

Bad Apple

Interfaith Blasphemy Activist Spirituality



Issue 4 summer 2023

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About us

We are a group of friends based in and around London who want to engage in conversations about faith and social justice organising. We are Muslim and Christian women and non-binary writers and activists. We are inspired by anarchist, queer, feminist, anti-ableist, anti-colonial, anti-capitalist and anti-racist practices and schools of thought. We encourage dialectic thought that challenges the boundaries between the secular and the mystical, the political and the personal.

Read, Write, Subscribe!

We've been really inspired by the positive responses to the first three issues of Bad Apple. Now we're onto Issue 4, we are working to widen our network of readers and contributors. If you are interested in any of the topics mentioned above, faith, anarchism and social justice, if you value writing and drawing as a way of thinking, get involved!

Write for us!

We are looking for essays, poems and drawings relevant to the themes of the magazine. We would also value help with layout and design. We are interested in collaborative writing and are happy to work with you to bring your writing into print. If you've been a bad apple, we want to hear from you!

Cover illustration: Giles MacDonogh, Bad Apple, drawing in ink on paper.

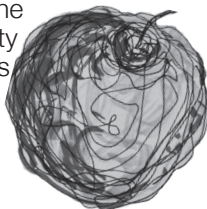
White Christians, Antitheism and Cultural Appropriation

Nora Ziegler

Atheism is a part of religious life. People of faith do not believe the same things equally or consistently and some don't believe at all. Antitheism separates religious faith from atheism and from radical politics. It is tempting to respond to antitheists by invoking the many religious revolutionaries around the world, whose faith informed their politics and helped them to stay strong and committed in the face of violent persecution.

However, white Christians should be very careful to appropriate revolutionary Christian legacies for our own religious identities. Christianity has been and is a tool of white supremacy as well as of liberation and subversion. The line between the two is bold but it does not always follow the neat boundaries of identity or geography. Sometimes it runs right through us. Sometimes we are at war with ourselves. To understand this struggle, and how religion can be a force of oppression as well as liberation, I believe we need to change how we think about power.

It is hard to grasp power as an individual because power is fundamentally social. Power is always a relationship, whether it is within or between humans, or plants, animals, non-living beings and even deities and spirits. For me, thinking about power has been part of healing from trauma, taking responsibility for my actions and mending relationships with others and with myself. Some of my reflections here may seem academic, but they are also deeply personal.



I have tried to think of power as a relationship between two moments and have called these objective and subjective power. The two can't be separated but they can become polarized within us, in relationships and across society. Binaries such as objective/subjective are both a means and a result of power. Therefore, to understand power, we can't assume them as natural, but we also can't simply ignore or transcend them. This is why I chose these terms, taking seriously Frantz Fanon's demand that 'an answer must be found on the objective as well as the subjective level'.¹

Objective power is the power we gain by using material and conceptual 'objects' such as tools, world views, labels, identities. These objects empower us to act, to have an impact on the world around us. At the same time, specific tools, world views or identities also disempower us because they exclude other ways of doing things, other ways of seeing the world, other ways of expressing ourselves.

I am empowered to speak or act and in the very same moment I am limited in my actions and thinking. However, the parts of me and of the world that are excluded, are thereby empowered in a different way. By virtue of being excluded they gain the power to expose the limited and arbitrary nature of the structures that exclude them. This is what I call subjective power: the power to imagine otherwise, to call bull-shit, to challenge systems and ideologies we might otherwise take for granted. It is also the power of those persecuted and killed by systemic violence to haunt us and live on in the memories of their loved ones.²

[continued on page 4]

Right:

Attendees of
the DSEI arms
fair stepping
over corpses.

Original title:
Die-in at DSEI.

Photo credit:

Diana More.

Published
under Creative
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The problem is, I can't do both at the same time. I can't speak and act sincerely while also critiquing my own words and actions. The people murdered in Gaza and Yemen can't protest outside UK arms fairs. This is why we need other people. Without others to challenge me, I can only speak ignorantly or remain silent. Without others to invoke the memory of the dead, saying their names, holding up pictures, embodying their ghosts in a die-in, those with objective power over life and death have the final word.

Another way of saying all this, is that we can't possess Truth and Power at the same time, and yet either is meaningless without the other. They can only be unified in relationships between people, between people and non-human beings, between different movements within and around us. Both are necessary for social change, but they can only be unified by working together in coalitions. This is not a process that we remain in control of. It makes us interdependent and vulnerable to others.

Whiteness is a project that aims to overcome this interdependence. On the one hand, white supremacy is an institution that affords objective power to white people. On the other hand, whiteness overcomes the need for community by constructing an illusionary artificial subjective power: a transcendental rational freedom. Instead of the power to imagine otherwise, whiteness promises the power to imagine anything.

As Chandra Mohanty says, middle-class white people 'would just like to "be", unconstrained by labels, by identities, by consignment to a group'.³ Whiteness functions as an identity and at the same time as an absence of identity, constructed in opposition to Blackness, ethnicity, indigeneity, religiosity, culture, class, queerness, and femininity. It creates an illusion of rational agency by defining the Other as irrational and passive.

Whiteness is an attempt to unify subjective and objective power unilaterally, to control both Truth and Power by creating

a universal 'Truth' abstracted from the ambiguities and contradictions of real life. Whiteness enables people to dominate while also considering themselves good people. It enables people to create and benefit from an irrational, brutal system while considering themselves rational and civilised. As Kehinde Andrews argues, whiteness exists as a psychosis to deal with the dissonance between the reality of racial exploitation and white mythologies of modernity.⁴

White Christianity has been able to engage in spirituality, indulging in its irrationality, reaching deeply into people's hearts and fantasies. At the same time, it has framed itself as the only rational religion in contrast to the barbaric and primitive Other. This combination is powerful and impossible to reason with. It makes sense, therefore, that European dissidents wanted to cleave it apart by separating state and religion.

However, secularism and antitheism both help reproduce whiteness. They help define the 'rational west' in opposition to the religious Other.⁵ Secularism allows liberals and leftists to challenge the authority of religious institutions without challenging the patriarchal and colonial foundations of their power. Antitheism enables leftists to appropriate ideas, symbols, and practices from religious communities and at the same time distance themselves from those communities, secularising, privatising and white washing these practices, making them respectable.

European poets and philosophers ripped off and secularised ancient Greek cosmology as part of the foundation of enlightenment ideology. Already in the mid-19th century, Europeans were travelling to India to learn techniques for spiritual wellbeing that are now ubiquitous in social movements, such as meditation and yoga.⁶ The 'dreadlock' is, among other uses and meanings, a Rastafarian practice that has been adopted by white leftists to express their own political and cultural dissent.

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The Boy I met at the Bar

Adenike Seafield

The boy with teeth says that he adores me, really, and I know that but he needs to be free right now.

I don't know what could be more free than the love we have.

I want him to dip his head into the water and know that he cannot drown because I am right there.

I want him to run array in a field knowing that if he falls I will clean the wounds.

I want him to put his nose into the air and smell all the beautiful things knowing that if per chance he finds a wasp I will help him shoo it away.

I want him to scream from the top of a building knowing if he loses his voice I am right there to say the words for him.

I do not say anything.

My bones are weary so I do not convince men to love me anymore.

They say you cannot love someone into being ready?

But why does loving me never make them want to change?

Why am I not a goal worthy of assiduous assertion?

"Freedom from all things" he says with conviction.

He doesn't know how terrifying that is.

To be so free and alone.

I do.

I do.

I do.

Adenike Seafield is a writer, poet and lawyer whose work attempts to make sense of life, love and God.

'We are definitely squatting'

Henry and M, an interview

What is squatting?

Squatting is when you occupy empty or unused commercial buildings. In England, legally, it has to be a commercial property. The place that I'm living in now used to be a centre that provided support for people who had come out of the social care system. The building was sold in trust, which means the landlord bought it from the Council for cheap on the promise that he was going to rebuild it as something for the community.

But this landlord in particular has been known.. there's other situations where he buys properties cheap on trust, and then lets them get run down, or lets people squat them so they get even more run down, to the point where he can go to the council and be like, 'Well, I can't rebuild this for the community so my only option is to knock it down and redevelop it for my own interest.'

There's only three or four properties in London that have been such long standing squats. In August it will be five years. It's because of this, the dodginess of this guy, that we've managed to keep it going for so long.

Most of the people I know who squat, it's three to six months and then you get moved on.

So how long have you been there?

I've been there just over a year now. We were squatting a place in Clapton and we got evicted illegally. The owners just hired some heavies to come round and kick us out. So we rang our friends to come help us and they were like, 'You guys should just come live with us. We've got some extra rooms.' And so we moved in.

What is your relationship with the local council?

Because we've been going on this long, it's now at the point where if we want to start working towards getting a longer term, more secure position in the place, we can. If you start paying business rates, (taxes raised on non-domestic properties) it means then you have a better legal standing, but it can also be risky because you don't know how the Council's going to respond.

But the Council knows that you're there...

Yes, they collect our bins and stuff. Our relationship with the Council has changed over the years. We've had noise abatement orders on the place when people were putting on too many parties but currently we're on pretty good terms with the Council.

Would you say you live in a community?

Different crews have different relationships. With this one, because it's been such a long standing squat, it's obviously not the original crew that opened the space. It can feel more disjointed as a community because people come and go and people have moved in their friends and stuff and it's not been like a core group.

Whereas the crews that move more regularly together do in some ways have more of a stronger community within them because they are having to like constantly plan and solve problems.

How do you make decisions?

It's really hard. There's a lot of strong personalities, so we do try and have regular house meetings and make sure that at

least the majority of the house is present before any big decisions are made. But sometimes it's easier for people just to make a decision.

If something's been discussed over and over and an agreement has not been [reached] people just take action. Like we have a really bad mice problem. And there's been a lot of debate about poison versus humane traps or getting cats. But we have dogs as well.

In the end someone just... got a cat.

So now the animal situation in the house is incredibly complex because there's four dogs, none of whom get on with each other, so they all have to be kept separate. And then the cats also are separate from the dogs. So each floor is segregated into one animal's district.

What are the advantages of squatting?

There's the obvious one. Which is you're not paying rent. But people often assume that because you're not paying rent, life is easy. People don't realise that a lot of maintenance goes with squatting and it's really time consuming. It is why, for lots of people, squatting doesn't mean they can actually be working full time. There's a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes.

We have a leak in the roof which has led to a really bad mould problem in our ceiling. So that's my current project: removing the rot and mould and resealing the roof.

Also, because this style of living does attract people who maybe have problems with mental health or drug abuse or whatever, you have to be prepared to live with constant chaos and drama, which can be amazingly fun. But then some days you're like, 'Oh, my God, I cannot be bothered with you people anymore.' That's definitely a factor, but it also means you meet some amazing people. So pros and cons are close in that regard.

Do you feel you have a caring role?

Everyone looks after each other, that's for sure, in a way that you don't necessarily have in rented spaces, even when it is a disjointed community, even when you don't really know the other people that well.

What led you to this way of life?

I've always been involved in squat parties and putting on events in squatted spaces. So that, I guess, is what introduced me to the community as a whole.

Although oftentimes when we do squat a building, after the event, we'll find a crew that's looking for a new place to live, and then they can take over the space, instead of just using it and discarding it. We just spread the word that there's an available space.

I do think squatting is a reaction to the housing crisis. Different people have different relationships with it. Some people don't want to pay rent while other people are doing it more with an ideological, political sense in terms of the housing crisis, communal living and just like alternative ways of existing.

The mentality behind why people are doing it changes from crew to crew.

So how would you describe your own relationship with squatting?

Definitely it's an ideological choice for me because, even if I didn't live in London, I would still search for similar communities or squatted spaces to live in. But, on a simply practical matter, I know I couldn't afford to maintain the van in London and be renting a space as well. The whole way of life in London is just becoming harder and harder.

Henry is a writer, teacher and peace activist

M. is a pseudonym

The Benedictus

Blessed be the
SHE has visited and redeemed them.
SHE has raised up for us a
in the house of servant,
AS SHE promised by the lips of holy
those who were **HER** prophets from of old **WOMEN**
A savior who would free us
SO HER love for our is fulfilled*
and **HER** holy covenant remembered.

SHE swore to Abraham **AND SARAH**
that free from fear,
and saved from
we might serve **HER** in holiness and justice*
all the days of our life in **HER** presence.

THE ACT OF
CRADLING
A CHILD,
BREAST
FEEDING
CARRYING
WHEN MOST
VULN-
ERABLE **SHE**

As for you, little child,*
you shall be called a prophet

You shall go ahead of the
to prepare **HER** ways before

To make known to **HER** people their salvation*
through forgiveness of all their sins,
the loving-kindness of the heart of our
who visits us like the dawn from on high.

will give light to those in darkness,†
those who dwell in the shadow of death,*
and guide us into the way of peace.

LUKE 1:68-79

LADY GODDESS
EARTH MOTHER
OF DALSTON,
OF HEADLIGHTS,
DRIVING RAIN,
FALLEN LEAF,
NEW BUDS,
CROWDS ON
THE TUBE

FROM STUCK
THOUGHTS,
ANXIETY,
STEREOTYPES
DISTRESS
RUMINATION
HURT, PRIDE,
DISEASE

MOTHER
UP AT DAWN
SEX AT DAWN
MOTHERS
FEEDING
BABIES BUS
DRIVERS,
OFFICE CLEAN
ERS, CAREERS,
SHIFT WORKERS,
PART
GOERS

Bending the canticle

Henry

Like many, I have scraps of verse, mostly psalms and poems, in the back of my mind, ready to be called on as needed. I quite often forget the order of the lines or change them around so much that when I see them in print they seem all wrong.

One of these, ready to be called on in a new enquiring period of life, is the Benedictus. Turning sixty, I discover, brings new struggles, in which I grow to accept things are not as they seem, in which familiar prayers and meditation lose their power and others take their place. Where prayer had once seemed to be genderless or mostly male, I needed to bring the feminine part of me into prayer. At this particular time of life, yes, in the practice of prayer, the masculine voice prevented me from finding meaning.

The Benedictus is taken from the words Zechariah says over his new born son. [Luke 1: 68-79] Elizabeth and Zechariah seem like down to earth people. Zechariah doesn't believe the angel who announces they will have a child, because his wife is 'very old'. As a punishment, he loses his ability to speak. An echo of Sarah who [doesn't] appear in this passage, when she laughs and hides in the tent. Zechariah regains his speech when he says, 'His name is John'.

In the Catholic Church, the Benedictus is a 'canticle' said during 'Lauds', or morning prayer. As a layperson, I mostly heard it when a male priest led my congregation. Now, in this new period of my life, the lines I had learned by heart through much repetition were not at all what I wanted to say. As they appear in the prayer book, isolated from their context, the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah, some words are war like and vengeful. 'Mighty saviour', sometimes translated as 'horn of salvation', sounds patriarchal and militaristic. I didn't want to cast anyone as 'foes' or 'those that hate us'.

One evening I found myself reciting the Benedictus from the point of view of a woman, talking of a woman.

As soon as I changed the pronouns from 'he' to 'she', I was filled with compassion. If I gave God a new gender, thoughts of life, earth and renewal took the place of anger. The words were suddenly close to me, they lost their distant authority and became personal. They guided me to think of creation. They awakened in me a kindred spirit with the cats and foxes and pigeons, fellow travellers in my street, on the tube, in town. They directed me to my own experience as a mother, daughter, grandmother, a woman long past child bearing age, just like Elizabeth. Just like Sarah.

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Erev Sukkot

Hayyim Rothman

You raged
because my key
opens the door
to the roof,
and because I used
the wooden poles
you left on the stairs
to build myself a hut
there.

I was reminded
suddenly
that warm sunshine
and cooling wind
belong to God,
whose hands are all palm,
whose fingers are without knuckle
and do not curl tightly,
so that he cannot
hold
onto anything
at all.

But the earth
and everything on it
belongs to man,
whose hands
are made differently.

I am

I am
the aching gut,
the throbbing waist,
the folded belly
that forms
when God doubles over
and laughs at himself.

A Rosh Hashana Proposal from Babylon

The street is littered
with angels.

It seems that there is no room for
them
in the sky.

God has grown too large.

His heels press
too hard
against the sapphire brickwork
that protects us
from eternity,
and they fall through the cracks.

He stretches the stitches of the par-
god
that hides from us
the world of truth,
and they burst through the seams.

It is time
to build a new tower.

We no longer wish
to storm heaven,
but to support it
from below

so that it does not fall
and crush us.

Hayyim Rothman is a rabbi, a scholar of early modern philosophy and Jewish-anarchist theology, and a poet. His first book, 'No Masters But God: Portraits of Anarcho-Judaism' is published by Manchester University Press.

Of Kurds and Quakers

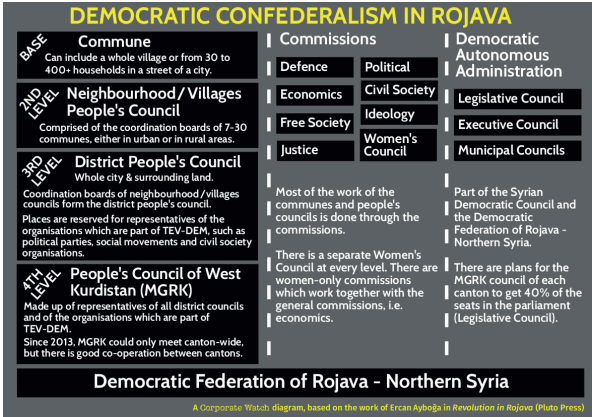
Benji

The Kurdish freedom movement often talks about the ‘two rivers’ of history: the river of Capitalist Modernity and the river of Democratic Modernity. The former refers to the history of state hegemony, capitalist realism and Darwinian competition that forms the only history most are ever exposed to, whilst the latter refers to the far older history of democratic society, communalism and mutual aid that predates it and has presented a continual resistance. The Kurdish movement identifies with this second current, but only as one example out of many.

As part of the movement’s call to build ‘world democratic confederalism’, it encourages everyone to learn the oft-suppressed democratic history of their own geographies. If we are to work towards democratic modernity within our own environs, we must be aware of this local history and build relationships with the democratic forces already hard at work all around us. This requires an ability to recognise such forces, beyond simply the words they use to describe themselves: every nation-state from the UK to the North Korea claims to be a democracy, and yet clearly, they will be no allies in our struggle. How, then, can we recognise these truly democratic forces? How can we identify those who are making their own ‘cracks in the wall’¹¹?

A structural analysis can be helpful here. We can assume that a democratic organisation will empower its

democratically minded members to thrive within it, whilst also safeguarding against co-option by those less co-operatively inclined; therefore, we can expect there to be many similarities between the structures that work for such movements and those that don’t. However, even the points of difference may be informative, and help us to translate the ideas of the Kurdish movement into our own context.



Above: Diagram based on the work of Ercan Ayboga in *Revolution in Rojava* (Pluto Press)

In this article, then, I’d like to talk about one such organisation with a powerful presence in the democratic history of the UK (and beyond), and one whose structures have proved themselves resilient over several hundreds of years: the Religious Society of Friends, more commonly known as the Quakers.

I see many parallels between the Quaker system of meetings and committees and the Kurdish model of democratic confederalism, both of which aim to guarantee subsidiarity by focussing on local groups (whether ‘meetings’ or

‘communes’) as the core organisational unit, whilst also structurally dissuading individualism in favour of collective action through cleverly-designed structures and mechanisms of accountability. Similarly, both rely on the establishment of adjacent structures (some short-lived, some longer lasting) to focus attention on particular areas or issues, or to provide a space for members united by a common characteristic (such as youth).

The two also appear to be in sync when it comes to perhaps the two most important aspects of any organisation: how it makes decisions, and how it deals with internal conflict.

In the former, Quakers are distinguished by the process of ‘Quaker decision-making’, in which a designated clerk is responsible for discerning, in the form of a minute, the ‘sense of the meeting’ once all present have had an opportunity to reflect and comment on the question at hand. This minute is then returned to the meeting to review, amend (if felt necessary) and eventually adopt, though it is crucial to note that this does not require unanimous support—only that everyone present agrees that it accurately reflects the ‘sense of the meeting’. Similarly, Kurdish organisations aim to build consensus and have implemented various mechanisms to ensure that minority views are not lost amidst majority preference, such as quota systems.

Internal conflict, meanwhile, is dealt with in Quakerism through (you guessed it) more meetings. This is only one option, however, and the Quakers are happy to highlight that ‘Friends were among the pioneers of conflict resolution as a distinct activity’¹². Whether through mediation, counselling or ‘a quiet but firm reproof’,

Quakerism has a rich toolbox of ways to defuse internal conflict and correct harmful behaviours, all taking place in the same spirit of mutual trust and a supportive community as *tekmîl* sessions within the Kurdish Freedom Movement.¹³

However, none of this is to say that both movements are identical (nor would we expect them to be). They have both emerged from very different political situations, social milieus, and cultural contexts and this necessarily has a deep impact on the resulting forms of each movement. However, I want to argue that what may at first appear to be irreconcilable differences may not be quite the obstacles they seem.

The first obstacle may well be what the Quakers are best known for: pacifism. How could the world’s oldest peace church possibly have anything in common with a movement that originated in a campaign of armed struggle against the Turkish state, and which continues that struggle in the various regions of Kurdistan today? I think that this comes from a misunderstanding of the Quaker peace testimony. In line with the Quaker position on all issues, exactly what this testimony entails is left to the discernment of each individual Quaker. This was seen in both the First and Second World Wars, where Quaker responses ranged from reluctantly joining the Armed Forces, to volunteering to serve in non-combatant roles, to strict conscientious objection (usually resulting in prison sentences, or worse).

Reinforcing this diversity of opinion, a section in *Quaker Faith & Practice* dedicated to highlighting the ‘dilemmas of the pacifist stand’ includes a 1661 quotation which could well be seen to echo Öcalan’s ‘rose theory’¹⁴ of ‘legitimate self-defence’

when it states that ‘a great blessing will attend the sword where it is borne uprightly to that end and its use will be honourable’¹⁵. In short, there are many different interpretations of just what this testimony requires from Quakers, and whilst many (perhaps even most) may take it to mean some form of pacifism, it is not necessarily as settled an issue as it may appear at first.

Another clear difference may be the role of women in both movements. Whilst both movements are distinguished by the number of women in positions of great influence throughout their histories—Margaret Fell could well be seen as a proto-Sakine Cansız for her role in documenting the activities of the early Quaker movement—the current state of affairs is very different. The Kurdish movement, through its separate women’s structures, quota system and male and female co-chairs, takes a more essentialist, separatist approach, whereas there is no contemporary parallel in Quakerism. However, it is worth noting that that has not always been the case; there were separate Women’s Meetings, both Yearly and local, throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, ending with the merging of the two Yearly Meetings in 1908 (though whilst they limited membership to women only, these did not have the same autonomy from the male-dominated general meetings as the Kurdish women’s structures today).

The third, and perhaps most obvious, difference is that one movement faces existential threats on a daily basis, and the other does not. The Quakers do not maintain any independent territory; the Kurdish movement controls the liberated areas of north-east Syria. Quakers have never faced ethnic cleansing or genocide at the

hands of either NATO militaries or Islamist terror cells; both are a daily reality for the Kurdish movement. The Quakers maintain an office at the UN; much of the Kurdish movement is internationally criminalised, and Öcalan remains imprisoned.

Obviously, these two movements operate in wildly different contexts, but I would suggest that this represents a good reason for us in the UK to study such local examples. The tactics, innovations and ideas that work for the Kurdish movement are unlikely to be exactly the same ones that work for our movements, and attempting to port them over directly is a recipe for disaster. But what could be more applicable to the British context than a movement still coming to grips with its complicated history of opposition to, and complicity in, the trans-Atlantic slave trade; a movement that can move successfully within liberal democratic spaces, even whilst stressing the supremacy of one’s conscience over the laws of states: a movement that inculcates in its members effective techniques of mental self-defence against capitalist modernity (though without using either of those terms); and, last but by no means least, a movement that operates in English, rather than Kurdish?

Benji is a member of the Kurdistan Solidarity Network with a long-standing interest in both the Quakers and other home-grown radical movements.

The full version of this article is available: <https://kurdistan solidarity.net/2022/12/08/of-kurds-and-quakers/>

11 <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2015/05/10/the-crack-in-the-wall-first-note-on-zapatista-method/>

12 <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/passage/4-23/>

13 <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/philip-argento-keeffe-tekml>

14 <https://medyanews.net/abdullah-ocalan-on-self-defence-honour-and-love-rose-theory/>

15 <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/24/#24-20>

White Christians..

[continued from page 5]

Anarchist academics have adopted concepts such as 'prefiguration' and 'messianic time', rooted in Jewish and Christian mysticisms. They have tried to retain the revolutionary potential of these ideas while also cleansing them of their mystical and religious content. Techniques for horizontal decision-making and conflict resolution commonly used in social movements, have also been learned from religious groups such as the Quakers and indigenous communities. For example, the 'talking stick' originated among indigenous peoples of North America as a spiritual tool for democratic decision making.⁷

All these practices are empowering in the 'objective' sense because they enable people to make sense of their lives and relationships, express and communicate ideas and put them into practice. However, these practices also ground people in a specific context and worldview. To secularise these practices is to make them universally applicable. Secularisation allows white middle-class leftists to employ such practices independently from global working-class, racialised and indigenous communities. And it helps maintain the liberal illusion that radical social change can be achieved without these communities.

Western leftists have an annoying habit of using specific tactics, structures, and

symbols as if they were magically radical in and of themselves in every context. What made these practices radical in the first place was that they express alternative worldviews and metaphysics⁸. They rehearse alternative ways of doing politics, of being in community, of being human. They give 'objective' form to that which is excluded and only exists as an absence or haunting presence, as 'subjective' power, within the hegemonic Western capitalist worldview.

However, turning such tactics and symbols into cultural property also co-opts them into a capitalist colonial worldview. I would like to suggest that white and middle-class leftists who aggressively police 'cultural appropriation', are motivated at least in part by a desire to reinforce their political, spiritual, and cultural independence from working-class people of colour. Instead of engaging in cultural practices in a respectful and accountable way, we avoid responsibility by declaring them off limits.

In Islam and Anarchism, Mohamed Abdou argues that respectfully learning and sharing cultural practices requires an ethics of hospitality⁹. It requires us to approach ideas and practices that are new to us as guests: listening, learning, and over time developing the experience and confidence to welcome and teach others. Again, this is not a process we can remain in control of. Hospitality means taking an interfaith and coalitional approach. It has the potential

1 Frantz Fanon. 1952. Black skin, white masks

2 Avery Gordon. 2008. Ghostly matters: haunting and the sociological imagination

3 Chandra Mohanty. 2003. Feminism without borders: decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity

4 Kehinde Andrews. 2016. 'The Psychosis of Whiteness: the celluloid hallucinations of Amazing Graze and Belle'. Journal of Black Studies

5 Erica Lagalisse. 2019. Occult features of anarchism: with attention to the conspiracy of kings and the conspiracy of the peoples.

6 Leela Gandhi. 2006. Affective communities: anticolonial thought, fin-de-siècle radicalism, and the politics of friendship

7 <https://www.du.edu/conflict-resolution/news/significance-talking-stick>

8 Cedric Robinson. 1983. Black Marxism: the making of the black radical tradition

9 Mohamed Abdou. 2021. Islam and anarchism: relationships and resonances

10 Bernice Johnson Reagon. 'Coalition Politics: Turning the Century'. Home girls: a black feminist anthology (edited by Barbara Smith)

to corrode boundaries between the self and other, subverting whiteness, and empowering us to collectively challenge white supremacy.

This requires building mutual trust across some very entrenched and painful divisions, and trust takes time. A lot of activists and leftists act as if we don't have time for building community and coalitions. But, echoing the words of Bernice Johnson Reagon, I believe we must try to take an 'old-age perspective'¹⁰. That means imagining that we will be doing this work together for decades and it is worth learning shared spiritual practices that will ground us in diverse, interconnected, resilient and militant movements for justice.

Nora Ziegler is an anarchist organiser and writer

Bending the Canticle

[continued from page 9]

The lines contain a wonderful promise for the future, even in times of stress, ending on a prayer for peace. It is a promise to two older people, full of hope and love and compassion. The promise, not of a baby, being long past child bearing age myself, but constant reappearance of love, to be cherished wherever I am.

But I really only understood this by disrupting my rote learning and changing the pronouns from masculine to feminine, deleting words, swapping others.

Reciting the Benedictus is something I do in my head. I change the words according to the seasons, places, the amount of time I have, and what mood I'm in. To present my version on paper, I have set it out as a page of a prayer book, with options, which seems fitting for a practical theology. The act of writing into the prayer book for this page was contemplative itself.

If you are familiar with this song, try changing the words, and add your own names and places.

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Overleaf

THE NOSE

Chris Paul

This image was given to me by my youngest brother Gregory (1962-1991). The smiling figure of the nondescript working man, minding his own business and having washed his hands of the struggle between the powerful and powerless – thereby giving his tacit support to the powerful – is nevertheless unwittingly subject to the authority of the state and all security structures. Even though he appears to be unaware or is simply going under the radar presenting as this banal persona and seemingly untroubled.

**THE NOSE IS WATCHING
YOU!!!**

