transforming those who have come together on the basis of commitment to a collectivity, with a powerful sense of their developing and continuing collective identity and purpose." (Boggs 2012: 17) Such internal programs could include: (1) political education to strengthen the knowledge, skills, and capacities of each individual cadre as a member of a collective; (2) the production of agitational and educational materials (such as literature, podcasts, films, and posters) to popularize the communist politics of the organization, and to hone the skills of cadre in disseminating these materials among the population; (3) recruitment, as future projects are contingent upon a sizable and growing core of cadre in the area to enable an effective division of tasks, rotation of responsibilities, and implementation of increasingly complex projects and campaigns.

To ensure that the party organization stays in constant contact with the masses and forges a responsive and symbiotic relationship, organic link, or trabazón, there must be a critical assessment and summation after the completion of every project or campaign to evaluate its effectiveness:

> Were the *purposes* of the project fulfilled? Were they clearly defined and understood by everyone involved in the first place and were they kept in mind throughout the project? Were the *methods* effective? Were they the best methods or the only ones that could have been chosen? Were schedules maintained and was every step of the process carried out? If some steps of the process were left out, was this harmful to the project or were some of them superfluous from the beginning? What were the achievements and shortcomings of the project, and what lessons can the group learn from it? What were the reasons for the breakdown or failure of the project at any point? Which of these were outside the control of the group and which might be anticipated and prepared for in the future? What were the expense and income from the project? Was strict accounting kept at every point and made available to the group as part of the final evaluation? Was every member clear about [their] responsibilities at every stage of the project? Were the resources of the group (skills, contacts, equipment, time) adequate to the project as planned, or did the group exhibit overconfidence and impatience in the planning?
>
> – Boggs 2012: 27

The combination of organizational discipline and unity around a common platform and program with maximum grassroots autonomy of local branches and clusters, and the development of an organizational culture and style of work that is synchronized with local conditions and customs makes for an organization with a greater capacity to fight for the area of autonomy, build a system of counterpower, resist counter-revolutionary repression, and prefigure the social relations of communism.

The Area of the Party

Thus far we have expressed support for the creation of "two, three, many parties of autonomy." However, in order to consolidate the communist movement, we are now faced with the

question of unity, or the task of forging bonds of solidarity among multiple revolutionary parties, grounded in mutual respect for the political independence of each organization and a humble recognition that no one organization can or will have all the answers. To achieve this unity in diversity—to create a "neighborhood of a thousand flags" (Rajendran 2010)—we propose building a network of interorganizational communication, cooperation, and coordination among multiple revolutionary parties: an *area of the party* embedded within a more expansive area of autonomy. Instead of sects competing with each other for dominance, each organization within the area of the party could operate as a complementary part of a more complex whole. Within this organizational ecology, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts: the associated parties are "defined not by their group identities, but by the initiatives they carry out—not single-issue campaigns in the usual sense, but strategic interventions that explore the political potentials opened by the conjuncture." (Nunes 2014a: 177) There are many structural configurations this area of the party could take, but the crucial aspect is that the relative autonomy of each affiliate organization is respected and leadership functions are distributed throughout the network, "the idea being accepted that each member can play, from time to time, a hegemonic role," with room for divergent perspectives on certain issues within an overall context of effective unity in action (Porcaro 2011).

The area of the party is conceived as *segmentary, polycentric,* and *networked* (Gerlach 2001). It is *segmentary* because it is composed of multiple party organizations or "segments," each with their own political platform, program, and style of work.[6] This segmentary character enables the area of the party to permeate into many different sectors of society simultaneously, reflecting the various standpoints and forms of life articulated by the multitude of workers and popular social groups (293). With multiple party organizations, a division of labor can be established with varying degrees of specialization at certain nodes, and failsafe measures distributed throughout the area. Having a degree of redundancy, duplication, and overlap contributes to overall system reliability, as "[f]ailure of one part does not necessarily harm the other parts since these are not connected." (305) Furthermore, the capacity to propose "many different solutions to a problem [is] the institutional equivalent to biodiversity in the ecosystem." (Biel 2013: 340) Within this pluralist organizational ecology, a culture of *emulation* among the affiliated organizations within the area of the party can amplify and accelerate dynamics of experimentation, adaptive learning, and escalating militancy, ultimately propelling a revolutionary rupture. Instead of a singular and undifferentiated political line for all times and places, different strategic, operational, and tactical approaches can be tested in a range of situations, with areawide learning facilitated through an integrated information and communications infrastructure.

The area of the party is *polycentric* because it does not consist of a singular central leadership headquarters, instead opting for collective leadership distributed at various scales through multiple leadership centers and areawide leadership development programs (Gerlach 2001: 294). Horizontality and verticality, centralism and decentralism, are not absolute principles, but contingent possibilities whose effective applications rest upon acknowledging the dialectical relation between these polarities, and a concrete analysis of the concrete situation (Lauesen 2018: 446-447). We must determine "how to *negotiate* them, what *balances* to strike between openness and closure, dispersion and unity, strategic action and process, and so forth." (Nunes 2014b: 13) For-

[6] This is not to suggest that a common political platform, program, and style of work will not organically emerge from the area of the party, but that we must not foreclose the possibility of multiple and complementary political platforms, programs, and styles of work within a broader revolutionary network of interorganizational communication, cooperation, and coordination.

mal leadership positions should be rotated and held directly accountable to the rank-and-file membership of the affiliated organizations through regular areawide assemblies (conferences, conventions, congresses, etc.). The area of the party reintroduces a dialectical method of analysis into the science of revolutionary organization, recognizing both the *situational* and *strategic* dimensions of leadership. Against "leader*less*" resistance, we posit a "leader*ful*" revolutionary movement: "It is not that there are no 'leaders'; there are several, of different kinds, at different scales, and on different layers, at any given time; and in principle anyone can occupy this position." (Nunes 2014b: 33)

Finally, the area of the party is *networked,* meaning the diverse party organizations affiliated to the area don't "do their own thing," but constitute a reticulate structure—an integrated network—which enables the associated parties "to exchange information and ideas and to coordinate participation in joint action." (Gerlach 2001: 295) As the imperialist world-system has already adopted a networked approach to counter-revolution through forms of inter-agency communication, cooperation, and coordination (Ronfeldt et al. 1998: 18), revolutionaries would be wise to recognize that "*it takes a network to fight a network.*" (Hardt and Negri 2004: 58) This integrated network could be maintained through traveling educators, agitators, and organizers; overlapping membership across affiliate party organizations; integrated information and communications infrastructure encompassing digital, broadcast, and print media; joint initiatives, projects, and campaigns; and recognition of a common struggle, a common enemy (imperialism), and a common objective (communism), even if the particularities of each affiliate party's analysis, vision, and strategy diverge on specific points. At the level of a neighborhood or municipality, the area of the party could manifest itself through joint councils or "fusion centers" to coordinate the operational and tactical activities of various party branches and collectives concentrated in a common zone, with the aim of facilitating mutual growth and development, and intensifying the protracted revolutionary struggle. Indeed, the construction of this integrated network could itself function as the scaffolding for articulating a system of counterpower from within the area of autonomy, constituting the institutional basis of a communal social system.

A segmentary, polycentric, and networked area of the party may prove to be more resilient in the face of counter-revolutionary repression, and more adaptive in the face of a rapidly changing terrain of struggle (a process that will inevitably be accelerated by factors such as climate change, economic crisis, and imperialist war). There are several potential sources of this resiliency: "To the extent that local groups are autonomous and self-sufficient, some are likely to survive the destruction of others. This is also true of leaders; some will survive and even become more active and radical when others are removed, retired, or co-opted." (Gerlach 2001: 303) Furthermore, regardless of the general level of repression or recomposition of the social formation, "burnout" can decimate a revolutionary organization's leadership core or the leading role of a specific party organization, whereas intentionally distributing and rotating leadership functions throughout the area of the party can help mitigate the consequences of burnout, as another group can pick up the banner of revolution and carry it forward into battle.

The area of the party is not without historical precedents. Within the autonomist current of the Italian communist movement, there began to crystallize an area of the party within the broader area of autonomy in the 1970s. As the nationwide New Left groups such as *Potere Operaio* (Workers' Power), *Gruppo Gramsci* (Gramsci Group), and *Lotta Continua* (Continuous Struggle) dissolved into the area of *Autonomia Operaia Organizzata* (Organized Workers' Autonomy), there emerged several attempts to establish dense networks of communication, cooperation, and coor-

dination among the various political organizations and collectives that proliferated throughout the fabric of Italian society. One such effort was the *Movimento dell'Autonomia Operaia* (MAO, Movement of Workers' Autonomy), proposed by the *Comitati Autonomia Operai* (CAO, Committee for Workers' Autonomy). While some concluded that the autonomy of the multitude of workers and popular social groups was juxtaposed to the organization of revolutionary parties of autonomy, CAO argued that, "on the contrary, the communist organization is the first form of freedom in the land of capital, and the first real experience of cooperation, of communist self-management." (CAO 1978) This "first form of freedom in the land of capital" could not be "founded," but was constructed through an organizational *process* embedded within the rhythms of class struggle on the terrain of everyday life, whose particular forms and structures remain responsive and adaptable to changes in social group composition.

Another such attempt to unite the communist forces of *Autonomia* was the *Movimento Comunista Organizzato* (MCO, Organized Communist Movement), proposed by the *Collettivi Politici Veneti* (CPV, Political Collective of Veneto). For the CPV, the MCO sought "centralization in the plurality of proletarian autonomy," with the aim of unifying the multiplicity of local and regional communist collectives via a process of articulating a common program for the construction of a system of counterpower, with joint slogans and plans of actions adopted throughout the area of the party (CPV 1979). Unfortunately, the autonomist movement proved unable to discover forms of unification that would preserve a degree of autonomy for the various party organizations and mass movement while ensuring the level of centralization required to effectively fight the imperialist state.

During the Salvadoran Revolution and Civil War (1979-1992) there emerged a united front of revolutionary anti-imperialist forces, encompassing an alliance of the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN, Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) and *Frente Democrático Revolucionario* (FDR, Revolutionary Democratic Front), which fought together under the banner of the "FMLN-FDR" (Grenier 1991: 52). While the FDR united a network of mass organizations—such as labor unions, peasant associations, barrio committees, and student groups—the FMLN united revolutionary parties to coordinate a common politico-military struggle.[7] The FMLN thus constituted an area of the party, embedded within a broader area of autonomy encompassing the liberated zones within the guerrilla territories, the base organizations affiliated with the FDR, and the more diffuse organizations and militants outside or adjacent to FMLN-FDR networks. What made the FMLN unique was that it established a mechanism of communication, coordination, and cooperation among the various politico-

[7] The FMLN consisted of five politico-military organizations: (1) *Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí* (FPL, Farabundo Martí Popular Liberation Forces), (2) *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP, People's Revolutionary Army), (3) *Resistencia Nacional* (RN, National Resistance), (4) *Partido Comunista Salvadoreño* (PCS, Communist Party of El Salvador), and (5) *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos* (PRTC, Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers). While the FMLN-FDR would succumb to reformism, this does not invalidate lessons synthesized from the study of their organizational structures. Of all the politico-military organizations, the FPL was the most advanced segment of the FMLN, adopting the perspective of *guerra popular prolongada* (protracted people's war) led by a worker-peasant alliance. It is a great tragedy that reformism within the FMLN was not uprooted from the outset, as this may have enabled affiliate organizations to synthesize the FPL's strategy of protracted people's war with the PRTC's recognition that a protracted revolutionary struggle would require a *continental* — indeed, an *international* — strategy. The PCS proved particularly problematic in its advocacy of an alliance with the Salvadoran bourgeoisie against U.S. imperialism, failing to recognize that this class of compradors were the primary allies of imperialism within El Salvador.

military organizations—El Salvador's area of the party—in a common revolutionary struggle with a common program. The five parties affiliated to the FMLN each maintained their own organizational infrastructure, leadership, and political perspective: "There was no single leader of the organization; for key decisions, agreement was supposed to be reached among the commanders of the five groups." (McClintock 1998: 48) As one FMLN guerrilla put it: "There's a real danger of each group going its own way, but it's also difficult to decree unity. We have genuine differences of approach, and the answer is not for every organization to renounce its beliefs in the name of unity. That smells of Stalinism to me." (56)

The Guatemalan Revolution and Civil War (1960-1996) displayed many features similar to those manifest in El Salvador. After years of sectarianism, rivalry, non-cooperation, and "zonalization" (i.e., each revolutionary organization having its own zone that was not to be encroached upon by the cadre of other organizations), the various revolutionary politico-military organizations came together under the umbrella of the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG, Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity) in January 1982.[8] During the course of the protracted revolutionary struggle, leadership functions within the URNG were rotated among affiliate parties, and the URNG stated clearly that it was "fighting for space, not for itself as a political party, but for the formulation of alternative, popularly based solutions to the country's crises." (Jonas 1991: 237) Indeed, the URNG did not see itself as the future holder of state power, but as a revolutionary catalyst working to deepen, defend, and expand the broader mass movement (Jonas 1991: 192). What emerged from the experience of the URNG by the end of the 1980s was a clear distinction between the area of the party (embodied in the URNG and its affiliate party organizations) and the area of autonomy (embodied in the popular organizations of the mass movement). The ultimate aim was to achieve "a popular/revolutionary convergence," or the articulation of a system of counterpower from among these disparate elements:

> The formulations [of the URNG] concerning alliances reflected new thinking about the relationship of revolutionary forces to the popular movement as the latter reemerged. On the one hand, all parties had learned the painful lessons of the late 1970s and early 1980s, when some popular organizations were more exposed to repression because of their open identification with the guerrilla movement. On the other hand, it was also important to overcome the disarticulation that existed in the 1980s between the revolutionary left and (nonclandestine) popular movements. The challenge was to define a new relationship, taking into account a necessary degree of autonomy of the popular organizations.
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> Jonas 1991: 192

In Turkey and Kurdistan, multiple revolutionary parties came together in 2016 to form the People's United Revolutionary Movement (*Halkların Birleşik Devrim Hareketi,* HBDH).[9] The HBDH was founded as an umbrella organization uniting Turkish and Kurdish revolutionary

[8] The four politico-military organizations affiliated to the URNG were the *Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* (EGP, Guerrilla Army of the Poor), *Organización Revolucionario del Pueblo en Armas* (ORPA, Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms), *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* (FAR, Rebel Armed Forces), and *Núcleo de Dirección Nacional del Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo* (PGT-NDN, Nucleus of National Direction of the Guatemalan Party of Labor).

[9] The nine organizations affiliated to the HBDH include the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (PKK, Kurdistan Workers' Party), *Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi/Marksist Leninist Silahlı Propaganda Birliği* (THKP-C/MLSPB, People's Liberation Party-Front of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist Armed Propaganda Unit), *Maoist Komünist Partisi* (MKP,

socialist and communist parties in a common struggle against the fascist policies of Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The organization of the HBDH arose from the International Freedom Battalion (IFB) in Rojava, Syria, where revolutionary socialists, communists, and anarchists were united in a common struggle for the defense of guerrilla resistance zones and liberated zones in Rojava against both the Islamic State and Turkish imperialism. Inspired by the International Brigades that fought fascism during the Spanish Revolution and Civil War (1936-1939), the IFB established networks of communication, cooperation, and coordination among its diverse volunteer forces—Kurdish, Turkish, and international—in the armed struggle against fascism. Like the IFB—and similar to the aforementioned historical examples of the FMLN and URNG—the HBDH aims to unite revolutionary parties within Turkey and Kurdistan for a common politico-military struggle, and embodies the organizational cohesion of an emerging area of the party in which multiple revolutionary organizations can communicate, cooperate, and coordinate action to win a common program, while retaining political independence and holding space for political difference within the revolutionary movement.

Basing ourselves on the accumulated historical experience of protracted revolutionary struggles against imperialism, it appears unlikely that founding a monolithic mass party will prove useful (or even possible) for today's communist movement. The needs and desires of the multitude of workers and popular social groups are too diffuse, and the forging of a revolutionary movement for communism will likely result from the converging efforts of multiple revolutionary parties (the area of the party) with a more expansive network of grassroots fighting organizations, alternative institutions, and popular defense forces (the area of autonomy). The intentional construction of an area of the party may prove to be a necessity for revolutionary forces in our present conjuncture, not only because of the generalized crisis of representative forms of governance, but due to radical transformations in the technosphere—no longer limited to the metropolitan core of imperialism—for "networked organization is an everyday reality for everyone, *including those who oppose it on principle,* and is widely perceived as rendering formalized ties, if not obsolete, then at least not unavoidable. To put it somewhat more dramatically: *even if* a return to the party-form were found to be the solution, the party would no doubt have to emerge from existing networks." (Nunes 2014b: 11) We maintain that the construction of revolutionary parties of autonomy and their convergence within an area of the party is indeed an integral component in building organized autonomy and a system of counterpower. However, we agree that our situation calls for something new: "a party of a networked type" (Dyer-Witheford and Matviyenko 2019: 148).

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Maoist Communist Party), *Türkiye Komünist Emek Partisi-Leninist* (TKEP-L, Communist Labor Party of Turkey-Leninist), *Türkiye İhtilalci Komünistler Birliği* (TİKB, Revolutionary Communist Union of Turkey), *Devrimci Komünarlar Partisi* (DKP, Revolutionary Communard Party), *Devrimci Karargâh* (Revolutionary Headquarters), *Marksist-Leninist Komünist Partisi* (MLKP, Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Turkey and North Kurdistan), and *Proleter Devrimciler Koordinasyonu* (Coordination of Revolutionary Proletarians).

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