

Post Colonial Anarchism

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I should be clear up front. I'm not a nationalist. Nor am I a tribalist, nor an internationalist, nor a municipalist. Peoples from all over the globe have been figuring out how to organize themselves into various collectives long before I came onto the scene and no one in any of these groups has ever bothered to ask me what I thought about their decisions. I won't hold my breath.

I do believe in free association and federalism because they usually represent the most non-coercive avenues for people to develop ways to live together in self-determined freedom and community. Anarchists have traditionally been particularly hostile to nations and have often attributed the worst crimes of states to them. This rejection of nations and their struggles for self-rule (nationalism) may not be the same as the anarchist demand for no rule, but getting free from foreign domination is a step in the right direction. This is one reason why anti-authoritarians (including anarchists) have generally supported anti-imperialist movements regardless of their nationalist aspirations.

The rejection of nationalism by many North American anarchists is often an expression of a colonial mindset that requires all of the peoples of the world fighting for liberation to define their social selves in relation to the class war. In this war there are two classes—the workers and the ruling class. The downtrodden of the world are to see themselves as workers. For this identity shift we gain the solidarity of the class war anarchists.

Other anarchists who don't subscribe to industrial age class war dogma simply would like to see anarchists cut their ties to the left completely. This severance would presumably free them of all of the political baggage that solidarity with revolutionary nationalists and indigenous autonomist struggles attract. The two above interpretations of the international role and responsibility of the anarchist movement with respect to the fight against neo-colonialism and imperialism are not the ideas of an anti-state fringe. They represent the two strongest tendencies in the North American scene.

Not all nations are states. In fact there are about 1600 nations in existence today (about eight times the number of states in the world). And as Sylvia Walby points out in her essay "The Myth of the Nation-State," "Nation-states are actually very rare as existing social and political forms...there are many states, but very few nation-states. The notion that there have been neatly bounded societies ...is inadequate."¹ There are many different types of states—theocratic-states (the Vatican, Iran), city-states (Singapore, Luxemburg), familial states (Saudi Arabia) tribal-states (Israel), multinational states (Canada, Spain) and super-states (the United Nations). Each type of state has been implicated in crimes against various peoples over their histories. Since the European enlightenment these various social groupings that states have succeeded in attaching themselves to have been understood by the left as backward and atavistic. They argue that peoples of the world should transcend things like families, clans, tribes, and nations and embrace "universal" principals of human identity. In truth, many of the social ideals that the left has asserted as universal are culturally situated in 19th century Europe.

The Politics of Arrogance

It's regular for North American anarchists to use their political label as a synonym for anti-authoritarian; although one is a term referring to a specific social and political movement born in

¹ Sylvia Walby, *The Myth of the Nation-State: theorizing society and politics in a global era*. British Sociological Association, August 2003.

the 1800's in Europe and the other is a broad description of a political tendency that has reared its head in some form in just about every society over the last few centuries. A mainstream definition of authoritarian describes someone who favors "blind submission to authority; of relating to, favoring a concentration of power in a leader or an elite not constitutionally responsible to the people."²

Now certainly anarchists are not the only folks on the world scene who are against the "blind submission to authority" and the "concentration of power" in an unaccountable leader. But this easy inter-changeability is an effect of a larger attitudinal cause. The attitude being that non-white legacies of struggle and our histories of stateless, communal modes of existence are at best, irrelevancies to the current struggles against state/ corporate domination or, at worst, an obstacle to be swept aside.

This attitude pervades the intellectual history of all the major European political traditions—not just anarchism. But if those of us who identify with the historical movement for non-hierarchical, free and non-coercive social relations don't begin to fundamentally rethink the way we understand our struggle both internally and externally, we will lose international allies and continue to alienate ones closer to home.

A different way of understanding anarchism in relation to the centuries-old struggle against arbitrary power is to view it as the newest member of a global family that includes numerous historical and present day communal societies and struggles against authority. The village communalism of the Ibo, and First Nations like the Zuni and the Hopi are a part of the family. The indigenous autonomist movements for self determination going on today in West Papua and Chiapas, Mexico with the EZLN are a part of the family. The international prison abolitionist movement, perhaps to most coordinated attack on the state's monopoly of the administration of justice, has deep anti-authoritarian currents, just as the numerous stateless hunter and gatherer bands, clans, and nomadic tribes that have managed to survive centuries without armies, flags, or money systems do.

Anarchist movements have also played a part in the fight against authority. Some valiant, if rather short-lived, episodes include the Spanish CNT and FAI battles during the 1930's and the Paris Commune 50 years earlier. The full record shows that North American anarchists haven't had much experience in maintaining long-term stateless, social formations. But they have produced theory and "analysis"—plenty of it. And it's this busy intellectualism that has scorned and turned its nose up at our national struggles for liberation as "statist" and "reformist" while demanding that global south anti-authoritarians adopt anarchism's workerist mantle or conform to some romantic notion of how pre-agricultural peoples lived. To help put this in context it's important to look at the universalist underpinnings of the traditional anarchist worldview and how its adherents understand their movement in relation to other struggles around the non-European world.

Colonial Universalism

To many, a critique of universalism on the left will seem like an anachronism. After all, if post-modern social philosophy has had any discernable political thrust, it's been in opposition to foundationalist claims and totalizing theories of human nature, relations, and power. But despite

² Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/authoritarian>

the last six decades of post-world war II thinking and action against universalism, there are still plenty of stubborn anarchists who refuse to let go of the most Euro-centric aspects of historical materialism.

Marx's critique of capitalism has had an influence way beyond those who choose to identify themselves as marxists. On the left, it has encouraged analysis that puts the class struggle at the center of the historical stage. Before the identity movements of the late 60's this analysis would regularly portray racism and other historical oppressions as subalterns of class oppression. But after these movements began to challenge some of the dogmas of class struggle orthodoxy some accommodations were made.

Progressives embraced multiculturalism even as they focused most of their attention towards corporate globalism and the international institutions that protect them. Marxists supported revolutionary nationalism, arguing that the modern vanguard is the black and brown working class. Even liberals argued for a cultural pluralism that made limited accommodations for social, cultural and religious differences while clinging to the last vestiges of the welfare state. Anarchists have largely rejected such left-of-center developments in response to the legacy of white supremacy and cultural imperialism, but have failed to develop their own. The default has been a rigid century and a half-old economic determinism that even some marxists have abandoned.

The embrace of universalism by anarchists has had a significant impact on their analysis of important issues and events. The interpretation of imperialism as an economically driven regime of capital and the view of nationalism as inherently retrograde and divisive owes a lot to the internal logic of universalism. If imperialism has as much to do with cultural hegemony or geopolitical dominance as the capitalist market expansion and raw material exploitation of private business, then maybe an international workers revolution may not come first or be the most fundamental task before all the world's oppressed. If nations and national liberation movements are not necessarily the statist antithesis of internationalism but represent just another social grouping of peoples with a common land, culture, and language, some of whom are willing to fight to maintain their ways of life, then maybe anarchists need to rethink their opposition to nationalism.

European universalism has never truly been about the recognition of our common humanity. In practice it's been about forcing the particular norms, prejudices and ideals of white, Christian cultures on the rest of the peoples of the earth, sometimes through economic domination, sometimes through cultural imperialism, sometimes through force.

Christendom used appeals to universalism as a justification for crusades and the persecution of "non believers" and native populations practicing their traditional religions in various parts of the world. For left internationalists, universalism provided a nice humanitarian cover for a massive social engineering project that sought to strip the masses of their national and communal identities in exchange for a workerist one because, as Murry Bookchin put it, there was a "need to achieve universality in order to abolish class society."³

Under this view the universality and primacy of the class struggle is a strategic necessity for the overthrow of the capitalist order. It's not a conclusion that comes out of the study and analysis of the history, situation and cultures of all peoples. At this stage, anarchists, autonomists, abolitionists and anti-authoritarians of color can not afford to be swept up by theories that have

³ Murry Bookchin. "Nationalism and the 'National Question'" http://www.democracynature.org/dn/vol12/bookchin_nation March 1993 P.1

never bothered to view non-white peoples as historical subjects. We are not mere props in the political stagecraft of white leftists.

Political universalism is part of the philosophical residue of Anglo-European colonialism. Today we witness this in the attempts of the U.S. to impose democracy in the Middle East and other parts of the world. One of the problems with this view is that it “offers a hegemonic view of existence by which the experiences, values and expectations of a dominant cultural are held to be true for all humanity” and is a “crucial feature of imperial hegemony because its assumption of a common humanity underlies [an] imperial discourse for the advancement or improvement of the colonized, goals that mask the extensive... exploitation of the colony.”⁴

So when the anarchists behind the FAQ web-site project declare that anarchists “oppose nationalism in all its forms as harmful to the interests of those who make up a given nation and their cultural identities,”⁵ we recognize that the blatant condescension imbued in those sentiments are a reflection of the conviction that they know what’s best for the colonized, not the colonized themselves.

No War But The Class War

Ever since Antonio Gramsci’s writings on marxism in the 20’s and 30’s the left has been rethinking the role of the worker in revolutionary practice. He argued that cultural hegemony was the key to class subordination and that in order to change economic and political structures we had to take over the institutions that transmit culture—the schools, the church, the media, etc. This shift from the economic determinism of orthodox marxism to the identitarian pluralism of what some call “cultural marxism” led a shift in emphasis away from the worker towards a broader group of the marginalized that included women, racial and sexual minorities and outlaws.

This thinking had little effect on the way marxist organizations and regimes have operated over the last 90 years. Groups like the Spartacist League in the U.S. have spent decades trashing black nationalism and feminism as ‘petty bourgeois’ and ‘separatist’ and claiming that their class analysis of racism, sexism, and other social systems of hierarchy (as by-products or divide and conquer tactics of capitalism) is more relevant to people of color and women than our own studies of how white supremacy and patriarchy have maintained systems of domination over us. Many Marxist groups have had an even worse record on LGBT liberation.

Khrushchev’s imperial attitude towards Mao’s peasant-led cultural revolution in China reflected, in part, his inability to make common cause with an Asian leader with the audacity to question the dogmas of soviet communism. As the U.K. Guardian noted a few years back “Mao deeply resented the Soviet assumption of superiority towards China, which he described as the unacceptable behaviour of “a father towards his son.”⁶ It’s been argued by anarchists like Murray Bookchin that the Marxist support for nationalist movements is strategic not ideological. In this instance we can attribute the failure of the two most powerful and populous communist countries on the globe to unite against the capitalist world in large part to a colonialist mentality that

⁴ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *Post Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. Routledge New York, NY 2000.

⁵ Are Anarchist Against Nationalism? *The Anarchist FAQ*. Alternative Media Project. <http://infoshop.org/page/AnarchistFAQSectionD6>

⁶ John Gittings, The day Khrushchev and Chairman Mao saw red Spitting images mark the end of the Sino-Soviet alliance. *The Guardian* (UK) 27 November 2001.

couldn't accept non-white regimes who strayed too far from the European materialist intellectual plantation—strategy be damned.

The most organized elements of North American anarchism today are class war based and anti-nationalist. The Northeast Federation of Anarcho-Communists state “anarchists oppose the idea of nationalism” and instead “believe in waging a class war.”⁷ The Workers Solidarity Alliance equates nationalism with “the idea that somehow both the rich and poor can be wrapped in the same flag and thus have the same interests...”⁸ Of course class war anarchists attempt to wrap the victims of colonial imperialism and the beneficiaries of it together in the same black flag as if the two have the same interests. As it turns out, it's just as hard for whites to give up imperial race privilege as it is for rich people to give up class privilege.

Rather than acknowledging the importance of class stratification along side other societal hierarchies and recognizing that each of them are potentially as repressive and exploitative as the other depending on the social context, class war anarchists have adopted a hierarchy of oppressions that makes the class war the primary struggle and the worker the primary agent of that struggle. The popular slogan “no war but the class war” masks a deep historical truth over which many white leftists are still in denial. White elites and their dupes, pawns, agents and allies have been waging a race war on peoples of color for centuries. When people of color who share a common culture, language and land decide it's time to make defending ourselves a priority, we're told by anarchists that they “never call for the victory of the dominated country over the imperialist. Instead we call for a victory of the workers (and peasants) of that country against both home and foreign exploiters (in effect, ‘no war but the class war’)” Are Anarchist Against Nationalism?⁹

If communities of color can't count on anarchists to do more than merely recognize their ‘right’ to defend themselves against white imperialism, then perhaps all anarchists can expect from communities of color is the recognition that they have a right to protest against the IMF every time they meet. If the price of solidarity is that we abandon our communal identities and accept one created for us by some left-wing Euro-elites over 150 years ago, then the hope of developing closer alliances with other movements against authority around the globe is doomed.

Anti-imperialist anti-nationalism

Many anarchists have recognized that opposition to native or national self-determination against Euro-Anglo colonial domination is a betrayal of their anti-authoritarian principals and commitment to anti-racism. This is why despite all the finger wagging that goes on by the scribe defenders of the anarchist faith about global south movements not being anarchist enough, there is a long history of anarchist solidarity with nationalist movements for self rule. Lucien van der Walt, a South African anarchist activist, details the many national struggles anarchists have been involved in his essay “Towards a History of Anarchist Anti-Imperialism.” He mentioned how groups like the Anarchist Group of Indigenous Algerians, the Mexican Liberal Party and

⁷ Northeast Federation of Anarcho-Communists. November 2002.

⁸ *Against the Madness*. Workers Solidarity Alliance. <http://workersolidarity.org/?p=188>.

⁹ *The Anarchist FAQ*. Alternative Media Project. <http://www.infoshop.org/faq/secD6.html>

other anti-imperialist anarchists “paid in blood for [their] opposition to imperial domination and control.”¹⁰

The movements and organizations he wrote about were by-and-large made up of activists of color working in their own struggles for both social revolution and national liberation. What these activists didn't do was refuse to fight along side nationalists because they believed that the class war was the most important or only fight worth engaging in. They didn't try to convince their people that getting rid of the factory bosses, of whom there were relatively few, was a bigger priority than getting rid of the colonial administrators who controlled where they could go and when they could go there, how or whether they could practice their faith, and what they could produce on their own land, among other things. They didn't spend time trying to foment hatred between urban workers (who represented a relatively privileged class in many of these countries) and the middle classes in an effort to polarize their nation into a class war. They knew that the colonial masters controlled both groups and would only use internal divisions to solidify their own domination. They instead worked to educate the masses about how class also contributed to their oppression and how national liberation wouldn't necessarily address those issues.

National liberation struggles don't end when the imperialists decide that economic control and the threat of military intervention are more effective means of domination than army bases and colonial governments on native soil. They continue through early independence when the imperialist powers are busy stabilizing their puppet regimes, and corporate markets. It continues through the imposition of neo-liberal economic pressures and dictates from organizations like the IMF, World Bank, and the World Trade Organization along with a host of regional outfits and private organized interests. And if and when those mechanisms aren't enough, the Security Council or the U.S. military will step in. International solidarity is not about committing to a process. It's about committing to a people and their struggle for liberation. This commitment means viewing solidarity not as a reward for doctrinal compliance among the colonized but as a discourse between peoples and across cultures about how we all can live, not in some imposed western ideal of freedom and equality but in a self-determined freedom where different people decide for themselves how they will arrange their affairs. This doesn't mean that anarchists always must agree and when we don't we should support voices in those societies who are committed to the visions most like our own.

The nation and the state

It's not that anarchists have always been closed to nationalist arguments or have never questioned class war fundamentalism. Hakim Bey in his book *Millennium* suggests that anarchists align their struggles against authority with anti-colonial and nationalist movements around the globe. (See his chapter “Notes on Nationalism” Hakim Bey *Millennium* Autonomedia & Garden of Delight. 1996). Bob Black has rightly observed that the anarchist ideal of the worker revolutionary in syndicalism is more popular among college professors than with workers in North America.¹¹ Even Bookchin in his 1971 essay “Listen Marxist” offered a devastating critique of class war fundamentalism and argued that “Marx's emphasis on the industrial proletariat as the

¹⁰ Van der Walt, Lucien. *Towards a History of Anarchist Anti-Imperialism*. Northeast Federation of Anarcho-Communists. <http://nefac.net/node/261>.

¹¹ Bob Black. *Anarchy after Leftism*. Cal Press 1997 p. 149.

‘agent’ of revolutionary change, and his ‘class analysis’ in explaining the transition from a class to a classless society” are “false in the context of our time.”¹² The problem is that these writers and others either hide in the safe shadow of critique where they debunk but don’t bother to offer alternatives (Black) or come up with alternatives just as colonial as the universal worker (Bookchin gives us the universal citizen).

But there’s an even bigger problem. Not only do these critics and theorists fail to offer non-colonial alternatives, they actually find time to dismiss efforts among activists of color and anarcho-feminists who dare to work for liberation from domination from our own self identities. Black dismisses anarcho-feminism as “separatist in tendency” and “oriented more toward statist feminism than anarchism.”¹³ Bookchin in his essay *Nationalism and the National Question* lamented that the New Left in the 60’s embraced “the particularism into which racial politics had degenerated instead of the potential universalism (read European) of a humanitas...the New Left placed blacks, colonial peoples, and even totalitarian colonial nations on the top of its theoretical pyramid, endowing them with a commanding or ‘hegemonic’ position in relation to whites, Euro-Americans, and bourgeois-democratic nations.” He adds, “In the 1970’s this particularistic strategy was adopted by certain feminists...”¹⁴

Bookchin’s assertion that blacks and “colonial peoples” occupied the top of some theoretical new left pyramid is reminiscent of the stereotypical poor white in the U.S. who’s convinced that blacks get all the breaks and the reason for their own condition has more to do with affirmative action than with the system of corporate feudalism that they’re the victims of. To the extent that any white radicals on the new left in the early 70’s paid more attention to what black, brown, red and yellow revolutionaries we’re saying than intellectuals like Bookchin, it was because they realized that the prime victims and biggest targets of state/ capitalist repression and exploitation around the world were in communities of color and their voices needed to be taken seriously.

Given the lack of clearly articulated alternatives, it’s not hard to understand why many white anarchists cling to this narrow conception of workers revolution. They feel that nationalism is in opposition to their work because historically its Euro-and Anglo-manifestations have been so closely tied to imperialism, and racism that, for them, it’s not a revolutionary option. But the categorical rejection of all nationalisms due to their perceived hostility to class revolution is not a necessary conclusion of anarchist intellectual history.

Bakunin

For most of Bakunin’s political life he could be described as a pan-Slavic revolutionary nationalist and an anarchist. He didn’t believe that his anti-imperialism and his anarchism were in conflict. He felt “strong sympathy for any national uprising against any form of oppression” declaring that “no one is entitled to impose its costume, its customs, its language and its laws.”¹⁵ Bakunin was not agnostic on the issue of self-determination. He clearly supported peoples who were fighting for it.

¹² Murray Bookchin. *Post Scarcity Anarchism*. Ramparts Press 1971 p.211.

¹³ Black, p.150.

¹⁴ Bookchin. “Nationalism and the National Question.” P. 11.

¹⁵ Cited in D. Guerin, 1970, *Anarchism*, Monthly Review, p. 68.

Not only did Bakunin support self-determination, he recognized the distinction between a nation and the state. “The state is not the fatherland, it is the abstraction...of the fatherland. The common people of all countries deeply love their fatherland, but that is a natural real love. The patriotism of the people is not just an idea, it is a fact; but political patriotism, love of the state, is not the faithful expression of that fact...”¹⁶ Nationalism is not the worship of the state, because it refers to a people and the love that they have for their land, their cultural and their language.

This was before the era of ‘diversity’ so Bakunin didn’t see anything in the commitment people had to the preservation of their national culture to celebrate. But he was smart enough to know that being anti-national was pointless. “Therefore we bow before tradition, before history, or rather, we recognize them, not because they appear to us as abstract barriers raised metaphysically, juridical and politically...but only because they have actually passed into the flesh and blood, into the real thoughts and the will of populations.”¹⁷

What Bakunin objected to was the principal of nationality because he felt that it wasn’t universal. He gradually became more intolerant of national struggles against colonialism because he saw how these movements inspired national chauvinism and hatred across Europe. His growing internationalism and commitment to workers solidarity put distance between him and national liberation advocates towards the end of his public life. “There is nothing more absurd and at the same time more harmful, more deadly, for the people to uphold the fictitious principal of nationality as the ideal of all the people’s aspirations, nationality is not a universal human principal.”¹⁸ It’s important to remember that Bakunin’s critique of nationalism was within the context of intra-European conflicts.

True internationalism is not anti-nationalist. It is a constructive ideal that seeks to create mutual respect, solidarity, and alliances among nations. To the extent that class elites attempt to use race, religion, gender, immigrant status, sexuality, age, or disability to divide the people in the name of the nation, anarchists should stand against it. But there are many nationalist struggles that are about self determination and human dignity, not division. The Palestinian struggle comes to mind along with the anti-colonial movement in Puerto Rico. Anarchists may fairly critique the statist elements in these movements. But the across the board opposition to the national unity of people of color in our struggle against imperialism renders many anarchists incapable of supporting even non-state, indigenous movements for autonomy in places like Chiapas, Mexico, or the Tamil struggle for autonomy in Sri Lanka.

Rocker

If there was some level of ambiguity around the relationship between anarchism and nationalism in the 19th century, that ambiguity ended with Rudolf Rocker’s opus *Nationalism and Culture*. Written in the 1930’s, the book highlighted the role that nationalist appeals were playing in solidifying domestic support for European fascist imperialism abroad and racial hatred at home. It also challenged the mythology of nationhood as an organic social grouping. He wrote “the nation

¹⁶ *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*. Edited by G.P. Maximoff. The Free Press New York 1953 P.324.

¹⁷ *ibid*.

¹⁸ Maximoff P.325.

is not the cause, but the result of the state. It is the state that creates the nation, not the nation the state.”¹⁹

The nation is a construction. And political leaders who resort to blood and soil tales of national origins do so because their reactionary nationalism is rooted in appeals to racism and imperialism and therefore needs a biological–land tie. But the fact that nations are developed by human action does not somehow invalidate their authenticity. Tribes are also human constructions, as are families, bands, etc... The only way to judge the usefulness of different social groupings is by observing their longevity and their tendency to support the type of lasting bonds between people that make human survival and growth possible. Families, and ethnical based tribes have survived the three most significant revolutions in human history—agriculture, industry, and the information age. Nations are a newer development. Only time will tell whether this construct will survive globalization and what some call ‘the new world order.’

For Rocker the free-city of Europe’s middle ages represented “that great epoch...of federalism whereby European culture was preserved from total submersion and the political influence of the arising royalty was for a long time confined to the non-urban country.”²⁰ He compared this age to the rise of the monarchical nation-state and claimed that among the medieval, European men of the free-cities “there never existed...those rigid, insurmountable barriers which arose with the appearance of the national states in Europe.”²¹

Rocker’s comparison of the golden age of autonomous, federated medieval cities to the rise of the nation wasn’t very useful. This is because the two are different in kind. The city is a geographic designation, like a province, or a country, or a county. A nation is a human designation—like a family, a tribe, or a gang.. This distinction is important because it sharpens the dilemma that anarchists of color find themselves in when we’re sorting through our politics. Since Rocker slammed the door shut on nationalism, non-white anarchists have been told to choose between our nation (or *people*) and our social philosophy. This choice is much more profound and, in the end, unnecessary, than whether we think cities are better units of social organization than counties. This choice has also led some to abandon anarchism.

Perhaps the most illustrative passage in Rocker’s book on the colonial character of universalism and its role in the construction of anti-nationalism can be found in his description of the social glue that tied medieval man together. “Medieval man felt himself to be bound up with a single, uniform culture...It was the community of Christendom which included all the scattered units of the Christian world and spiritually unified them.”²² Fair enough. But now for the kicker. “Church and empire likewise had root in this universal idea...For pope and emperor Christianity was the necessary ideological basis for the realization of a new world dominion...For medieval man it was the symbol of a great spiritual community...” but “while the Christian idea united them, the idea of the nation separated and organized them into antagonistic camps.”²³

What Rocker leaves out are the crusades, the inquisitions, the witch burnings, the Jewish pogroms, the slaughter of pagans. And that’s only in Europe. By the late medieval period the conquistadors were in Central and South America committing genocide against the heathen indigenous populations in the name of Christianity. The Church may have had a unifying effect for

¹⁹ Rudolph Rocker. *Nationalism and Culture*. Black Rose Books 1998 (Reprint) Original 1937 P. 200.

²⁰ Rocker P.2.

²¹ Rocker P.3.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

some Europeans, but this unity was achieved with the blood of millions both inside and outside of the continent. I'll take the divisions of the nation over the "unity" of the Christian Church any day.

For all its limitations, Rocker's *Nationalism and Culture* was a mammoth effort and clearly a classic of anarchist literature. More than any other book, it detailed the connections between reactionary nationalism and racism and made clear how the state used both to enhance its power over the masses. While his sweeping dismissal of all nationalism is regrettable, it is at least politically understandable within the context of the rise of Euro-fascism in the 1930's. What's harder to reconcile are post-world war II anarchists who have witnessed the anti-colonial movements in the global south and still maintain that national movements for liberation against colonialism are "the same" as the imperial nationalist movements of Europe in the last two centuries.

Colonial Contemporaries

Murry Bookchin addressed himself specifically to anarchist universalism within the context of the 'national question' in 1993. After echoing Rocker's idyllic view of the free cities of medieval Europe, he warned "the great role assigned to reason by the enlightenment may well be in grave doubt" if we forget that "our true social affinities are based on citizenship, equality and a universalistic sense of a common humanity."²⁴

Are 'our' true affinities based on citizenship? I'm not sure that the tens of millions of non-citizens in the U.S. who, due to their status as undocumented immigrants, would agree. In fact, citizenship has historically been a construction of property owners as a way to exercise privilege and power over poor migrants, and religious and racial minorities. This has been true from Roman times to present day America. And affinities based on a "universalistic sense of a common humanity" sound good, but who gets to define what that common humanity is? The First International (an almost exclusively European affair)? Or maybe a bunch of Institute for Social Ecology graduates?

The underlying issue is not the lack of diversity of various left circles and movements that purport to represent universal principals. It's the very supposition that any single movement or political ideal could represent any meaningful global consensus on how communities should arrange their social institutions. Anarchists have their ideas and should work in their communities to, among other things, demonstrate that those ideas can work in the real world for other peoples around the globe. Some success in this endeavor should be a prerequisite for international anarchist criticism of national liberation and indigenous struggles against western imperialism.

In the essay Bookchin evokes fondly the lyrics of the socialist anthem the Internationale—"Tis the final conflict!"—and longs for the "sense of universalistic commitment" that those words embodied.²⁵ Forgive me for not being two inspired by the image of Bookchin and a group of his old left New York buddies, hunched over in a semi-circle ready to bust a note. But he goes into attack mode when he picks up where Rocker left off and applies his across-the-board rejection of nationalism to the colonial struggles of Africa, Asia, and the Americas of the 1950's and 60's. Bookchin mocked the national liberation movements of the period through his sophomoric use

²⁴ Bookchin, "Nationalism and the National Question." P. 11.

²⁵ Ibid.

of quotes in describing their “attempts to achieve ‘autonomy’ from imperialism...even at the expense of a popular democracy in the colonized world.”²⁶

Bookchin doesn't bother to identify one colonial popular democracy (a contradiction in terms) that was overthrown by nationalists or native movements in the quest for autonomy. He doesn't because none existed. But that's alright...we all know that darkies are always better off under white rule. Bookchin's larger point is that the nice, idealistic, white kids in the new left got duped and intimidated into supporting authoritarian national liberation movements by the usual assortment of black national revolutionary thugs, solemn and sympathetic Native Americans fighting to hang on to their land, Latino political gangs lurking in the barrio, and other stereotypical ghosts of 1960's radical mythology. It's astonishing that at this late date Bookchin would still be walking around blaming black revolutionary nationalists and Asian Maoists for the decline of the new left and the rise of 'micro nationalism.' It's always easier to blame others than it is to look in the mirror.

'Post Left' Colonialism

There seems to be a developing split between anarchist journal writers and activists on the national question. To their credit, lots of anarchists have participated in anti-imperialist struggles with respect for the people with whom they've struggled. Currently, anarchist organizers and cultural workers in North America are increasingly throwing off the shackles of dogma and are doing solidarity work with national and autonomous movements against colonialism. But as this divergence has taken place, the colonial anarchists have become even more desperate in their attempt to hang on to the tradition. And on this front the attempt to protect colonial anarchy has been led not by the class war anarchists, but by a loosely knit network of green and primitivist intellectuals who argue that anarchists should cut their lingering ties to the left altogether.

A 1993 screed by Fredy Perlman that appeared in *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* asserts that the fascist nationalism of Europe in the 1930's and 40's “could now be applied to Africans as well as Navahos, Apaches as well as Palestinians. The borrowings from Mussolini, Hitler, and the Zionists are judiciously covered up, because Mussolini and Hitler failed to hold on to their seized power...”²⁷

This appeared in the same journal that did a four-part series called 'Post-Left Anarchy' in the fall of 1999 in which Lawrence Jarach reprimanded anarchists who dared to show solidarity with the EZLN for their “uncritical support.” “The name of the organization should be enough to cause anarchists to pause” (Zapatista National Liberation Army) because “national liberation has never been part of the anarchist agenda...The EZLN, for all its revolutionary posturing, is a broad based democratic movement for progressive social change within the fabric of the Mexican state.”²⁸ How do you even engage with people about colonialism who treat “Africans” as some sort of Hitler-inspired nationalist monolith or who claim that indigenous autonomists who have successfully sustained a decade-old uprising through disciplined armed struggle are basically revolutionary poseurs? Generally, you don't.

²⁶ Bookchin, “Nationalism and the National Question.” P. 10.

²⁷ Fredy Perlman, “The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism” *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*. #37, Summer 1993.

²⁸ Lawrence Jarach, “Don't let the Left (overs) Ruin Your Appetite” *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*. #48, Fall – Winter 1999–2000.

But in the Spring 2002 issue of *Green Anarchy* a Zapatista did. It was a response to an article that appeared in the paper a few months earlier entitled “The EZLN is NOT Anarchist.” The article labels the EZLN as “fundamentally reformist” not working towards anything “that could not be provided for by capitalism.”²⁹ The piece went on to instruct anarchists to find ways to “intervene in a way that is fitting with one’s aims, in a way that moves one’s revolutionary anarchist project forward.”³⁰

The Zapatista responded “It would be difficult for us to design a more concise list of colonial words and attitudes than those used in this sentence. “Intervene?” “moves one’s ‘project’ forward?” Mexicans have a very well developed understanding of what ‘intervention’ entails.”³¹ He ended with this, “Colonialism is one of the many enemies we are fighting in this world and so long as North Americans reinforce colonial thought patterns in their ‘revolutionary’ struggles, they will never be on the side of any anti-colonial struggle anywhere. We in the Zapatista struggle have never asked anyone for unflinching, uncritical support. What we have asked the world to do is respect the historical context we are in and think about the actions we do to pull ourselves from under the boots of oppression.”³²

If and when North American anarchists learn how to do this with all of the struggles against colonial and neo-colonial domination around the globe—whether they’re nationalist or go under some other label, then we’ll be welcomed into a much larger and richer international tradition of people’s struggles against domination. This is where we belong.

²⁹ *Green Anarchy. The EZLN is NOT Anarchist. #6 Summer 2001.*

³⁰ *Green Anarchy. A Zapatista Response to The EZLN is NOT Anarchist #8 Spring 2002 P. 3.*

³¹ *Green Anarchy P. 4.*

³² *Ibid.*

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