

Kickbacks, Ancestors, and Wildcats

The Anarkata Turn

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“The pigs say, ‘Well, the Breakfast For Children program is a socialistic program. Its a communistic program.’

And the women said, ‘Well, I tell you what, boy... I don’t know if I like communism and I don’t know if I like socialism. But I know that that Breakfast For Children program feeds my kids... And if you put your hands on that Breakfast For Children program, I’m gonna come off this can and I’m gonna beat your...’”

- Fred Hampton, *Power Anywhere There’s People*

“What did the untested militants,
and smug ideologues,
know of Truth
and Tubman?
Unlike Unruly Colored Women,
they failed to recognize that experience
was capable of opening up new ways,
yielding a thousand new forms
and improvisations.”

- Saidiya Hartman, *The Anarchy of Black Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner*

In September 2019 a group of Anarkatas set up a free store in a park, and asked the kids there to help us out and tell their friends and family about it. Not surprising to us, several young Black children, mostly little Black girls, began working out and asking around on their own accord about who needed what and how much they needed. They also started struggling with each other about whether or if there was anyone who was taking more than they needed and should put some stuff back or to give to someone else, and ultimately kept trying to make sure anyone in the area who lacked got something they needed. The kids, with these girls in the lead, were not self-professed anarchists. There was no pamphlet they read from and a lot of their deliberations did ironically involve some poor shaming as they weren't necessarily a politically conscious bunch. Yet, *by their hands alone*, magic happened, and with no authority to manage their activities *but their own* these children themselves helped our Back to School Kickback become a success.

We did not approach them with a speech or much theory at all or pushing any ideology, although we had our canon and thought with us. We simply *acted in our principles*, **with the material aid present**, and it made room for the anarchy of Blackness to shoot forth. By the end of the Kickback, bookbags full of loose leaf, folders, pens, markers, pencils, index cards,

as well as comic books, food, water, toys, VHS tapes, CDs — all things that local folk needed, had been autonomously distributed, and equitably so, without any outside interference. And all from beyond the reaches of State management, NPIC trappings, and philanthropic paternalistic/profitteerism.

In short: a group of kids in the hood did something anarchic without being proselytized to about revolutionary theory. A group of kids in the hood did something anarchic without identifying as revolutionaries. A group of kids in the hood did something anarchic without even knowing who or what ‘the left’ or ‘Kuwasi Balagoon’ is. A group of kids ultimately led themselves in meeting a community need, and did it in a dedicated and thoughtful way, outside formal/mainstream channels (government, business, church, school, nonprofit), even amidst mistakes — and all because we were there facilitating an opportunity for them to fill a gap all Black working class people in our region feel when September rolls around. As Anarkatas, we were just there as **radical extensions of what is an organic Black tendency toward communal self-empowerment**. Taking care of our own is not just a cultural necessity under colonialism and capitalism, but an ancestral rite that still energizes through our spirits on the daily.

This is how the Anarkata Turn situates itself. We’re *not here to convert anyone*; we just want people to rock wit, people to collab wit, so we can build our communities by ourselves for ourselves. We are revolutionaries, so we struggle tirelessly to ensure that this mutual aid work can happen in an **encompassing and intersectional** way, in a way that frees the most marginal from those trying to hoard resources and power and clamber their way to the top of the ladder, who push the rest of us into a barrel to fight desperately like crabs. We want to destroy the barrel, and to destroy the ladder too, so that our people will not be caged by colonialism, capitalism, cisheteropatriarchy. We violently oppose the authoritarians and the colo-

nizers and cishets and disablists invested in domination. We believe this ultimately requires eradicating the government/State too, as well as any other form of hierarchy that exists. Like the Anarkata Statement declares, liberation comes from “the ways we ride for each other, and not from top down hierarchical authority...”

Now, for clarity’s sake, what hierarchy means is that someone is imposing their will on another. But there’s more to it. A parent telling their kid not to walk in front of a bus isn’t hierarchy, for example; that is guidance and protection. Just like an elder advising a spiritual devotee on the necessary duties of their ancestral tradition isn’t necessarily hierarchy either, but rather is assisting them in their personal contribution to the cosmic order. Guidance, protection, assistance, advice — these can be understood as leadership. That’s the role my comrades and I played in the park with those kids and how Anarkatas try to operate. **Leadership is more like nurturance** and requires a lot of **accountability** to the success or survival or growth and **self-empowerment of the so-called ‘led’** — a great deal of which means transferring skills and resources so that people can guide themselves.

Leadership can become hierarchy when it fails to meet an affirming end, and when it is manifested through abuse and through exploitation, when it serves control and self-interest, and when its mode of relation is rooted in methods of domination and born in oppressive ideologies. When a parent’s ‘authority’ is rooted in self-righteousness and personal catharsis, as is often the case under colonial ideology, when parents cannot be questioned and treat and beat their kids like slavemasters did to our ancestors or like cops do to us all on the street today, when parents threaten the growth of their children keep them from properly learning to assess and express their emotions and make decisions for themselves and form healthy relationships and advocate for their needs—this is hierarchical relation. When the religious leadership robs the people and

keeps them poor and ignorant, as is often the case unfortunately, and when it prevents the faithful from affirming and nurturing their full persons and their environments and one another, when it polices and violates and justifies oppression and brainwashes them into xenophobia — this is a hierarchical relation. And even when the revolutionaries come around but they prevent the people from being able to organize to meet their needs because they dominate all potential avenues for organizing, when they make everything about their own particular ideology or their own methods or venues or circles or affinity groups in ways that people seeking liberation cannot access materials or take power for themselves outside these myopic channels, and when these channels fail to resolve the contradictions of our suffering and even work to uphold or benefit from them and stifle the expression of liberating energies in alternative ways — this is all hierarchical. Hierarchy means that there is a certain ‘will’ being imposed upon the masses, one that subjects us to certain interests, despotic interests — interests that contradict the people’s journeys towards autonomy and safety.

When anarchic movements began to develop into explicitly politicized forms, all the hierarchies they have sought to destroy — disablism, transmisia, the State, racism, colonialism — each involved a particular material interest (a capitalist one) being forced onto the planet and the people. It was the ‘will’ of class and colonial rulers imposed upon us, creating a rift between us and our communion with mother earth, and which enacts a system of ‘organized, protected robbery’ as Fanon called it. **Land, labor, and more is stolen to produce and maintain wealth for the powerful captor-colonizers** while everyone else and our lands is sucked dry resources and forced to live under premature and actual death, disease, destitution and deterioration. So first and foremost, destruction of all hierarchies — which is Anarchy — thus requires actually and unapologetically disrupting the imposed material interests of

Capital, disrupting settler and imperial colonial rule, disrupting cisheteropatriarchal control, ending the ableist disposal of whole populations written off as useless because of our disabilities.

This is what makes mutual aid networks/initiatives — like the free store my comrades and I put together — important. The poverty that makes the back to school season an issue for many Black communities is a direct consequence of capitalism, of a system built on greed and enslavement and land theft and exploitation and brutality. So when we work with people to address the *consequences* of oppression concretely, we make it easier for the vulnerable to survive and we open up potential for us to prove to ourselves and the people that we can resolve the structural *causes* of oppression concretely as well — not just in theory, **but in practice**. We can demonstrate that anarchy is not something far off, but that it can begin now. This helps to both radicalize and conscientize, which basically mean that people become more confident and understanding of skills we have or can learn to use in meeting our needs and freeing ourselves, and it means we become more aware of why autonomy from the Man and white power is necessary, why it's valid, and to become more conscientious about the reasons why revolutionary movements that fight for liberation are happening in this particular historical moment and this geographical region among this group of people. A revolutionary has to be devoted to helping this process of radicalization and conscientization happen, tirelessly assuring it comes to fruition, fighting to affirm and defend and hold ourselves accountable to the growth of our revolutionary activity. It is the concrete work, actual mutual aid, like our Back to School Kickbacks, which set the stage for any of this to occur, because when it comes to Black people the seeds for anarchy are already in our culture and spirit because **we are a communalistic people**. So all people need is just the opportunity to enact it more fully outside the trappings of capitalist, colonial, cisheteropatriarchal binds. This isn't to

say all Black people are anarchists or even that all Black people are here for Black people (cuz all skin aint kin); or that communist social life is inherently anarchic or free of oppressions. What I am saying tho is that Anarkata is simply a process or phenomenon or method or paradigm for stretching the potentials of natural/organic Black anarchy whenever and wherever they manifest. We call it an 'Anarkata Turn,' because it is like with Sankofa; the movement progresses because it is rooted in us going back to fetch what's before us, going back to fetch *what we have already been carrying with and in us*. Those children at the park that day proved this thesis, because again they led themselves, outside the State, in a dedicated and contextually devised, systematic manner, to meet a community need — due to the interaction of both revolutionary commitments on our part, and due to their own ancestrally-inherited, culturally-reinforced Black conscience.

Now there are revolutionaries who reject the Anarkata Turn. There are revolutionaries who would overlook those young girls as not anarchists for lacking a political tract, or who would even say we Anarkatas are not revolutionary for failing to preach to those kids the gospel of whoever's ideology. They also would never even hold such an action as a back to school 'Kickback,' and even if they did they would quietly insist that the people they share resources with and provide mutual aid for to be other anarchists who share their ideology. They spurn comprehensive survival-program-style mutual aid praxis because it fosters "dependency", in their minds, from undeserving populations who aren't radical enough to qualify for their graces. Even where this isn't the case, the only people these types of 'revolutionaries' talk to are those who share their radical 'lifestyle' and aesthetic. And often times, because what they do materially is so conditional on ideology, the people they end up sharing resources with and for are other bourgeois/white folk who claim their particular brand of radicalism. So what we have is people who got much

to give by virtue of their class position, but who circulate it all among themselves, and when they ‘organize’ they create opportunities not for building the community (because how can you when you isolated to your ideological social club?) but for indulging only *themselves* mentally and materially. The material consequence of this type of ‘anarchism’ is to never truly challenge oppression or its effects. And, to be honest, these people aren’t real radicals and are just as much partaking in hierarchy and robbery as the enemy. They are, after all, powerful and privileged folk hoarding resources at the end of the day, cloaking themselves in radical talk. They have **their own interests**, whether it’s in a certain political clique (or cult) or moral high ground over competing ideologies. Though they claim to ‘lead’, they don’t nurture or guide or affirm the oppressed’s organic activity. Instead, they impose their self-interest onto the oppressed’s activities, subjecting or hindering them in a way that doesn’t challenge their class participation in larger contexts of displacement and carceral endangerment of the locals.

Anarkatas have witnessed this hierarchical charade known as (white) anarchism time and time again, and that is why collectives like mine decide to do Kritikal Kickbacks like the Back to School one I mentioned before. What we prioritize is **engaging the community without requiring anything of them**. You don’t have to declare yourself Anarkata to work with us, or to be Anarkata for us to collab with you on what serves the community’s betterment and community’s defense. And when you rock wit us, it aint all theory or baseless, performative subversions. No, issa vibe and it’s fun as hell, wit music and food and we strive to make it that because we tryna resonate wit yo Soul and do this revolution stuff for the culture too. And we are dedicated, we are principled, and we are serious about revolution. We are adamant about mutual aid, about trans liberation and disability justice, about community defense and political education, about abolition and true accountability, about food

sovereignty, about freeing the most marginal and knocking the people clambering to the top right on down, about spreading leadership capacity and nurturing that which already is at work — even such that bears no ‘politic’ (like with the kids at the park). It is central that we be out here as radicals funneling resources to those who need it and facilitating their capacity to meet their needs and help one another and themselves — and that we do so in a genuine, principled (not flaky), and unselfish way.

This, quite strangely, makes the Anarkata Turn unique, perhaps even ‘incorrect’ to many anarchists. That’s why I declare that **perhaps Anarkata is to anarchism what a shadow is to a glass**. Both are not something you can clearly see or grasp with the eye, but that is the only real connection between the two. Glass can go invisible and shadows fade and don’t have form, but they are distinct phenomena and only one has hidden Black people running from slavecatchers in the woods (cuz if we did rebellious stuff under a glass we’d be visible enough to be caught or burned by the light of a thousand suns like ants!) Anarchy and Black life have much in common, yes, and Anarkata is just about extending that to its most revolutionary form. It is akin to Kwame Turé’s reminders that the ‘unconscious’ already seek freedom, will quickly mobilize for it, and that revolutionaries need really to just be helping a ‘conscious’ understanding of unconsciously rebellious behavior develop — through radical organizing. But (orthodox) anarchism looks past this, often instead requires that niggas trade their Blackness for some dead white man’s philosophy, as if we need something from them in order to transcend our fallen ways, and give the impression that this simple formula is the Way and the Truth and the Life, that if we simply meditate on and convene around and try to individualistically apply the insights of some European man’s book, we’ll all rise to the liberation hilltop. Anarkata and traditional anarchism are therefore not the same. Perhaps

anarchism and Black struggle aren't incommensurable, but what my comrades and other Black Anarchic Radicals (BARs) do know is that until the 'genre' of anarchy we strive for is rooted in Afrikan-centeredness/Pan-Africanism, *rooted in concrete Black histories and concrete practices and concrete material struggles*, it will not resonate and it will not change anything.

It was disabled, mentally ill Black queer and trans women and nonmen who really felt this most viscerally during the last decade. Our communities were forced to choose between 'identity' or 'anarchy' as if there was ever really a way to have one without the other while living at the 'bottom of the lowerarchy' as Assata once called it. As radicals, these communities on the margins and front lines of violence already had to fight for each other independent of dominant channels, autonomously. So we spent the 2010s re-observing as much revolutionary theory as possible and studying Black history and culture and spirituality and struggle and kept being reminded that anarchy was oozing all through it and that we needed to just carefully, in a dedicated, organized fashion, go out and concretely nurture those fires until the plantation was set ablaze. Anarchy, the death of hierarchy, is at hand, we were sure. Black History Month of 2019 came; 2019, the year some faiths prophesied we'd get free; 2019, the year of global uprisings, "the Year of Revolt", as the Ready for Revolution crew called it — and Anarkata announced itself like a cat that had already been prowling, deciding to make its presence known. Quite simply, Anarkata meant we would just work to synthesize the things about Black liberation that already tend toward anarchy, while struggling to remove impediments (the forces of domination) by building our power and fighting to undermine and overthrow the structures in our way. We'd have hurdles to face, and the tide of reaction from our adversaries to deal with and suppress at all costs, including our own internalized oppressive b.s. But we would also have the will of the masses and our ancestors help-

ing us push back and unleash what has been stirring here upon the world. It is this whirlwind of Black life that got us to make an Anarkata Turn and that would keep us turning and spinning in the circle and cypher of revolution: the ballrooms and other alternative homeplaces that Black trans and queer folk create; the grandparents' living rooms in which every family member across generations has lived in or slept in while on hard times; the 'two dollar ride, two dollar ride' finesse in the subway as fares go up and kiosks fail us, and the various informal group/cooperative economic practices by which we done taken care our hair, watched our kids, schooled each other, protected each other, cleaned up for each other, raised rent and medical expenses for each other; the 'five finger discount' and underground railroads and other illegal means to which we've sought our basic needs and our freedom; the 'text me when you get home' check-ins because you know it's real on these streets and some man or pig or fascist could kill or disappear one of our siblings for no reason at all; the 'say hi to the elders you know when you see them' unctions from our parents because we know we should be a community and social organism and have kinship; the casual declarations of 'f**k the police' on a daily and in every song because we deep down recognize that them and 911 alike are a joke and aint here for us; the 'save this' reminders from our parents when it comes to plastic bags and plastic containers and cooking oil because even if we aint on some green politic we know that wastefulness is not okay and we should use every part of what we got instead of throwing it away; the spirit and power of Marsha P Johnson and Assata Shakur and Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman and Kimpa Vita and Malcolm X and Martin and Frances Beal and Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral and Queen Nanny and other maroons and palenques and quilombos and each of the various units that took on the name Combahee and many others; the words and work of Moya Bailey and Kimberlé Crenshaw and Miss Major and Angela Davis and Cece McDonald and

Sylvia Wynter and Mariame Kaba and Ruth Wilson Gilmore and countless other even unnamed or not-well-known Black heroes, theyroes, and heroes, whether ancestors or the everyday this-world niggas who got us hip to all this with just a look, a touch, or their care; and its the plants we grow and tend to and it's the creatures we pet and feed and take care of and its the waters we commune with that hold our dead and its the mountains where our ghosts and guerrillas are hiding in and carrying out struggle from and its the skies our folklorists used to say we could fly upon like angels on Jacob's Ladder and the stars above that guided niggas off the plantation over a century ago; and it's the Divinity we call upon, and the inspired religious experiences that free us up from rigid colonial and gendered limitations on how we inhabit our bodies and express our emotions; and it's also the very expanding and black-colored universe itself. It's all these wild and wayward Things and more that inspire us before it's ever Kropotkin, or Malatesta, or Bookchin or Marx or Mao (if they ever even come into the picture). Not discounting the left's insights, because some of it is useful, but we just saying that first and foremost we are BLACK before we are anarchic, not the other way around, the latter proceeding from and never taking us out of the former. Revolution for us is a consolidation, not a conversion.

As such, it will come as we studiously and reverently integrate a range of Black radical contributions and praxis with our cultures of resistance and rebellion. It will come as we wholeheartedly operate under guidance of Black revolutionary (trans)feminist principles and true intersectional analytics that provide a 'roadmap to areas of need' and center the most marginal. It will come as we tirelessly build via principled and even ecumenical dedication to radical community organizing. It will come as we ground ourselves in establishing and defending and being accountable to viable and comprehensive networks of autonomous community support + mutual aid. And it will come because our people are daily struggling to

make Black liberation more possible by their own means. It will come because our people work to make genuinely radical conscience more widespread for our communities on our own terms. Leaders and formal or mainstream or dominant positions and channels need not dictate; we simply require nurturers and reminders and defenders for everyone and ourselves that we have the capacity to alter conditions, and that only we — not anyone's authority or institutions or superiority — got us. It is by our collective strength we will get free.

“To educate the masses politically does not mean, cannot mean, making a political speech. What it means is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility, and that if we go forward it is due to them too, that there is no such thing as a demiurge, that there is no famous man who will take the responsibility for everything, but that the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the hands of the people.”

— Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

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