

## *Chapter Two*

# **An Anarchism That is Not Anarchism: Notes toward a Critique of Anarchist Imperialism**

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What follows is a two-pronged critique of some prevailing currents and tendencies within contemporary anarchism—one which takes aim at both the rationalist, Enlightenment underpinnings of some contemporary anarchisms as well as the Eurocentrism and racism that frequently result from these—but I hope that the implications of this critique will exceed its object. While the first opens us up toward the relationship between anarchism and poststructuralism, we will instead approach the question of the Enlightenment through the “mythical” syndicalism of Georges Sorel. The second opens us toward a process of decolonizing anarchism, which I discuss through black revolutionary Frantz Fanon, and which in turn involves the confrontation with and destruction of a dangerous “anarchist imperialism” that threatens to draw us into dubious alliances and erase truly radical antistate voices and practices. In both gestures, moreover, it is not only the limitations of the Enlightenment that are surpassed, but equally those of the poststructuralist critique thereof.

### THE BLACK FLAME OF CLASS REASON

The recently published syndicalist tome *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism* is both welcome and dissatisfying.<sup>1</sup> What is laudable is the authors’ insistence that anarchism *is* socialist: despite the dubiousness of any attempt to fix the meaning of a concept or a set of ideas, this reinfusion of anarchism with a specifically *class* content is

welcome in political terms, against the proliferation of individualist and “lifestylist” variants of anarchism (although we will see that they are overzealous in this task, and this virtue becomes a vice). What is far less welcome, however, is another insistence, as firm and intransigent as the first but less politically justifiable: the attempt to anchor anarchism firmly and irretrievably in Enlightenment rationalism.

Resisting the classic image of the anarchist as raving, bloodthirsty, and irrational, *Black Flame* bends the stick much too far in the opposite direction, and in so doing reveals some very real difficulties of anarchism as a tradition that will mark our point of departure. Here following Murray Bookchin’s characterization of Spanish anarchism as a form of “radical popular enlightenment,” the authors of *Black Flame* push this argument further and broaden it to the entirety of the tradition, describing Mikhail Bakunin as “a rationalist and a modernist” and limiting the irrationalist impulse to thinkers—like Leo Tolstoy and Max Stirner—who the authors seek to exclude from that tradition entirely. In so doing, the authors seek to retrieve “the rationalist impulse in anarchism—which locates anarchism firmly within the modern world, rather than the premodern ones of moral philosophy and religion.”<sup>2</sup> This they do in part to facilitate their insistence on a *rapprochement* between anarchism and syndicalism—thus against arguments linking syndicalism to the “Revolt against Reason,” and thereby to French theorist Georges Sorel (whom we will discuss more extensively below).<sup>3</sup>

This effort to situate anarchism within the European Enlightenment tradition emerges most clearly in graphic form as a historical flowchart in which anarchism finds its origin in “Enlightenment ideas: Progress, rationalism, liberty, conscious design of society.”<sup>4</sup> One wonders immediately why the second half requires the first, and why it is that the authors of *Black Flame* seek to root anarchism not merely in “progress,” “rationalism,” etc., but moreover in “Enlightenment” versions of the same, which is effectively shorthand for “European.” This slip reveals what it attempts to conceal: the Eurocentrism at the heart of this effort to reclaim anarchism. What is neglected in this insistence that anarchism is “rationalist” and “modernist” is the constitutive underside of this rationalism and this modernity, one which is by this point so well-documented that its exclusion is impermissible.<sup>5</sup> For Enrique Dussel, to cite just one example, there was not one, but *two modernities*, and it is the systematic privileging of the later, eighteenth-century modernity that conceals its foundation in sixteenth-century modernity, which is to say, in the historical-political process of colonization.<sup>6</sup> And just as with modernity, we find the same gesture of concealment with regard to reason: European rationality, in the form of the Cartesian *ego cogito*, rests on an unrecognized colonial basis that Dussel calls the *ego conquiro*, the conquering colonial man provided the most potent blueprint for Cartesian sovereignty.<sup>7</sup> And lest we believe that the dangers of this neglect are limited to the

historical or the epistemological realms, Santiago Castro-Gómez has demonstrated how European rationalism and specifically what he terms “zero-point hubris” translated directly into the deployment of colonial racism.<sup>8</sup>

Hence we already see that the two sides of our critique are utterly inseparable and that between European Enlightenment rationality and the project of racialization and colonization there exists a relationship of fundamental complicity, as with two sides of a single sordid coin. If we will take different paths that deal tendentially with different subjects, we must bear in mind that they are not in fact separate. The implications of erasing this colonial history—all the more surprising coming from the South African authors of *Black Flame*—are serious, and strike at the very heart of this anarchism, whose task it then becomes to complete the “unfinished project of modernity.”<sup>9</sup> This orientation—which assumes that the ideas of the European Enlightenment were fundamentally good and correct, but what was lacking was the execution, the practice—is one which simultaneously blocks the two forms of critique that we will turn to below: the poststructuralist (or loosely, “post-modernist”) critique from *within* Europe and the decolonial critique from *without*. Below, we will track these critiques in general terms via engagements with French syndicalist Georges Sorel and black revolutionary Frantz Fanon, but we must first see what particular implications the avowed Eurocentrism of *Black Flame* has within its own framework.

This is another way of asking how the authors of *Black Flame*, and anarchism more generally, deal with questions of race and colonization and how their limitations in this sense are rooted in their theoretical location of anarchism within the legacy of the European Enlightenment and their privileging of rationalism. To speak firstly, and in general terms, about anarchism and race, the historical failures are massive and well-known, and these are directly rooted in anarchist Eurocentrism: “Anarchism,” as Joel Olson bluntly explains, “has always had a hard time dealing with race,” choosing instead to emphasize a “critique of all forms of oppression.”<sup>10</sup> This form of critique seems on the surface of things to be upheld in *Black Flame*, with the authors insisting that “the important point is that [racial, gender, etc.] equality was a *principle* of the broad anarchist tradition.”<sup>11</sup> For Olson, while there is something laudable about declaring oneself against all forms of oppression, this standard anarchist stance also bears within it significant dangers. Indeed, one thing that stands out about critiquing all forms of oppression is just how *easy* it is to do so. The harder work—that of grasping how the capitalist system operates and how it can be brought down through strategic action—remains, despite all our declarations of opposition. In other words, we might respond to the insistence on the anarchist *principle* of equality in the following terms: yes, but a principle is a very easy thing to have, whereas a *practice* of revolutionary equality is what concerns us, a rarer commodity indeed. Such a revolutionary practice requires understanding *how* that system operates, and

despite the fact that we can oppose a variety of oppressions as equally reprehensible on *ethical* grounds, this doesn't mean that those in power share our insistent intersectionality. As Olson puts it:

The critique of hierarchy . . . mistakenly blends a *moral* condemnation of all forms of oppression with a *political and strategic* analysis of how power functions in the U.S. The American state . . . was not built on animal cruelty or child abuse, however pervasive and heinous these forms of domination are. Rather . . . it was built on white supremacy.<sup>12</sup>

Hence what the critique of all oppressions entails is the erasure of the strategic centrality of certain oppressions.

But to return to our first point, we must ask what is the concealed theoretical foundation of this “critique of all oppressions” and this anarchist “principle” of equality. Once we scratch beneath the surface, we can see that this fundamental anarchist principle is fully compatible with the Enlightenment tradition that the authors of *Black Flame* wear so proudly. To insist on a “principle” of equality and an opposition to all oppressions is to do little more than the French Revolutionaries who emblazoned *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* on their banners while, for the most part, avoiding questions of colonial-racial domination.<sup>13</sup> The abstract and formal universalism of Enlightenment thought is what conceals the failure of these three principles as merely a question of execution (as in the “unfinished project of modernity” argument) rather than one of inherent contradictions of *all* abstract principles, especially those rooted in the geopolitical practices of empire and colonization. In other words, the French Revolution and its nominal quest for absolute human equality did not simply fail, it failed for specific reasons. The belief that a *principle* of equality suffices for the establishment of a *practice* of equality is a desperately idealist one which would in and of itself fail to explain the failure of its own Enlightenment forbears to do the same.

However, the error of *Black Flame* is more egregious than this, more than a mere repetition of the general anarchist error that Olson associates with the “critique of all oppressions.” This is because the authors of *Black Flame* are not content to merely insist on a lazy intersectional argument, but instead seek to reinscribe *one* oppression as primary: that of class. Just as the authors' effort to avoid the smear of anarchist irrationalism led them to bend the stick too far in the other direction, their critique of the evacuation of class from some anarchisms leads them similarly to reassert the centrality of class to a problematic degree.<sup>14</sup> Here the virtue of *Black Flame* quickly becomes a vice; if the insistence on a class content for anarchism is in one sense an advance over “lifestyle” anarchism and individualist libertarianism, and even in some sense the “critique of all oppressions” as well, the ultimate effect is a doubling of anarchism's Eurocentric baggage. After all, class-centrism is

itself Eurocentric, it speaks to specifically European conditions, and fails to grasp situations of historical social heterogeneity in which race frequently functions as a class category and the two are in many cases irretrievably intertwined.<sup>15</sup> To here parallel our first point in other terms, the European class structure itself had a constitutive “underside” that too often goes unrecognized, as wage labor in Europe was but the flip-side of the coin of un-waged slave and *encomienda* labor in the colonies.<sup>16</sup>

Both of these seemingly contradictory errors—the critique of all oppressions and class-centrism—coexist in *Black Flame*: the first in the structural segregation of questions of race and colonialism and the second in the caricatured critique the authors offer of nationalism and race. As to the first, if we were doubtful of Olson’s claim that the “critique of all oppressions” tends to conceal the importance of race, then the very structure of *Black Flame* ought to convince us: after nine chapters, distributed into sections ranging from “theory and analysis” to “strategy and tactics,” we find, tucked under the heading “social themes,” a final chapter addressing “anarchist internationalism and race, imperialism, and gender.” And all this in one chapter, no less! While some will dismiss this structural positioning—where all “social themes” are tucked in as if contained to an appendix, as if prompted by an afterthought—as merely an ill-considered attempt at inclusion, a closer look at the content of the arguments shows that it reflects instead something deeply troubling about the “broad anarchist tradition” the authors attempt to salvage.

This emerges clearly in the authors’ unconvincing critique of nationalism and race, in which all nationalism is caricatured as essentialism and all “identity politics” is similarly caricatured as fragmentary. There is a general error of Eurocentrism here, in the assumption that all nations, and thus all nationalisms are the same, which emerges in particular form in the authors’ erroneous dismissal of the “particularly influential” “wages of whiteness” approach of David Roediger and the “race traitor” politics of Noel Ignatiev.<sup>17</sup> The straw man of race and nationalism then comfortably established, these astonishing logical flaws are then capped with the following gem:

By contrast, anarchist and syndicalist class politics, with its potential to unite people of different races, offers a path beyond the endless spiral of perpetual conflict that nationalism and identity politics must invariably generate and perpetuate . . . The broad anarchist tradition stresses, on the contrary, mobilizing as many ordinary people as possible, across racial lines, to fight *in their own interests* for better conditions. This does not mean ignoring racial prejudice and discrimination.<sup>18</sup>

Race thus disappears without a trace into the category of “ordinary people,” but not without the polite insistence that the authors, of course, take the subject of racism very seriously. Two points are key here—one regarding race and one regarding reason—and they intersect in the question of the

dialectic. The first is quite straightforward: for equality to be possible, it is not sufficient to merely hold hands and state such equality as a fact, and surely the authors of *Black Flame* would not advocate such a course of action when it comes to the bosses.

Secondly, regarding reason, not only does their fidelity to Enlightenment rationalism obscure the importance of race, but it even confounds the authors' own efforts in their own terms: their historical subject, the "ordinary people" of the "popular classes" can only appear as unified and undivided, rationally aware of "their own [similarly unambiguous] interests" (and this against the far more complex constellation of subjectivities in the wages of whiteness tradition<sup>19</sup>). The implications of this are severe. Whereas much of the anarchist tradition sought to disrupt economism through a privileging of the intervention of the will, we return here to the blandest of economism. In other words, in their effort to establish anarchism as class-centered and rationalistic, the authors of *Black Flame* lose all capacity to convincingly explain mass action: if they cannot explain why it is that people take action, especially in so voluntarist a realm as anarchism, then they cannot so easily dismiss the role of the irrational in revolutionary politics.

These two points connect in the question of the dialectic, as it is precisely in the connection between rationalist idealism and the sidestepping of questions of race and colonialism that *Black Flame* becomes, to use an old-fashioned-sounding term, undialectical. By assuming that all references to race and all nationalisms are the same, *Black Flame* denies the importance of struggles around race and nationalism and their historical capacity to generate and feed other struggles (not to mention their necessity).<sup>20</sup> In the place of a dialectical dynamic, we find instead a caricature: identity and nationalism lead to an "endless spiral" of conflict, but one which does not lead to liberation. Thus the authors fail to apply their own understanding of Bakunin's economic principle—that, against individualist anarchisms, true freedom can only come *after* equality is established—in a consistent way across different spheres: to, e.g., race, nationalism, gender, etc. As we will see below, this is something that Frantz Fanon, in his ontologization of dialectical change, accomplishes, and as Olson clearly shows, it is possible to formulate an anarchist theory of the centrality of white supremacy which reproduces none of the caricatured elements as they appear in *Black Flame*.

In what follows, we will take this relationship between Enlightenment reason and Eurocentrism/colonialism/racism as the starting point for an ostensibly two-pronged critique which is actually just one. Put differently, our argument would appear two-pronged only to those we are critiquing, but it is precisely this fact, and our refusal to abstractly reject this view, that forces us into the language of the twofold.

## ANARCHISM BY ANOTHER NAME

The two thinkers through whom we will approach this two-pronged critique share much in common: Both Georges Sorel and Frantz Fanon were influential theorists of what they called “violence”; both were sharp critics of Marxist orthodoxy, and both celebrated the potential importance of voluntarist interventions in revolutionary struggles. They share many of these elements with much that traffics under the name “anarchism,” but Sorel and Fanon share a peculiar in-betweenness in being *identified as* anarchist without themselves embracing anarchism as an identity. This in-betweenness will contribute to the ways in which both thinkers overcome the related errors of both poststructuralism and Eurocentric anarchism. Here, I will present a brief summary of Sorel and Fanon, their theoretical and historical relationship to one another, and their fraught relationships with the respective “anarchisms” of their times.

Any brief summary of Sorel’s thought begins from the category of ideology, one which marks Sorel’s prescience vis-à-vis not only poststructuralism but also later trends in the Western Marxism from which it emerged. This recognition of the power of ideology resulted directly from political developments that Marx himself did not generally foresee; namely, the potential for the socialist left to come to power through elections rather than through violent revolution and the potential impact this could have on the class war. Around the turn of the century, European Marxism was in many ways divided over the question of “revisionism”: the revisionists arguing that it was necessary to update Marxism to suit contemporary circumstances, the antirevisionists rejecting this position in favor of an orthodox insistence on Marxist doctrine. These debates over doctrine were not without their political implications, as the revisionists tended to argue that what failed in Marx’s doctrine was precisely the certainty of catastrophic revolution and that his teachings were to be updated to coincide with a gradualist socialist politics. The antirevisionists, on the contrary, blindly upheld the inevitability of the revolution even when their own reformist politics suggested otherwise.

Both revisionists and antirevisionists, however, tethered their Marxism to their politics through a degree of economic determinism. Whether the revolution was certain or not depended on the state of economic development and the degree to which this development reflected that described in the pages of *Capital*. It was on this terrain that Sorel would mark his difference from both sides with the aim of returning to “the *spirit* of Marx,” not the letter.<sup>21</sup> This very invocation of spirit should tell us something. Sorel would reject both the blind orthodoxy of the antirevisionists (“the letter” of Marx) as well as the reformist gradualism that was assumed to go hand-in-hand with such a rejection. By emphasizing “spirit,” Sorel was able to break with the economic

determinism of both sides, making possible a revolutionary revisionism that would take into account the importance of ideology and the state to an unprecedented degree.

Sorel's critique of Marxism therefore centered on the assumption that society, in Marx's words, was divided into "two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat."<sup>22</sup> This was a far cry from Sorel's lived reality, in which class divisions had given way to the doctrine of social unity. For Sorel, as a result, there was no guarantee for the existence of class as something distinct from a merely individual condition, and the function of bourgeois ideology was precisely to *erase* class, undermining class division through a "social education" in the virtues of "harmony."<sup>23</sup> This critique of economic determinism therefore has several implications: if the existence of opposing classes is not guaranteed, nor is there then any guarantee of dialectical motion, since the conflictive fuel that powers its engine has evaporated. The idea of progress has therefore become little more than a bourgeois weapon with which to diagnose the end of history and the perfection of the liberal-democratic present. Rationalism (which here moves hand-in-hand with economic determinism) stumbles inevitably on these hard facts, leading to the reformist orientation of most Marxist revisionism.

Sorel's response was as radical as it was unorthodox: if class antagonism was disintegrating through the influence of ideology, then the only alternative was to *reassert* this antagonism, thereby breathing life again into class identity. Such a reassertion of nonobjective class oppositions thus could not be understood in strictly rationalistic terms, and Sorel would thus turn to the concept of the "revolutionary myth"—embodied in the syndicalist general strike—in an effort to provide a framework capable of explaining the seeming irrationalism of mass action. This myth, finally, was seen by Sorel as jumpstarting the frozen Marxist dialectic, driving it subjectively toward an as-yet indeterminate future.

Despite being heavily influenced by Proudhon as well as a close friend of the anarchist Fernand Pelloutier, Sorel nevertheless dismissed much of his contemporary anarchism as "*intellectually entirely bourgeois*," justifying the orthodox Marxist attack on anarchism with the insistence that "the most eloquent dissertations of revolt could produce nothing and . . . literature cannot change the course of history." But the anarchists, in turn, were correct to critique the Marxists for their participation in a corrupt and corrupting parliamentary system, which similarly blocked the path to revolution: "Experience was not slow in showing that the anarchists were right about this, and that, in entering into bourgeois institutions, revolutionaries have been transformed by adopting the spirit of these institutions."<sup>24</sup> Hence while Sorel would in many ways scorn and deride the beliefs of anarchists themselves, he nevertheless did look positively upon their impact.



This impact emerged specifically from those anarchists who decided to abandon their bourgeois individualism and enter into the syndicalist movement, and who thereby “did not [merely] apply theories which had been fabricated in philosophical coteries,” and who “taught the workers that they need not be ashamed of acts of violence.”<sup>25</sup> Violence here stood as the marker of absolute and irreconcilable opposition to the bosses and their state, and Sorel credits anarchist influence with reducing the tendency toward working-class assimilation and incorporation into structures of power, thereby counteracting the bourgeois ideology of unity and reinforcing class divisions.<sup>26</sup> In their hostility to institutions—or better put, to *institutionalization*, to incorporation into the institutions of the enemy—syndicalist anarchists (or as Sorel slyly calls them, “former anarchists”) were able to inject a crucial element into the proletarian struggle and were thereby responsible for “one of the greatest events that has been produced in our time.”<sup>27</sup>

If Sorel was ambivalent toward anarchists, later anarchists would be similarly ambivalent toward Sorel, and astonishingly few are willing to reclaim him today. As we have already seen, the authors of *Black Flame* prop Sorel up as a foil for the reassertion of anarchism as rationalist, and anarchist anthropologist David Graeber—following Marcel Mauss (whose description of Sorel he seems to accept uncritically)—similarly dismisses him, but even in this dismissal, we can track moments which gesture toward our own inclinations. Graeber, for example, notes that “Sorel argued that since the masses were not fundamentally good or rational, it was foolish to make one’s primary appeal to them through reasoned arguments.” In other words, as we have seen, Sorel (rightly) critiqued both class essentialism and rationalism.<sup>28</sup> Misinterpretations and caricatures aside, we find a political reason to worry about Graeber’s Maussian anarchism: Mauss and, it would seem, Graeber advocate gradualist approaches to radical change, while Sorel was wedded to an unapologetically catastrophic vision. In terms of the anarchist appropriation of Sorel, the Italian Wu Ming collective stands here as an outlier in the effort to reclaim Sorel’s notion of myth for radical transformation.<sup>29</sup>

While not a direct heir of Sorel, Fanon would refigure many arguably Sorelian themes in the process of transposing these onto different identities and different units of analysis. Specifically, Fanon’s work first *ontologizes* the Sorelian formulation of class—in *Black Skin, White Masks*—applying a similar understanding to racism as a process of excluding certain subjects from access to Being. Secondly—in *Wretched of the Earth*—he would then *globalize* this formulation by transposing it onto the broader international structures of the modern/colonial world-system.<sup>30</sup> Like Sorel, he would reject the objective basis for the identities—racial and national—that he would analyze. Like Sorel, too, he would reject a strict rationalism as the best path to attacking structures of oppression. Like Sorel, finally, this intersection of nonobjective identity and nonrational action would take the form of a mythi-

cal projection of identities—first black, later national—as the first step in jumpstarting the dialectical motion necessary to push beyond contemporary oppressive stalemates.

Just as Sorel rejected the caricatured anarchism of “propaganda of the deed,” so too would Fanon—writing in the context of the Algerian Revolution—dismiss a certain form of brutality as “counterrevolutionary, adventurist, and anarchist.”<sup>31</sup> But he simultaneously recognizes the fact that the label *anarchist* was systematically deployed against truly revolutionary elements as a strategy by those attempting to control—and, as with Sorel, institutionalize—struggles: “At the first signs of a skirmish, the leaders are quick to call them juvenile hotheads. But because these demands are neither juvenile nor hotheaded, the revolutionary elements articulating them are rapidly isolated and removed. The leaders cloaked in their experience ruthlessly reject ‘these upstarts, these anarchists.’”<sup>32</sup> As with Sorel, anarchism here appears as an accusation which reveals a real and radical critique of the dangers of institutions, one which is not taken on as an identity, but which, to borrow another Fanonian term, is “overdetermined,” or imposed on the radical subject who questions the path of moderation, the merits of reformism, and above all, the neutrality of enemy (or even one’s own) institutions.<sup>33</sup>

Unlike Sorel, however, Fanon would not receive even a mixed hearing from anarchists, and this is due to precisely the difficulties we saw above with *Black Flame*; namely, the inability of many anarchists to think dialectically or in even a complex manner about race or the nation. After all, was Fanon not an ardent defender of Third World nationalism and the state that served as its practical vehicle? Fanon is therefore generally dismissed by anarchists as a racial essentialist or an apologist for nationalism, despite the fact that he rejected essentialism (“*It is the racist who creates the inferiorized*”<sup>34</sup>) and was among the sharpest critics of African nationalism (“national consciousness,” he makes clear “is not nationalism.”<sup>35</sup>). In what follows, we will trace the subtle thread which draws the two thinkers together, counterintuitively rendering Sorel’s antistate class consciousness compatible with Fanon’s antiracist national consciousness, opening up in the process an entire horizon that too often escapes contemporary anarchisms. The gesture that draws them together is suggested already in their hostility to institutionalization, a danger that exists as much within our movements as within the formal structures of the state and which as a result requires a more complex view.

The precise route of this gesture is opened up by the peculiar distinction that Sorel introduces into the concept of violence, distinguishing the (bourgeois) “force” that upholds the state from the diametrically opposed (proletarian) “violence” that destroys it: “the object of force is to impose a certain social order in which the minority governs, while violence tends to the destruction of that order.”<sup>36</sup> This definition of the state as a structure of minority governance introduces two elements into our analysis: it both further

*specifies* what it is we oppose in the state in terms of its content (the state as a structure of institutionalized inequality and minority governance) while simultaneously *broadening* the potential spheres in which this definition applies (by focusing on this content rather than on an abstract and universal antistatism or anti-institutionalism).

Fanon's ontologization and globalization of Sorel's class antagonism must be understood in this context. Once we do so, we can see that, while the terms have shifted, the fundamental egalitarianism remains, one which fears the corraling and domestication of the revolutionary energies of the masses. Whereas Sorel sought to cultivate proletarian identity against the institutionalized inequality of the bourgeois state, Fanon sought to cultivate first black and later national identity against the institutionalized inequalities of both white supremacy (on the domestic level) and European colonization and imperialism (on the international level). It is this opposition to minority rule that allows Fanon to be characterized, if not as an antistatist, then at least as an antiauthoritarian.<sup>37</sup> Both he and Sorel bring a powerful critique of institutionalized inequality in the state, but arguably even more crucially for our purposes, they provide the same within movement dynamics, demonstrating in their anxiety the perils of institutionalization of mass power and its corraling by leadership. In this, their complex positions on "anarchism" reveal sharp critiques of the dangers of institutions while their refusal to identify as such reveals their insistence on the need for institutions of some sort.

Put differently, the approach of Sorel and Fanon—by privileging the *content* of institutions over their mere institutional *form*—leads to a view which is more about liberation from inequality than the literal elimination of institutions. And if this marks their advance over certain forms of anarchism, it marks simultaneously their advance over certain variants of poststructuralist philosophy: the abstract and all-too-easy slide from critique to rejection which plays out frequently in anarchist politics (as a critique-rejection of institutions and the importance of race), is repeated in philosophical terms by poststructuralism (as a critique-rejection of reason, humanism, and the dialectic, just to name a few). This nonanarchist anarchism will prove central when we turn to discussing Venezuela, where the absence of any capital-A "anarchism" worth its salt means that we must look elsewhere, or to paraphrase Sorel's Marxism, we must look to the "spirit not the word." What will be preserved in this turn is instead a radically dialectical view: of race that is not race, humanism that is not humanism, reason that is not reason, science that is not science, and most importantly, a dialectic that is not a dialectic. It is therefore no coincidence that it is this anarchism which is not an anarchism that will lead us there.<sup>38</sup>

Before turning to Venezuela, however, we will briefly outline the ways in which Sorel and Fanon contribute to the simultaneously internal and external critique of both anarchism and poststructuralism (each of which, in turn,

represent internal critiques of the European political and philosophical traditions).

## ANTICIPATING POSTSTRUCTURALISM: GEORGES SOREL

The work of Georges Sorel simultaneously prefigures and surpasses later poststructuralism.<sup>39</sup> He prefigures poststructuralism in the critiques he shares with it—of reason, progress, determinism, optimism, objectivity, developmentalism—but surpasses it in the political insistence that, firstly, mere critique is insufficient, and that, secondly, such critique cannot lead directly to a rejection of the object of critique *in toto* (as such a critique would thereby remain necessarily abstract). In other words, the limitations of the broader poststructuralist critique of dialectics appears here as the general key to Sorel's methodological advance over post-structuralism, but again, his is not the sort of dialectic we might expect. Sorel's anticipation of post-structuralism remains largely unrecognized, due in no small part to his systematic disavowal in France and persistent but generally unfounded association with fascism. What else but such a tremendous blockage could explain the absence of an author who penned a text entitled *The Illusions of Progress* from entering into the annals of post-structuralism's prehistory?<sup>40</sup> In what follows, we will briefly trace but two ways in which this anticipation figures, vis-à-vis Michel Foucault and Jacques Rancière.

That Foucault was influenced by or even unconsciously reflected theoretical similarities with Sorel has been a contentious, if only sporadically debated, issue.<sup>41</sup> Either as tacit admission of such or playful subterfuge, in his conversations with Duccio Trombadori, Foucault seems to openly endorse a view of Marxism as revolutionary myth that is quite similar to that of Sorel, but does so, in a way perhaps characteristic of many French thinkers, without citing Sorel openly. Not coincidentally, this endorsement of myth is provoked by Foucault's aversion to the sort of Marxism predominant in France, and even less coincidentally, the attraction of Marxism-as-myth emerges from his experiences in the Third World, and Tunisia specifically, where

everyone was drawn into Marxism with radical violence and intensity and with a staggeringly powerful thrust. For those young people, Marxism did not represent merely a way of analyzing reality; it was also a kind of moral force . . . And that led me to believe that without a doubt the role of political ideology, or of a political perception of the world, was indispensable to the goal of setting off the struggle.<sup>42</sup>

Violence, morality, ideology, and a resistance to analytical dissection: all seem to explicitly echo Sorel's myth.<sup>43</sup> But this does not mean that Marxism-as-myth excluded the conservative possibility of Marxism-as-science, as

Foucault immediately adds that, even in Tunisia, “I could see that the precision of theory, its scientific character, was an entirely secondary question that functioned in the debates more as a means of deception than as a truthful, correct, and proper criterion of conduct.”<sup>44</sup>

This “secondary” function of Marxism as deceptive science in Tunisia was, for Foucault, its primary function in France, and this explains in large part his own sharp critiques of and distance from his contemporary Marxists, and moreover reflects his more general hostility to reason as “science.” Foucault famously mobilizes the history of the concept of madness in an effort to reveal the constitutive underside of Western rationality: reason, he demonstrates, always relies in a fundamental way on its opposite, an opposite that must be both maintained and contained for reason’s operations to remain unquestioned.<sup>45</sup> After diagnosing this constitutive underside of Western reason (one which, we should note, remains incomplete in its limitation to Europe and its exclusion of colonization as a political and epistemological practice), Foucault turns his attention in a more sustained way to the *strategic effects* of reason in the guise of “science.” Here, his equation of power with knowledge—or the insistence that knowledge practices have power effects—gains a new dimension, as science becomes “the unitary theoretical instance that claims to be able to filter” knowledges, legitimating some and disqualifying others.<sup>46</sup>

This hostility to science as a ruse of those attempting to seize power by way of knowledge will be directed squarely at the traditional dialectic:

The dialectic codifies struggle, war, and confrontations into a logic, or so-called logic, of contradiction; it turns them into the twofold process of the totalization and revelation of a rationality that is at once final but also basic, and in any case irreversible. The dialectic, finally, ensures the historical constitution of a universal subject, a reconciled truth, and a right in which all particularities have their ordained place. The Hegelian dialectic and all those that come after it must . . . be understood as philosophy and right’s colonization . . . of a historico-political discourse that was both a statement of fact, a proclamation, and a practice of social warfare.<sup>47</sup>

The clear error here results from the phrase “*and all that come after it must,*” one which attempts not only to summarize the recent dialectical past but also to foreclose a potentially dialectical future, to block any reformulation of dialectics to suit liberatory purposes (such as he himself had already perceived in Tunisian Marxism-as-myth). Furthermore, it is worth noting the persistent surfacing of dialectical moments in Foucault’s own work, whether in his oft-overlooked insistence on strategy over mere tactics or his formulation of counterdiscourse.<sup>48</sup> As Foucault would reject the dialectic *in toto*, so too would he reject his own function as a European intellectual, embracing the “particular” intellectual without recognizing the “general” privilege that he himself enjoyed (and here our critique opens toward Fanon).<sup>49</sup>

On both the question of reason and that of science, Sorel's anticipation of Foucault is pronounced, but Sorel's destination differs from that of Foucault. For Sorel, at the root of the rationality that underwrote European capitalism and tainted European socialism there lay the idea of progress, and much as Foucault drew out the historical connections between reason and power, so too does rational progress function, in Sorel's work, to tighten our chains rather than to break them.<sup>50</sup> It is here of course that reason and progress give rise to a particularly potent manifestation of knowledge as power: science. Here, Sorel shares many of Foucault's critiques of science as a centralizing, authorizing, and hierarchizing concept, but here too we find the gap that separates the two. Despite his own epistemological doubts, which notably extend even to the hard sciences, Sorel would refuse to "take refuge in skepticism," and thereby to abandon science to the "sorcerers, mediums, and miracle-workers," adding that:

Today, no philosophers worthy of consideration accept the skeptical position; their great aim, on the contrary, is to prove the legitimacy of a science which, however, makes no claim to know the real nature of things and which confines itself to relations which can be utilized for practical ends . . . To proceed scientifically means, first of all, to know what forces exist in the world, and then to take measures whereby we may utilize them.<sup>51</sup>

Confronted with the reactionary nature of science—which Sorel had identified as a mechanism of class inequality as early as *The Trial of Socrates*<sup>52</sup>—mere rejection of that science will not suffice. Rather, skirting the fine strategic line between science and skepticism, Sorel seeks instead to reestablish the basis for a science of class violence in which knowledge is transitory and power-laden, yes, but also strategically indispensable.

This insistence is reflected on a macro level in the question of the dialectic, as the quotation above—in its insistence on knowing the balance of forces in the world—already suggests. Against the bourgeois ideology of unity which seeks to enthrone progress and halt dialectical motion, Sorel's mythical class violence intervenes to jumpstart that dialectic, which in the process sheds many of the worrying elements (teleology, unity, objectivity, totalization, science, etc.) that Foucault would grant as intrinsic.<sup>53</sup> Just as Sorel's critique of science entails its radical reformulation of the same rather than its abstract dismissal, so too do we find a proliferation of such paradoxical pairings which constitute Sorel's positive project: to a science that is not science, we can add a progress that is not progress,<sup>54</sup> a Marxism that is not Marxism, a violence that is not violence, a reason that is not reason, most importantly, a dialectic that is not the dialectic, and—in terms of the current study—an anarchism that is not anarchism.

Much as Sorel's work prefigured that of Foucault, so too would it prefigure that of French philosopher Jacques Rancière in at least two ways which

are relevant to our discussion. Firstly, like Sorel before him, Rancière's work seeks to undermine assumptions regarding the infrastructural basis for class society by reframing the question in cultural and ideological terms. However, Rancière's response to this absence of uniformity in class culture is strikingly different from Sorel's. Whereas the latter would briefly mourn the absence of objective (i.e., economic) class existence before moving swiftly into the political effort to mythically recreate class antagonism through the assertion of class identity in the struggle (what he calls "violence"), Rancière's response would be more ambiguous in both normative and political terms. First, in *The Nights of Labor*, Rancière presents a sort of celebratory ethnography of working-class cultural multiplicity in which workers rebelled against the very basis for their objective existence, transgressing the often porous borders that distinguished them as a class.<sup>55</sup> Second, this ethnography would be complemented by Rancière's inclusion of Marx himself within the critical volume *The Philosopher and His Poor*, published two years later, which insists that this central theorist of class antagonism was himself guilty of the effort to keep workers in their place.<sup>56</sup>

While Sorel might be sympathetic to what is rescued in terms of working-class subjectivity and agency in both volumes, he would clearly disagree with the paradoxical limitations that Rancière seems to place on that agency. What Sorel fears is *precisely* this disintegration of the working class into a multiplicity, the precondition for the incorporation of the working class into bourgeois society: "Everything may be saved," he insists in a patently exhortative register, "if the proletariat, by their use of violence, manage to re-establish the division into classes."<sup>57</sup> If the proletariat have the freedom to spend their evenings crossing class boundaries and engaging in otherwise proscribed flights of aesthetic fancy, Sorel might enquire of Rancière, then what is it that prevents them from being equally capable of *choosing to be a class*? Such an option would seem, to Sorel, far more in keeping with the "immemorial interests of civilization" than the class mimicry Rancière seems to endorse and whose effect could be nothing more than a cessation of dialectical motion.<sup>58</sup>

Secondly, both Sorel and Rancière are veritably obsessed with education, or better put, with the subtle dangers that a nominally "progressive" pedagogy can entail. Even Sorel's earliest works on the Bible and the trial of Socrates were, in effect, thinly veiled educational treatises which sought to reinvigorate the Third Republic through a pedagogy of radically egalitarian virtue.<sup>59</sup> By the time Sorel had turned his attention to syndicalism, however, the dangers of education had come to outweigh its potential benefits: education—in alliance with the ideology of progress—had become the primary vehicle for weakening class antagonisms to the point of dissolution in the "democratic morass."<sup>60</sup> Thus if class antagonism lacked an objective economic basis, it also found itself actively under siege by what Sorel veno-

mously dismisses as the “pontiffs of social duty” and “professors of ethics,” whose stated objectives were to educate away class conflict and reunite worker and boss under the unified framework of what Sorel venomously dismisses as “social harmony,” “social unity,” or put plainly, “society.” Society as such, in Sorel’s view, is a fantasy, but one which gains in reality insofar as ideological interventions successfully undercut class antagonism.

Rancière’s critique of pedagogy emerges from engagement with sociologist of education Pierre Bourdieu, whose diagnosis of exclusion appears to Rancière as a tautological circle which authorizes the sociologist’s diagnosis.<sup>61</sup> Rancière’s response to the sociological diagnosis of exclusion is as striking as it is novel: “Equality is not given, nor is it claimed; it is practiced, it is verified.”<sup>62</sup> Such a practice of equality dissolves oppositions into “a multiplicity of concrete acts and actual moments and situations, situations that erupt into the fiction of inegalitarian society without themselves becoming institutions.”<sup>63</sup> Two things are key here: a critique of institutions and an affirmation of multiplicity. As to the first, we can only repeat what we have said above: that Sorel and Fanon maintain a subtler view of institutions as necessary but threatening. Certainly, Rancière’s hero Jacotot had no school, but institutions are key nonetheless, whether these be informal educational institutions or working-class practice as pedagogy. As to the second, we find again Rancière’s paradoxical limitation of the very same working-class agency he seeks to rescue. If Marx is guilty of keeping the proletariat in its place, and if Bourdieu is guilty of fixing the excluded in their exclusion, Rancière’s only response is to tear down these walls of exclusion in a free play of multiplicity (in the practice of equality). Certainly, workers are capable of rejecting class in favor of multiplicity, and Rancière masterfully documents how many have done so. But they are also capable, in Sorel’s view, of insisting on dialectical oppositions, of insisting that they have an enemy, that that enemy is common, and that that enemy must be fought “violently” through the “mythical” collective action of the proletariat. In other words, proletarian agency is not limited to resisting inequality through recourse to multiplicity: for Sorel it involves instead the dialectical reply of unified action as a class. While this does not entail the use of existing institutions (educational or otherwise), which in fact threaten to dissolve this conflict rather than sharpen it, it does not refuse institutions entirely: the *syndicats* are its institution, the workplace its school.

The choice between multiplicity and dialectical rupture, moreover, is not one without consequences, and it reveals that Rancière’s practice of equality—viewed through Sorelian and Fanonian lenses—effectively puts the cart before the horse. Fanon’s analysis of race and critique of the Hegelian dialectic draws these implications out in the starkest of terms: Rancière’s insistence on equality as a practice is utterly incapable of grappling with the sort of ontological disqualification that Fanon diagnoses, in which equality *even as*



*practice and verification* requires a prior act which ruptures the racialized subject's exclusion from being. Equality is something to be won, not something to be practiced, and to insist on the latter is to lose sight of how it is that equality functions in the first place: it is *not ontological*, but itself a practice of power. Purportedly, ontological equality has already been divided by racialization as exclusion from Being, and for Fanon, access to the reciprocity of equality can only be gained through dialectical struggle.

It is in this reformulated dialectic that Sorel and Fanon surpass both post-structuralism and the flat sort of anarchism present in *Black Flame*, but the fullest insights of this dialectic for contemporary anarchism only emerge in the wake of the "decolonial turn" that Sorel himself—due to his own class-centrism (albeit one distinct from that of *Black Flame*)—would not complete.<sup>64</sup> In what space remains, we will turn briefly to Fanon before diagnosing the political dangers of contemporary anarchist responses to the Bolivarian Revolution currently underway in Venezuela.

#### AGAINST ANARCHIST IMPERIALISM: FROM FANON TO VENEZUELA

As we have said, Fanon's contribution is to transpose Sorel's framework of class identity first ontologically (onto race) and then geopolitically (onto Third World national consciousness). In so doing, he draws us beyond the necessarily Eurocentric sphere of class-centrism and links rationality more clearly to Europe and to racism as establishing the foundational basis for reason. But in contrast to the caricatured dismissal of race offered by *Black Flame*, we have also seen that Fanon emphasizes the *sociopolitical* importance of race while rejecting its biological basis. Here we see that *Black Flame*'s rejection of race for class betrays a double pretension: that class is more objectively "real" than race and that this means that the latter can and must be rejected in the political realm.<sup>65</sup> Again, to treat race in this manner repeats the dangerous slide from critique to rejection, one which, to repeat, is abstract and undialectical. Setting out from the recognition of this error, we will now turn from Sorel to a more explicit focus on Fanon, but we do not want to suggest that Fanon did not in any way anticipate poststructuralism: to some degree he did so, but to a greater degree he coincided with it as a persistently decolonial critic.<sup>66</sup> This decolonial critique, as we have seen, involves a general rupture with the abstract universalism of Enlightenment thought, and in more particular terms, critiques of reason, of essentialism, etc., which do not relapse into such universalist errors. To put it differently, if Foucault bound truth to power, Fanon's decolonial method would insist that

some truths yield specific historical constellations of power, of which colonialism is but the broadest example.

Just as Bakunin argued that freedom is only possible *after* equality (something overlooked by many individualist anarchists then and now), Fanon's critique of Hegel on the basis of race demonstrates something similar: that the revolutionary dialectic of recognition *requires a previous situation of equality and reciprocity*.<sup>67</sup> Put simply: I must first be recognized as human to be recognized as equal. The implications for the anarchism of *Black Flame* is twofold: firstly, Fanon shows convincingly that rationalism falls far short of being able to give racialized subjects access to humanity. Such subjects cannot "argue" their way to equality, and the "knife blades" of reason are not sharp enough to cut through the racism that is their very condition of existence.<sup>68</sup> Secondly, on a political level, we cannot merely wish away race in an idealistic fashion, organizing our struggles as though it did not exist: only autonomous action by racialized subjects can rupture the division of non-Being from Being and allow for a radical mutual recognition that must precede other struggles (around, e.g., class). Fanon's analysis, as a result, pulls the rug out from under the uncritical, abstract universalism of *Black Flame* by revealing the flawed ontological assumptions—that we are all already equal in political terms—it brings to the table, assumptions which we have seen as well in Rancière.

In *Wretched of the Earth*, which as we have seen represents a globalization of the Fanonian framework, the critique of progress that we saw in Sorel as in much poststructuralism acquires a new significance: against both the linear progressivism of Modernization Theory (in which the poor nations must merely follow in the footsteps of Euro-America) and the purportedly dialectical progressivism of orthodox Marxist stageism (in which the Third World must endure capitalism and the poor must form alliances with the national bourgeoisie), Fanon's theory here becomes explicitly antidevelopmentalist. This too finds some premonition in Sorel, who as we have seen rejected class mimicry,<sup>69</sup> but for Fanon, the mimicry to be opposed operates on the global level: "We have better things to do . . . than follow in that Europe's footsteps . . . Come, comrades, the European game is finally over, we must find something else. We can do anything today provided we do not ape [*singer*] Europe, provided we are not obsessed with catching up with Europe."<sup>70</sup> This turning away from Europe is also fundamentally a turning away from the slide from critique to abstract dismissal that we have been diagnosing throughout, and this appears most emphatically in Fanon's concept of sociogeny. This concept suggests that, after having critiqued the effects of social structures in generating various neuroses and deformations of humanity, it is wholly insufficient to either remain within that merely critical position or to turn one's back on the deformation entirely.<sup>71</sup> Elsewhere, we have shown how this sociogenic imperative drives Fanon beyond

both Foucault and Rancière on questions of humanism and symbolic violence, respectively.<sup>72</sup> With regard to both, we can do no better than to refer to the eminent “Foucaultian” Edward Said, who diagnoses Foucault’s failure in the following terms:

Ignoring the imperial context of his own theories, Foucault seems to actually represent an irresistible colonizing movement that paradoxically fortifies the prestige of both the lonely individual scholar and the system that contains him. Both . . . [Foucault and Fanon] have Hegel, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Canguilhem, and Sartre in their heritage, yet only Fanon presses that formidable arsenal into antiauthoritarian service. Foucault . . . swerves away from politics entirely.<sup>73</sup>

Here we find a systematization of what for Sorel had been merely an orientation<sup>74</sup>: the need to push through and beyond critique into the dirty work of politics. Following Enrique Dussel’s formulation of “transmodernity” against “postmodernity,” we could then characterize Fanon’s relation to post-structuralism as a sort of “trans-structuralism,” his alter-humanism a “trans-humanism,” and the path leading us to both a “transdialectical” progression.<sup>75</sup>

Finally, and with regard to the question of our reformulated dialectic, Fanon’s extends his critique beyond those who—as in *Black Flame*—reject out of hand the importance of autonomous black or national struggles and in so doing brings us back to the question of both class-centrism and rationalism as European legacies. Fanon accuses Sartre, himself a supporter of contemporary black movements, of undercutting those very same movements by reinscribing them within a historical dialectic whose outcome is both rationally predictable and Eurocentric. For Sartre, black identity was but a “weak term” in the dialectical progression which ends with the proletariat, and Fanon’s response is stinging:

We had appealed to a friend of the colored peoples, and this friend had found nothing better to do than demonstrate the relativity of their action. For once this friend, this born Hegelian, had forgotten that *consciousness needs to lose itself in the night of the absolute*, the only condition for attaining self-consciousness. To counter rationalism he recalled the negative side, but he forgot that this negativity draws its value from an *almost substantive absoluteness*. Consciousness committed to experience knows nothing, has to know nothing, of the essence and determination of its being.<sup>76</sup>

Thus it remains insufficient to recognize the importance of black struggles if these struggles are merely subsumed to a broader dialectic in which class predominates. But while Sartre’s betrayal is a dialectical one, Fanon—like Sorel before him—does not take the Foucaultian path of rejecting “the Hegelian dialectic and all those that come after it.”<sup>77</sup> Rather, he takes this as an opportunity to drive forward the radicalization of Sartre’s dialectical vision,

breaking with both its class-centrism and rationalism (and thus Eurocentrism). As we turn directly to the question of anarchism and contemporary decolonization efforts in Venezuela, we must bear these insights regarding the dialectical necessity for struggles around race in mind if we are to avoid falling into the characteristically anarchist errors outlined above. And we must also bear in mind the implications that such insights have for our understanding of the state and institutions more generally, an understanding which must be complex and oriented toward dialectical content rather than outward form.

When we turn to contemporary Venezuela, we find the peculiarity of a similarly absent anarchism and the concomitant danger of insistently privileging self-identified “anarchist” voices. We can agree wholeheartedly with the assertion by the editor of the massive tome *Anarchism in Latin America*—an assertion that continues to hold in the present—that “in Venezuela there was never an organized anarchist movement.”<sup>78</sup> Here, the rejection of Fanon by anarchists also speaks to something that *Black Flame* got right without meaning to do so: “anarchism” as a phenomenon that goes by that name is, by and large, a European-inspired phenomenon. Nowhere is this as clear as in Latin America, where the influence of anarchist ideas correlates directly to previous waves of immigration, specifically from Spain and Italy.<sup>79</sup> This is not to say that anarchism as a series of practices and ideas in opposition to the state has its origins singularly in Europe, nor should it suggest that local anarchisms have not flourished in a way that challenges Eurocentrism and assesses and transforms that tradition on the basis of local conditions (as José Carlos Mariátegui famously did with Marxism in Peru). Rather, what we want to insist is that antistate practices flourish in many places and through many means and that by insisting that these assume the name “anarchism,” we frequently *obscure* rather than reveal their importance.

This pernicious dynamic continues well into the present, making Venezuela a notoriously difficult subject for anarchists to even discuss, much less to discuss coherently and in a principled manner.<sup>80</sup> The danger arises from self-identified anarchists of wealthier countries identifying themselves automatically and uncritically with the self-identified anarchists of the Third World countries. This is something that I have observed on countless occasions: a U.S. anarchist visits Venezuela to get an understanding of the political process, seeks out Venezuelan “anarchists,” and thereby establishes a closed circuit in which what is learned about Venezuelan politics was what one sought out in the first place. This closed circuit makes Venezuela a difficult subject for anarchists precisely because, in the words of one anarchist observer, “events in Venezuela are not taking place within our Anarchist lexicon (oh, dear!) and so we are unsure of what to do when we’re expecting to see ‘liberation fronts’ and instead get National Reserves.”<sup>81</sup>

Here the military question reflects broader questions about institutions and the need to understand their *content* rather than dismissing all institutions *in toto*.

The two sides of this closed circuit together constitute what I call “anarchist imperialism,” but this phenomenon is not limited, as we saw as well in our discussion above, to the word “anarchism.” The first implication, as we saw above, is the danger of U.S. and European anarchists identifying *a priori* with the “explicitly anarchist viewpoint,” i.e., those who self-identify as “anarchists.”<sup>82</sup> In the Venezuelan context, the danger of such a gesture is exceptionally potent: due in part to the relative absence of such self-identified anarchists, the mantle of “anarchist” belongs to a very small number, including the small group operating around the newspaper *El Libertario*, who—by virtue of the attention granted by foreign anarchists—enjoy far more influence internationally than their domestic organizing would merit. And beyond the group’s utter lack of a social base,<sup>83</sup> it is worth noting the reactionary positions they assumed in the past: while millions were pouring into the streets to organize popular resistance to the coup that briefly overthrew Chávez in April of 2002, *El Libertario* refused to support Chávez’s return to power (thereby driving out many of their more radical comrades).<sup>84</sup>

This damning error of political judgment, moreover, was not accidental but was instead closely related to the “critique of all oppressions” logic dissected above. This is perhaps best expressed in the statement by an associate of *El Libertario* that “we are neither for Chávez, nor for Fedecamaras or the CTV or the Coordinadora Democrática.”<sup>85</sup> It is incomprehensible on either a theoretical or a practical level to draw any sort of equivalence between the Chávez government and its quasi-fascist opponents, but it should not surprise us when dogmatic anarchists insist on doing so. While the editors of *El Libertario* are quick to insist that their position of “uncompromising opposition to Chavismo is not simply the result of a mechanical application of anarchist theory,” this denial reveals more than it convinces.<sup>86</sup> What is necessary instead is, as we saw with the question of race, to understand the historical and strategic relationship between both sides and the potential to organize for revolutionary change.<sup>87</sup>

Which brings us to a second and arguably more threatening face of anarchist imperialism. If we have seen that a fidelity to the word *anarchist* often leads U.S. and European anarchists into closed circuits of occasionally dubious allies, then the flip-side of this is the silencing of many truly revolutionary voices and the erasure of radical antistate practices. The best example of this in contemporary Venezuela is the “Tupamaro” phenomenon.<sup>88</sup> Put in the briefest possible terms, the Tupamaros are revolutionary neighborhood organizations and militias which simultaneously seek the radicalization of the Bolivarian Revolution and the assertion of local power and self-defense. Their view is one in which the state as it exists will be fundamentally dis-

mantled, and yet their voices are rarely recognized by anarchists in Venezuela or elsewhere, and this is because of their seemingly paradoxical relationship to the state and Chávez. As the leader of one such militia group, La Piedrita, explained to me: ferocious autonomy notwithstanding, he considers Chávez the “maximum leader” of the process and “the only one who can prevent a civil war in Venezuela.” But this is in reality no paradox: it is the expression of a strategic understanding of the path the struggle in Venezuela is taking, one which entails that revolutionary organizations offer their support (to quote Chávez’s own historic words against him) “for now.”<sup>89</sup>

Thus the danger of what I call “anarchist imperialism” is one which is intimately connected with fidelity to anarchism as identity rather than as a series of practices which undermine and attack the state as a structure of inequality. In privileging nominally “anarchist” voices and erasing others, this approach can lead us to miss the antistate forest for the anarchist trees. But this is about more than just a name: it reflects the absence of a dialectical and dynamic view: just as *Black Flame* fails to see the dialectical impact of organizing around race and radical decolonial nationalism, so too do anarchists fail to see the radical potential of organizing around Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution, seeing only the looming threat of the bloated petro-state. And beyond merely neglecting the radical potential of Venezuelan national consciousness, they similarly neglect the fact that the target of this consciousness is not merely the transformation of the national state but also the transformation of that broader, global structure of inequality that is the modern/colonial world system and to which Fanon draws our gaze. In so doing, we must insist that this anarchist “imperialism” is more than merely metaphorical, since this view—like the imperialist wars of our day—seeks to spread the faith internationally by demanding that all struggles, regardless of context and conditions, assume the form it has chosen as preordained.<sup>90</sup>

What anarchism requires in the present is a new, dialectical reason, but one unlike traditional, deterministic, closed dialectics, one which—to return to the dual object of our critique—both allows for the irrational function of identity while allowing that identity to assume the necessarily complex form that lies between essentialism and abstract rejection, thereby opening it up to social realities with material implications, like race and nation. Only with such a complex dialectical view might anarchism, to quote Fanon, abandon the “European game” of abstract and disembodied rationality and the blinders to race entailed by a similarly abstract “critique of all oppressions” (especially when this abstractness is compounded by a myopic focus on class which neglects the concept’s European origins).<sup>91</sup> Only then can anarchism develop in a way which overcomes the “sterile formalism” of an abstract opposition to all institutions and all oppressions, and of an equally sterile fidelity to anarchism as a name rather than as a series of practices. Only then can anarchism effectively move beyond itself, becoming an anarchism that is

not anarchism, capable of truly transcending those institutions and oppressions in a manner more consistent with the term's etymology: *an-arche* as "beyond the principle" which governs the present.<sup>92</sup> And only then can anarchism resist the temptation to "complete the unfinished project of the Enlightenment" and turn instead to the infinitely more revolutionary and generative global path of "completing the unfinished project of decolonization."<sup>93</sup>

## NOTES

1. Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt, *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism* (Oakland: AK Press, 2009).

2. Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 69.

3. Here as in other dismissals of Sorel's influence, the authors make much of his external position vis-à-vis the syndicalist movement, but this was more a result of Sorel's hostility to intellectual intervention in working-class movements (a hostility which he applied rigidly to himself as well) than a lack of political engagement. When combined with the incredible claim that Sorel sought the preservation of bourgeois society, a claim which fully misunderstands Sorel's understanding of the dialectic, the caricature is complete. See *Ibid.*, 149–51. Biography is here substituted for theory. The authors insist that it is Bakunin, not Sorel, who represents the intellectual father of syndicalism (*Ibid.*, 16).

4. *Ibid.*, 114.

5. Central texts here include Walter Dignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, & Colonization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor and the Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Humanities Press, 1996).

6. Enrique Dussel, "Beyond Eurocentrism: The World-System and the Limits of Modernity," in *The Cultures of Globalization*, eds. Frederic Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

7. See, for example, Enrique Dussel, *Ética de la Liberación en la Edad de la Globalización y de la Exclusión* (Madrid: Trotta, 1998), 68.

8. "Zero-point hubris" refers to "the imaginary according to which an observer of the social world can situate herself in a neutral observation platform that, in turn, cannot be observed from any point. Our hypothetical observer would be in a position to adopt a sovereign view of the world, whose power would lie precisely in being nonobservable and nonrepresentable. The inhabitants of the zero-point (enlightened philosophers and scientists) are convinced that they can acquire a point of view toward which it is impossible to have a point of view. This pretension—which recalls the theological image of the *Deus absconditus* (which observes without being observed), but also the Foucaultian panopticon—clearly exemplifies the hubris of Enlightenment thought." Santiago Castro-Gómez, *La Hybris del Punto Cero: Ciencia, raza e ilustración en la Nueva Granada (1750–1816)* (Bogotá: Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2005), 18.

9. In philosophical terms, this is most directly associated with Jürgen Habermas, see especially *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Boston: MIT Press, 1990).

10. Joel Olson, "The Problem with Infoshops and Insurrection: U.S. Anarchism, Movement Building, and the Racial Order," in *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy*, eds. R. Amster, et al. (London: Routledge, 2009), 35–36.

11. Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 24.

12. Olson, "Problem with Infoshops and Insurrection," 37.

13. There were exceptions among the most radical Jacobins, who would denounce racism as the "aristocracy of the skin," but even these were driven more by events in the colonies and the autonomy of slave action than by their own principles. See C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1963 [1938]).

14. The authors justify their class-centrism unconvincingly on the basis of its purported universality, a universality which experiences of colonization and slavery confound (Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 111).

15. As examples of this heterogeneity and the interpenetration of race and class, see James, *Black Jacobins*; Anibal Quijano, "La Colonialidad del Poder y Clasificación Social," *Journal of World-Systems Research* 6.2 (summer/fall 2000): 342–86; George Ciccariello-Maher, "Toward a Racial Geography of Caracas: Neoliberal Urbanism and the Fear of Penetration," *Qui Parle* 16.2 (spring/summer 2007): 39–71.

16. After all, what did the waged workers of the Industrial Revolution consume in increasingly massive quantities, if not the energy-inducing cane products of the colonies?

17. Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 303–304.

18. *Ibid.*, 304–305.

19. Put briefly, we could say that this tradition, while insisting on an overarching working-class interest in fighting racism, nevertheless recognizes the very real benefits that white workers reap under a racist system. See David Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Verso, 2007).

20. In this regard, see W. E. B. Du Bois' seminal *Black Reconstruction in America (1860–1880)* (New York: The Free Press, 1998 [1935]); Noel Ignatiev, *Introduction to the United States: An Autonomist Political History* (Denver: Final Conflict Publishing, 1992 [1980]).

21. Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. Jeremy Jennings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999 [1906/1908]), 120, my emphasis.

22. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (London: Penguin, 1967), 218.

23. Sorel, *Reflections*, 57.

24. *Ibid.*, 34, see also 222.

25. *Ibid.*, 35.

26. *Ibid.*, 59.

27. *Ibid.*, 35.

28. David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004), 18–19. It seems as though Mauss opposed anarchism for its purported association with Sorel, which is ironic since Sorel himself opposed anarchism fairly openly, as we have seen.

29. Wu Ming (Roberto Bui), "Tute Bianche: The Practical Side of Myth-Making (in Catastrophic Times)," *Giap Digest* 11 (19 October 2001).

30. For the modern world-system as simultaneously colonial, see Ramón Grosfoguel and Ana Margarita Cervantes-Rodríguez, eds., *The Modern/Colonial/Capitalist World-System in the Twentieth Century: Global Processes, Antisystemic Movements, and the Geopolitics of Knowledge* (Westport: Praeger, 2002).

31. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004 [1961]), 95. Fanon further attempts to distinguish revolutionary terrorists from "unbalanced anarchists" in *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1965 [1959]), 57. It is worth noting here that Fanon does not endorse this as an accurate reflection of anarchism, but merely notes it as a literary construction.

32. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 77.

33. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008 [1952]), 95.

34. *Ibid.*, 73.

35. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 179.

36. Sorel, *Reflections*, 32–33; see also 209.

37. This is done, for example, by Edward Said, himself an opponent of the domestication of the Palestinian struggle by the aptly named Palestinian "Authority." See his *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993), 336.

38. In practical terms, the debate over anarchist fidelity to a strictly anarchist tradition (one not coincidentally tied up with questions of race) contributed to the disintegration of the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation. See Roy San Filippo, ed., *A New World in Our*



*Hearts: Eight Years of Writings from the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation* (Oakland: AK Press, 2002).

39. This is not to mention the many ways in which Sorel falls undeniably short of poststructuralist and other insights, notably in his unshakeable fidelity to productivism.

40. Elsewhere, I have shown the weight of the disavowal of Sorel in France through the figure of Sartre, who took it upon himself to dismiss Sorel's "fascist chatter" on behalf of Fanon (*Wretched of the Earth*, xlix).

41. Miller, for example, is clear in suggesting as much. James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000 [1993]), 171; 177.

42. Michel Foucault, *Remarks on Marx*, trans. R. James Goldstein and James Cascaito (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991 [1978/1981]), 134, 137.

43. For Sorel, social myths are "unanalyzable into parts which could be placed on the plane of historical descriptions." Sorel, *Reflections*, 29.

44. Foucault, *Remarks on Marx*, 137.

45. See, for example, Michel Foucault, *History of Madness* (London: Routledge, 2006 [1961]).

46. Foucault's own genealogies, on the other hand, "are, quite specifically, antisciences . . . They are about the insurrection of knowledges" against the "centralizing power-effects" of scientific discourse. Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended," Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003 [1997]), 9.

47. Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended," 58.

48. The first is to be found in Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990 [1976]), 95–96, 99. Regarding counterdiscourse, it is arguably the case that Foucault's privileging of this concept in the "Society Must Be Defended" lectures, in which his critique of dialectics is front-and-center, effectively represents a transformed dialectic itself. Had these points been more consistently emphasized throughout Foucault's career, he might be more resistant to Sorel's critique of skepticism.

49. See George Ciccarillo-Maher, "The Internal Limits of the European Gaze: Intellectuals and the Colonial Difference," *Radical Philosophy Review* 9.2 (fall 2006), 139–165.

50. John L. Stanley, "Translator's Introduction," in Sorel, *Illusions of Progress*, xii.

51. Sorel, *Reflections*, 180–81.

52. Georges Sorel, *Le Procès de Socrate: Examen critique des thèses socratiques* (Paris: Alcan, 1889). Sorel's indictment of Socrates turns largely on the latter's understanding of science, which Sorel viewed as necessarily hierarchical and inegalitarian.

53. Frederic Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), provides some useful openings on the question of dialectics, demonstrating similarly that the poststructuralist critique is both insufficient and itself subtly dialectical.

54. ". . . it is not the idea of progress that Sorel detests, but, rather, the idea of progress . . . [with] its overtones of naturalness, normality, and necessity." Robert A. Nisbet, "Foreword," in Sorel, *Illusions of Progress*, vii.

55. Jacques Rancière, *The Nights of Labor: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, trans. John Drury (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989 [1981]).

56. Jacques Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, trans. John Drury, et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004 [1983]).

57. Sorel, *Reflections*, 85.

58. Sorel, *Reflections*, 85. Sorel "cannot accept the idea that the historical mission of the proletariat is to imitate the bourgeoisie," and insists that the "greatest danger" threatening the proletariat is the temptation to "imitate democracy" and its bourgeois culture (171–172).

59. Georges Sorel, *Contribution à l'étude profane de la Bible* (Paris: Auguste Ghio, 1889); Sorel, *Le Procès de Socrate*.

60. Sorel, *Reflections*, 78.

61. Rancière addresses Bourdieu, however obliquely, in both *The Philosopher and His Poor* and *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991 [1987]). As Ross describes it, Bourdieu's impact on French society resulted in equal part from the successes and the failures of May 1968: "the first granting his work the energy and posture

of critique, the second reinforcing in it the gravitational pull of structure.” Ross, “Translator’s Introduction,” in Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, x. This was similarly expressed by Rancière and the other members of the Révoltes logiques collective in the claim that Bourdieu’s work combined “the orphaned fervor of denouncing the system with the disenchanting certitude of its perpetuity,” thereby allowing simultaneously “the denunciation of both the mechanisms of domination and the illusions of liberation” (*L’Empire du sociologue*, 5, 7, cited in Ross, “Translator’s Introduction,” x, xi). Like Sorel, then, Rancière confronts the political implications of disillusioned Marxists for whom the revolution is rendered uncertain, be it by the Revisionist Controversy and parliamentary socialism or by the failures of May 1968, a disillusionment expressed as scientifically authorized sociological critique.

62. Jacques Rancière, *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 137.

63. Ross, “Translator’s Introduction,” xxiii.

64. On the concept of the “decolonial turn,” see Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Césaire’s Gift and the Decolonial Turn,” *Radical Philosophy Review* 9.2 (fall 2006), 111–38.

65. There is more than a small degree of bad faith, moreover, in the claim that the non-objective status of race renders it less important than class, or politically unimportant. This is because, viewed historically, the anarchist “critique of all forms of oppression” preceded the critique of race as an objective factor of human existence. Put differently, opposition to racial supremacy generally preceded and trumped opposition to race itself, and race as a political reality was rejected long before race as an objective biological fact was called into question.

66. See, for example, Fanon’s extended critique of the abstract Eurocentrism of Lacan’s “mirror stage” (*Black Skin*, 139fn25).

67. Fanon, *Black Skin*, 195.

68. This the subject of much of Fanon’s anguished phenomenology, in for example, *Black Skin*, 98. Here, Fanon follows Sartre’s analysis in *Anti-Semite and Jew* of anti-Semitism as fundamentally impermeable to reason.

69. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 171.

70. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 236.

71. Fanon first outlines sociogeny schematically in *Black Skin, White Masks* (xv), before enacting its implications in the move from diagnostician (psychiatrist) to Algerian revolutionary. This move is documented in his 1956 “Letter to the Resident Minister,” in *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1967 [1964]), 52–54.

72. In “The Internal Limits of the European Gaze,” I demonstrate Foucault’s failure to engage with and reformulate the concept of humanism, and the ways in which both Fanon and Aimé Césaire before him surpass Foucault in this task. Rancière makes a similar mistake in his diagnosis of Bourdieu’s symbolic violence, which paradoxically recreates the immobilizing elements of Bourdieu’s formulation. “Jumpstarting the Decolonial Engine: Symbolic Violence from Fanon to Chávez,” *Theory & Event* 13.1 (2010).

73. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 335–36.

74. Sorel’s hostility to intellectual intervention in movements, while to some degree laudable, is what in the end blocks this very transition. He cannot see beyond his own status as an intellectual, and therefore cannot act within movements in anything but an intellectual capacity.

75. Enrique Dussel, “World-System and ‘Trans’-Modernity,” *Nepantla: Views from the South* 3.2 (2002): 221–44.

76. Fanon, *Black Skin*, 112–13, my emphasis, translation modified.

77. Foucault, “Society Must Be Defended,” 58.

78. Cappelletti, “Anarquismo Latinoamericano,” in Rama and Cappelletti, eds., *Anarquismo en América Latina* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1990), cli. That I say this statement holds in the present will surprise no one familiar with contemporary Venezuelan revolutionary movements.

79. The volume *El Anarquismo en América Latina* both reflects this limitation and exceeds it. This volume, despite being published in Venezuela, emphasizes European immigrants and grants disproportional weight to the Southern Cone. In this, it stumbles on the difficulties of the word *anarchism*, tending to apply it solely to heirs of the European tradition, and even characterizing other strains as “preanarchist” (cxii). However, in so stumbling, it also occasionally

escapes the limitations of the word, drawing into the orbit of its analysis various other strains of liberatory thought.

80. One promising exception to this tendency is Nachie from the Red & Anarchist Action Network, whose insights derive in part from the fact of being a “red” anarchist and having a keen nose for imperialism. Nachie agrees on the general difficulty anarchists face when dealing with the question of Venezuela, which on occasions approaches an “outright reluctance” to even discuss the subject, adding that “the libertarian tendency has been for the most part incapable or unwilling to deal with the Venezuela issue in any serious way.” Nachie, Red & Anarchist Action Network (RAAN), “Bolivanarchism: The Venezuela Question in Our Movement” (9 June 2005), [www.redanarchist.org/texts/historical/bolivanarchism.html](http://www.redanarchist.org/texts/historical/bolivanarchism.html), accessed 3 July 2010.

81. Nachie, “Bolivanarchism.” This question becomes all the more difficult because, since Nachie’s piece was published, the transformation of the Venezuelan military has proceeded further, in the establishment of “Bolivarian Militias.” See the recent analysis by Alan Woods, “Venezuela: The People in Arms” (15 April 2010), [www.marxist.com/venezuela-the-people-in-arms.htm](http://www.marxist.com/venezuela-the-people-in-arms.htm), accessed 3 July 2010.

82. See Nachie, “Bolivanarchism,” who similarly identifies “imperialist overtones” in some anarchist discussions of Venezuela.

83. This was visible in an acute form in the group’s failed attempt to mount an “Alternative Social Forum” against the World Social Forum which was held in Caracas in January of 2006. Rather than contributing critically to and benefiting humbly from what were a multitude of incredibly vibrant workshops and panels, *El Lib* chose instead the vanguardist solution of dismissing the entire event as reactionary. The result was predictable: in contrast to the many thousands attending the official WSF, the “anarchist” alternative drew mere handfuls.

84. I have spoken at length with socialist feminist Jessie Blanco, a former member of the circle around *El Libertario*, about this moment, one which marked her departure from the group.

85. Cited in Nachie, “Bolivanarchism.”

86. “A Consistent Reply to Repeated Questions,” *El Libertario* 34 (September–October 2003).

87. Nachie nearly gets this right, correctly identifying the complexities of the role of the state, of popular institutions, and of the relation between the two, but the conclusion remains a confused one in which the errors of anarchism crop up visibly: “In either case, our only responsible course of action is to engage ourselves in the non-governmental expressions of the Revolution so that as a movement we are in a position to debunk it as necessary and defend it when needed.” The insistence on “non-governmental expressions” is a noble sounding one, but it is one which is unsustainable in practice within the Venezuelan revolutionary process (in part because it is difficult to identify what, precisely, constitutes a “non-governmental” expression).

88. See George Ciccariello-Maher, “Embedded with the Tupamaros: ‘We Are Not Terrorists,’” *Counterpunch* (25 April 2008); “Radical Chavismo Bares its Teeth,” *MR Zine* (18 April 2008).

89. The seeming paradox becomes more acute once we recognize the consistently serious tension that exists between Chávez and his governing allies and the Tupamaro organizations. Recently, Chávez even issued an arrest warrant for this same leader of La Piedrita, but even this does not damper the latter’s overall support for the process.

90. A slightly different phenomenon emerged in the aftermath of the Zapatista rebellion, one which—as is so often the case in other realms—combined imperialism with exoticism, only this time with an anarchist face: Zapatismo was taken up by European and American activists and theorists to be reimposed as the model for radical change. This was arguably present in John Holloway’s, *Change the World without Taking Power*, 2d. ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2005), although in the second edition he tepidly corrects this view in response to critiques on the basis of the Venezuelan experience (262fn49).

91. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 236.

92. Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morovsky (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1985 [1976]), 58. The Argentine-Mexican philosopher of liberation, Dussel shares much with Sorel and Fanon in terms of being simultaneously critical

of anarchism and of the dangers inherent in all political institutions. Recently, Dussel has insisted both that the immediate destruction of the state foreseen by anarchism is, at least in the Latin American context, politically reactionary (as we have seen in practical terms in the Venezuelan case), and that all institutions embody a dangerous degeneration which must be confronted. See Enrique Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*, trans. George Ciccariello-Maher (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008 [2006]). The phrase *sterile formalism* is one which Fanon applies to nationalism but which, in accordance with our method, can apply equally well to certain forms of anarchism (*Wretched of the Earth*, 144).

93. Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept," *Cultural Studies*, 21.2 (March 2007): 263.