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The Failure Of The State And The Rise Of Anarchism In Contemporary Anti-Systemic Praxis

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Abstract: The centrality of anarchism to the praxis of contemporary anti-systemic social movements has been well documented. From the alter-globalisation movement to Occupy, many contemporary anti-systemic movements are defined by their commitment to some of the central tenets of anarchism, including the pursuit of decentralized, directly democratic and egalitarian organisational forms that are independent from and reject the state as an agent of social change. This stands in contrast to traditional anti-systemic forces which, as Immanuel Wallerstein identifies, have typically seen the state as the principle agent of social change. However, within the scholarly literature, only limited attempts have been made to develop an understanding as to *why* many anti-systemic movements now reject the state as an agent of change. This paper seeks to provide a theoretical and historical account of this. By tracing the historical failure of 'state-centric' anti-systemic movements (principally state communist, social-democratic and nationalist forces) this paper argues that an *anarchistic praxis* – though not a doctrinaire ideological programme – has become a primary point of reference for contemporary anti-systemic movements. It argues further that this can be seen, in many ways, as a response to the failure of ideologically motivated, state-centric anti-systemic forces to bring about substantial, transformative social change once assuming power. This argument will be substantiated and illustrated through two qualitative cases: the Zapatistas and the South African shack dweller's movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo.

Keywords: Abahlali baseMjondolo, anarchism, anti-systemic, praxis, Zapatistas

Introduction

Anarchism has long been dismissed as incompatible with the complexities of contemporary society; either a recipe for violence and chaos, or, more often, a 'pre-modern' utopian fantasy. Indeed, these are axioms often uncritically taught to budding students (see Heywood 2007). To such observers, it must thus be perplexing to find anarchism now of substantial influence within what Wallerstein (2002) labels 'anti-systemic' social movements.

Much scholarly discussion identifies what I refer to as an *anarchistic praxis* as being at the centre of these movements. For instance, Curran (2006, 2), Graeber (2002) and Wallerstein (2002) each identify the centrality of anarchism in contemporary opposition to neoliberal globalisation. Elsewhere, anarchism – or, at least, anarchist principles – has been identified as an animating ideological force behind Occupy (Gibson 2013), WikiLeaks (Curran and Gibson 2013) and the alter-globalisation movement in the West (Dixon 2012), and the Landless Peasant's Movement (Stedile 2002), the Zapatistas (EZLN) (Curran 2006; Graeber 2002) and Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM) (Gibson 2008; Pithouse 2006) in the 'global South.' It is thus evident that much contemporary anti-systemic praxis is defined by a commitment to some of anarchism's central praxiological tenets, principles and analyses, including opposition to hierarchy, decentralisaition and the pursuit of directly democratic social forms (see Epstein 2001; Gordon 2007; Graeber 2002). Most significant is that anti-systemic movements increasingly reject the state as an agent of change. It is this final point that forms the core of this article. The originality of this piece lies in the fact that, whilst, as explored, many identify the centrality of anarchism within

contemporary anti-systemic praxis, few attempts have been made to develop an understanding as to *why* many anti-systemic movements now reject the state as an agent of change. In light of this lacuna, I seek to provide a theoretical-historical account of the way anti-systemic movements have developed and changed. To do this, my paper will develop an understanding of *why* an anarchistic praxis has become central within contemporary anti-systemic movements.

I argue that an *anarchistic praxis* – though not a doctrinaire ideological programme – has become a primary point of reference for contemporary anti-systemic social movements and that this can be seen, in many ways, as a response to the failure of state-centric versions to bring about transformative social change once assuming power. Admittedly, one cannot explain the actions of *every* anti-systemic actor. Hence, I am not alleging that state-centric anti-systemic movements no longer exist or that their ideological underpinnings do not inspire participants, but merely that the influence of state-centric anti-systemic movements is on the wane and that, as a result of their failure, an anarchistic praxis is increasingly significant in the constitution of contemporary anti-systemic forces. Furthermore, I am not arguing that this state-centric praxis is the *only* reason these forces have failed. However, it is the most significant shared feature of their praxis and is the feature this paper focuses on.

Necessitated by the misconceptions surrounding it, this article begins by explicating what constitutes an anarchistic praxis. Sympathising with socialist critiques of capitalism, an anarchistic praxis is differentiated from the numerous varieties of state socialism by virtue of its pursuit of decentralised, directly democratic social forms independent of the state and capital that, as far as possible, *prefigure* anarchism's utopian social vision. The second section explores – through the work of Immanuel Wallerstein – the historical dominance of a 'state-centric' praxis within anti-systemic movements – animated by the notion that the state is the major agent of social change, and that, subsequently, taking state power is a necessary initial part of enacting social change – before outlining the considerable success state-centric anti-systemic movements have had in obtaining state power. However, despite this success, these movements subsequently failed to deliver on the second part of their promise: the radical transformation of society. In many cases, they instead became functionaries of state power. In important ways, the state has thus 'failed' as an agent of revolutionary change, substantiating the anarchist contention that it is destined to reproduce domination. This failure also helps to explain the widespread adoption, within contemporary anti-systemic movements, of an anti-state, anarchistic praxis.

The final section empirically illustrates this argument through two cases: the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico and the South African shack dweller's movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo. These movements illuminate that contemporary anti-systemic actors increasingly recognise both the failure of state-centric anti-systemic movements and, more broadly, the failure (and, perhaps, inability) of the state, to transform social order. Besides illustrating my argument, there are significant methodological reasons I chose the EZLN and AbM over other possible case-study candidates. First, they are amongst the largest and most influential contemporary anti-systemic movements. Second, these cases (both of the 'global south') represent voices distinct and separate from 'Western' manifestations of an anarchistic praxis – like Occupy – that have received comparatively ample academic focus. For instance, while the EZLN, and their impact on the alter-globalisation movement, have been extensively analysed, there has been limited analysis of the movements' specific rejection of the state as an agent of change. Third, limited attention has been paid to the specific movements that utilize an anarchistic praxis in the global south. Hence, utilising cases from the global 'South' will broaden quantitative and qualitative understanding of 'anarchical' movements, lending further applicability and generalisability to my argument. Finally, both movements represent a 'living politics' in which anarchist principles serve as the source of social life and political enlightenment, acting to substantiate the claim (see Curran 2006) that anarchism constitutes the core of contemporary pursuits of a post-capitalist world.

Anarchism and an 'Anarchistic Praxis'

Hierarchy, Capitalism and the State

Etymologically, anarchism means (something like) the absence of authority. Along these lines, Peter Kropotkin

(1910) claims anarchist 'tendencies' run throughout the history of social and political thought. This claim is substantiated by Rudolf Rocker (2001, 17), who asserts that "anarchist ideas are to be found in almost every period of known history": evident not only in the writings of its canonical figures, but also as far back as the Taoist Sage, Laozi, the Hedonists, Cynics and Stoics in Ancient Greece, the practices of Christian sects of the Middle Ages and the medieval guilds of Europe, and also in the works of 'utopian' socialists like Fourier. Nonetheless, throughout much of human history the word 'anarchism' has been pejoratively synonymous with disorder and even terror, associations maintained to this day.

The notion of 'anarchism' as a coherent political ideology, named as such, took shape via the writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. For Proudhon, it is not anarchy, but hierarchy, that produces chaos and disorder. For anarchists, the legitimacy of social institutions and practices are directly tied to the extent that they promote individual freedom. From this conviction springs anarchism's opposition to the state, which anarchists consider the exemplar of externally imposed hierarchy. It is not only the principle source of social antagonism, but, as Kropotkin (1946, 1) contends, also "the greatest hindrance to the birth of a society based on equality and liberty, as well as the historic means designed to prevent this blossoming." Government operationalizes state power. As a consequence, anarchism stands in opposition to both the state and government (concepts sometimes used interchangeably within the tradition). As Proudhon (2004, 294) famously declares:

> To be governed is to be… spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, regulated, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, checked, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creates who have neither the right not the wisdom nor the virtue to do so. To be governed is to be… repressed, fined, vilified, harassed, hunted down, abused, clubbed, disarmed, bound, chocked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed… That is government, that is its justice, that is its morality.

However, the anarchist opposition to hierarchy goes beyond anti-statism, demanding the repudiation of hierarchy in various forms. Anarchists share with Marxists and other state socialists a rejection of capitalism, arguing it is fundamentally exploitative and alienating. Indeed, anarchism, in its denunciation of hierarchy, is consistent with Marx's conception of capitalism as alienation insofar as both are ultimately pursuant of a social order in which social bonds are the product of free association.

In recent intellectual history 'anarcho'-capitalists and right-wing libertarians have posited the inviolability of private property rights, contending infringements constitute a fundamental breach of individual liberty. They go on to argue that the market can actualise freedom as a non-coercive realm of exchange between utility maximising agents, with violation on the part of the state qualifying as a hierarchical imposition that quashes intrinsic moral rights and freedoms (see, for instance Nozick 1974). However anarchism, particularly in its 'classical' social forms, has typically condemned capitalism for its exploitative and alienating effects. Anarchist's – foremost amongst them, Kropotkin (1904) – claim that capitalism, by engendering egoism, greed and selfishness, threatens the altruistic and mutualistic bonds that underlie human speciation, and thus threatens social atomisation and fragmentation. The capitalist economy and private property, rather than actualising human freedom, constitute instead forms of arbitrary domination. They produce economic monopolies that operate for and under the interests of the few against the many. The masses not only live dreary lives as alienated cogs in a broader economic machine, but a life of compulsion, forced as they are to sell their labour power in order to survive. Furthermore, by forcing much of the population into the realm of competitive market relations in order to survive, capitalism actively impedes the development of alternative lifestyles and social arrangements, promoting homogeneity and conformity.

For anarchists, the state is not external to this process, but complicit in it. The state, amongst other things, enforces laws, maintains systemic stability, panders to the interests of capital and fills functionalist gaps in the market in times of crisis. It also plays a directly violent role in crushing socially oppositional elements. Capitalism, in short, is propped-up and reinforced by the violence of the state. This is confirmed by Hayek (1994, 45) who, nominally a champion of unregulated

capitalism, nonetheless admits a necessary role for the state in maintaining the capitalist order, stating: "in no [market] system that could be rationally defended would the state just do nothing."

Hence, anarchism traditionally stands in opposition to both the state and capitalism. In this sense, it is "the confluence of the two great currents which… since the French Revolution have found such characteristic expression in the intellectual life of Europe: socialism and liberalism" (Rocker 2001, 16). The great liberal thinkers, in order to maximize individual liberty, sought to limit governmental and statist functions. Anarchists extend this critique of the state further, and seek to eliminate political power itself from social life. But they also appreciate the socialist critique of liberalism. Personal and social freedom can only be actualized in the context of equitable, non-dominatory economic conditions. Anarchism thus shares with socialism the demand to abolish capitalism in favour of common ownership of the means of production, free for the use of all without distinction.

However, the anarchists depart from the various state socialists on the question of *how* a post-capitalist society ought to be realized. As explored below, the social democrats seek to gain control of the bourgeois state through parliamentary processes, building a socialist society through reformist means. On the other hand, the state communists – including Marx and his followers[1] – preserve the state and political power in the form of a proletarian dictatorship that, as discussed in the paper's second section, after driving the transition towards a classless society, they hope will dissolve itself, producing, from hierarchical means, the ends of a non-hierarchical communist society.

Anarchists thus struggle against not only class, but hierarchy itself, a distinction which constitutes the major point of departure for anarchists from statist forms of socialism. In pursuit of a non-hierarchical society, anarchists contend that the struggle against capitalism must also carry through as a struggle against hierarchy itself, including, especially, hierarchical political power and the state. Thus, as David Apter (1970, 397-398) claims, anarchism "employs a socialist critique of capitalism with a liberal critique of socialism"; thus constituting the libertarian wing of socialism. Against the centralisation of political and economic forces advocated by socialism, anarchists argue the social appropriation of capital must be carried out directly by the masses themselves.

An Anarchistic Praxis: Prefiguration, Direct Democracy and Decentralisation

Hence, for anarchists, social forms ought to *prefigure*, as far as possible, the post-capitalist society sought. In short, a liberated society can only be achieved through similarly libertarian means of getting there (Franks 2006, 99). The reason for this, anarchists posit, is that, whatever the intentions, the means of praxis tend to inherently transform into and become its ends. Bookchin (2004, 11), for instance, argues that the historical failure of the revolutionary left can be found in the way in which anti-systemic forces have typically utilised profoundly oppressive and hierarchical means (such as the dictatorship of the proletariat, or the capitalist state) in an attempt to realise an emancipated, post capitalist future (the ends). While anarchists and socialists find commonalities, particularly in their critiques of capitalism, this conflation of means and ends is the basis upon which anarchists reject both Marxian notions of the dictatorship of the proletariat and social democratic reformism. Along these lines Bakunin (1972, 329) prophetically cautioned that statist forms of socialism would, despite perhaps noble aims, spawn a tyrannical and oppressive 'red bureaucracy.' This critique of state socialism's emphasis on the state as an agent of change is driven by anarchism's "conviction that an instrument of domination… cannot be used to achieve liberation; that ends cannot be separated from means" (Gibson 2013, 341).

Anarchist social structures and organisational forms aim to stifle human tendencies towards violence and egoism and instead encourage spontaneity and the impulse towards mutual aid. Peter Kropotkin (1904), against Social Darwinists, Hobbesians and Malthusians, sought to explicate that, alongside mutual struggle, exists another, equally necessary, tendency towards mutual aid that enables human beings and other animals to maintain themselves against a some-

1 For discussion on Marx and Lenin and the dictatorship of the proletariat, vanguardism and the state, see section two of this article.

times hostile nature. For anarchists, capitalism and the state undermine these sociable instincts. Processes of rationalisation and the domination of money and the commodity form produce highly fragmented, atomised social forms, undermining community bonds.

Anarchists, in contrast to the highly centralised and undemocratic social forms that characterise state capitalism and socialism alike, advocate decentralisation and confederalism to suppress the emergence of hierarchy (see Bookchin 1991). For anarchists, an emancipated society can only be realised through the direct participation of social agents in collective decision-making processes. Decentralisation aims at fostering this participation, vitiating the need for centralised decision-making bodies. Anarchists, in conflating means and ends, aim instead towards the development of decentralised counterpower institutions that build "the structure of the new society in the shell of the old" (Industrial Workers of the World, n.d). Hence, while anarchists rarely explicate what libertarian structures would look like (if they are to be truly the product of participatory practices, how could one?), what is clear is that non-hierarchical, directly democratic structures must emerge as part of the revolutionary process, constituting simultaneously its means and ends.

The State And The Promise Of Liberation

'State-Centric' Anti-Systemic Movements

Utilising 1848 as a symbolic starting point, Wallerstein (2002) identifies and analytically splits anti-systemic forces into two broad forms: 'national' and 'social' movements. Social movements are principally envisaged as socialist political parties, movements and trade unions struggling against bourgeois domination and state managers. The major source of oppression, these movements contend, is the capitalist economy and the class relations that spring from this (Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein 1989, 30). Conversely, 'national' movements seek the creation of a nation-state, or to at least secede from colonial empires (Goodman 2002, 17). Wallerstein (2002) argues that, although these movements accorded priority to their own social or national objectives – often specifically opposed to the other – and the two rarely cooperated, the history of these movements reveals a set of shared features.

First, they presented themselves as revolutionaries. However, the two types generally had a 'reformist' wing that advocated social transformation from *within* the system. Nevertheless, these movements, even reformist versions, were seen as threats to the status-quo. Furthermore, it was often difficult to tell the two apart. Sometimes 'revolutionaries' would compromise to gain or retain power, whereas 'reformists' often realised state power was more limited than hoped (Wallerstein 1996).

Second, these movements went through a parallel series of debates over strategy that varied from 'state-centric' perspectives to those that viewed the state as an intrinsic enemy and pursued instead civil and individual transformation. Within the social movements, this materialised in the debate between state socialists and anarchists; within the national movements between 'political' and 'cultural' nationalists (Wallerstein 1996). Though, for a time, statist and anti-state alternatives held a broadly similar influence within anti-systemic forces, the state-centric perspectives eventually triumphed, arguing the immediate source of power and influence is located in the state apparatus (Tilly 1996, 10). Resultantly, anti-state alternatives came to be dismissed as 'utopian' in that they supposedly ignored political 'realities.'[2] Moreover, attempts to ignore the centrality of the state were destined to fail as anti-state variants would, ultimately, be suppressed by the state.

The 'Two Step' Strategy and the State Apparatus

Contrary to more libertarian alternatives, state-centric movements, broadly speaking, articulated an instrumentalist 'two step strategy' in that they would first seek to gain power over the state and follow this by initiating the second step: transforming the world (Wallerstein 2002, 30). Controlling the state apparatus thus became the principal short-term aim of these movements. Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein (1989) identify two basic ways that state-centric anti-systemic forces sought to obtain state power: (1) through reform and (2) through revolution.

Social Democracy and State Communism

In the social movement, these debates culminated in conflict between social democrats (reformists) and state communists (revolutionaries). This was so despite the

2 See, for example, Lenin's *The State and Revolution* (1992).

two movements sharing the same broad objective of overthrowing capitalism and a similar anti-systemic heritage. Though social democracy's reformist tactics would immediately appear to violate its very status as an 'anti-systemic' force (actors, after all, actively seek to participate in the system), social democracy retains its anti-systemic character by maintaining the achievement of socialism is only possible with the abolition of capitalism. Rather than smashing the state or promoting revolution, however, social democrats seek the gradual overthrow of capitalism through bourgeois-parliamentary means (Steger 1997, 140). Upon being elected, social democrats propose eventually utilising state power to collectivise the means of production and eliminate wage labour, thus eliminating the domination of capital. An example of this is the 'Socialist Objective' of the Australian Labor Party, which proposes that, once sufficiently establishing political power, the Party will seek "the socialisation of industry, production, distribution and exchange" (McKinlay 1981, 52-53).

Conversely, 'revolutionary' communists accuse social democrats of legitimising capitalism through their passive acceptation and affirmation of bourgeois institutions and processes. In contrast to social democrats, communists argue the *capitalist* state – which constitutes, as Marx and Engels (2002, 221) famously put it, a mere "committee of the bourgeoisie," dedicated to perpetuating capitalism – cannot be utilised towards socialist ends. The state constitutes part of the 'superstructure,' an outgrowth of the economic relationships emergent from the capitalist mode of production. Such an instrument cannot be reformed for emancipatory ends. Because the economic 'base' (essentially) determines the character of the superstructure,[3] the only possible way the working class is able to realise its emancipatory telos is through the appropriation of political power by a 'dictatorship' of the proletariat that transforms base relations. As its initial task, this dictatorship seeks political power in order to destroy class relations inherent in capitalist society, thus abolishing the prior (and most significant) source of domination (Marx and Engels 2004, 54). As Marx (2001, 26) puts it, the political movement of the proletariat must have, as its immediate goal

> *the conquest of political power…* this requires a previous organisation of the working class developed up to a certain point and arising precisely from its economic struggles… with the object of enforcing its interests in a general form, in a form possessing general, *socially coercive force.* [emphasis added]

Hence, state communists advocate a working class revolution to smash the capitalist state and replace it with a revolutionary 'proletarian state' – which, Lenin (1987) would later assert, out of practical necessity, must be composed of a vanguard of the working class – that would subsequently transform society.

As sketched out most famously by Marx and Engels (2002, 243-244) in *The Communist Manifesto*, this transitionary period would involve "the confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels," the "abolition of property in land" and the centralisation of all factories and instruments of production, credit and the banking system and communication and transport in the hands of the state. After dissolving class antagonisms, the proletarian dictatorship would centralise production and eliminate wage labour and the dehumanising aspects of the division of labour (Marx and Engels 2002, 244). Marx (2008, 27) vaguely posits that, at this point, the statist dictatorship would eventually lose its political character and 'wither away,' leaving a communistic society, built on free and voluntary social bonds, that transformed distribution from "each according to [their] ability, to each according to [their] needs."

The Global Rise to (State) Power of Anti-Systemic Movements

Despite substantial differences, it appeared as though state-centric forces would achieve their transformative promises on a transnational scale. By the mid-twentieth century, they had, in many cases, achieved 'step one' of the two step strategy and gained state power throughout the world. Social democrats had generally established influence within Western political systems

3 See "Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" (Marx 1994, 211) and also the preface to *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels 2004), for Marx's explication of the base-superstructure relationship.

(see Lavelle 2008, 7).[4] Though on an alternating basis in competition with other parties, they still achieved power over the state apparatus and were thus in a position to initiate the second step of the strategy: social transformation. Similarly, national liberation movements assumed power or partially realised their aims of decolonisation through Asia and Africa[5], state-communist parties ruled over approximately a third of the world[6] and populist movements ascended in Latin America. As Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein (1989, 33) identify, "from the vantage point of 1848, the success of the anti-systemic movements has been very impressive indeed."

The 'Failure' of State-Centric Movements

Yet when these anti-systemic movements gained state power, they failed to live up to their promise of transforming the world. The longer these formerly anti-systemic parties or movements stayed in office, the more it appeared they were attempting to postpone or even suppress the realisation of their transformative promises:

> The cadres of a militant mobilizing movement became the functionaries of a party in power… a privileged caste of higher officials, with more power and more real wealth than the rest of the population emerged. At the same time, the ordinary workers enjoined to toil even harder and sacrifice ever more in the name of national development. *The militant… tactics that had been daily the bread of the social movement became 'counter-revolutionary', highly discouraged and usually repressed once [the movement] was in office.* [Wallerstein 2002, 32-33. Emphasis added]

Even in states where reforms or 'revolutions' have been achieved, there is increasing disillusionment with the capacity of such movements to deliver substantive change. Many of the problems the anti-systemic movements objected to – from alienating wage labour, to the level of democratic participation within society, or the role of the state in the international system – remain in place. Simply put, though anti-systemic movements achieved some victories – particularly in winning welfare concessions and alleviating extreme poverty – not enough has changed. The implications of this for the anti-systemic movements were huge. The masses drew from this, at best, negative conclusions about their performance; at worst, they called for revolutionary change (for instance, the Soviet Union or China). These populations ceased to believe that state-centric movements would realise the more egalitarian future promised; disillusionment reflected in, for instance, rebellions against statist versions of communism[7] and its repudiation throughout much of the world.

Throughout the interwar period, the terrors of the Soviet experience shook the wider legitimacy of state communism.[8] Though the struggle against Nazism temporarily legitimated the Bolshevik regime, the perpetuation of systematic tyranny by communist regimes, like the USSR and China, in the post-war world continued largely unabated. The centralisation of production, distribution and exchange extolled in works like *The Communist Manifesto* produced systematic oppression of the masses they championed and a 'new' bureaucratic ruling class. The dictatorship of the proletariat failed to disappear. Instead, around the globe, the aspirations of communist parties for political power prevented the socialistic reconstruction of the economy. As Rudolf Rocker argues:

> The 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' in which naïve souls wish to see merely a passing, but inevitable, transition stage to real Socialism, has today grown into a frightful despotism and a new imperialism, which lags behind the tyranny of the Fascist states in nothing. The assertion that the state must continue to exist until class conflicts, and classes with them, disappear, sounds, in the light of historical experience, almost like a bad joke. [Rocker 2004, 12-13]

Affirming persistent anarchist critiques, communist parties the world over tended to become functionaries of state power. The ultimate general results of the revolution envisioned by Marx never realised. Once gaining

4 Examples include the Australian Labor Party (ALP), the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland*s and the Swedish *Socialdemokratiska Arbetarpartiet*.

5 Including in Vietnam, Mozambique and Nicaragua.

6 Most prominently, the USSR and the People's Republic of China.

7 For instance: in the USSR, rebellion began almost immediately, with the Makhnovists, Mensheviks and the Kronstadt Rebellion providing early examples of resistance, by various left forces, to Bolshevik rule; see Guerin (2003, 98-108).

8 The purpose here is not to debate the extent regimes like the USSR or the People's Republic of China were/are 'true' reflections of Marxism-Leninism – they may also rightly be called 'state capitalist.' Rather, I am merely exploring the failure of 'state communist' regimes to produce liberating change.

political power, communist parties quickly came to repress the militant tactics that had once been their primary means of political struggle. Actually existing state communist regimes were not agents participating in liberating social transformation in a worldwide struggle against capitalist oppression. Instead, these regimes came to be characterised by oppressive statist hierarchies.

Similarly, social democrats have long abandoned their anti-systemic ambition: the dissolution of capitalism through the evolutionary establishment of socialism. Social democrats are now typically satisfied with "curbing the excesses of capitalism and redistributing [some] power and resources to the disadvantaged and the forgotten" (Seyd and Whiteley 2002, 185). In adopting this goal and rejecting the more ambitious aim of (eventually) overthrowing capitalism, they have sacrificed their anti-systemic telos. This is potently illustrated by the widespread adoption of neoliberalism and the emergent dominance of catch-all party models within capitalist democracies (see Lavelle 2008, 39-40).

Finally, since taking state power, 'national' anti-systemic movements have been responsible for the perpetuation of systematic oppression. In the pursuit of homogenous nation-states, many contemporary national movements[9] have committed unspeakable violence and tyranny, in the form of things like ethnic cleansing, genocide, and other forms of state-sanctioned violence (prominently in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda throughout the 1990s). Indeed, nationalism and national liberation movements, far from acting as beacons of social progress, or a buttress against imperialism, are more readily associated with: (1) regressive, xenophobic parties and movements that vehemently oppose multiculturalism and/or immigration and (2) aggressive, violent ethnic-nationalisms that, in attempting to cultivate homogenous nation-states, perpetuate unmitigated violence in ostensible pursuit of this end.

National liberation theorists contend that 'national' liberation struggles must eventually give way to a wider 'humanistic' struggle that seeks, as opposed to parochial 'national' emancipation, 'human' emancipation (see Fanon 2001, 119-166). However, a similar problem to that of Marxism-Leninism applies: like the 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' at what point does the nationalist ruling class 'know' that 'national' liberation has been achieved? Furthermore, can an *inclusive,* humanistic society be cultivated from one that has struggled to be *exclusive* and nationalistic? Given the parochial impulse of 'national liberation' struggles produced by the 'us/them' dichotomy nationalism cultivates, and the hitherto typically chauvinistic character of national liberation movements, one must question whether the cosmopolitan transformation (of explicitly nationalist movements) is possible, or whether new movements must instead emerge on the failed edifice of nationalist struggles and overcome their limitations (for instance, see Bookchin's (1995, 68-72) criticism of national liberation movements).

Having lost confidence in these movements, most also withdrew their faith in the state as the locus of transformative change. Whilst populations did not necessarily stop supporting state-centric forces,[10] this support often became a 'defensive' measure; a vote for the 'lesser evil,' rather than a verification of ideology or expectations (Offe 1994, 116). The fall and transformation of various communist regimes and the unprecedented dominance of neoliberalism both within states and the international system vindicates such a conclusion. Additionally, the emergence of neoliberalism exacerbates the failure of state-centric anti-systemic forces, threatening, along with policies of austerity, the few concessions anti-systemic struggles gained from the capitalist ruling strata. This has made the failure of the state even more striking, as the few 'victories' won are now threatened, or in the process of being reversed.[11]

The failure of the state affirms that mechanisms of state control are ultimately incapable of serving the end of liberating social transforming. As Michels (1911) argues in the seminal *Political Parties*, though vanguardist and representative leftist political organisations might be conceived in the pursuit of social change – as the means to an end – these groups tend to ossify into hierarchical, centralised bodies. Hierarchs become increasingly differentiated from the masses and ordi-

9 Through the likes of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Idi Amin in Uganda and Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia.

10 Though, often, it also means this. See Lavelle (2008, 39-40).

11 A prominent example is the wave of austerity currently sweeping the globe. Moreover, state spending has not decreased under neoliberalism, but has instead been redirected away from social spending towards things like the military, police and the subsidisation of monopoly capital. See Harvey (2007, 70-81).

nary members find themselves progressively removed from decision-making processes. As rules, procedures and activity become further detached from the mass body, 'the people' increasingly reject it and refrain from participating within it. This bestows upon leaders greater decision-making capacity, while also ensuring that hierarchs become increasingly convinced by their own propaganda and adulation, eventually concluding they know what is best. Furthermore, the means of hierarchy and centralisation ('the party' and the state) quickly come to supplant the ends of a liberated society free from oppression and exploitation ('the revolution'). While state-centric forces achieved some significant concessions from the ruling strata, the telos of social transformation and the liberation of daily life remain unachievable through the mechanisms of state control, coming to be eventually supplanted by a desire to maintain power and perpetuate privilege.

Such an outcome acts vindicates the anarchist critique of the state and its incapacity to produce liberating change. As the anarchist historian, Voline (1974, 538), states, any revolution inspired by and adoptive of statist forms, even 'provisionally', is lost as "all political power inevitably creates a privileged position for those who exercise it." This is because, "those in power are obliged to create the bureaucratic and repressive apparatus which is indispensable for any authority that wants to maintain itself, to command, to give orders… to govern."

Resultantly, anti-systemic movements are now generally "deeply suspicious of the state and of state-oriented action." They are also more inclusive and non-hierarchical in that the "basis of participation is a common objective… and a common respect for each [individual]'s immediate priorities" (Wallerstein 2002, 35-37). It is thus not surprising that anti-systemic political actors have turned to anarchism which, instead of advocating a "fixed, self-enclosed social system," strives "for the free, unhindered unfolding of all the individual and social forces in life" (Rocker 2004, 31). Amongst the great nineteenth-century political philosophies, anarchism stands alone in opposition to the state. Liberals, social democrats, nationalists and Marxists alike, though divided ideologically, were driven to capture the state and wield state power in the interests of their constituent groups against others. Anarchists, singularly in opposition, warned presciently against this. This perhaps explains why anti-systemic movements, in their contemporaneous rejection of the state and a state-centric praxis, act in accord with anarchistic analyses, principles and praxis.

Enough Is Enough! Towards an Anarchistic Praxis

Vignette: A 'Post Ideological' Anarchism

Though never anointing themselves as anarchists, one can see in the practice of the Zapatistas and Abahlali baseMjondolo a powerful expression of and commitment to anarchist principles. The praxis of both corresponds with what Curran (2006, 2) describes as 'post ideological anarchism.' Though inspired by and drawing from anarchism in constructing autonomous politics, post-ideological anarchists reject "doctrinaire positions and sectarian politics," preferring instead to conflate anarchism with an eclectic assortment of other political ideas. These movements thus illustrate my principal argument: that anarchism informs the "impulse, culture and organisation" of anti-systemic movements; that its "ideas and principles are generating new radical dreams and visions" that impact significantly upon the methodology, practice and philosophy of modern anti-systemic forces.

It should be restated: I am not claiming that anti-systemic actors who utilise these principles are, or explicitly refer to themselves as, 'anarchists.' Nonetheless, everywhere one finds the same anarchist *principles* informing praxis. In line with this, both the Zapatistas and Abahlali baseMjondolo have adopted a praxis constructed around anti-statism, anti-capitalism, decentralisation and direct democracy that looks to, as far as possible, prefigure emancipated social and organisational forms. Furthermore, the emergence of both movements, and the anarchistic praxis central to their expression, is tied to the perpetual oppression experienced by both at the hands of the state and global capital. As such, they illustrate the tendency of contemporary anti-systemic forces to reject the state as an agent of transformative social change.

The Zapatistas

The Zapatista uprising followed centuries of brutal oppression of the indigenous Maya of Chiapas, Mexico, first under Spanish imperial rule, and then the domina-

tion of the Mexican state and its hierarch, global capital. It is no coincidence that the EZLN uprising began on January 1, 1994: the day NAFTA was signed into law. As the Zapatistas declared, through Subcomandante Marcos:

> We are a product of five hundred years of struggle … we have nothing, absolutely nothing, not even a roof over our heads, no land, no work, no health care, no food or education … today we say: ENOUGH IS ENOUGH! [Marcos 1993]

Historically, the Mexican state "has treated Chiapas as an internal colony, sucking out its wealth while leaving its people – particularly the overwhelming majority who live off the land – more impoverished than ever" (Burbach 2001, 118). Chiapas thus serves as a vivid expression of the contradictions of neoliberal globalisation, laying bare capitalism's simultaneous generation of wealth and poverty. For the Zapatistas, the Mexican state and international capital "feed on the blood of the people"; taking "the wealth out of Chiapas and in exchange" leave behind nothing but "their mortal and pestilent mark" (Marcos 1994).

Though responding to a particularly brutal and oppressive mobilisation of state power, the Zapatistas have resisted the formation of a nationalistic praxis, instead pursuing the formation of transnational opposition to neoliberal globalisation. This is encapsulated vividly in the declaration 'Against Neoliberalism and for Humanity,' issued from La Realidad in 1996. In it the Zapatistas note how money disregards borders and grants

> no importance… to races or colours… money humiliates dignities, insults honesties and assassinates hopes. The historic crime in the concentration of privileges, wealth and impunities is renamed 'neo-liberalism.' It democratizes misery and hopelessness. [Marcos 1996]

The Zapatistas thus constitute a particular expression of an international anti-capitalist mobilisation that "beyond borders, races and colours, shares the song of life, the struggle against death, the flower of hope and the breath of dignity" (Marcos 1996).

Closely connected with an understanding of the state developed through struggle and in line with anarchist views of political power, the Zapatistas do not seek to capture state power, but circumvent it. Yet this stands at odds with the foundational ambitions of the Zapatistas. Initially, the EZLN developed as a "completely vertical" military organisation "established to take power through armed force." However, this rigid conception quickly came to clash with the reality of life in indigenous communities. The original vanguard's "conception of the world and revolution was badly dented in the confrontation with the indigenous realities of Chiapas" (Marcos 1995). It was only when the EZLN subordinated itself to participatory structures that the project exploded into a popular mobilisation.

The Zapatistas have, consequently, come to oppose the Marxist-Leninist idea of a vanguard, however it may be conceived. Despite beginning as a hierarchical politico-military group, the Zapatistas have shown a commitment to participatory practices in, for instance, declining the formation of a practical political alliance with the subversive Mexican political movement, the Popular Revolutionary Front (EPR). As the EZLN confirmed in a communiqué to the EPR, "what we want… [is] not to seize power but to exercize it" (cited in De Angelis 2000, 32). Instead, the Zapatistas see the construction of *autonomous* democratic structures within civil society as an end in itself. Along these lines, by 1987, the Zapatistas had set up a complex confederal network in which settlements took direct charge of praxis and decision-making. What had formerly been a vanguard submitted and integrated itself into the "social, cultural [and] political… fabric of the communities." Every initiative taken had to be "authorized by the regional command after deliberations in assemblies"; the communities "made the EZLN cede to them" (Lorenzano 1998, 143).

This ties in with the way in which power ought to be exercised within anarchist social structures: at an individual level. Rather than bargaining for a limited version of territorially based autonomy within a centralised model of governance demanding adherence to the state, the Zapatistas insist on the right of each community under its influence to develop its own network of political relations (Stahler-Sholk 2007, 49). Though quickly encircled by the Mexican Army after the 1994 Declaration, the Zapatistas quickly announced their presence in thirty-eight municipalities outside of the army barricade. Following this, the Zapatistas boycotted official elections and rejected the assertion of

authority proclaimed by the Mexican state. Instead, they effectively created parallel structures of governance by adopting traditional indigenous practices that produce direct, participatory procedures in open community assemblies (Stahler-Sholk 2007, 54-56).

These confederalist, decentralized social structures are an attempt to build institutions that seek to render existing hierarchies irrelevant. The Zapatistas contend that it is only through changing "the forms of organisation and the tasks of politics" that social transformation is possible. In saying "'no' to leaders, we are also saying 'no' to ourselves" (Marcos 2001a, 73). In this, the EZLN is challenging not only the hierarchy on which the movement was originally constructed, but hierarchy itself: saying 'no' to the right of anyone to decide on behalf of, or impose themselves on, another. Accordingly, the Zapatistas are an "armed movement which does not want to take power, as in the old revolutionary schemes" (Marcos cited in Lorenzano 1998, 141). Rather, they are "subordinate to [civil society], to the point of disappearing as an alternative" (Marcos 2001b, 58). Thus, the Zapatistas are fundamentally indifferent to the state; they seek to bypass and live autonomously from what they see as its deceitful, destructive influence.

The operational methods of cultivating and propagating these democratic structures converge with the anarchist ideas explored above. Through the utilisation of two central principles, the Zapatistas have shown a sophisticated commitment to and understanding of both the anarchist congruence of means and ends and pursuit of a prefigurative politics. Through the first operational principle of 'command-obeying,' the Zapatistas have sought to subvert hierarchy by juxtaposing the relationship between the leaders and the led. In practice, this has led to the rotation of leadership in community councils in order to avoid a situation of permanent leadership and a form of 'consensus' decision-making within communities in which all important decisions must necessarily be decided upon by participants. Furthermore, decisions that fall outside of the scope of a single community are decided upon within village assemblies that draw parallels with classical anarchist ideas of confederalism. This preoccupation with participatory decision-making is an attempt to avoid the pitfalls of externally imposed hierarchy and hence, administrative political power (Jeffries 2001, 132).

The second operational concept of 'asking we walk' places the burden of responsibility for activity on individuals, rather than certain figures or 'vanguardist' social groups driving political praxis (Curran 2006, 154-155). This means that, rather than *telling* others how it is that social change is to be carried out (as one in the role of a 'vanguard' would), one is constantly engaged in emancipatory praxis by consistently *asking* how it is that social change is to be carried out and by participants doing tasks themselves. As such, liberation depends not on providing the correct answers, but asking the right questions and taking collective, democratic responsibility for revolutionary action.

Abahlali Basemjondolo

Similar to the Zapatistas, AbM emerged from post-Apartheid South Africa as a response to the continued marginalisation of the poor and dispossessed. In the wake of the oppression and degradation of the racially violent and oppressive Apartheid regime, Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) promised to liberate the impoverished and oppressed by establishing a socialistic society through parliamentary means. However, the socioeconomic inequalities of Apartheid South Africa remain largely intact. This is justified by the ANC with reference to the rise of an African bourgeoisie, in which a host of new millionaires have been created (Gibson 2008, 695).

It is in this context of stark inequality and continuing state repression that AbM emerges. Though beginning as a single issue movement demanding better economic services, housing and sanitation, AbM has since drawn connections between their own subjective experiences of injustice, and the systemic inequities that plague post-Apartheid South Africa. As the movement's spokesperson, S'bu Zikode, explains, AbM felt betrayed: "this is the government that we fought for, worked for and voted for and which now beats and arrests us" (cited in Pithouse 2005). In ignoring the poor, AbM participant, Hlongwa (2007), claims politicians have shown "they are not the answer" to the suffering of the poor, who are treated as "the ladders of the politicians" who, like a "hibernating animal," come "out in election season to make empty promises" only

to soon disappear. Another resident similarly claims that the government has "promised us lots of things, but they never did even one... Still no toilet, still no electricity, still no house" (cited in Xin Wei 2006). The movement thus sees the post-Apartheid state as a parasitical entity that steals from and oppresses the poor and the politicians that compose it and claim to represent the people as the:

> New bosses, not the servants of the poor. They deceive us and make fools of us. They ask us for our vote and then disappear with our votes to their big houses and conferences where they plan with the rich how to make the rich richer. [Hlongwa, 2007]

After lengthy deliberation, the movement decided to refrain from electoral politics in order to preserve its integrity as a radical political project. Espousing the slogan 'No Land, No House, No Vote,' AbM instead seeks the establishment of confederalist, decentralised municipal structures parallel to and independent from the 'corrupt influence' of the post-Apartheid state and the logic of global capital, "which… represent the poor because they are for and by the poor" (Hlongwa 2007).

What AbM has sought to construct is a radically democratic political culture. First and foremost, the shack dwellers are committed to a participatory and decentralised praxis. All new issues are discussed at open-forum meetings conducted on a formal, weekly basis. When issues are raised, participants seek consensus building through lengthy measures at which point, if consensus is unable to be reached, the issue is put to a majoritarian vote. When municipal delegates are sent out as functionaries to other communities, they are mandated to make decisions on issues already democratically decided upon and not to make decisions on behalf of the movement or particular communities within it. This decentralisation means that each community that joins the movement engages in decision-making autonomously and collectively. What develops from this is a political practice in which participants actively decide what is important and in which elected 'leaders' are, on a daily basis, accountable and accessible to those that elect them.[12] Embodied in such practices is a desire, like the Zapatistas, to create an autonomous space where the 'forgotten' are respected, dignity is reclaimed and politics is a composite of collective existence. The praxis of *Abahlali* is thus centred around a self-conscious pursuit of direct democracy and collective self-management:

> Let us keep our votes. Let us speak for ourselves where we live and work. Let us keep our power for ourselves. The poor are many. We have shown that together we can be very strong. Abahlali has now won many victories… Let us vote for ourselves every day. [Hlongwa 2007]

The notion of 'voting for ourselves' appears as an explicit rejection of hierarchy and representation. It suggests that little can be achieved when decision-making is removed from the personal level of more direct, participatory forms of democracy. Central to this has been a concrete recognition, essential to an anarchical praxis, that one's praxis must, as far as possible, prefigure one's vision of an emancipated society. In line with this, AbM (2008a) has always

> asked people to speak to us, not for us… to work with us, not for us. We have asked people to think with us, not for us. We have asked people to understand that our movement will always belong to its members and never to any NGO or political party.

Within this is recognition that when power is externally imposed it risks developing into oligarchic structures antithetical to participatory democracy. Thus, *Abahlali* has consistently opposed representation by hierarchies, even those who claim to work in their interests, be they governments, NGOs, or interest groups.

Instead, politics must be a composite of collective existence, a 'living solidarity' that is experienced daily. Though the shack dwellers speak of a struggle for houses and services, they also acknowledge, in a Kantian vein, that "freedom is more than all of this. Freedom is a way of living, not a list of demands to be met." Though delivering houses will "do away with the lack of houses," this in itself will not realise freedom. Rather, "freedom is a way of living, where everyone is important and where everyone's experience and intelligence counts" (AbM, 2008b). Accordingly, AbM acknowledges liberty cannot be realised through the 'temporary' tyranny of statist hierarchies, cannot be achieved through the leadership of a self-appointed vanguard and is not something to be bestowed in a

12 See ethnographic treatment of this in Nimmagudda (2008).

distant era once 'revolution' has been achieved. Rather, it is something to be realized collectively in the way people live; through a self-liberation that reaches social dimensions:

> We are for a living communism. We are for a communism that emerges from the struggles of ordinary people and which is shaped and owned by ordinary people. We are for a communism built from the ground up. We are for a communism in which land and wealth are shared and managed democratically. Any party or groupuscule or NGO that declares from above that it is the vanguard of the people's struggles and that the people must therefore accept their authority is the enemy of the people's struggles. Leadership is earned and is never permanent. It can never be declared from above. It only lasts for as long as communities of struggle decide to invest their hope in particular structures. [AbM 2010]

As such, the movement has developed a notion of a 'politics of the poor.' That is, a "homemade politics that everyone can understand and find a home in," a participatory praxis that utilizes a dialogic formulae discernible to the people (Zikode cited in Pithouse 2006). As Zikode (cited in AbM 2006) declares: "our struggle is thought in action and it is thought from the ground… We define ourselves and our struggle." Rejecting hierarchy and imposed leadership, this constitutes a "genuinely radical politics… in which the poor are powerful and not those in which they are silenced as they are named and directed from without" (Pithouse 2008, 89).

Conclusion

Anarchism constitutes the core of contemporary anti-systemic praxis. This is a point substantiated by anarchism's influence in and on recent movements as diverse as Occupy, the alter-globalisation movement and WikiLeaks, to name but a few examples. Yet even in explicating this insight, scholars have largely failed to properly engage with the question as to *why* anarchism appears now at the core of anti-systemic radicalism. This paper developed an understanding of this. I argued that an anarchistic praxis – though not a doctrinaire ideological programme – has become a primary point of reference for contemporary anti-systemic social movements and that this can be seen, in many ways, as a response to the failure of state-centric versions to bring about substantial, transformative social change once assuming power.

In order to substantiate this claim, this paper was divided into three main sections. The first, by virtue of the misconceptions surrounding anarchism, explicated what is entailed in an anarchistic praxis. Sympathising with the socialist critique of capitalism, anarchism nonetheless differentiates itself as the 'libertarian' wing of socialism through its critique of hierarchy and pursuit of directly democratic, decentralised organisational forms, independent from capital and the state, that prefigure its emancipated social vision. The second section began by exploring the historical dominance of a state-centric praxis within anti-systemic movements and, the subsequent success state-centric movements had in acquiring state power. Despite success, however, these movements failed to deliver on the second 'step' of their strategy and deliver transformative social change, instead becoming, in numerous ways, functionaries of state power. In important ways, the state has thus 'failed' as an agent of revolutionary change, substantiating the anarchist contention that it is destined to reproduce domination. The article's final section turned to illustrating this argument through an exploration of two cases: the Zapatistas and Abahlali baseMjondolo. These movements illustrate that contemporary anti-systemic movements appear to be increasingly recognising the failure of traditional state-centric movements to deliver transformative change and, moreover, the anarchist insight that the state is incapable of delivering such change.

Significantly, these anarchic anti-systemic movements offer much more. They implore us to consider revolution as something to be intersubjectively constructed among participants, rather than imposed from without through the state or other hierarchical forms. This principle represents a long-marginalised way of anti-systemic politics; a rejection of hierarchical power and the failed state-centric forces of the past, along with the dominant liberal 'democratic' modality of the present. The propagation of an anarchistic praxis represents an attempt to reclaim democracy, along face-to-face, direct lines; a reconstruction of the *polis* in which people are able to construct another world from below, free from the hierarchies that have so long betrayed the possibility of a more just, equal and free world.

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