What's In A Slogan? "KYLR" and Militant Anarcha-feminism

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Contents

An anarchist walks out of a punk show to smoke. On her vest are anarchist patches with various standard slogans, "No Gods No Masters," "Death To Transphobes," "Kill Your Local Rapist," "All Cops Are Bastards," "Punch Nazis," "From The River To The Sea Palestine Will Be Free," "Make Total Destroy," "The Only Good Cop Is A Dead Cop," "Eat The Rich," "Death Before Detransition" and… "Fire To The Prisons."

A suddenly red-faced bystander trots up to her to argue.

> *"Oh so you're saying you support a blanket social policy of allowing anyone to burn anything they accuse of being a 'prison' with no evidentiary standards?! With that sort of policy you would have endorsed the Philadelphia police when they burned down an entire black neighborhood! Encouraging people to burn down prisons like vigilantes is worse than maintaining them because you'd kill all the prisoners inside! You're actually the opposite of abolition!"*

She laughs and spits in his face.

Back inside the band on stage howls something about "liberation." The lead singer has raped five people, and each time an "accountability process" of his friends proclaimed him reformed, so still talking about it is "carceral." The venue coordinator infamously provides unspecified drugs to young women and then brutally rapes them for hours in collaboration with his wife, both smirkingly justifying it with the phrase *"buy the ticket, take the ride."* Several of their survivors have needed reconstructive surgery on their genitals. The bouncer has never raped anyone, but when girls get "hysterical" or "start talking drama" he always kicks them out and not their rapists. At the merch tables a proud women's and gender studies major distros zines with pastel flowers on them; he speaks in rapt, seemingly compassionate and spritely tones, about how *"we all do harm."* He hospitalized his last partner twice. She got out a couple months ago and fled the punk scene and the city.

An older trans woman, covered in tattoos and with graying hair, tentatively enters the space with a friend, their first night out at a show in years and look around, quickly recognizing her own rapist happily chatting and backslapping with the "professional accountability team" who stepped in and offered their services when she called him out. One of her conditions was that he stop attending shows and stop drinking. He has a beer in hand.

Nothing can be done.

"It's an unfortunate fact," says an older punk in earshot, *"but while perpetrators can be rehabilitated, survivors are often too broken and crazy to be allowed in our spaces. They're disruptive, individualistic, and anti-democratic. They'd just continue the cycle of violence if they got their way."*

The older trans woman and her friend walk out the door, they've been there for all of a minute but the night is ruined.

The red-faced liberal with spit on his beard is still screaming apoplectically at the punk girl in the battle vest, *"That's assault! You've committed assault! That's carceral! That's retaliatory! You think you're an anarchist but you're reproducing the logic of revenge that constitutes the state! I'm calling the police!"*

She's still laughing.

The older trans woman notices her "Kill Your Local Rapist" patch and smiles, some tension finally releasing. *"Hey, I like your patches. You wanna ditch this shitshow and go get pizza?"*

A SLOGAN WITH CONTEXT

All language use takes place within social contexts. Unfortunately, the internet often strips away this context. Someone in a wildly different subculture, enmeshed in a different default paradigm, might see "No Gods No Masters" and immediately pattern-match that to a call to exterminate every religious believer. Or, more directly, see "Death To Transphobes," believe it to be a serious policy proposal for death camps, and start screaming about how most of the world is presently transphobic, and so this is genocidal western imperialism. But just as "Death Before Detransition" isn't a call to kill other people detransitioning, "From The River To The Sea…" isn't a call to exterminate Jews from the Levant, and "Make Total Destroy" isn't a call to blow up the sun, "Kill Your Local Rapist" isn't a policy proposal to have everyone on the planet immediately lynch literally anyone ever accused of rape by anyone. Everyday language use, to say nothing of a political meme, always has context.

The line between deliberate baiting bad faith and simple ignorance on the part of responders can be hard to parse, however.

Some, with little contact with radical subcultures away from glowing electronic screens, might read the above story as an absurdly contrived one, rhetorically loaded hypotheticals designed to completely obscure reality. But while I stacked the deck in presentation, the examples are all absolutely real. Even the clownish objections to "Fire To The Prisons."

Nor is the density of examples of rapists in one venue at all contrived. I've experienced going to a protest or a show or a general meeting and noticing a pile of rapists present countless times, my friends even more. All of the examples are themselves generalizations over multiple similar examples I've known, all well-worn common categories. I am not inventing extreme hypotheticals but trying to relay basic context to you. This is just part of the world in which old anarcha-feminist slogans like "Kill Your Local Rapist" live.

It's also important to note that this isn't something magically unique to subcultures or ones with certain politics. The background rate of rapists in our society is pretty high, even the extremely conservative estimates put it at 5% of men alone, with evidence for higher claims of 20%. This base rate applies to suburban normies just as much as activists or punks, the difference is that in subcultural scenes folks are often far more socially connected — instead of having at best a couple friends and a couple work friends like most people, you have social ties with hundreds of other people in your city. And plenty of people are constantly moving to and from other cities, bringing stories and direct experiences. You thus encounter more rapists in active subcultures. Although how many you hear about is influenced by how trustworthy folks may consider you. Yes, it's true that predators are attracted to subcultural spaces with a large pool of potential victims, to say nothing of communities with high turnover like radical activism. And there are some who are drawn to spaces like anarchism because they mistakenly think a community prohibition on calling the cops means they'll face no consequences. But the main influence that an ideology like anarchism has is being more prone to proactively air the presence of rapists rather than hush it up behind closed doors. Thus one publicly hears about the rapists in anarchist spaces (at least if the town in question isn't toxically secretive), but less frequently about the same number in liberal, communist, or conservative spaces.

In 2007, some conservatives in Minnesota discovered the existence of anarchists as we planned for protests against the Republican National Convention. They read our websites with

astonishment, *"These anarchists seem really fucked up! They talk about having something called 'rape culture.' Imagine being so evil that you have a rape culture!"*

I hope you, dear reader, can laugh and immediately recognize the fallacy. But it's a recurring one.

We exist pickled in an omnipresent rape culture. The chortling conservatives certainly do. There are tons of rapists in their communities; they just cover it up, studiously avoid seeing it, or torture the definition of rape so badly that the complaints of their uncle's child bride don't register. Liberals of course use different deflections, but are just as saturated. From the Catholic Church to Hollywood, our society may occasionally put on some pretenses of opposing rape, but in every way that matters abet and defend rapists. Work a crisis line and you will discover, beyond the callousness of almost everyone and the stunning lack of even the most basic resources for survivors, the sheer ubiquity of rape in all corners and all communities.

Driving home one night a couple years ago, my partner and I stopped for a naked girl standing dazed in the middle of the street as every other driver moved around her, dismissing her as an insane homeless person. She was drugged out of her mind, terrified beyond all sanity, and incapable of speech. As we waited with her for hours, got her clothes and drove her home, the horrific bruises started to form everywhere on her body. She had barely escaped a planned and brutal rapist who had clearly done this many times before. She was just some normie girl. He's one of our friendly normie neighbors. We just don't know which one; it would have been inappropriate to press her. Statistically speaking, one of your neighbors is just like him.

If you think you don't personally know rapists, you just have your eyes closed.

What can be done?

By default, even in radical subcultures, everyone wants to go through something like official channels. No one likes to rock the boat and piss everyone off. So you walk up to the show organizer or the venue organizer or the bouncer and ask them to kick a rapist. They refuse. *"Where's your evidence?! We can't just accept testimony from anyone! I take rape really seriously and so I'm offended by how casually your making this accusation without sufficient documentation!"*

Even if the individual in question isn't bad faith, they instinctively see the situation as one of conflict mediation where they are obliged to start from neutrality between two equally likely possibilities, rape and false-accusation. Except there usually is an asymmetry: they're annoyed at you for making it their problem and they're often already in closer social proximity to the rapist, otherwise you wouldn't be bringing this to them. Thus if they side with you to any degree there will be fallout for them, hangouts and conversations will suddenly become awkward at best. Removing a band or a speaker or a tabler they were working with? That's a huge cost on them.

From your pocket your phone keeps buzzing as many of the alerted survivors you're friends with scream at you to jump their rapist, to get them kicked out, to scream warnings out to the entire room, to cut the power to the whole show, to relay a personal message to anyone he's chatting up, but watch out, he carries a big knife and freely uses it on folks… It's overwhelming. You remember helping one of these friends get to the emergency room and then escape when an officer demanded a statement. You remember months of helping another friend process over text messages.

So you keep pressing the venue's authorities for a while about the active risk to attendees the rapists pose, and emphasizing that the venue could be seen as culpable for refusing to do

anything. They finally relent and allow you to make a general statement about the presence of rapists in the room, *"But don't name anyone!!"*

That's how you end up standing before a room of people, interrupting the show or meeting or whatever and awkwardly tell them that there are known rapists in the room and just to like watch your drinks and maybe be a little careful.

The room suddenly explodes in outrage at you.

"Why won't you name them!" "Because they obviously don't have proof!" "I say! Interesting hypothetical! I think we should all discuss how we should decide these kinds of novel situations!"

With amazing speed the room spontaneously organizes itself into a collective judicial proceeding. Everyone feels right with this new arrangement. It feels correct, known. The Thing To Do.

Regardless of whether any given person took civics class, there are omnipresent narratives, frameworks and techniques in our society that we grow up breathing in and out like air. So the entire room starts vapidly declaring phrases like *"Innocent Until Proven Guilty."*

One of the brutal serial rapists you know closely looks you square in the eyes with a cocky smirk and announces to the room, *"Speaking as a survivor, this feels really retraumatizing and inappropriate. It's irresponsible to call people out against the wishes of any survivors and outside of the formal channels for transformative justice. In general I think you all could really stand to read unspecified Black Indigenous feminists so you could learn this kind of carceral mob mentality doesn't help anything."*

After you've done this dance a few times you stop bothering. You just go home. You never go in the first place.

Dozens of you do the same. Then hundreds. But, of course, the shows, the protests, the meetings, keep happening with the same old folks and the same old rapists and their enablers. New survivors keep being generated. But the people who remain notice none of this damage; they thank themselves for having bravely resisted the potential injustice of wild accusations. Some of them think they helped survivors! They took the dangerous chaotic messiness and pressured it into stable institutionalized accountability processes. When a rapist talks a big talk about being reformed after reading a single bell hooks zine, everyone present feels warmly encouraged. They *did* do the right thing! Of course they did! Society is at peace now. The destabilizing exceptions have been dealt with.

And they can get those warm feels again in a couple years when he echoes the same words in an accountability process for another rape!

Part of the dynamic is that half the population quite evidently can't imagine being raped, yet think it's totally plausible that they could rape someone or be falsely accused.

But another dynamic is that liberalism completely warps most people's perspectives, making them incapable of thinking outside the implicit framework of a state. The necessity of centralized authority to exclusively evaluate and sentence, itself bound by formal constraints, is deeply embedded in many people, regardless of whether this is relabeled as The Commune, The Organization, or The Community.

Okay, but what else could we do?

"Kill Your Local Rapist" may read to a liberal used to thinking in terms of policy proposals, like a legal regime of immediately executing anyone ever accused of being a rapist by anyone else; certainly a bad prescription. But even if most anarcha-feminist punks wearing the patch mean something more like a provocative push towards survivor-led militancy, for most liberals there's

nothing in their frame of reference besides legal trials and lynch mobs. Contextual provocation or not, "Kill Your Local Rapist" is still an endorsement of "vigilante" action, the same as assassinating a cop or CEO or nazi, and isn't that just mindless mob justice that would lead to endless cycles of violence?

What even is there outside the state?

HOW STATELESS SOCIETIES WORK

The first thing to understand about actually existing stateless societies is that they're not naive, merely stateless by ignorance, having failed to invent or even imagine the state. To the contrary, stateless societies are constantly haunted by the possibility of state-formation and thus diligently shape almost everything they do around avoiding such runaway power. They may have seen a king emerge in a neighboring region and they'll be damned if the same thing happens to them.

This is important because no state in history was formed through rational deliberation on collective action problems and risk — like a liberal textbook might suggest — instead the statist system is everywhere the unbroken continuous legacy of pillage and despotism. No community ever consensed on a social contract; power was always imposed. Insofar as modern states "provide" any boons to their citizens, these are the product of the state eventually seizing control over preexisting dynamics in society or seeking to better manage and control their workforce.

Liberals are very proud of a few "checks and balances" imposed into the flesh of these bloodthirsty beasts: things like voting, competing branches of government, semi-consistent legal systems, and epistemic blinders to deal with evaluating truth in all-or-nothings. In practice, of course, none of these has any real traction or stopping power. At best they slow the state's compounding tyranny a little. The power-seeking simply focus their efforts on capturing a single existing behemoth and then leverage its economies of scale to do unimaginable levels of harm. The centralization is a runaway feedback process. All the incentives are to increase the power of that beast, never to diminish its power, and so people are fed to it in an endless stream of carnage. Killing the beast becomes a harder and harder task, requiring ever greater levels of sacrifice, so that even if we eventually win, the statist system that presently enlocks the planet will have tortured, enslaved and murdered for generations.

To avoid this runaway process, at least locally within their own domain, stateless societies create fractally more checks and balances, often by rejecting centralization entirely, so that every individual becomes themselves an active check and balance in a host of ways.

To really understand stateless societies it's best to get outside the frame of mind of institutions — thinking of a "stateless society" as a single thing, a state that technically isn't a state, a state minus some distinct state aspects — and instead think in terms of a collection of individuals running various strategies, in a game theoretic sense.

In game theory you might have a set of actors all interacting with one another in endlessly repeating iterations. Thanks to repetition and the ability of actors to remember past behavior, there can be strong pressures towards cooperation. The anarchist game theorist Michael Taylor famously wrote about these dynamics, providing rigorous modern grounding for Kropotkin's arguments for the social and evolutionary emergence of mutual aid.

The classic example is the n-iterated prisoner's dilemma. While snitching is the optimal strategy in the one-off version of the game, when parties repeatedly play the game and can make

decisions based on the track record of the other player, more complicated strategies become possible and yet the best one is incredibly simple: tit-for-tat with a slight skew towards cooperation. You cooperate by default but punish deviation from cooperation, maybe eventually testing out a tentative forgiveness; you don't trust someone against the evidence.

More interesting things start happening when you run a bunch of different types of games and increase the number of players in the pool from two. Surprisingly, cooperation often remains highly viable, but two things broadly emerge:

The first is that the population often contains a mix of strategies. Some players (human or automated) consistently play minority strategies and still survive. The resulting ecosystem may stabilize with a high number of cooperators, but it usually retains a stubborn minority of predatory monsters who will take advantage of them at the first opportunity; these never go entirely extinct or all mutate to a different strategy, at best they settle into a persistent fringe exploiting the cooperators.

The second is that dominant strategies of cooperation involve not just mild retaliations in kind when someone does something to you specifically, but aggressive self-sacrificing retaliation against those who demonstrate predatory strategies to anyone. Solidarity, as the old anarchist saying goes, means attack.

What's important to note is that *there is nothing like a state* in these models, just decentralized individuals adopting varying strategies. Depending on a host of things the resulting overall ecosystems that stabilize can vary quite a bit.

Of course, anthropologists never needed fancy math and computer simulations to discover this reality. Many learned it quickly from just talking to those actually living in stateless societies.

These people were not unaware of the possibility of state formation, but all-too-aware, and thus their societies were characterized by extreme hypervigilance distributed in a multitude of ways aggressively trying to nip all possible state-formation in the bud.

The central imperative is that anyone seeking power be immediately recognized and attacked or aggressively sanctioned by everyone. If someone tries to set up severe charismatic authority, a mafia shakedown operation or a personal army, this must be quickly detected and relayed widely and everyone in the vicinity has to put everything down to go create a massive disincentive, using whatever's normalized as sufficient for a class of cases in a long spectrum of options from mockery to lethal force. Such confrontations can be costly, and some individuals might be disinclined to join in, so often the strategic norm is to likewise apply social pressure against neutrality, in much the same way that activists will when mobilizing a boycott or strike.

Infamously, state societies like our own normalize neutrality and passiveness, even in the face of oppression, always sloughing off all responsibility or decisionmaking to some distant collective institution or authority that, even if it's somehow aligned against the oppression in question, has an inherently hard time integrating knowledge of particular contexts much less acting quickly or dexterously. In contrast, stateless societies, at their best, are all about active individual responsibility. Proactive vigilance against tyranny taking root is the concern of everyone, with a distributed social fabric thus enabling individuals to apply their own unique particularized knowledge to disincentivize power-seeking behavior, in ways that can fluidly shift and vary across contexts. How far along is a certain charismatic individual aggregating sharp influence to becoming a warlord?

The mix of strategies a given stateless society uses around this disincentivization vary, and obviously not every one of them should be uncritically treated or fully adopted by anarchists,

who additionally seek to avoid interpersonal domination and maximize freedom, not merely to avoid states. Some strategies — like extreme mockery of anything that smells like personal confidence, or extremely aggressive sanction of having any wealth whatsoever, or periodic uprisings against the "sorcery" of anyone with social prestige, or totally ostracizing anyone who uses violence at all ever, even when resisting slave raids — clearly overreach. Those might suppress the emergence of power loci and keep the cancer of state-formation at bay, but they do so at arguably unnecessary costs. Someone being obnoxiously arrogant is not the same thing as someone actually wielding power. Similarly, a small degree of variation in personal material wealth or status is worth accepting if the alternative is owning nothing but what you can carry, never having friends, or never excelling at anything. And similarly *violence* as a category isn't the same thing as power or oppression, but often quite important to resistance.

But even if the strategies that congealed in some stateless communities as social norms are less than fully optimized by anarchist perspectives — and we can significantly improve on them with more meta-awareness and nuance — we may still appreciate how such societies historically evolved such imprecise measures and overcorrections just to be safe. The examples of bottom-up censure of wealth, arrogance, or any violence are understandable failures of targeting a simple and readily apparent metric rather than the underlying target, a classic hallmark of social norms formed through piecemeal evolution rather than deliberative radicalism.

When it comes to rapists, a diversity of responses is documented, in part depending on how gender-egalitarian a society was. Two extreme categories are illustrative: In the first, some stateless societies just kill rapists (or expel them alone into the wilderness where death is likely). In the second, other societies handle a rapist by means of adjudicators in a polycentric legal system.

Neither of these examples is perfect, nevertheless the structure of imperfections can be instructive.

The Xeer polycentric legal system across Somalia, adopted since the seventh century, is a classic example of a stateless "justice system" and has been cited as inspiration by both social anarchists and libertarians. There's certainly strong commonalities with approaches independently invented and applied in anarchist communities across the world since the 90s. Yet, across these cases, while the polycentric adjudication model could work on cases of mere interpersonal harm, like stealing another activist's car, they proved incredibly weak on rape, being structurally skewed towards maintaining social peace.

In more traditional polycentric systems like Xeer, kinship is the central social unit and this collective structure is how accountability is enforced. Unlike individuals who can die and thus no longer present their case to an adjudicator, families are relatively perpetual "actors." Your family is thus responsible for defending you, taking any claim you might have before adjudicators, but your actions are in turn the responsibility of your family. If you murder someone, their family and your family agree on common reputable adjudicators, the adjudicators weigh the evidence and circumstances, and then your family pays their family some restitution. Agreeing on common adjudicators is actually pretty smooth, as are the competitive pressures on them to be neutral between clans and consistent. Outsiders expect this sort of system to immediately devolve into blood feuds between families, but those are surprisingly rare because no one involved is a fool and the entire system is shaped around avoiding such. Peace rather than conflict is always strongly in the interests of families and adjudicators, individuals be damned.

As two liberal critics put it,

> *"the accused in a rape case is usually required to pay monetary compensation, a burden shared by his family and clan members, or, in limited circumstances, he may be required to marry the victim. The victim is not perceived as being denied justice, or as someone whose welfare has been subsumed by the wider interests of her community. Instead, keeping the rape case out of the courts and the public eye is regarded as advantageous for the victim. The objective sought by elders is to ensure there are no reprisals that could unleash a cycle of violence and to protect the reputation and marriage prospects of the victim, not to prevent future criminal behaviour. While peace between families and clans is maintained, it is at the expense of providing a deterrent against rape"* source

We can also view the explicit patriarchal norms of such traditional polycentric systems as a product of regulatory capture. The professional adjudicators have *some* level of competition keeping them honest *between* clans, but with stature and familial representation as central dynamics, both are easily captured by the gerontocratic. With men then controlling roles as familial representatives and adjudicative elders they can lock out women and their concerns, both involving rapes inside a clan and rapes that cross clan boundaries. This is the core problem with the collective institutions of the Xeer approach. Maybe not quite as bad as states, but subject to the same corruptions.

In medieval Iceland — often cited by anarcho-capitalists as an ideal — the same sort of relative centralization and clan structure applied, with similar patriarchal failure modes. In relative contrast among polycentric legal systems, the anthropologist Oko Elechi detailed in *Doing Justice Without The State*, how his people, the Igbo, used what were functionally overlapping meshes of mutual aid societies instead of patriarchal clans, so a given individual could appeal to multiple groups for solidarity and representation, including along common lines of identity like youth and women. The point of such further decentralization was to provide counter pressures against systemic regulatory capture, although this did not end up preventing the Afikpo (in contrast to the Abaja, Otanzu and Isu) from classifying some rape as adultery, and adultery as a crime against *social stability*, with the solution sometimes being the marriage of the survivor and their rapist. As Oko Elechi writes, centralization into the Nigerian state only expanded such leniency towards rape. Deeper decentralization than Xeer is thus an important but *insufficient* component in stopping rape, there are broader dynamics that constitute a culture, for good or for bad, beyond a formal justice system. The book *People Without Government*, by the anthropologist Harold Barclay — who came to embrace anarchism — covers a wide array of examples of stateless societies beyond such polycentric systems, including more egalitarian ones, comprised of diffuse strategic mixes where distributed sanction and more spontaneous ad hoc counter-organizing or direct action is normalized.

Given all this context, the liberals quoted on the Xeer system are silly to expect a state justice system to offer survivors anything more or provide substantive disincentivization. Xeer is captured by patriarchy in no small part *because* of the centralization within it. The centralization of states makes them prey to even worse regulatory capture by patriarchy — consider the sheer hostility cops have to survivors — and even if they were to be somehow shifted to prosecute rape stringently, we would have good reason *to not want them to*. Rape, by its nature, often occurs in ways where knowledge of the truth is highly localized; you and your friends may have very good contextual reason to believe, but that isn't necessarily transitive to a distant global arbiter like the state. What individuals can in fact know near absolutely, distant strangers divorced from

the social local web of trust must be more reserved about. A single centralized system with a monopoly on violence should not easily believe any given accusation, because that would incentivize wild exploitation of the system. A single centralized system capable of extracting the truth would use those surveillance powers for absolute tyranny. It's almost as if centralization removes dexterity, knowledge, and nuance while intensifying all dangers.

If centralized solutions like state judicial systems were the only option on the menu for rape survivors, there would be no hope.

Thankfully, we can demonstrably do without states. Statelessness thus offers a wide platform within which we can craft better individual strategies and norm ecosystems — not just polycentric adjudicative institutions. The extent of the possible is much vaster than with statism. It's thus critical that we understand the core strategy dynamics that enable them to exist at all; but not every experiment is perfect and we should learn from and improve on mistakes.

A BRIEF REPORT BACK ON ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESSES

In the 1990s anarcha-feminists started experimenting with ad hoc attempts to reform rapists. Some of the early projects in Portland, Minneapolis, and Philly became templates that were copied across continents and into small towns with great hope.

Uniform across these attempts was a DIY ethos. *How hard could it be?*

But the folks involved often had divergent implicit goals and expectations; for example:

1) Restoring the survivor, providing them with safety from the rapist/abuser.

2) Protecting potential targets of the rapist/abuser in the future.

3) Getting the rapist/abuser to change their core motivational system and entire view of the world.

4) Restoring peace in the broader community and suppressing social conflicts.

This is because the makeup of an accountability team dramatically varied. Sometimes it was the survivor's friends and the perpetrator's friends. Sometimes only one "side." Sometimes it was them plus bystanders. Sometimes it was only ad hoc bystanders. Sometimes it was bystanders trying to make a reputation for themselves as professionals and authorities in this new field. Sometimes it was just an existing patriarch leaping at the opportunity to posture as macho and benevolent. Personal motivations varied wildly.

I want to be clear: Despite them now being a widespread joke, I've seen and heard of accountability processes that worked. But only ever because the perpetrator was independently motivated and driven to change *or* because the accountability process was over something like mere interpersonal conflict, a theft of a car or a clash of personalities, for example, not an act like rape or abuse that's grounded in power-seeking.

The latter sort of successes parallel polycentric adjudication systems like Xeer. They work really well over friction and economic disputes between individuals! When an individual does mere "harm" to another, an accountability process may be the way to go. But rape is usually not even remotely in the same category as mere harm.

An anarcha-feminst friend of mine and scholar of accountability processes, who was herself repeatedly raped for years as a child by a neighbor, has laughed darkly about these approaches for over a decade. *"They think of rape through the lens of a drunken consent slip during a hookup,*

because that's hard enough to confront, they can't really even begin to fathom anything beyond that."

In this view (3) is virtually impossible. Someone whose core motivation towards the world is one of predation, who joined anarchist subcultural spaces purely because he thought there would be more vulnerable lambs there, is not going to invent empathy and ethics from scratch by reading some feminist theory. He's not going to be peer-pressured into it. Nor is he going to break down on the couch, discover some childhood trauma, and transcend it, because two punk scouts trying to get their therapy badge talked to him. And if you think *"providing him with resources for his needs and community belonging"* is going to open his heart, congratulations you're just voluntarily subsidizing a predator, while in the process offensively and incorrectly suggesting poor or marginalized people are more likely to rape.

At best he's gonna learn some new impressive language and plan ways around this inconvenience in the future.

Some people get really weird at this junction and start expressing existential depression around the proposition "everyone can change." I've never understood this reaction.

There's a finite number of bits in a human brain and thus always some conceivable input string that will undo whatever complex path-dependent chain of causes led that person to ossify into the values they currently hold. With immortality and trillions of years a team of likewise immortal therapists could nonstop try to figure out some exact fractal skeleton key that will turn Hitler into a devoted anarchist. It is technically possible.

And you, yourself, can do incredible feats of self-reconfiguration, *if you want to*. Take some LSD, reconnect with your childhood perspective, meditate and build extensive chains of self-awareness down the entirety of your conscious process. Restructure your daily habits, correct your default narratives. There's so much you can do. You are almost infinitely plastic, exactly to the extent *you want to be*. One of the sweetest guys I've known was studiously self-controlled like no other and of constant compassionate assistance to survivors, precisely because he'd beaten a partner decades prior and, living with the visceral horror and disgust of that, *on his own* dedicated his entire life to never letting anything like that happen again. But if those processes, narratives, instinctual strategic frames, and notions of self-identity, in your brain with root privileges, are never internally motivated to release control, then nothing's happening.

Neither of these facts changes the reality of cost-benefit tradeoffs we usually face. How long will it take to convert a captured spy of the enemy army before we trust him to wander freely back out into the trenches, transformed into a committed anarchist? More time and effort than we can spare.

Half the stories told of failed accountability processes zero in on this. The perpetrator never changed in any core way; instead years went by with a crew of activists wasting their lives and energy down the drain. In many cases this is so demoralizing and exhausting that they drop out of the movement or of being activists altogether.

But the other half of the stories are somehow even worse. In these stories it's not just the perpetrator failing to change, it's that the entire accountability process was hijacked by folks involved in it — regulatory capture on the fly.

Sometimes the accountability is captured by the perpetrator's friends who use it as a shield between him and the survivor, a way to marginalize her and paint her as unreasonable, and then a way to certify him as reformed and aggressively silence anyone still talking about things.

Sometimes the accountability process is captured by opportunists seeking validation. They see the accountability process as a personal position of power and prestige. From this vantage point, it makes no sense to admit any problems with the accountability process. The whole goal is to certify what an amazing job as mediator you did, and thus anything to the contrary must be suppressed.

Often the accountability process is captured by scene elders and bystanders whose primary goal is to stop the fighting, to remove all social pressures to break apart friendships. Their whole framework is restoring The Community, a nebulous concept that means something like a warm feeling of belonging their instinctual primate brain conjures when they have a bunch of friends and no one is mad. Of course the most efficient way to do that is to kick the survivor out. She's the one that raised all the fuss in the first place. The rapist only hurt one relationship, she's hurt *many* relationships by trying to make them take a stance on the rapist. Folks may not consciously want to expel the survivor from the start; but as things go on the conflict between their goals and hers become more and more apparent, which they consider a betrayal by the survivor, prompting them to come up with reasons to crusade against her. Additionally — beyond the maintenance of "Community" — specific scene elders often actively benefit from the continuation of patriarchal norms just as tribal elders in Somalia do.

Usually it's a mixture of these dynamics of regulatory capture. As a result, survivors frequently report the accountability process as far more traumatizing and alienating than the rape.

This has led to widespread endorsement of survivors going it alone or with their friends, which can still look like different things. In terms of accountability processes there's been a shift to recognize that *"if it's not survivor-led, it's not accountability."* (Because who else would it be accountability *to*?) But beyond the instances where a survivor believes an accountability process might work, anarchists have adapted the tools we use in insurgent struggle on other fronts, recognizing the rapist as often less a case of interpersonal conflict than something more akin to state-formation.

So anarcha-feminists form networks of underground cells (whisper networks), some crews become research professionals (adapting work exposing nazis), folks may do a house demo (much like a march on the boss), or sabotage the perpetrator's tools, or tag and paste up warnings, or hunt down and jump the perpetrator like one does neonazi boneheads. And just as boycotts can be necessary up and down the supply chain to bring a capitalist to heel, mobilization against rapists obliges pressing sanctions on their friends and support network.

A vast shift has thus occurred from viewing rapists as misbehaving folks in mere intra-scene conflict, to viewing them as existential threats or outside enemies. Just as anarchists will still ruthlessly organize labor against "small business owner" bosses within our subcultural scenes, ignoring their claims that "we're all on the same side," so too have we learned to organize against rapists.

So it's worth asking *why* anyone would think the community-restoring "accountability" approaches would work with rapists, when we would never consider applying them with some random neonazi bonehead, MAGA chud, occult ecofascist entryist, TERF karen, or killer cop.

RAPE AS A VALUE SYSTEM, IDEOLOGY, AND POWER DYNAMIC

I mean the answer obviously is patriarchy. Any given feminist on the street could provide an impromptu lecture in depth on why so many people identify with rapists more than survivors. As well as how the overall social norms created by rape culture provides a variety of material benefits to tons of people (mostly cis men) who don't themselves rape, thus seeding incentives to shy from tackling it. Hell, I knew a cis woman who *explicitly endorsed* rape culture because she liked it rough and *"it makes getting laid easier for me; if some other bitches get hurt, why should I care?"* (She later raped a close friend of mine and then bragged about it publicly afterwards, mocking him.)

Vast numbers of books and zines have been written tracing all the ways narratives underpinning rape culture course through our society and embed themselves as common sense, both misrepresenting the facts of patriarchy and reinforcing identification and values that align with rapists against survivors. But if tracing such narratives were sufficient, one could truly just hand a perpetrator (or apologist) a reading list and fix the problem.

What anarchists and feminists have been emphasizing in addition is that rape is a matter of *power*. Beyond the experience of rape for its target, which is a direct and visceral experience of having all your agency taken away, much the same way that waterboarding is, rape is about power for the rapist:

1) People feel sufficiently entitled to use other people's bodies because they already have only weak recognition of the other person as just as much a moral ends as themselves and thus relax or simply fail to feel ethical diligence towards them. Controlling people is often quite efficiently instrumental to other ends. Existing apathy and self-interest thus finds rapid expression as power.

2) People pursue power over others as an end-unto-itself, relishing situations and relationships of domination and control. The victory of suppressing another person's annoying agency, the sense of strength and potency is intoxicating to a lot of people, but it also closely interlocks with their core worldview. Power as a terminal goal thus becomes satiated through the rape itself.

3) There are power differentials in our society such that it's not just quite feasible to get away with rape, but often positively rewarded. People with power forge bonds together over raping their social inferiors. This doesn't just mean billionaires bonding on Epstein's island, but extends as a wide phenomenon: Oakland cops repeatedly raping an underage girl together. A circus punk project, band, fraternity, or occult group may rape to demonstrate their solidarity with one another over both outsiders and the targets' specific class. It extends down to the most micro-interpersonal level: a couple might help each other rape a target in part because it creates shared social culpability and obligation to one another. Thus rape often functions to facilitate broader social dynamics, like centralized social bubbles of power, some of the earliest seeds of states.

When speaking of patriarchy as a cultural and institutional system, rape is its most core technology of enforcement. Rapists are not just cops in the sense of dishing out terror and control, but in the way that they interlock in mutual class identity, solidarity, and collaboration. The lone rapist whose motivation is cold apathy and selfishness rather than active sadism is *facilitated* by this wider army of rapists, who make his choice so easy, and of course the impact of his act is

to reinforce the wider system; in this he operates akin to someone voluntarily deputized into a posse.

Note how you can't at all fix this stuff by reading a pile of feminist analysis or being hugged by everyone in your "community." These are questions of *values*. Someone who does not ultimately care very much about other people will be unmoved. Someone who sees power as an end-in-itself might read feminist analyses of patriarchy as blueprints with critical commentary implying how patriarchy could be strengthened. The member of the fraternity, manarchist platformist reading group, or whatever that uses collective solidarity around rape as a bond will be unmoved so long as the power nexus remains. Even if you break it up and resituate each member in a new community of exclusively feminists who might create a different norm system of social solidarity, you haven't addressed the underlying motivations that led him to it.

I'm not saying it's *impossible*, in theory, to bootstrap a change in someone's personal values against their value for the self-preservation of said values — values can and do change, but such cases are relatively rare in adults, usually the result of preexisting dramatic internal tension between values. They're also really hard to oversee or mastermind from the outside, especially in an antagonistic or stressful confrontation with someone they've raped, where every incentive is to find a way out. At best, all that social pressure or rewards can do is incentivize not getting caught, performing a certain way, winning over those watching you, triangulating, taking advantage of new context. Importantly, and contrary to a popular myth on the Left, value changes are not something that falls into place as an inexorable deterministic result of social changes. The structures and norms of a society can certainly partially *influence* the development of our orientations, but a significant component is random, internal or stray local influences. And many of those locked into power-seeking values stay locked in.

In this sense it makes sense to think of rapists in much the same way that we do cops or capitalists or tankies or nazis, as *ideological enemies*. If you find a cop hiding in anarchist circles there's no question about the severity of the response required, so why should we treat rapists all that differently?

When confronted with these realities, a sizable fraction of people in radical milieus have one of four responses:

1) One response is to take objection to the entire idea of anarchism in the first place. *"What?! Since when are we supposed to be opposed to power-seeking or actively seek to prevent it in the wider world?! That's woke moralism!!"* To which you can really only say, yes yes yes, we're anarchists, that's the whole point, see yourself out. This fraction of people is small, but they will at times quite frankly admit that they're in radical circles specifically to prey upon people. They may see anarchist politics as adding some slight constraints on how *the game* of such predation functions, but they primarily see it as about resisting distant formal institutions like the state. Struggles for interpersonal power and domination should continue — as they can't imagine sociality or satiation without it — and they were mistakenly attracted to anarchism as the affirmation of this supposed "individualism." This sort of person is often also attracted to occult or satanist circles — *"do what thou wilt!"* has many a nazi or rapist in punk circles shouted in their own defense — but always believes the liberal narrative that police either desire or are intended to stop rape, and thus see any anarchist efforts at stopping rape as us *"being cops."* In this topsy-turvy worldview, rapists are the anti-establishment rebels, and those survivors struggling against their oppression are tantamount to a police state.

2) Some people weirdly have an emotional breakdown and existential crisis, because their entire worldview has been built on the assumption that people are innately good and *only institutions* make them behave badly. They correctly notice that police forces are structurally incentivized to behave in certain ways, but largely discount that they also work by centrally collecting and mobilizing people with already bad value systems. In this sort of person's perspective, power is a matter of big distant systems that somehow exist separate from us and then impose their logic downward, not something that bubbles up fractally. But state-formation is not something magically imposed from without, nor is it a single mistake. Individuals are constantly trying out different strategies from birth on, and thus power-seeking is constantly reinvented, at least at some low rate. While actually existing stateless societies understand the need for constant vigilance and suppression of power, this person often inherits a very marxist way of thinking in which people are merely the products of their culture and time, so abolishing rape is impossible until we have a revolution and abolish capitalism; whereupon it's an automatic result.

3) Quite a lot of folks will violently reject the premise that rape is about power on the grounds that, because they worry about "accidentally" raping someone, such cases should be the prototypical ones. I want to be clear: well-intentioned missteps around consent in bed can happen, as can missteps from relatively limited levels of apathy and selfishness. Consent isn't a legalistic absolutist system of formal agreements, but can extend to context, implications, non-verbal signals, etc. Someone didn't think you were affected by alcohol, but you were. You froze up having a severe trauma reaction and your partner didn't notice. You felt obligated to say yes and pretend you were enthusiastic because you were alone on a boat with them and couldn't risk "the implication." Even people who are hypervigilant about consent can miss signals and context. Furthermore there are situations where, yes, someone got lazy about attentiveness and memory from what is ultimately their selfishness, but the degree of such is relatively limited. "Hey come back to bed," and they lightly grab your arm, something that in some contexts would just be a friendly form of nonverbal communication, but creates a threatening or "implication" dynamic in this specific context they don't bother to see. Or someone consensually sleeps with one partner off-condom and then gets so wasted before sleeping with their other partner they fail to inform them of the contextual change in risks around STIs. Or someone gets so into the act that they at one point instinctually and animalistically claw so hard at their partner's back they draw blood, despite an explicit prior agreement against pain or blood. These are violations of consent and they can be quite grave or dismissible to different affected parties in different contexts. Consent is inextricably a felt experience, not something entirely reducible to formal paperwork. It's totally fair for someone to describe a given experience like this as rape, including the implicit leveraging not just of interpersonal power but of systemic power, but also feel that their rapist is not wedded to the pursuit of power as a core value and would pretty easily course-correct forever upon being informed and helped. Survivors — as previously discussed — are the most informed party with the best knowledge of their situation. *"We were both 17, he was just ignorant,"* is a common line as is, *"it was technically a consent violation worth noting, but I read it as an accident, it didn't mean much to me, and having given it a lot of thought I think she's now very unlikely to repeat it."* And fair enough! But while somewhat common, these are simply not anywhere near the prototypical case of rape. The vast majority of rapes are done by serial rapists.

4) Most frequently, however, the person goes into conniptions about "how can you know?!!" For survivors and their immediate friends — those likely to be wearing the aforementioned "KYLR" patches — this is a completely bizarre and ludicrous response, a shockingly bad faith

non-sequitur. How can you "know" that someone is a cop or a CEO? How can a survivor of Guantanamo bay "know" that their torturer is a torturer? Such demands are absurdities, preposterous derailments and deflections that aggressively misread an ongoing context in which almost never is there any conflict or remotely plausible doubt over the facts. It's honestly rare even for serial rapists in subcultural spaces to *deny* their actions, so confidently insulated have they long been from any consequences. A lot of the time the rapist even has released a statement admitting to it, thinking that will win accolades and then bury the issue. *"But she's a crazy bitch who keeps bringing it up"* and *"this was a couple years ago, let it go"* are usually more than sufficient. Those who do deny the bare facts usually do so in the most cartoonish and least convincing manner possible, my favorite example was a bro who puffed up his chest and shouted in the middle of an anarchist space, *"What, are you gonna listen to those lying crazy bitches! Say it to my face, you pussies! I'll stab anyone who says I'm patriarchal!"* Suffice to say there should be no real epistemic barrier to evaluating the truth of his case. In this ubiquitous context of well-known serial rapists infesting subcultural spaces and continuing to prey without consequences, as well as the >99% failure rate to do anything by centralized systems (state justice and organizational accountability processes), people declaring *"we must treat everyone as totally innocent until proven guilty in a trial of law!"* might as well be speaking Martian. But objectors in this vein often treat their objection as a concern with runaway power… in the other direction. *"If we promote believing any accusation and taking militant action then that'll inevitably lead to opportunists taking advantage of this and the most successful will be those with power already, targeting the weakest, so any punishment of rape will only deepen existing power relations!"*

So okay, let's finally talk about

EPISTEMICS AND ASYMMETRIES

In 2012, defenders of a contrived accountability process that had not just protected an acknowledged violent abuser but aggressively attacked the survivor and her friends, trying to box them out of anarchist and antifascist circles nationwide, interrupted a feminist conference to read aloud a statement ghostwritten in part by Kristian Williams. What it amounted to was a list of contrived rhetorical questions like, *Should we always believe survivors?! Should we always follow the wishes of survivors?!*

They were unprepared for the room to be critical of this insultingly baiting line of attack and, when folks pressed back, this confirmed to them that feminists were totally unreasonable, gripped by hysterical thinking and a mob mentality. They themselves were self-evidently the cool, collected, reasonable ones, dealing in abstractions and principles; it's such a shame that such emotional feminism had infected anarchism and refused to civilly debate in the public marketplace of ideas. But then such feminists were so obviously illogical that is it any surprise they only rely upon knee-jerk denunciation of anyone who merely questions them?

If it will bring you comfort, let me now hold your hand and say, yes, exceptions are possible. Exceptions exist.

Yes, there are occasionally some false accusations in radical spaces. I've seen people in queer spaces rush to get out fake accusations first in hopes of turning a community against their survivor. I've also seen rapists compose studiously disingenuous callouts of their survivor. I've seen

all kinds of wildly fucked shit. Still, false accusations are far rarer than even just easily confirmable ones.

Yes, a flat societal norm of *"believe every stray verbal accusation of any stranger with 100% credence and immediately use lethal force as a punitive measure"* will be exploited. In the immediate aftermath of #MeToo someone once went around town threatening people with the claim that they were best friends with a prominent feminist (they were not) and, *"if you don't do as I say I'll tell them to make up a callout about you."* I've read text messages in which someone tries to rope another person into a relationship by threatening to make a contrived callout. Both opportunists were laboring under the hilariously mistaken belief that callouts are easy and likely to do anything beyond at most losing a couple friends and causing some friction, and both were promptly exposed in their malicious opportunism on local anarcha-feminist whisper networks.

Yes, there are still ethical bounds on survivor requests. If a survivor asks you to blow up a planet to kill their rapist, that's bad. If a survivor asks you, as one once did, to kill their violent abuser — who had literally gotten away with murdering a homeless man — by, in turn, burning down an entire venue he was in, killing countless innocent attendees as collateral damage in the process, that's obviously bad and you should say no. Similarly, some things are categorically bad, like rape or prison, because they instantiate precisely the worst sort of persistent relationships we're seeking to abolish. So if a survivor demands to rape their rapist, that's bad and should set off every alarm bell possible. Assassinating Hitler to quickly remove his threat is one thing, raping him is a completely different thing that reveals far more about the would-be-rapist.

Yes, existing power relationships can influence and skew who is taken seriously and who is weak to attacks. *Outside of anarchist spaces*, blanket claims that queer folk, trans femmes, Black men, and many others are rapists *by nature* remain rampant. Some have thus increasingly claimed that trans femmes are overwhelmingly targeted by false claims of rape *in radical circles as well* and thus no one should ever believe any specific accusation against one. In my experience — just as is true with all other demographics — there are far more easily confirmed accusations of rape than even slightly suspect ones and most predators get away without any real consequences. Rapists are just as common as anywhere else. The only appreciable difference regards the kind of opportunism available: the rapists in this community frequently leap to use their transness as some kind of a defense, even when — as is often the case in a marginalized community that clusters together — their survivor is *also* a trans woman.

That said, when a predator exempt from transmisogyny rapes or abuses a trans femme — which is quite common given the precarity of many trans femmes — and then attempts to push lies about the survivor, it's ghastly how viciously many bystanders or even friends who directly know it to be a lie will enthusiastically side against the trans femme and ruthlessly and explicitly leverage claims that they're just a man and thus inherently evil. By her very act of naming, resisting, or denouncing the rapist, the trans femme is derided as failing to perform her gender role (as a passive object) and thus trans femmes experience particularly aggressive gender policing around any rage they demonstrate towards perpetrators. Rape apologists are notoriously opportunistic, grabbing onto anything they think might work, and thus they have no qualms against trying to rally outsiders to a radical space to defeat a survivor.

The impact that *both* dynamics have is to cut young precarious trans women off from any support against their rapists. It's no wonder then that the overwhelming majority of militant anarcha-feminists I encounter wearing *"Kill Your Local Rapist"* patches in recent years are themselves trans femmes.

Over prior decades I've seen survivors completely leave radical scenes rather than attempt to callout someone with more, as it were, "oppression points" than them, and this used to provide a lot of cover for cis women raping men. At least in radical spaces, times have increasingly changed as folks have been forced to come to terms with the ubiquity of rape across demographic categories, but rape apologists will always be more than happy to leverage identity whichever way. A Black man accused by a Black queer woman will scream about how he's being lynched and imply she and her friends are white, then explicitly leverage misogyny and colorism against her. Opportunism abounds. Folks grab at whatever they think might work before a given audience.

Far more stark, though, are asymmetries around social capital.

There are still a couple serial rapists and abusers in positions at, for lack of a better description, high places in the anarchist movement, considered elders with immense social capital and/or organizational standing. Survivor stories have circulated for decades, but all have been too scared of a public fight. "Nothing can be done." And it's true, even if the anarchist movement organized one big formal public trial, there's good chances it'd be a blowout against the survivors. I'm not going to lie to anyone about that. If it's sometimes impossibly hard to kick a couch surfing nazi out of a punk house for raping one of the actual roommates, the odds aren't good against someone with an entire network of old boys immediately willing to side with them against some upstart. Such pressure extends and can quickly overwhelm a few voices. A direct confrontation threatens to swamp you just in the replies and the counter-narratives being spun too fast to even see. The second a social media account starts to imply something it gets reported into oblivion by hundreds of followers. And the echo-chamber effects of large numbers feeling legitimized by the amount of other people agreeing with them is a horrifying thing to watch. The *last thing* you sometimes want is a jury of your "peers."

Similarly, when you have very little social capital you have very little capacity to punch back or disrupt free floating accusations. This is true. But I want to note something specifically about that:

It's far easier to box someone out of communities with something *other than a callout of rape*.

Even beyond the present ubiquity of rape culture, such that someone will get a volunteer defense army upon accusation, a rape callout puts you personally *on the line*. It exposes and risks your own skin. Even if you claim it happened to someone else and you're just relaying, you've taken a concrete and major action.

Most people who want to marginalize someone else instinctively use far more efficient tools that are also nebulous. *"Hahaha, let's all make fun of this person." "Oh she's so problematic." "Wait, you actually hang with them? Oh, wow…"*

Unfortunately, at almost no time in history has "rapist" been a more cutting barb than the local equivalent of "poseur." Anyone with eyes can see that people will collectively shower far more active harassment, cruelty, and outright violence on people for a nebulous crime like "cringe" than they ever will for actual concrete ethical infringements.

When you're striking from above in a social capital landscape, you have far more efficient tools that do not bother to contest in the realm of crude facts and thus expose you. And what are you gonna do when targeted like this, write a counter-callout about how someone incorrectly spread the claim that you were *"deeply unserious"*? Are you going to meet someone in court and litigate the claim that you have *"loser taste in music"*? Are you going to write a defensive thread on twitter about how the scene queen derisively refers to you with the nickname *"Stunty"*? Even *"it's sad and my heart goes out to her, I wish we could provide her help, she's really unhinged and has a lot*

of STIs" can be devastating. These are impossible to contest or even acknowledge and FAR more effective at boxing people out from a position of social capital because they carry overwhelming implicit threats around having anything to do with you. Even when you're threatening someone, in this age of screenshots it's easier to work in the realm of nebulous implication.

You absolutely do not want to show your hand or get into an actual argument with them over nerd shit like values and facts.

Even in toxic corners of entirely-online Leftist spaces where callouts are weaponized incessantly, it's far easier to nuke someone with a callout of language misuse or problematic take or insufficient deference. Indeed, in the constantly shifting landscape of made-up-on-the-spot expectations around precise language use, the piranhas attracted to these spaces tend to *condemn* rape callouts as carceral, as not speaking the language, not following a subcultural code of performative tenderness, precisely because they're too grounded in serious matters of direct reality, they would *disrupt* the daily games.

Almost no one with social capital uses rape accusations against those without. It's simply way too inefficient and risky. Rapists and their apologists tend to know this in their bones, which is why their counter-plays are so often of this form rather than direct counter-accusations. Again, not saying they *never* make fake rape accusations in response; the powerful can always get creative in their sadism, and there's an eternal tendency of those called out for rape to want to craft a fake callout *"to prove a point,"* but in general why take direct risks when other means have long sufficed?

Even though there are still some holdouts who have wrapped themselves in sufficient shielding to avoid getting dethroned, the increasing tendency for rape callouts to matter hasn't reinforced the power of those with social capital; it's eroded their insulation.

I also want to acknowledge that when people think of "gossip" they often collapse a bunch of things together including the above social moves. To some people "gossip" can be a stressful cipher, a cursed realm that operates according to chaotic and unpredictable, seemingly magical, rules. I have sympathy for this perspective. Different social circles, stratas, cultures, etc. leverage different norms around such decentralized epistemologies. Some dynamics stuck under the umbrella of "gossip" can, in fact, be fast and loose. I learned years later that someone I'd helped online during a suicidal moment and only met in person twice, had promptly gone around implying to tons of people that we were partners. And some other random person in Olympia apparently told lots of people we were in a polycule together! These are silly and a little creepy and I was disturbed when both got back around to me. But how can I tell that the version that got back to me was even the form in which things were originally relayed? Everyone knows that retellings can get distorted.

It is certainly true that *some* decentralized ways of spreading and ingesting information are not reliable.

So how can we know?

How is knowledge even possible?

Don't we need formal trials? Isn't that the best means ever invented for finding truth?

We've talked about how centralized systems are prone to regulatory capture and have structural biases towards prioritizing the community "peace" that underpins their own existence, but it's worth emphasizing just as much that centralized systems are really bad at knowing anything and how unavoidable individualism is.

Individuals intimately know their own context: we know our memories and tendencies, we know the environment we interact with regularly, we know a lot about individual people close to us in some ways, we know the trust and affinity dynamics of our social relations and their interactions, we know particular skills, we know our own desires and motivations, and we know a ton more that is built up subconsciously or reflexively into instinct and habit… All of these are hard to convey: we have trouble codifying them in ideas, we have trouble enunciating them in words, we have trouble being concise in our testimony, we have trouble synching with the language and thoughts of the people we're talking to, and we have immense trouble proving the appropriate level of trustworthiness for the things we say. Additionally, individuals can undertake great cognitive leaps that are almost impossible to replicate formally in front of other people. You can solve a math problem in seconds that then takes days to explain.

This is all a deep and inexorable phenomenon tied to the density of information our neural networks are capable of holding, the speed of computation that they're able to handle internally and the sheer slowness of language.

Collective systems are constrained by the bitrate of language. A human brain on its own is incredibly dense and fast, but when a bunch of brains are wired together into a static "organization" said entity can only operate at the speed of language. This is why meetings are always such a drag. Every single person present can think faster than the meeting, as a collective entity, can.

But there's the additional problem sometimes called that of revealed preference; even if every single participant is earnestly trying to convey the truth, it's impossible for other individuals to know how much weight to give things. I may say that I want X *"a lot"* or *"sorta"* but that doesn't mean much. Even if we start assigning numbers "on a scale of one to ten" there's still no clarity on how I actually pick out those weightings in my own mind. Language alone, no matter how descriptive or evocative, simply can't sync our brains up over questions of weightings. And when you start to delve past direct weightings you get then to questions of complicated dependencies, fractal tangles of influences, potentialities, causes, etc that are hard to convey and themselves involve weightings.

All this extends to veracity claims, too. When someone says *"I'm really confident,"* that doesn't actually mean much to a room full of strangers. Even if someone sets out a pile of claims with various rankings against one another, like being more certain of A than B and B than C, or even saying "I'm 5% certain" the truthfulness and context of those claims is hard to convey. (This is part of why bets and markets do better than discussion groups or request forms at conveying things like certainty and interest.)

A fundamental gap exists between our individual brains, one that cannot be easily bridged by any application of language.

Collective entities thus face limited capacity to obtain or hold relevant information and systematic uncertainty about it. This is why legal systems develop so much timidity and constraints on action, judges, juries, legislatures, direct assemblies; there are sharp constraints on their capacity to know.

Individuals, on the other hand, are capable of knowing quite well. You *know* whether you were raped. (It's no coincidence that so many of the reactionary "false memory" pseudoscientific grifters who spent the 90s telling everyone there was an epidemic of false accusations have gotten new lives as anti-trans grifters.) Similarly, while to a collective entity your friend Sarah is just another interchangeable hypothetical individual, relatively stripped of context, a single gray dot, to you, with rich and long knowledge of her, she's a galaxy. Because of so many points of context

that would be impossible to relay, when she confides in you that she was raped, you can evaluate how overwhelmingly unlikely it is that she would "make this up."

Before the cold impartiality of a collective system, however, very little that informs your evaluation can be integrated. She's a black box and a potential exploitation of the machine. Your testimony to her character is just another gray dot. A potential collaborator trying to exploit the system along with her.

The centralized trial system of the state is so systematically bad at helping survivors, not merely because of historical contingency, but for structural reasons.

Moreover, trials dehumanize, traumatize, publicize, and provide means for continued torture by the original perpetrator. Some are able to find solace or strength in confronting their torturer before witnesses, but for many, especially given the structural inclination of courts to remain neutral on facts (i.e. side against survivors) with regard to things like rape and stalking so dependent upon personal experience and hyperlocal context, the trial is a continuation of the original act.

Again, adjudication by a collective or neutral third party may work well enough in cases of mere conflict, like a disagreement over the title to a car — two gray dots in a tug of war seeking a mediator. But it's simply not in any way able to handle instances of deeply personal power-seeking.

Part of why people overwhelmingly love the centralization of the state is that it removes all obligation to think and act for yourself. Did Monica rape Susie? You can simply wait for The Trial to decide. What should be done about it? I'm sure the appropriate sentence will be handed down.

Even when The State or The Organization hands down a verdict and sentence you disagree with, it provides an easy reference point to center discussion on.

Anarchism, by contrast, is infamously unpopular because we demand individual ethical responsibility without bounds. Where fake anarchists like "anarcho-capitalists" draw a tiny circle around a few power dynamics they oppose, declaring neutrality on every other ethical issue, anarchists follow Malatesta in believing that there is no end to our struggle against power. This hypervigilance where we never stop evaluating our interpersonal and contextual acts defines our movement, where we press new frontiers on relationships, youth liberation, animal liberation, etc. This is similar to how power-seekers will always be inclined to unify against us because our aspirations leave them no room to retreat, no alternate way of playing "the game," no private realm of unchallenged tyranny.

Part of the transition from stateless societies to states can be explained by the fact that oppression is *simpler*. We can complain about how power is systematically riven with stupidity, but that can have a visceral appeal. Liberals get to not have to think, just offload everything onto The State, maybe take a vote, and then sit back and grill. The infamously unselfaware slogan during the Trump years, "If Hillary won we'd be at brunch right now," is reflective of this.

Nevertheless, there are still plenty of examples of decentralized social epistemology even in our statist society. Science, for example, manages to capture more and more truth without anything like a centralized trial. Indeed science is robust in no small part according to how much it resists centralization; individuals following their own noses in varied local contexts and sharing their results is a starkly potent approach, which explains why the state works so hard against science to constrain and re-centralize it.

Similarly, antifascist research crews are notoriously better than professional news outlets when it comes to identifying, tracking, and exposing fascists. One's reputation for diligent re-

search and nuanced accuracy means a ton, and the pushback of reality over time is a harsh filter; those who fall short in these aggregating standards are marginalized from existing networks. Thresholds of diligence are expected before sharing leads or initial work. The innocent are protected — for example blurred out of photographic evidence (including the faces of dogs). The work can even extend to deeply serious and highly resourced projects of long term infiltration. There is never any "trial" of a fascist before they're doxed or jumped, the proof is aggregated as open source and verified across competing researchers.

Anarcha-feminist whisper networks are remarkably similar in function, aggregating over time with increased standards and expectations. An individual that's sloppy in research, believes eventually revealed falsities without verifiable good cause, or tramples over the wishes of survivors in their means of sharing will get iced out in proportion, a crew that leverages callouts in attempts to grab power will be treated hostilely. Some of the sharpest sanction I've ever seen militant anarcha-feminists bring on individuals was on those proven to be lying. Often this happened immediately because the lies were bad, but sometimes it took the liar continuing to apply their strategy.

None of this should be a surprise. Just as when you run games like the prisoner's dilemma repeatedly, and allow the actors to remember past behavior from other actors and respond with disincentivization, bad behavior becomes sharply suppressed.

But the benefits of n-iteration isn't just that agents running the lying strategy eventually slip up, and only need to slip up once, it's also that agents running the altruistically-sanction strategy repeatedly play the game and evolve, integrating more and more tacit knowledge. Thus the *"bitter old crazy bitch"* of a given scene that every survivor goes to for help ends up getting a lot of experience with rapists and their games as well as false-accusations, learning more and more about how to detect and counter.

In contrast a liar does not have this experience, because they're strategizing from a deeply asymmetric vantagepoint. They can less afford to lose in conflicts, so they can't aggregate knowledge from those losses. They're also focused on fewer interactions because their selfishness gives them limited horizons. A liar isn't going to slog through supporting three dozen survivors in depth to gather the tacit knowledge to pull off a lie. That's just not a cost-efficient investment for whatever the fringe personal benefit might be. Plus their heart just isn't going to be in it, and the facade will eventually crack.

Now, despite these asymmetries, certainly bad actors *can* and do sometimes attempt to grow more enmeshed in survivor support circles in order to gain useful social capital and learn how to cloak their own power-seeking. A classic example from the 80s is a woman who gained power as director of a Portland domestic violence nonprofit after having been abusive to her husband, and, after he escaped, she stalked his new partner, assaulted her, and then shot him in the genitals at his new house. This was the bad old days of second wave feminism, so she'd been able to partially cloak her own power-seeking by means of absolutist stereotypes about gender classes. Still, even before this was revealed, her staff — who were, unlike her, actually involved in repeated day-to-day support for survivors — *hated* her, correctly recognizing a pattern of abusive behavior in other contexts and generally smelling what she was. It's important to note two things about this: first, this infiltration leveraged organizational centralization and hierarchy, and second, it was relatively early on in the history of domestic violence activism.

As many of the early grassroots radical activist projects of the 60s and 70s were turned into nonprofits, they became subject to this sort of regulatory capture. Yet across the wider move-

ment, as time progressed, experience with the diversity of abuse and rape aggregated, building knowledge and nuance in.

Infiltration into dens of altruists is a satiation-postponing strategy for power-seekers, which few have the stomach for. But even those with such tolerance then have to operate surrounded by vigilant enemies. It's far less risky to group up with other power-seekers rather than among those anti-authoritarians actively trying to reveal people like you. You might pull off some short term gains, but you *will* eventually be exposed. And when exposed you will have sunk so much into the investment you'll have nothing left to retreat back to. I know of an abuser who spent immense energy and time posturing as good on abuse, to the point that, when his ongoing abuse he was hiding was revealed and he committed suicide, *every single one of his friends* refused to shed a tear.

All of this is a subset of a broader asymmetry that has enabled anarchists to dramatically influence the world and achieve many victories over the course of our movement, despite our unavoidable unpopularity: Mutual aid.

While some now use the term as merely *"nice feels when being nice,"* what Kropotkin described was a game theoretic dynamic that skews what strategies survive in a population, both biologically and socially. Altruists are better at decentralized coordination than the selfish and power-seeking. The non-altruistic will sometimes recognize they have common goals or a class identity, but they will never individually sacrifice for others. To solve collective action problems their only option is centralization and hierarchies. Cops won't run into a burning building to save one another unless someone is capable of *ordering* them. But a distributed network of altruistic individuals *can* autonomously solve collective action problems.

Power-seekers are simply bad at collective action in decentralized contexts, which is part of why fascists seeking to do intelligence work against anarchists and antifascists so frequently use the cops like a crutch. Left on their own, they're notoriously bad at evidentiary standards. Each individual has an incentive to be sloppy on dox work or — more often — make up fantastical fabrications, with no real incentive to personally engage in internal conflict or pushback that would disincentivize such. As a result of their limited experiences in such decentralized situations, the non-altruistic tend to throw up their hands and categorically dismiss the decentralized as the same sort of cesspool of constant lies that they generate. The same unbroken dynamic that lynched Emmett Till today sets up rural barricades and pulls people out of cars demanding to know if they're the Soros-funded antifa responsible for forest fires to push "global warming."

Now there are exceptions, to be sure. A small minority of reactionaries *are* altruistic in the sense that they will seriously self-sacrifice for one another or a cause — not just in a showy self-aggrandizing moment of martyrdom, but in uncelebrated daily drudgery. Nor is everyone on our side altruistic, diligent, or experienced. (Personally, I heard that a thousand Proud Boys are coming to attack this protest right now because a friend-of-a-friend-of-a-friend heard someone saw a pickup truck with an American flag.) But the *overall* skew is sharp.

The solution to this phenomenon is not to deny that you can know situations directly as an individual and you can develop incredibly high credences in certain things via network effects and their compounding dynamics, but to more aggressively leverage the asymmetries that benefit the altruistic, the true, and resistance to power. The anarchist solution to the specter of false accusations, in other words, is to intensify what we already do. To spread participation in our kinds of decentralized epistemological structures and continue to insurgently disrupt and disincentivize power.

After all, we broadly trust our comrades fighting ISIS in Syria to make evaluations on the ground, to evaluate who's an ISIS member and who isn't on the fly. Sometimes the evidence can be borderline, but mostly it's overwhelmingly clearcut. And those with experience build up tacit knowledge about what constitutes a sniper or not that would be hard to codify into some centralized universal "justice system." If anarchism is an unending path we walk, a perpetual minority insurgency against power, why should our campaigns of resistance against rapists look any different?

Why shouldn't a crew of survivors who've dropped out of activism to waste their time and emotional health for years on a fruitless accountability process, while the rapist keeps raping, just get some baseball bats and jump the fucker?

INSURGENCY VS LIBERAL ABOLITIONISM

But, of course, liberals simply cannot think outside the artificial global neutrality of "policy" and "justice." A liberal will hear something like "Fire To The Prisons" and immediately transmute this into a meta-policy that licenses the police burning down neighborhoods. I wasn't making up that example! Liberals have literally had that response!

Even when looking at a group of insurgent Maquis fighters assassinating a fascist in his sleep, the liberal mind squirms to avoid recognizing the specificity, *"oh so you think it's okay for any individual to kill anyone whenever they feel like it."*

This is because liberals are utterly terrified of taking object-level stances on specific things, even when that's something like *"fascists are a threat and individual violence is justified in stopping them."* To get inside the liberal mind you have to understand that they feel overwhelmingly weak, they do not think they can win any outright conflict head-on, so instead the strategy is always to trick the opponent into agreeing to a neutral meta-framework. You will then both be bound by this framework, but — surprise — it is structured in such a way that the liberal is favored.

This is why liberals cannot stand outright violent resistance to fascists; they feel this sacrifices an existing mutual compact with the fascists to civil debate and electoral competition within a framework of law.

You may retort that this is self-evidently absurd, no fascist is in any way bound to that meta-accord and failing to violently disrupt them early in their mobilization only allows them to gather strength before they inevitably strike, but just as liberals recoil from personal responsibility they cannot fathom anything like war. This is why they refuse to arm themselves or prepare in any way. They would ultimately rather be passively led to the death camps than turn to actual resistance. Liberals believe that armed conflict is inherently the domain of fascists. Thus to even personally own a gun in preparation is to embrace a conflict one will lose.

In a bar in Hamburg after the Chaos Communications Congress in 2013 a liberal lawyer overheard a friend and me talking about potentially picketing talks by collaborators with the NSA, and expressed her outrage that we would abandon civility and The System's internal mechanisms for adjudication. I laughed and said something like, *"I mean, lady, I support people shooting snitches. The civil rights movement was won through the barrel of activists' guns."* She lost her mind and apoplectically screamed at us in horror like we were lovecraftian nightmares out to abduct her child, spraying spittle in our faces as she detailed how many members of her family had been lost in the Holocaust, before shouting her chilling conclusion that I have never forgotten, *"But*

if the fascists took power again today I would proudly march you anarchists to the camps myself! Because anarchists are far worse than fascists! We need laws!"

So it goes with liberals.

I want to be clear, however, that they do have a smidgen of a point. Even though it's a myth that fascist governments were efficient at warfare, and even though anarchists have many advantages in *decentralized* conflict — hence our longstanding embrace of insurgency and 4th generation warfare — there are some respects in which power-seekers are better at violence than us. Violence is artificially simple, it cuts away tangles of complexity and reduces situations down to a calculus in which some of our greatest advantages do not apply.

We're exceptionally good in domains like art and science, but not particularly good by default at fisticuffs. Fascists know this and spend almost their entire time complaining about how unfair it is that their preferred arenas aren't dominant. They long for the day of the rope, where all the cultural decentralized thinky-things are irrelevant and all that matters is brute strength and cruelty. In a parallel to the eternal outrage of patriarchs about their wives poisoning them, they're perpetually mad that many antifascists are twiggy or effeminate and fight from the shadows "without honor." They know that in a "fair fight" on an open battlefield or an open campaign of total genocide in which they, for instance, just slaughter all city-dwellers, they would finally stop losing to us.

But just because fascists have *an edge* on us in violence doesn't mean that the moment things shift to violence they obtain a final total victory.

Liberals are prone to sneer about the encouragement of gun-owning as a check on the state, *"Don't you know that in a real war the state would steamroll you with missiles and drones?! You're never going to win a revolution against something like the US empire, that's why you've gotta vote and build a mass movement!"*

But this entirely misses the point. War is costly. The potential and presence of violence, can have a massive impact in changing incentives, without lining everyone up on a field and letting them fire all their weapons at one another directly.

Just because it's theoretically *possible* for one party to defeat another doesn't mean such would be cheap or preferrable. Similarly, insurgents don't have to march into the capital of an evil system to win against it, they just have to make its continued operations unfeasibly expensive.

As every radical knows, KKK lynch mobs were defeated not through centralized means, but through Black communities and activists getting armed to the teeth. Yes, white racists often outnumbered their targets, but the moment things got costly or risky most of them backed down. While figures like MLK put on public spectacles of nonviolence, behind the scenes he embraced protection from armed activists.

Moreover, violence isn't just useful for liberation in the context of defensive counter-escalation; there are often specific situations in which we *do* have an advantage in violence over our enemies. *Where* an insurgent strikes at a vulnerability can have a huge impact. Awareness of these possibilities requires effort. But, from riots to assassinations to punching Richard Spencer, history shows a host of examples.

Across the board, liberals have studiously refused to learn this lesson because it obliges personal responsibility and risk outside the comforting structures of centralized law. As a result they refuse to even think about engagements past a certain point in the escalation ladder, and thus provide every incentive for fascists to just escalate to the level of conflict in which they are unopposed.

Rape culture, as feminists have emphasized for decades, constitutes a widespread war. Patriarchy is a constant campaign of abuse, femicides, and rape — a regime of terror where violence is always partially targeted to bystanders as a means of broad enforcement, setting norms, expectations, risks, and fears. Like white supremacy, patriarchy is both centralized into institutions and decentralized into an ecosystem of reinforcing individual strategies.

Since liberals cannot imagine or permit decentralized solutions to decentralized problems, they instead try to box rape into being a mere matter for a "justice system." They will themselves behind a veil of ignorance so they can ignore all context, just as they refuse to see the future implications of conceding the top of an escalation ladder. Rape is then always an individual *exception* rather than an ongoing struggle. And rape is not a matter of power; rape becomes simply a matter of "harm," in no sense categorically different from the harms everyone inflicts on one another all the time.

These biases of liberals are why they've so badly misconstrued the anarchist project of abolishing the state's core tools of prisons and police.

Liberals read our critique of these mechanisms on the surface level, as a critique of people being mean or violent. They failed to grasp that the critique is of centralization and its runaway dynamics, not of any negative feelings or harmful actions per se. Thus this liberal appropriation of "abolition" has managed to steal some of the aesthetics and cultural cachet built by the anarchist movement and allied liberation struggles and used it to repeat the same stale old attacks on those very same people.

In 1999 during the Battle of Seattle against the WTO, I was across the street when some anarchists in bloc smashed up the Starbucks. The liberals immediately freaked out. Some complained about such "vigilantism" being the same as KKK lynchings. They said that all violence was inherently male and thus patriarchal. And they said that only white people would ever engage in violence because people of color are too terrified of ever acting against their oppressors. They've been repeating these same silly bits for twenty five years. Infamously, they will look directly at a Black girl in bloc clearly among other non white males and refer to her as a "straight white male." They are absolutely shameless. And they all come up with exactly the same objections to any disturbance of the peace.

"An eye for an eye makes the world go blind."

In strict categorical terms this kind of objection is ludicrous; if the price for smashing up a billionaire's Starbucks is he gets to smash up any starbucks I own, that's an easy trade. I will happily steal 100% of a billionaire's wealth and donate it away if the trade is he gets to do the same to me. Context clearly matters. And, by definition, no feminist *whatsoever* is calling for an eye-for-an-eye in the case of rape. We don't think that the solution to torturers is torture. We don't think that the solution to prisons is prisons. We don't think the solution to rape is rape.

But what the liberal *really* means is that something they call "retaliation" is bad.

This is an interesting conceptual slippage.

At core anarchists want to abolish prisons for the same reason we want to abolish police, borders, legislatures, etc: because they're tools by which organized violence is centralized and thus inherently corrupted in an inexorable feedback loop of power concentration. Unlike decentralized societies, these institutions are not fluidly contestable, but insulate themselves, creating higher and higher thresholds of investment necessary for any sort of change.

Liberals cannot admit that such runaway power concentration is a problem, so they have selectively focused on symptoms of it.

This is partially the fault of radicals. In our arguments against prisons we would often make throwaway points at the end like, *"and even in their own terms they don't even work at stopping crime!"* But this rhetorical point-scoring undermined our project by allowing liberals to focus on the wrong thing. Thus *revolutionary* arguments for the abolition of prisons became subsumed under existing prison *reform* movements.

As Black radicals like Joy James have critiqued at length, these reform movements were not interested in burning down the prisons and liberating police-killing comrades at gunpoint to continue the struggle, they were motivated by trying to make the existing regime *work better*. And the regime has been happy to cultivate such pseudo "abolitionists" as a dumping ground for misdirected activist energy. Whole ecosystems of nonprofits and academics now happily run on grant-funded treadmills, echoing an "abolitionism" stripped of any radical analysis or revolutionary imperative.

These reformists correctly recognize that prisons constitute a form of sustained personal domination — torture, in other words. But they don't place responsibility for this on the core self-preservation imperatives of the state; they don't see this as part of a wider feedbacking of power. No. Instead they decide that prisons must be a product of psychological failing in the general population.

Like the Christian traditions of justice reform that they are a continuation of, these liberals continue to view this all in terms of people holding negative *feelings*.

RETRIBUTION AND REVENGE

During the 2020 uprisings literally millions of dollars poured into Portland, filling the pockets of whatever grifter or liberal was ready to mobilize a donation link online.

One of these, "Portland Freedom Fund" proclaimed it would pay for bail for people of color. After ignoring countless folks for months they got a request from someone in their circles to bail out one Mohamed Adan. The papers that the main woman behind the fund signed explained some of the situation of strangulation and contempt violation. Adan was on his 9th domestic violence charge, this time arrested after he had again broken into the home of his ex, Rachael Abraham, and woken her up by beating her with prayer beads. He had been charged with five different attempts at strangulation, in addition to the lengthy beatings and putting a gun to her head promising to murder her… only to be released on an ankle monitor and then cut it off. Rachael, an Afro Latina and a Muslim, had emphasized with frantic certainty that Adan had promised to murder her. The bail fund covered his bail and released him without any plan to check him or to provide safety for his target. He promptly murdered his ex, beating and repeatedly stabbing her countless times in front of their three children before finally strangling her to death and continuing to stab the corpse — a slow excruciating murder that had been telegraphed and warned of in every conceivable way.

Local anarchists involved in survivor support, leftists in domestic violence orgs, as well as numerous orgs in local Black and Muslim communities were beyond furious at the irresponsibility and/or naivety. But the bail fund, for their part, callously referred to the brutal murder as "harm," refused to admit mistake or apologize, complained that the children who had watched their mother murdered were now being *denied a father figure* by his arrest, and decided that

any critiques of their actions were definitionally right-wing. Questions of why this man was prioritized over hundreds of other folks were responded to with incredulity.

It should come as no surprise that conservative media latched onto the case to demonize everyone opposed to prisons and police as equally callous and irresponsible. But liberals have largely responded, in turn, by leaping to defend the Portland Freedom Fund, repeatedly expressing rabid outrage that anyone would critique them for Adan's actions when the Fund was (supposedly, if not in fact) committed to a general rule of bailing everyone.

In the liberal mind the universality of the meta-rule must come first; this is why liberals are always most interested in defending the free speech of nazis and not leftists. The bail fund's support for a monster like Adan over other petty criminals or political arrestees is likewise seen as an expression of *how* committed they were. Nothing signals one's personal virtue (ie dedication to liberalism) more than picking out and defending *the most* shockingly noxious case.

If women have to die, brutally killed at the hands of these cases, that's a small price to pay.

In this framework, survivors are, almost by definition, the enemy. And statements put out by these sorts of liberals, as well as talks and trainings they give, couldn't be more clear on this disdain and enmity.

Because, let's be frank, survivors will frequently work their asses off, do whatever they can, to get imminent threats to their life put behind bars. It rarely works, but a lot of them do try. When your life is on the line, when you're desperately scrambling for any one to help and any option whatsoever, you don't pause to think *"but what if my lifeless body could provide liberalism with a few more intangible virtue points?"*

Some survivors, however, correctly realize that the state is aligned against them. That calling the cops will almost certainly make things worse. So they take things into their own hands and kill their rapist, their abuser, their trafficker, their father.

Liberal abolitionists hate these people *more than anything*. They get apoplectic when the very concept is brought up. These are *not* who they're trying to bail out! Indeed, they repeatedly give every indication that this is the one category of prisoner they think should remain in prison.

In much the same way that liberals furiously wail about the violence of *antifascists* while ignoring that of fascists, the category of *"survivor defendant"* sunders the earth between *liberal* abolitionism and *radical* abolitionism.

The liberal sees in the survivor defendant not an insurgent against the patriarchal system that prisons are a part of, but instead the essence of everything in the prison system the liberal wants to do away with. Not only do survivor defendants shatter the social peace, not only do they open up the prospect of individual responsibility in decentralized and context-aware struggle outside the state, but they embraced *"retribution,"* and potentially the worst thing possible, in the eyes of liberals, *"revenge."*

The conceptual category of "retribution" is fucking weird. It's literally just any sort of negative response to an act. If you touch my thigh and I slap your hand away, that can be classified as "retribution." If you say something awful and I tell you to shut up, that's "retribution." And certainly any response to an act that attempts to disincentivize it constitutes "retribution" in the broadest sense. If you exclude any strategy that could look like "retribution" you get game-theoretically clobbered. The emergence of mutual aid that Kropotkin mapped becomes entirely impossible.

Positive-reinforcement with children and animals is both ethical and an amazingly effective strategy — no one is beaten into having good values and healthy relationships — but if you're

totally unwilling to draw a barrier at some point in an escalation ladder and *push back*, your puppy will shove you aside and eat off your plate. And if you're unwilling to punch or shoot nazis, you will simply be murdered. Every strategic bundle capable of flourishing necessarily includes some threshold at which you respond negatively.

It's not even clear that we can distinguish some essential line between disincentives and incentives. The two are the same thing; the possibility space of our world is just a single continuous landscape of relative ups and downs.

Revenge, by contrast, is an *emotional* concept.

And liberals operate by default in a paradigm of personal virtue — especially those "abolitionists" who are just continuing the tradition of christian prison reformists. In such a paradigm, emotions are not heuristics, tools, or even hazily grouped byproducts of underlying thoughts, but virtues and vices in-and-of-themselves. To be mad is to be bad. Thus to be *mad* at your rapist is an unethical state, however understandable, that you have an obligation to work yourself out of.

Liberals swoon when told of a story where a survivor of genocide or torture looks their captor in the face, ideally in a court of law, and *forgives them*. They are not so happy about revenge stories. They do not want to hear about the survivor who goes to their grave hating the monsters.

Hate, after all, implies a continued tension. To hate the bloodsoaked genocidaire of your people who has retired comfortably to the same american suburb as you, is to reject the neutrality of the comfortable personal bubbles liberalism would put you in. Hate is a directedness on the social graph, akin to an individual obligation or responsibility.

In the late 1990s, the SPLC classified anarchism as an ideology of hate.

This is not to simply reverse the liberal narrative and make a virtue out of hate or revenge. There's a longstanding tendency for anarchists to lean into this. "REVENGE" has long graced our banners in various slogans, and while there's a trivial sense in which this is fine enough, even useful rhetoric, I believe we can go wrong when we act like it picks out a clear or natural category, much less try to valorize such a fuzzy notion as an emotional state that is good in-and-of-itself. I just don't know what it would mean to oppose or endorse an *emotion* and I'm wary of the arbitrariness of any ethical framework that acts like the descriptive bundlings we pick out with our names for "emotions" cut reality at the joints.

Still, if "vengefulness" is anything like a natural cluster of brain states, it probably emerges at a primordial evolutionary level, in much the same way as the highs we can feel when engaged in mutual aid, these are rough strategies that every organism needs some mix of to succeed. If there is an instinctual urge to retaliate when infringed upon, this makes sense as a survival trait. But it is also the case that primordial evolutionary instincts are not always the best strategy; we have brains specifically to think things through in unique contexts and improve over raw heuristics.

I am thus uncomfortable with "vengeance" as an end-in-itself. And just because Christianity promotes a form of patriarchy grounded in pushing "forgiveness," we shouldn't forget that there are older genealogies of patriarchy grounded in the fetishization of revenge. When I grew up in the projects the local strategic mix was toxic: every public slight demanded immediate violent retaliation or else you would be branded as weak and made a target. I did well enough, but my mother certainly got bored with driving me to the hospital to get stitches. I have absolutely no desire to live in a world where escalation is the only available strategy and seething vengefulness is seen as a personal virtue. My embrace of anarchism is in no small part grounded in rejecting

that world's simplistic norms. But for a given emotional state in a given context, I think that "revenge" can only be judged in terms of its consequences for liberation.

Any ethics that doesn't terminate in describing emotional states as virtues or vices would have to concede that revenge is sometimes good and sometimes bad, depending on, you know, *everything else*. If vengeance clouds the mind and self-perpetuates regardless of consequences, then it's bad. If it gets you out of bed each morning to plot the downfall of a king, it's good.

When feminist fighters in Syria kill a member of ISIS they'll often go through the contacts in his phone and call every one of them to brag that, *"another rapist is dead!"*

While unrecognized by the international community and deeply inspiring in its liberatory reforms, the experiment in Rojava is functionally a state, and as such is shot through with centralization. It has police, courts, and prisons. Uniform guidelines are said to apply no matter the context. Six month to three year prison sentences are handed out to rapists, regardless of the wishes of survivors one way or the other. One of the main intentions of its centralized structures has been to assure peace and suppress vengeance. This is because the social landscape it operates above is still structured into perpetualized collective units, families, and thus the fear of blood feuds dictates policy. Revenge is bad, they lecture.

And yet there is no other way to describe the act of calling someone's entire social network and shouting with joy in their ear that their friend, their son, their brother is dead.

ISIS is best defined as an army of rapists, whose central motivation is the ideology of rape. Privileged first world kids, from engineering students to doctors, poured into its ranks to form what amounts to a single battalion in the cause.

The women who fight them are often survivors without a family or clan to treat them as property or wage blood feuds over them — individuals engaged in the worldwide feminist insurgency against the army of rapists. Whatever the "revolutionary" authorities try to dictate, they still scream with joy.

CONCLUSION: THE DISCOURSE

In 1975, Joan Little, a 21-year-old Black woman, was put on trial for murdering the 62-year-old white jailer, Clarence Alligood, who attempted to rape her. The case drew massive attention and her act was enthusiastically defended by the wider Black liberation, revolutionary abolitionist, and feminist movements. Because she killed him with an ice pick, the radical left chanted the slogan *"All Power To The Ice Pick."*

In 2022, leftist social media spaces were plunged into a sudden contrived storm of outrage over the similar decades-old punk and anarcha-feminist slogan of Kill Your Local Rapist. About a month in, it was revealed that the two most virulent and active accounts fanning the outrage were separately run by notorious serial rapists, Laurelai and Uriel. One local leftist had a breakdown in shock when folks proved the account was Uriel's and showed his callouts — suddenly in their twitter feed was the face of the stranger who had raped them at a party, a face they never thought they'd see again. As time has gone on even more of the accounts that raised such a disingenuous fuss have been exposed as well known rapists and abusers, in some cases *literally even working for the FBI or defense contractors*.

That such predators would be highly active parts of the coalition of outrage should be completely unsurprising; they know who their enemies are. They know *"the cancel horde"* poses an

existential risk to them; their very survival depends upon weakening all consequences whatsoever.

Now this is not to slur all those who raised objections as rapists and cops. But other factions of the coalition suddenly screaming abuse and bad faith arguments at anyone defending the slogan surely had to know rapists would be joining alongside them, yet I never saw a single attempt by those screaming about principle to preemptively draw lines against both sides or really engage in any counter-signaling against the intense rapist apologia and anti-survivor shit in their same dogpiles. Outrage was unrelentingly directed to the anarcha-feminists.

The account later exposed as Uriel wrapped itself in certain aesthetics of pastel softness (Uriel has always aggressively identified as a straight cis man), yet would spend all day snarling threats and posting images of lynchings of Black people in the comments of the Black radicals defending "KYLR." Uriel was not alone in this; liberal "abolitionists" came to barrage pretty much any feminist voice defending militancy against rapists with images of lynchings and, in particular, Emmett Till. Often their sharpest bile was reserved for Black women endorsing violent resistance. I'm willing to bet not a one of them had ever heard of Joan Little, despite the equal historical significance of her case and it being the far more relevant comparison.

A huge fraction of the anarcha-feminists that faced this storm were trans women; after all a majority of the local anarchists I know in militant girl gangs are trans women, and yet an absurd narrative began to be aggressively pushed in which, because many transmisogynists falsely believe trans women to be rapists by nature, to support anarchist militancy against or even public callouts of rapists was treason to trans women. One can not imagine a more toxic and deadly way to empower rapists than telling already extremely marginalized trans women that they will be expelled from their circles if they resist a predator in their own ranks.

In a patriarchal world where rape is so deeply legitimized and normalized as a method of gender control, one cannot imagine a greater betrayal of queer folks than to try to frame resistance to rape as inherently anti-queer.

But okay, the discourse was bad online, so what?

Well, at the end of the day it shouldn't be too surprising if a liberal — even one with a pastel and twee #abolition Instagram account — has never heard venerable anarchist slogans, has no awareness of subcultural scenes or the history of prefigurative experiments, and so reacts in horror to militancy by screaming about how you can't take action outside the law. We *expect* liberals to have these responses, but it's particularly galling when anarchists do.

This was the thing endlessly repeated in shock and disbelief by anarchists about the KYLR discourse online: *"Why are you suddenly making liberal arguments about rapists that you would never make about fascists, cops, bosses, etc? Why shouldn't we use the anarchist toolkit here too?"*

The sense of betrayal is intense. And I've seen literally dozens of comrades ditch social media entirely over it.

This was, of course, the intent.

The old boys networks that defend the missing stairs of radical subcultural scenes do so for a host of reasons. Some are self-consciously anti-feminist, others are knee-jerk defenders of their friends, others just want to restore social peace and avoid personal responsibility at any cost, and still others are sincerely infected with liberal ideology in some way. All of them wish survivors making trouble would shut the fuck up and go away.

By coalescing in wide coalitions with storms of normie liberals against militant anarcha-feminists, they very much seek to push the "crazy bitches" that have haunted anarchism out

of discourse and out of radical spaces. They wish to cultivate community ignorance again. I've seen them try to paint the militant anarcha-feminists as newbies, as rabble, as purely online weirdos, when a huge fraction of the people they're talking about have been around longer than them.

This is a message for them: I've seen you cheer about how the *"tide is turning"* against militant feminists by rallying liberals outraged about "KYLR." The idea that the tide was ever anything but on your side is laughable, but I will frankly admit that you may yet be able to defeat the menace, in some sense. You may yet be able to secure hegemonic control over local scenes and even form up national or international ranks. But the simple fact is that *for decades* the approaches you demand and say are enough have not had any real success in stopping rapists. Thus you will *continually* produce "crazy bitches" you then have to work to shut out.

You will never find peace.

And the rest of us will still be here, waiting for them.

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William Gillis
What's In A Slogan? "KYLR" and Militant Anarcha-feminism
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