

The End of the World

If we began from the fraught relationship between decolonization and dialectics, we conclude with a similarly painful tension between decolonization and another tradition too often mired in an unrecognized Eurocentrism: anarchism. Each of the thinkers considered here maintained a tense and complicated relation with anarchism. Sorel was sharply critical of his contemporary anarchists, whom he deemed "*intellectually entirely bourgeois*," while nevertheless recognizing that they had radicalized the syndicalist movement by infusing it with a laudable wariness of the state.⁵⁶ While Fanon was critical of anarchistic adventurism in Algeria, he knew that those seeking to unleash a decolonial struggle grounded in the self-activity of the masses would themselves inevitably be tarred with the same brush and denounced by established leaders as "these upstarts, these anarchists."⁵⁷ Dussel is critical of what he calls the "impossible-possibility of the extreme anarchist"—referring to an undifferentiated and non-institutionalized *potentia* much like the Multitude—but he echoes Sorel in his insistence that "quasi-anarchists do indeed remind us that institutions become fetishized and always need to be transformed," holding out the "dissolution of the state" as his ultimate political horizon.⁵⁸

The peculiar in-betweenness of these thinkers and others—even Mariátegui was deeply influenced by the anarchist Manuel González Prada—suggests a peculiar if often unrecognized resonance between decolonization and something like anarchism. This relationship is best grasped not as the formal unity of the two, however—by simply adding one to the other—but instead by grasping the *content* these impulses share. Recall Dussel's early formulation of decolonial liberation as "an-arche," beyond the principle of the present, and Fanon's ontological correlation of *state* and *status*—either ontological status or the status quo of the present. The state for Fanon and Dussel is thus similar to that of Sorel—an entrenched "Jacobin" structure of inequality and hierarchy—and where they oppose the state, it is because it is a structure of inequality, not simply because it calls itself a state. Attacking the governing structure of the present is always violent and an-archic by definition, but even more so when that structure is based on the racial-colonial apartheid that separates true Being from substandard nonbeings.

Whereas the *New York Review of Books* once described Fanon as a "Black Rousseau" and a "true Jacobin," just as C. L. R. James had deemed Toussaint and others "Black Jacobins," these cannot be understood as terms of

unambiguous praise.⁵⁹ Fanon shared Sorel's anti-Jacobin wariness of the cold abstraction of those revolutionary intellectuals and political leaders who would simply occupy the upper echelons of a new hierarchy. Even James—his own title notwithstanding—shows how it was the very Jacobinism of Robespierre and Toussaint that led to their downfall: both eventually attacked their left wing, lost the support of the masses, and thereby sealed their own doom.⁶⁰

In an oft-overlooked footnote to the 1963 edition of *Black Jacobins*, James even seems to share Sorel's equation of Jacobinism with a "principle of hierarchy," citing Georges Lefebvre's Sorbonne lectures to cleave a distinction between Jacobins and sansculottes:

The Jacobins . . . were authoritarian in outlook. Consciously or not, they wished to act with the people and for them, but they claimed the right of leadership, and when they arrived at the head of affairs they ceased to consult the people, did away with elections, proscribed the Hebertistes and the Enrages. They can be described as enlightened despots. The sansculottes on the contrary were extreme democrats: they wanted the direct government of the people by the people; if they demanded a dictatorship against the aristocrats they wished to exercise it themselves and to make their leaders do what they wanted.⁶¹

While not strictly opposed to the state as a mechanism, or even to the Jacobins that occupied that state for a time, the sansculottes were indeed hostile to the hierarchy that Jacobinism reproduced. It was this gap, turned yawning chasm, that would doom revolutionary processes from Saint-Domingue to France and beyond. Against the abstract and rationalist freedom of the Rights of Man, to which Toussaint himself remained hypnotically beholden, the popular masses were demanding a concrete freedom that drew upon tradition. And against the authoritarian violence of Jacobinism, they sought to deploy a radically democratic brutality that has much in common with Sorel's distinction between two violences, and whose vehicle in the Haitian context was a proto-Fanonian resort to the rational irrationality of Black identity.⁶²

As Césaire put it: "Equality refuses to remain abstract. And what an affair it is when the colonized takes back the word on his own account to demand that it not remain a mere word!"⁶³ Armed with a substantive view of the state and the Jacobin-sansculotte distinction that it entails—not to mention a concretized understanding of decolonial freedom—we are better prepared to draw together anarchism, dialectics, and decolonization in a

way that does not reduce one to the other or simply add them uncomfortably together. Not only can we glimpse in both some anarchisms and some decolonial nationalisms a ruthless hostility toward ingrained hierarchy, but we can also see the inverse: not only that some nationalisms are certainly reactionary, but also that some anarchisms are too scornfully Jacobin and too imbued with Eurocentrism to be of much use toward decolonization.⁶⁴

What reinvigoration of the “unfinished project of decolonization” might result from an emphasis on these “an-archistic” insights of Fanon and Dussel, insights that exceed the theoretical to insist on the dangers of formal decolonization, the reification of the state, and the closure of the revolutionary dialectic?⁶⁵ What enrichment of anarchism might result from loosening the formalistic grip of “the state” and embracing decolonization as a means of attacking the most powerful and essential hierarchy of our times—the ontological apartheid that renders some less human than others? What potentialities might emerge if we refuse the additive formulation of decolonization + anarchism (or communism, for that matter), instead allowing the mutual interpenetration of the two in a manner that—with clear complicity between content and form—is no more and no less than dialectical?

“Colonization,” in the words of Maia Ramnath, “is one of the most concentrated forms of power in history, incorporating extreme modes of domination, dispossession, and racial hierarchy.” If we can loosen our conception of “the state” to its broadest sense—as status, the status quo, the existing state of things—we might be able to grasp decolonization as truly constituting, as she rightly puts it, “the highest form of anarchism.”⁶⁶ It is against this state of affairs—this sedimented structure of class, racial, and colonial inequality—that the thinkers considered here sought to unleash a radically open-ended dialectics whose liberating violence alchemically transforms everything and everyone it touches and whose objective is no more and no less than what Fanon called “the end of the world, by Jove.”⁶⁷ The abolition of existing structures, of the white supremacy embedded in institutions both formal and informal, the tearing down of the apartheid walls separating Being from its constitutive opposite: *this* is the end of the world, and for Fanon as for Césaire, it was and remains “the only thing in the world worth starting.”⁶⁸