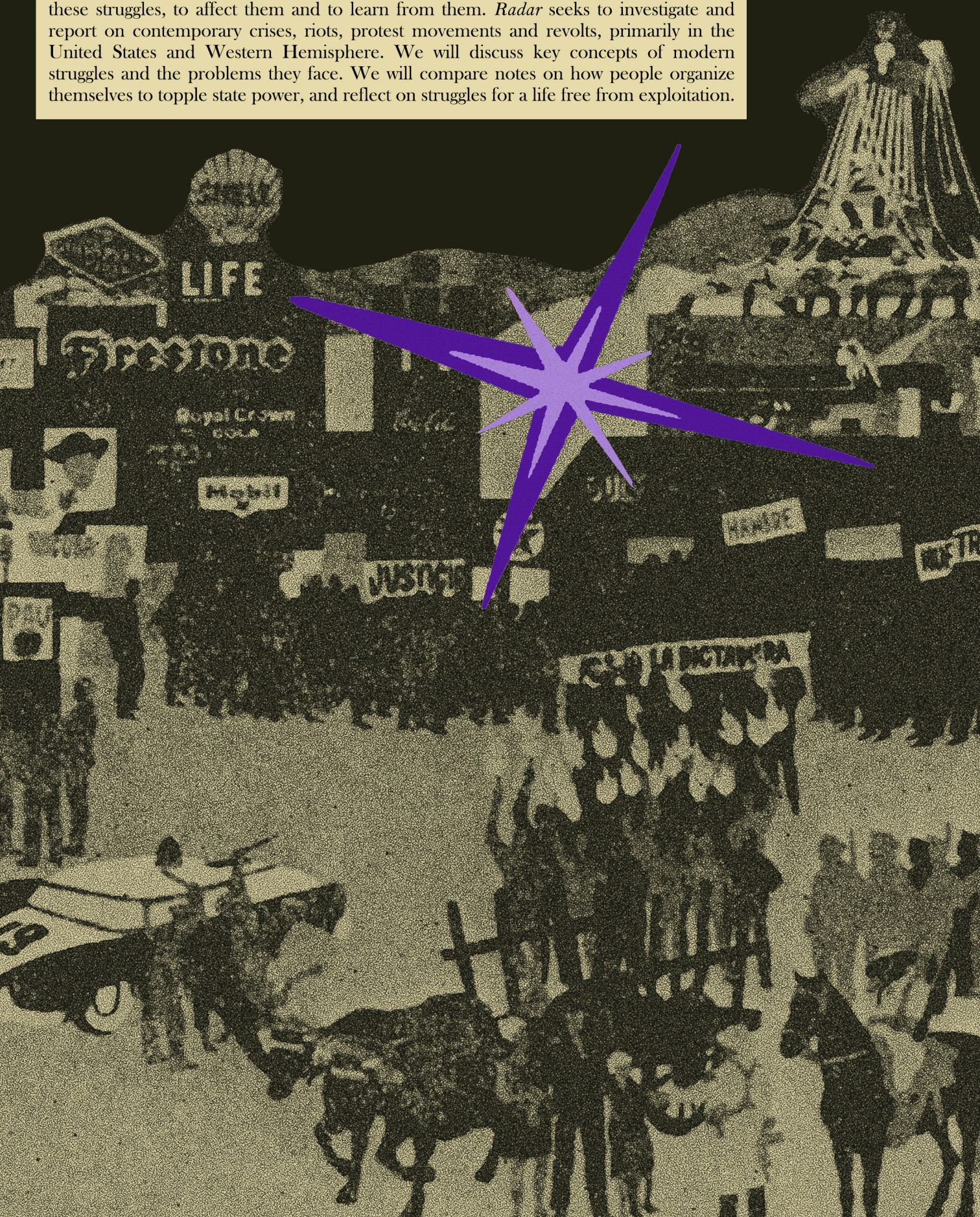
# RADAR

Spring 2025

Issue 02

*Radar* is a journal based out of the United States. The editors take part in movements and unrest across the country, the hemisphere, and the world. We act decisively from within these struggles, to affect them and to learn from them. *Radar* seeks to investigate and report on contemporary crises, riots, protest movements and revolts, primarily in the United States and Western Hemisphere. We will discuss key concepts of modern struggles and the problems they face. We will compare notes on how people organize themselves to topple state power, and reflect on struggles for a life free from exploitation.

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We decided to publish some of our recent correspondences with a reader. She wrote to us about *The Student Intifada and the Revolution to Come* (Radar #1). We are grateful for the opportunity to correct mistakes and to develop clarity through criticism.
Write to us at radarjournal@protonmail.com.

***Comrades,***

*I don't think the short country items in the appendix work. The format itself is a problem. Revolutions are complex, they can't be summarized in a couple of paragraphs. There's too much missing. You simply cannot describe the events of 1977 – 1979 in Iran without mentioning Islam. Or 1978 without mentioning the striking oil workers, or the other strikes that lasted months. Instead you offer a Persian date with an event that either wasn't Nixon's visit or wasn't 1953—1953 was the coup that overthrew Mossadegh, who nationalized the oil industry. Hundreds died. Nixon visited Iran in 1972. Also, the guerrilla organizations came out against Khomeini one by one, splitting and fracturing in the process. Yes, there were thousands in the streets for the 8th of March in 1979, but not for the Fedayeen or the Mojahedin, ever.*

*On a minor note, the poetry reading was an important moment. I've seen the argument that it was a turning point, but there's a more convincing argument for the Shah's visit to Jimmy Carter in November 1977 when they set off tear gas on the White House lawn to contain the protests.*

*In terms of Mexico, I wrote the only book in English about the events at Madera (I'm happy to share the PDF.) The Grupo Popular Guerrillero emerged in February, 1964. When you say "preciding" years, you mean "succeeding." I argue that the turn to arms put an end to a series of land invasions and urban encampments that were illegal, innovative, enjoyed the leadership of very young women—the normalistas were teenagers—and had broad public support. Direct action had not been exhausted, the movement was spreading into the middle schools. The movement eventually regrouped, in the early 1970s, and engaged in a series of urban invasions that created a commune, the Colonia Pancho Villa. The armed component appears more heroic from a distance and eclipses the movement that nurtured it, but it was a dead-end.*

*These are complicated questions and we need to look at history. You're looking at examples of student movements that turned to armed struggle. In Nicaragua they were successful until they were not. Mexico I would argue was a disaster, and the weight of the guerrilla movement in Iran is up for debate. Why not do a series and go country by country since we're bound by nation-state narratives?*

***Emelina Rosa***

***Emelina Rosa,***

*Thanks so much for emailing us your thoughts. We were excited to hear about you meeting our friend in Tucson and were happy to hear your comments on the journal. Hopefully this can be the beginning of a deeper conversation on the ideas in it and the questions implied in building a revolutionary movement today.*

*The event we referenced in Iran in 1953 were protests at the University of Tehran where 3 students were killed, after the Shah's coup of that year, on December 7th. According to sources we read, these protests occurred in the context of the coup and the planned visit of then Vice President Nixon. The day we published in the journal was mistakenly December 16th. It has been corrected on our website. We were not personally familiar with the norms of using the Solar Hijri calendar versus the Gregorian calendar in Iran which is why we put both. In references that we used, "Student Day" was indicated by sometimes 16th Azar 1332 and sometimes December 7th, or both.*

*References for that can be found here (Wikipedia, 'Student Day') and here (Tehran Times, 'Student Day: The Day Young Iranians Revolted Against U.S. Imperialism'). The books we used to inform the Iran section in general were* Rebels with a Cause *by Maziar Behrooz,* Revolution without Revolutionaries *by Asef Bayat, and then specifically for the narrative of the unfolding of the revolution,* Iran Between Two Revolutions *by Ervand Abrahamian. Any additional recommendations you might have or insights into these references would be awesome.*

*We would love a PDF of your book! The main references we used regarding the emergence of the GPG and the student movement in Mexico was Donald Hodges and Ross Gandy's book* Mexico Under Siege *and a couple of different essays in* Mexico Beyond 1968 *edited by Jaime Pensado and Enrique Ochoa. A comrade of ours in Mexico City has written a piece for issue #2, hopefully coming out next month, on the political history of Mexico and specifically the relationship between counterinsurgency and the "War on Drugs." Our relationship to international struggles and specifically struggles in the Western Hemisphere are something we would like to help revolutionaries in the U.S. understand and connect to more deeply.*

*Again, thank you for the email and the corrections. We agree that summaries of true historic events are indeed difficult, if not impossible for all the reasons you laid out. If you are open to it, we would like to publish your email, an edited version of it, or something else you would be willing to send us regarding your comments. This is exactly the conversation we would like comrades to be having.*

*Looking forward,*
***Radar***

***Dear Radar,***

*You're right about Nixon, I'd forgotten how long his career was. I like your sources. I've also been using Nikkie Keddie,* Roots of Revolution, *and Ryszard Kapuscinki,* Shah of Shahs. *You did not answer my larger point about accounting for the Islamicists. Does one of these references explain the thousands who came out on the streets for the secular revolutionaries after February 1979?*

*Here is my book. Yes publish this exchange.*

*saludos,*
***Emelina Rosa***

**Emelina,**

*Apologies for the delay in getting back to you.*

*Our goal was to provide brief summaries of key revolts and revolutions where students played a significant role—not just within the university, but in the broader society. In the 20th century, students worldwide allied with diverse sectors of society to pursue revolutionary objectives. The "student intifada" didn't follow this pattern. Why? What held it back from becoming a full-fledged revolt? We tried to answer these questions in our essay.*

*The Iranian Revolution is complex, with deep internal divisions. You're right: our summary skips too much. The history of Shi'ism in Iran, the role of workers and the shoras, Ali Shariati, women's resistance, SAVAK, ethnic minorities' demands, the Constitutional Revolution, the influence of the Russian Revolution, the USSR, the oil boom—examining these factors would be essential for a complete understanding of the revolution and its aftermath. We focused on the role of students.*

*You asked if any of our references explains the mobilization for the secular/marxist revolutionaries. Yes, they do. Maziar Behrooz's book especially goes into the role of the Left, their successes and shortcomings.*

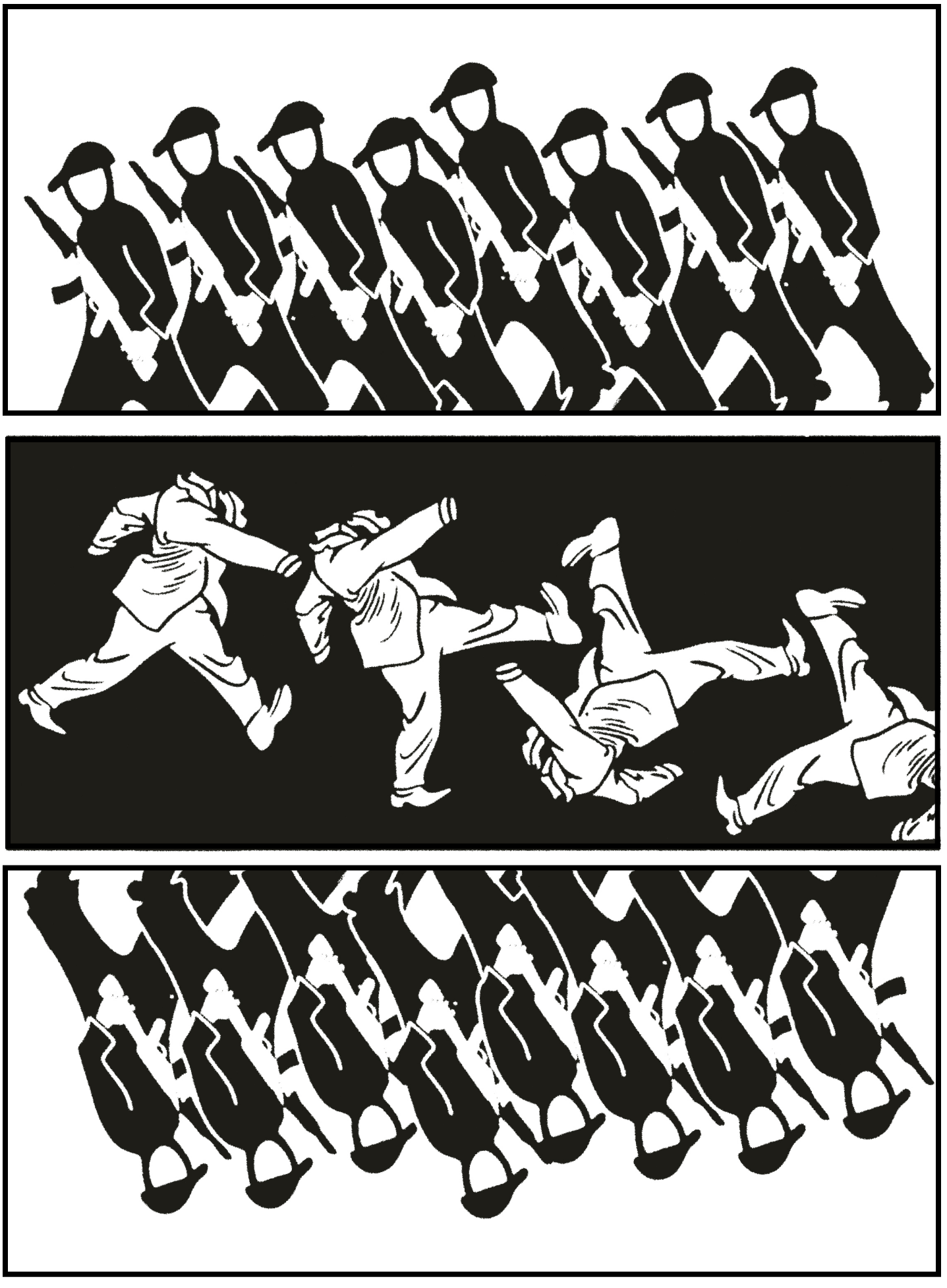
*The Fedayeen and Mujahedin, largely composed of university students, played a crucial role in the February 1979 insurrection. Ervand Abrahamian notes, "By early February 1979, the Mojahedin, as well as the other guerrilla groups, were well enough organized to quietly recreate their armed cells, especially in Tehran, Tabriz, Mashhad, and Isfahan. Although these groups were not large enough to take up the vanguard role in the revolution, they were armed and sufficiently well-organized to play an important role in the chaotic situation in which literally thousands of autonomous bodies, ad hoc committees, and grass-roots associations were battering away at the regime. In such a situation, any armed organization possessing some semblance of discipline and following could have played an important role." The membership of these groups grew from hundreds to thousands. We don't want to exaggerate their role in the revolution, however. But the left wing groups cannot be discounted in any serious account of the revolution.*

*The revolution took the Left by surprise. They were unable to outmaneuver the Khomeinists, who were better organized. By 1977, most far-left groups had been nearly crushed by the Shah's regime. When the Shah relaxed his repression in the following years, opposition movements quickly gained momentum. However, the severe repression throughout the mid-20th century had left little room for the Left to organize or build a strong revolutionary movement. Had the Shah not repressed these groups so harshly, would the Left have been in a better position to lead the revolution instead of the Khomeinists? It's impossible to say.*

*The Fedayeen and Mujahedin splintered at the revolution's outset. They clashed over the Kurdish and Turkmen uprisings, women's resistance, the question of armed struggle, and the nature of the IRP itself. Despite these splits, they participated in resistance to the IRP and were central to organizing the 1979 May Day demonstrations, which brought hundreds of thousands into the streets of Tehran. By 1981, both groups had been outlawed (the Fedayeen had already split, with the minority faction opposing Khomeini banned, along with Paykar and the Mujahedin), leaving the IRP to control May Day marches and celebrations.*

*We're planning to publish our first few emails in issue 2, which should be out soon. Let's continue our conversation.*

**Radar**



# in this issue . . .

# RESONANCES

Since our first issue, the US-Israeli war against Palestine took on new proportions. Western media outlets have steadfastly avoided altering the "death toll." It remains frozen at "46,000", despite the continuous bombardment and attrition inflicted upon the Palestinians. On October 1, after a series of staging actions against Hezbollah leadership (which included an illegal remote-controlled attack on thousands of pagers), Israel invaded southern Lebanon, the sixth invasion into Lebanon by Israel since 1978.

Over the next two months, US-backed Israeli forces bombed buildings across the south, refugee camps in the north, and in Beirut itself. 1.4 million Lebanese people were displaced. Hassan Nasrallah, then-Secretary General of Hezbollah, was killed in a bombing that destroyed an apartment complex. Israel killed more than 2,000 civilians. For their part, Hezbollah volunteers destroyed dozens of Israeli tanks, and killed over 100 IDF conscripts. On November 27, Israel signed a ceasefire agreement with Lebanon, which it continuously violates.

On December 8, less than two weeks after the ceasefire in Lebanon, the 54-year dynastic rule of Syria by the Assad family came to an abrupt end. After more than a decade of civil war, a coalition led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)— "rebels" in US media parlance — launched a lightning offensive in northwest Syria. Aleppo fell quickly. The advance tore across the country. Two weeks later, Assad fled to Russia, and Damascus erupted in celebration. Saydnaya prison, where tens of thousands vanished under the regime's thumb, was torn apart in a desperate search for those left to die.

The celebrations were short-lived. HTS, the new power in Syria, is a hardline Salafist group with roots in al-Qaeda. Aisha al-Debs, Syria's new director of Women's Affairs, recently told women not to "overstep the priorities that God created for them." No sooner had Assad fled that Israel pushed deeper into Syria, past the occupied Golan Heights, taking Syrian positions without a fight. The US and Israeli air forces have bombed hundreds of targets across the country — military bases, naval ports, ISIS hideouts. The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) moved in on Manbij and Kurdish positions along the Euphrates, clashing with the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) as Assad's army collapsed. On the Turkish border near Kobane, Turkish forces have amassed, displacing tens of thousands of people. On January 22, the new Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani announced that the HTS government plans to privatize state-owned ports and industry, opening it up to foreign capitalists and investors.

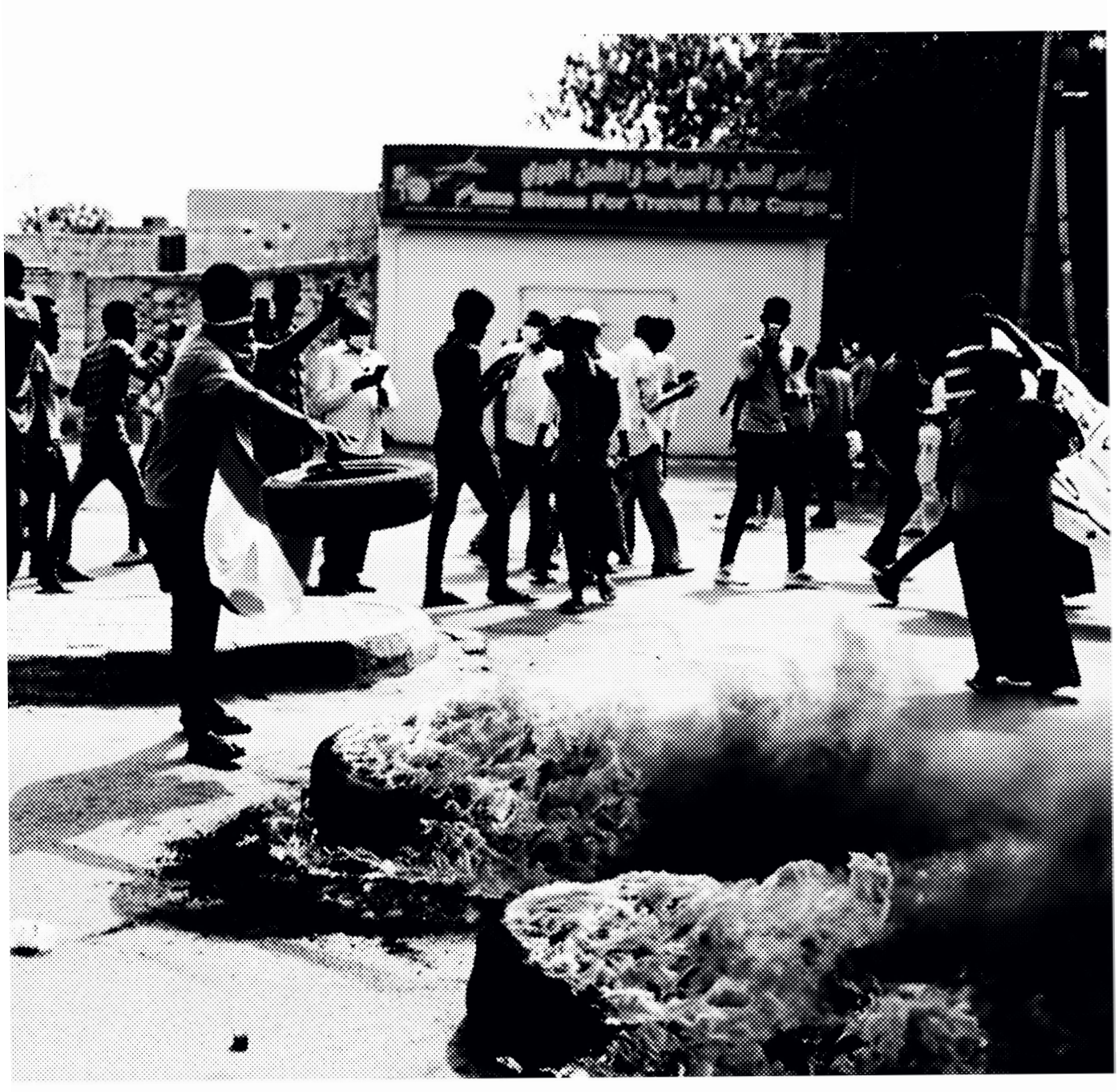
Syria's future hangs by a thread. Will it remain a battleground for imperial powers and Islamic extremists? Or will a new, democratic, multi-ethnic Syria rise from the wreckage? In the introduction to our first issue, we wrote that in Syria, the spirit of the entire age is "trapped in a cycle of permanent gestation." Already, just a few months later, it seems the gestation is ending. What is born is to be determined.

*Gaza, 2024*

In Sudan, the civil war continues. At Gaza solidarity protests and online, leftists and activists have attached "#FreeSudan" to their commentary on the war in Gaza. This serves as a small but necessary challenge to the widespread indifference from liberals and leftists to the crisis taking place. Still, those who understand the need to rally around the situation seldom grasp what this freedom demands or what it truly means. To depoliticize the violence in Sudan as "just another African civil war" is a racist betrayal. For this reason, we present an in-depth look at Sudan's modern history leading to the tragedy unfolding today. We have also reached out to Sudanese revolutionaries, speaking to them directly, to hear their voices.

We intend to continually grapple with questions posed by mass struggles. With a critical look, we aspire to draw general principles and hypotheses from contemporary problems, which always present themselves as historical contingencies, unique and without parallel. Indeed, the experiences of individuals always feel that way. It is our contention that what is taking place now in Sudan is structurally related to observable dynamics elsewhere in the world. Moreoever, we think that understanding the setbacks and carnage unleashed cyclically on impoverished people in the global south is mandatory for adequately comprehending the status quo in the global north.

Donald Trump has won the US presidency, again. He inherits the crises of the Biden-Harris administration, as well as a partisan Supreme Court, supersized police departments, and the largest military budget ever. He also inherits a public seething in class rage, proven by the near-universal celebration



of the daytime assassination of United Healthcare CEO Brian Thompson, allegedly by 27 year old Luigi Mangione.

The day before he swore his oath, Israel accepted a ceasefire deal proposed by the Palestinians in October 2023. The streets of Gaza City filled with cheering crowds, waving flags and sobbing tears of joy. Guerrillas openly walked through the streets, embracing their neighbors and community members in episodes of unadulerated gratitude.

Since then, hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians have begun to return back to their homes in Gaza. Many returned on foot to neighborhoods completely reduced to rubble by IDF bombardment. In Jenin, IDF raids have continued, displacing thousands and killing over a dozen people since the ceasefire.

With few outlying exceptions, protest encampments at university campuses across the US did not reemerge in the fall. Authorities have handed down disciplinary measures to students involved in the spring protests, and universities have written new policies to prevent similar disruptions from recurring. Donald Trump has repeatedly said that he will deport students without citizenship who participated in the protests and cancel student visas of those who "sympathize with Hamas." He is now expected to sign an excecutive order codifying these plans into law.

Meaningful reform and concessions have not played a significant role in ending the movements of the last 5 years. Instead, the state wages a persistent grudge match with protesters, intensifying force over time. We only expect this dynamic to deepen under the Trump administration. When movements have been able to overwhelm police forces by pushing back lines, breaking curfews, or defending territory, they only managed to do so temporarily. Serious disorganization and theoretical impasses weakened them, allowing police to regroup in larger, more aggressive forms. What doesn't grow, dies.

What kind of organizations are needed to overcome these problems? What does it take for protest movements to grow despite surveillance, disinformation campaigns, home raids, arrests, and police violence? What is the relationship between spontaneous revolt and revolution? To answer these questions, the Revolutionary Intercommunalist Research Group turns to a piece by former Black Liberation Army member, James Yaki Sayles. Yaki reflects on how the repression and split of the Black Panther Party contributed to the BLA's strategic failure to grow beyond disjointed attacks into a revolutionary movement. We place the BLA within their historic context, from which they drew great inspiration.

We have sold nearly all of *Radar* no. 1 (2000 copies). Thank you to everyone who bought copies and to the dozens of collectives, spaces, bookstores, distros, and galleries that ordered in bulk. We did not make any profit on issue 1, and our collective is all-volunteer. We are always accepting donations, which help us to keep costs low. If you would like to correspond with us, email us at radarjournal@protonmail.com.

## WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

If ghetto molotov flames of rebellion
escape and trap your young
Into a fiery path
tell me, what would you do?

Turn reactionary and inform
on the righteous flame throwers?
After all, accidents will happen
sometimes.
when the young die we must bear more.

If your place of business
Is looted to raise funds for
the underground
would you turn your
reactionary rage on
the comrades, because
of your personal loss,
tell me, what would you do?
Consider these minor things
before hand. You who
say that you are with us.

**Habib Tiwoni**
May 16, 1970
New York

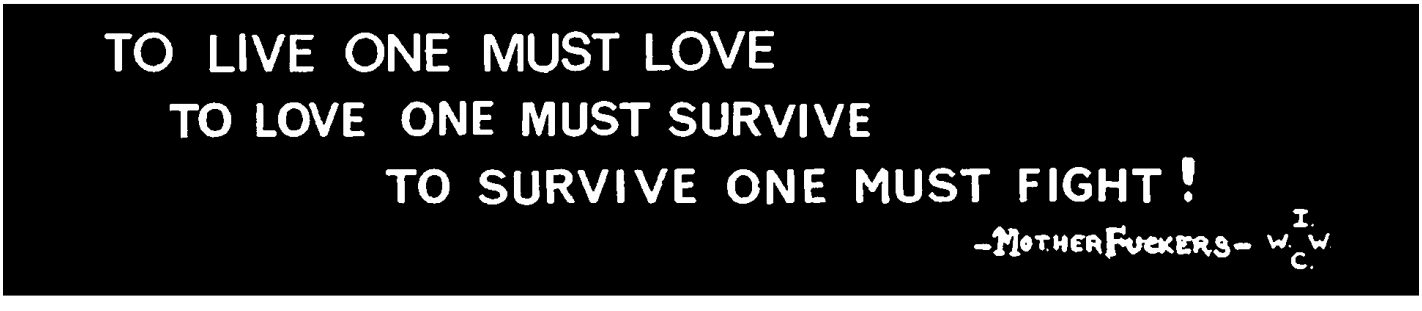
# FULL CIRCLE:

## A LIFE IN REBELLION BY BEN MOREA

Ben Morea co-founded Black Mask, a broadside that ran ten issues from November 1966 to May '68. The paper is still a visual and theoretical touchstone for anarchists. The neo-Dada rebels of Black Mask founded Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers (UAW/MF), a Lower East Side street gang and chosen family. Rooted in their neighborhood, the Motherfuckers protected, inspired, and organized each other amid Black liberation movements and anti-Vietnam War protests. At odds with pacifism, they embraced sabotage. Their innovations—affinity groups, breakaway marches, cultural disruptions in music and art, and tense, yet productive, cross-factional collaboration—remain widespread today.

Born in 1941 in Maryland and raised in Hell's Kitchen, Morea became one of the most dynamic US revolutionaries of the 1960s underground. He saw creativity—and politics—as spiritual acts. A street kid steeped in Harlem jazz and heroin haze, he was drawn into the radical experimental group, the Living Theater. He began painting, exploring Dada and Surrealism. He worked with anarchists of the Durutti Column and played a key role in Aldo Tambellini's anti-commodification collective, Group Center, forging a unique link between art and revolution.

Many details of his history surfaced with his return to public life after 40 years incommunicado. Fearing imprisonment or worse as the countercultural movements of the 1960s collapsed, Morea fled West, assuming a new identity in 1969, leaving the actions of Black Mask and UATW/MF as his legacy. Long sought-after by radicals, academics, and artists alike, he returned to New York in 2006. Publishers and zinesters republished and analyzed Black Mask. Academics and anarchists study his writings and theories. Morea has traveled the world, meeting dissidents, showing his paintings, and engaging with contemporary movements. His public activity over the last 19 years sheds light on the tactics, strategy, and actions of the armed rebellions he joined in the late 1960s.



For the first time, Morea reveals the full scope of his life in *Full Circle: A Life in Rebellion*, forthcoming from Detritus Books. Over twenty days of interviews, he recounts his origins, political work, and the previously untold period spent in the New Mexico and Colorado wilderness, where he immersed himself in Native American life and spiritual practices. This rich narrative reflects a time when revolution felt imminent, when millions shared that belief, and the years that followed.

Radical scenes often fixate on the people, groups, and actions of the 1960s, creating a relationship marked by intense scrutiny and deep alienation—like religious fanatics seeking absolution in ancient texts. Real lives and actions are reduced to mythology, stripped of historical context. This mythology justifies passivity in the present, assuming conditions in the past were more ripe for action, without explaining how or why.

Others think that the 60s are irrelevant, a fantasy we escape to through ephemera and nostalgia. Proponents of this theory claim that today is "totally different" than it was just fifty years ago. This idea holds us fascinated but separated from the real lives and decisions of people we admire: perhaps, a time will come where our lives will be just like theirs, and when they are, we will suddenly act as they did. How, when, or why, we don't know. While apparently opposed to the manner of the fixaters and mythologizers, this approach to history produces exactly the same confusion insofar as it leaves the past in the past, and the present appears without any concrete development.

*Full Circle* illuminates Morea's activities at the height of the American counterculture. More importantly, it reveals his life beyond the brief period most commonly associated with him. It shows that every moment of his 83 years has been defined by engagement and reciprocity—his childhood in the country and on the street, his work in jazz and art, his exploration of the esoteric and non-Western cultures, and his presence in numerous political scenes before and during the war. These experiences are more relevant to our lives than the obsession with the 60s. The book allows us to grasp the reality and texture of his life—and perhaps our own—in the wake of brutal repression.

The following excerpt begins at the juncture where the revolutionary movement, despite years of growth, failed to transform society. In the late 1960s, nationwide protests continued unabated. Bank robberies, bombings, and other violent acts of sabotage surged. The establishment feared the Black Liberation movement, recognizing it as a central threat to "national security". Police beat and shot at protesters in the streets, while carrying out raids, shoot-outs, and assassinations by night.

In 1969, Fred Hampton, the Young Patriots, and the Young Lords united Black people, poor whites, and Puerto Ricans in Chicago. Sam Melville, a member of "The Crazies"—associates of the Weather Underground and the Black Panthers—played a key role in the Attica Prison revolt. Morea joined this broad effort to unite Black and white people against racism, which he saw as a capitalist tool of oppression. He worked closely with Amiri Baraka and the Black Panthers. The government initiated a campaign of assassinations against these movements. Morea narrowly avoided a confrontation with federal agents on his way to Chicago for the Days of Rage, described in the excerpt below. Reading the writing on the wall, he decided to leave New York City and head west.


The following account is not a collection of specific actions or heroic moments. Instead, Morea analyzes the political moment and the interplay of powers both with and against him. He offers a broad political narrative of the United States—and by extension, the world—as well as his daily experiences on the Lower East Side, the New Mexican border, or in the Colorado mountains. To understand political heroism within the framework of everyday decisions—decisions as weighty as those we must make today—it's important to follow Morea's journey beyond the peak of the 60s. Like all of us, he wakes up every day to confront the world. He is guided by relationships, experiences, failures, and goals.

What is a person to do? Rebellion is often learned in informal ways—through discussion, exchange, as a response to needs, a drive to action. Purpose gives us direction. In the 60s, they say you could feel it in the air, the sensitization of the conscience. Morea's approach is never to wait until you're ready, but always to be prepared. Daily life is the necessary prelude to creating a new society. A man's life is a circle, from childhood to childhood, and it is within that circle that power moves. This is the heavy effort—life so palpable it can wield violence and nourishment in a single blow. We call for help while immersing ourselves in the action of repair.

# DAY SEVEN
## (COUNTER)REVOLUTION

**I have a question about the late 60s, when the anti-Vietnam War movement, student activism and Black liberation were all energized and strong. At some point, did you feel that there was a chance — I don't know if I should use the word "revolution," but you felt it may really be possible to remove the government, or decompose the power, you had some hopeful vision like that?**

If I understand the question correctly, yes, I thought it was possible. I believed it. I mean I couldn't have done what I did if I didn't believe it. If I thought it was futile, would I have put my life on the line? We were moving in a way that felt like, it is now, this could happen. I had to believe it.

**I'm also curious about the moment when you had that belief, but then you lost it.**

I didn't lose the belief that it was possible. I lost the belief that it would happen today. In the 60s the appeal was that we can change it, now. I woke up every day and felt like we're gonna do it. We're gonna bring it down. Or die trying.

But at some point I realized that it wasn't going to happen immediately. The powers that be had been able to stop it. They had retaken the front, or the beachhead, so to speak. I could see that the chance of us bringing about the change was gone. But only for that moment.

That's what I'm curious about. Because it happened so fast, one year there's imminent possibility, the next it's gone. It must have been so intense to live through that.
And I don't know how we knew it, but somehow you could feel that this was our chance. It was the crucial moment. But the conservative world crushed it. They pushed back, it happened all over the world. And it's gotten worse ever since. What we were afraid of then, actually happened. But you could feel that we were close to having success at changing something.

**You kind of saw it coming already? Like more intense capitalism, commodification, environmental destruction, all of that?**

In every realm. It was the beginning of the counterrevolution. It's lasted up until now. But we could see it then. That was part of the reason for leaving. A lot of us went out west. At some point we realized that the powers that be had retaken control. And we began to understand that in order to have an alternative word, we had to build it. We reached that point in 69. It took most people into the 70s.

**So there was a sense of leaving together? Not that people just individually scattered.**

Correct. It wasn't that we gave up the fight. But to continue the fight, and grow stronger. We saw the chance to leave urban existence behind, and start to build new ways of living. Many people reached a similar point, like the Back to the Land movement was starting. We had a parallel development in a sense.

**Can you say more about what was happening, how you knew. Because the struggle in 69 still appeared vibrant, in many aspects. How did you realize when you did?**

Well I had certain signals. Because it was a matter of survival. Even if I felt the revolution could still happen, I myself faced elimination. For instance, I was going to the Chicago protests, I was traveling with my girlfriend. She had a blue Volkswagen that I frequently used to travel in. Along the way we were stopping different places, Detroit, Ann Arbor, wherever we had friends. And I got a call from Chicago. Someone called to warn me that the cops were stopping blue Volkswagens, and they had my picture. They approached the car with guns drawn, like they were expecting a standoff. Or they were going to provoke one. Later on I got another call, saying the same thing. Then a third call, the same. At that point I turned around.

**Meaning, the Feds were really after you. You'd been marked.**

So it was both. On a personal level I'd reached a stalemate. But I could see that the movement had also reached a stalemate.

**So after what happened in Chicago, you decided to leave and go out west?**

No. That wasn't fully understood, or planned at that point. But once we realized we were going to leave, we moved a lot of the younger runaways out of the city. We took them to San Francisco, where we thought they'd be safer. I felt like I couldn't leave them behind. It was something I had to do before leaving.

But to get the kids across the country, see we couldn't use any of our cars, you know, because they'd be followed. But we managed to steal a credit card. Back then, credit cards were rare. And it wasn't as easy to disable them. So it was a big deal. We used it to rent cars, and get gas and food, the whole trip. We would change cars every so often to avoid being followed. In the end we used five different cars! The last one went into the Pacific.

**Really? That's incredible. I never heard that story.**

Oh there's so much that I never... it's never come up. I remember one moment, we were driving across the country, and we stopped at a mall to get supplies. So we asked the kids what they wanted. You know we had this credit card, we could get whatever they wanted. And they all said that they didn't want anything. That's beautiful.

A true non-commodity reality.

**What happened with the kids, did they stay together for a while?**

They stayed together at the beginning. But I lost track, you know, because I went into the wilderness. I never followed the progression.

**You didn't keep in touch, even years later?**

Well I cut off all communication. So I was incommunicado. And when I came out of the wilderness, I homesteaded. But I basically stayed incommunicado, for many years.

**When you say you went into the wilderness, you mean...**

We were in the mountains, on horseback. My wife and I went together. When we left the city, we went out west, and she came with me into the mountains. We stayed for five years, hunting and gathering, living in the wilderness.

**You stayed for five years? Just the two of you, out in the elements? How could you even do that?**

It's not that it was easy. We gave up comfort. We'd be without food, or freezing cold, or soaking wet. In the rainy season we'd be wet for weeks at a time. I mean it was a rough life. But when I first went, it was a matter of survival. If I hadn't gone into the mountains, I'd be gone. I had to do it. And my wife was with me.

**She was as wild as you!**

And I'll always give her absolute credit. I could never dismiss what she did. It was beyond the norm. I couldn't have done it without her.

# KNOW YOURSELF
# KNOW YOUR PEOPLE

ARMED LOVE

MOTHERFUCKERS

**Your life is unreal. You go from New York City to living in the wilderness? It's hard to even imagine!**

It's almost unimaginable. And I cannot tell you how or why, but I felt so comfortable, or I don't know how to put it... I don't know if I overcame my discomfort, but I felt like this is where I am. So I better figure it out. I figured that one out. Now I gotta figure this one out.

**I guess it's hard to imagine your life before that, too. I mean the intensity.**

I can't really explain it, in words... Like one time, we were scouting. It was early on, so we were scouting the land. And we stopped somewhere to spend the night. Well the sheriff came and said that we were trespassing. To us that didn't mean anything, you know, we were just there. But he insisted that we had to move, we had to get out. We were being removed, so to speak.

So we start to get things together and get ready to move. And the sheriff points at our dog. He says you can't take the dog, so I'll just have to kill him. He goes to the car and opens the trunk, and takes out a shotgun. As soon as I see the gun, I take out my pistol. I'm wearing a poncho, so the sheriff doesn't see it. I've got the pistol fixed on him. My wife is standing next to me and I tell her, if he goes to shoot the dog, I'm gonna kill him. So she pleads with him, why would you do that, he's just a dog, you can't kill him. And she prevailed. She knew that if I killed the sheriff, there was no way I could get away.

**You just knew you had to. You knew you would.**

There was no way I would allow him to kill my dog. I never even thought about it, like should I or shouldn't I. It was just you kill my dog, I kill you.

**Then it was a good thing your wife was there! She was able to convince him not to?**

She convinced him, luckily for me. And for him. Especially for him!

**In a way it shows how you had freed yourself. I mean if he's about to shoot the dog, and the only way to stop him is to shoot him, then that's what you would do.**

And I can't explain it. I mean, can you imagine that state of mind? But that's how we were. We were beyond... I don't know how to convey it. It almost doesn't sound real.

# DAY EIGHT
## WILD WEST

**Let's get back to the story: you and your wife went to the mountains, and started living in the wilderness. But how did you do it? Like how did you prepare? What season was it when you first went in?**

It was probably spring. We waited out the first winter. We were trying to scout. We got horses, you know, we got pack saddles, we'd go trade. We would ride some. But we didn't totally leave civilization, at first. We stayed mostly around the communes.

**So it's really remote, like big mountains right?**

Up to 10,000 feet!

**You were camping in a tent?**

We had a tent, and we built shelters. It depended how long we were going to stay at one camp. We had the horses so we would ride, set up camp different places.

**And you were able to survive by hunting and gathering? All these things you learned just by experience?**

Well you do it, or die. Like in the beginning I was not a great hunter. But our lives depended on it. It wasn't a hobby. I had to do it. So I had to get good at it. Until I got good enough, I had to just struggle along. I would go days sometimes I couldn't get any game.

**Because you wouldn't give up and go get pizza or something.**

And there's no place to go! Either you get the food out there, or you don't eat.

**What were you hunting?**

Deer and elk. Or we'd get small game like rabbit, squirrel, wild chicken, wild turkey. Like I'd be out hunting, and my wife would see small game and she would shoot it. She was a good shot.

**That's really wild.**

It was a wild life. Especially after the Lower East Side. But I always used to think, it's really not that different. There's a parallel, I don't know...

**Somehow you deal with both environments in a similar way, I guess?**

And you deal with it just as a living thing.

**Also you had horses. How did you adjust to that, coming from the city?**

First of all, I wasn't born in the city. I was born in the country. Second of all, even in the city I was always around horses. I worked with horses. I worked at the bridle path in Central Park, I worked at all the horse stables. One time someone from King Ranch saw me and wanted to train me as a jockey!

**You could have had a whole different life! You think you could have been a jockey?**

I was like fourteen years old, and my mother said no, you're not going to Kentucky.

**But that's amazing how these different elements in your life are present in different moments.**

That's what made it possible to live as I did. I wasn't just a city kid. I was born in the country, along the Potomac River. We had relatives on both sides, Virginia and Maryland. That was a whole world. There were reservations, that was Algonquian country. I used to stay there when I was a kid. Up until I was ten, when my mother remarried, I would go back and forth.

And I always felt grateful that in the first ten years of my life, I had a lot of interaction with non-urban life. I wasn't just a product of urban life. That really shaped me. Because I was able to experience both, I could understand both. I wasn't stuck with one or the other. I could move between environments. To tell you the truth, I don't think that I could have done what I did, if I was just a city kid. Could you imagine a city kid going to the wilderness to live? On horseback, hunting and gathering? It's almost unimaginable.

**How about your wife? How did she do?**

Well she did it, but it was hard for her. To be without food, or cold, or soaking wet, for weeks. I would come across her at times and she'd be crying. Life would be so hard sometimes. And no matter how hard, she took it like, that's life. She was strong enough. But it was really hard on her.

**What about the others from the family who went out west, how did they handle the shift?**

Well nobody went totally into the wilderness in the way that we did. A few people tried, they followed our example and did it. But for most people there was some transition. Like there were the communes, they were part city, part country. And people from the city could fit in. And then some of them became more country. So there was this transition, or mixture.

**There were a lot of communes, I guess? Because it's not only from New York but like from San Francisco and different cities, all these people were moving out to the country and making communes, right?**

That was the Back to the Land movement. A lot of them went to New Mexico and Colorado, and to California. A lot also went to Vermont. And the communes were mostly New Age, counterculture, what people call hippie. But there were some that we were closer to, that we fit in with.

**Most New Age communes, you wouldn't fit in with?**

No. We had a rough edge, you know, the Lower East Side was rough. So we always had this edge. We weren't hippies. And you could feel it. We looked a little like hippies, but you could feel that there was a difference. And some people were apprehensive of us.

**They were suspicious, like who are these intense people from the city?**

Not suspicious, but some people were uncomfortable, or they didn't understand us. Or they disagreed with our belief in self-defense, which meant violence. And they disliked us for that.

**I guess someone coming from a New Age commune in New Mexico would have a hard time imagining Lower East Side life.**

Exactly. And not only were we from the Lower East Side, we were on the warrior side of it. But there were also some communes with people a little bit like that.

**You mean militant? Like more politicized, rather than just New Age.**

Yeah, or mixed.

**So after you left New York you still had contact with some people?**

Mostly I was incommunicado. A lot of people thought I was dead, and I encouraged that. But some people from my family came and stayed a while. At some point most people scattered. So it was transitional somewhat.

**You were in New Mexico? Or where were you, exactly?**

It's a mountainous region that expands across northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. It has nothing to do with the state, the state is just a line. It's one region. And that's where we stayed. And so we would cross, like say we were in New Mexico and the Forest Service tried to find us, so we'd cross the border into Colorado. And vice versa, when Colorado got too hot, we'd cross back into New Mexico. I would send postcards to the Forest Service headquarters, like you can stop looking, I'm in another state! They could tell it was true by the postmark.

**That's convenient, two different states.**

And that was still border country then. It used to be part of Mexico. There were actually people who lived along this border that didn't really speak English. I mean it was remote, it was like a hidden area. And authority had no hold. There was no law, everybody was armed.

**So it was relatively autonomous? It makes sense that you were drawn there.**

Totally. There was no police. The law was enforced by people themselves. If you rustled a cow, they didn't call the police, they'd just shoot you! There was no local police, and the state police never went there. This whole area was self-governing. Like the people we joined in New Mexico in their uprising. They sensed that they were being encroached upon by an artificial law — and they rebelled.


ARMED LOVE / MOTHERFUCKER
TRIBE

**There was an uprising? And you joined it?**

Correct. They had been occupied by the National Guard. And they had written to us that they needed more people like us. You know, people with guns. So we went. There were about ten of us that went.

**All of you ready to fight with guns? That's a big deal.**

And we had been at that point of relocating anyway. We weren't sure how, or where, or what. Then we got this letter.

**But that's a big move in terms of confrontation. Like against the National Guard, in this remote little area, that's pretty intense.**

Yeah, the state police had roadblocks around this area, so you couldn't go in or out if you were known. And some of my comrades got spotted at the roadblocks. They had arms, and they were arrested.

**What was happening before, would you give us the context of the uprising?**

Way back, in this border region, the Spanish government gave communities what they called a land grant. It gave them the right to use the land communally, to graze their animals. So that everybody has their little plot where they live and grow food, and then they have some thousands of acres to graze their herds. It's an ideal. Grazing tribes around the world do that. There's no land grant, it's just the fact of life. It's based on use, not ownership.

So there's an immediate conflict with the American legal system. Wealthy Americans used the law to possess land, to say this is mine, you can't graze on my land. And they got the sheriff's department to enforce it. The conflict intensified, and there was a rebellion. They raided the courthouse, there was a shootout. Then the National Guard occupied. And that was when they wrote to us.

**Were you surprised to get this kind of request?**

No. It was a logical request.

**But did you know each other before? Or they knew of you somehow?**

There was one person that knew of us. Really she knew me. There was a woman who was in SNCC, she had been involved in the South with the freedom rides. She was a militant. And she was part Mexican, so she got involved in the Mexican-American struggle. She joined the uprising, and she was living there amongst them. So she was the one that wrote to us. The others didn't know us.

**Was it difficult to communicate? Or you had people that could translate?**

No, they all spoke English. They were not deep in that part of the population that didn't speak English. They had a town, a little town way up in the mountains. Whereas it was the more rural people, the rural rancheros, that didn't interact with English speakers.

**You really got to know the land, and the people and these histories. It must be beautiful there.**

Yeah, it's beautiful country.

**Had you been there before to that part of the country?**

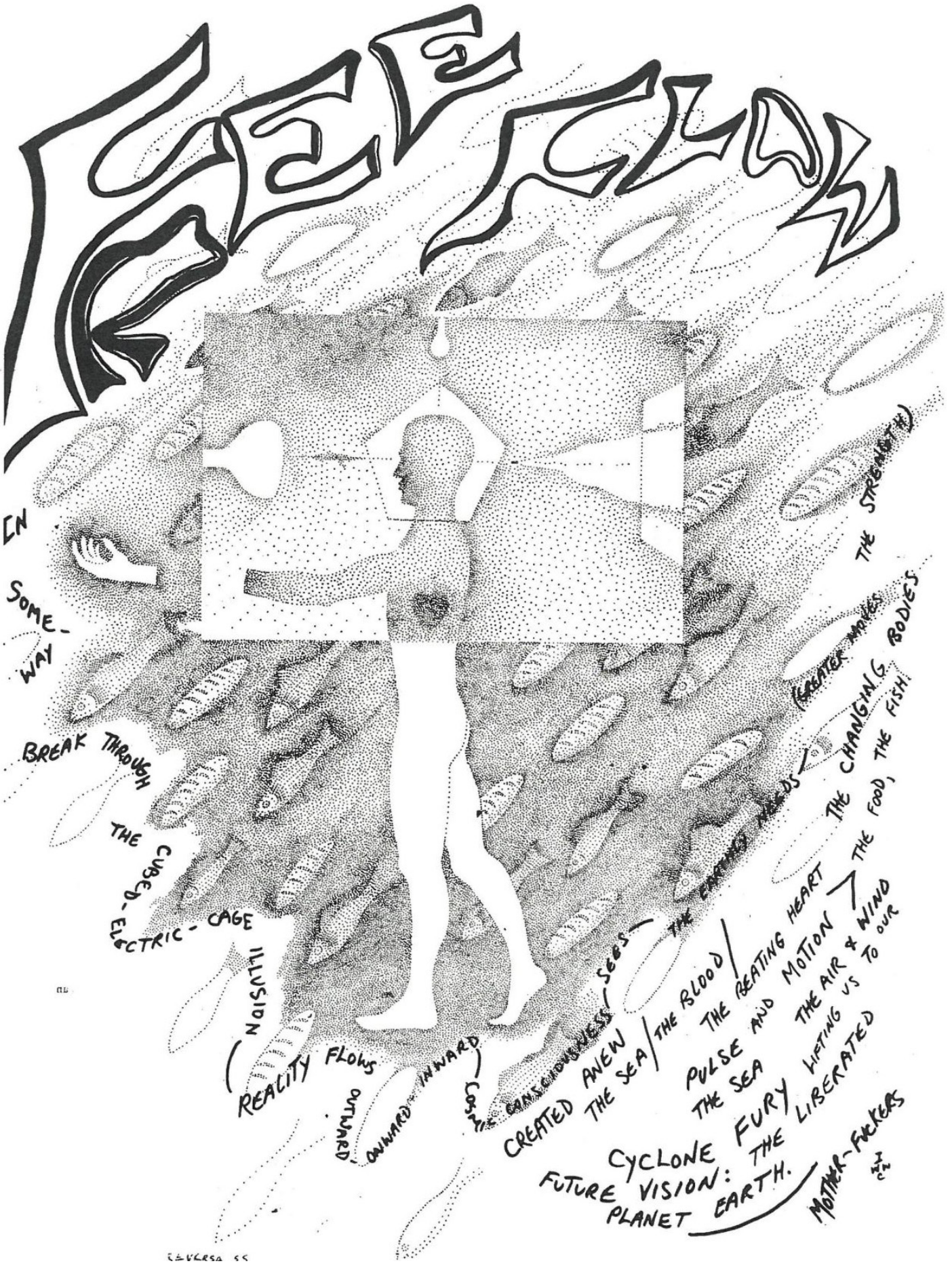
Not really. We went there once to take part in the great bus race. You know Ken Kesey's bus, called Further? And then the Hog Farm had a bus, the Road Hog. And then we had a bus. So we had a race. I used to argue with Ken Kesey that we won, but actually I have no idea. I was so stoned I didn't even know what was going on, you know, I couldn't tell you who won for real. But I used to always tease him, hey we won that race!

**Those were very different conditions, your first and second time to New Mexico. Wow.**

You know sometimes, when I hear myself, I almost can't believe it. Like when I talk about the things we did, how different they were, how extreme on so many different levels, from the counterculture, to the militancy, to the art — I'm almost like wow, did we do all that? It almost sounds like a fantasy. To me too, it sounds like a dream. I'm still amazed by this story of the uprising. As it turned out, when you left the city it wasn't a retreat from armed struggle. It was an escalation!

And that was also a transitional moment. I was ready to die in the struggle. But at the same time, I had this sense that there was something missing. Something was needed, beyond art and politics. I was seeking something other than what was available to me in the city. I could never quite formulate it. Not even what the question would be. I just sensed there was something missing. So when I felt that it was time to leave New York, or when I more or less had to leave, it was not only the impetus to leave, but I thought, this is my chance to see what this other thing is.

I didn't have a clear idea of what it was. But I knew that it was necessary.


FEEDBACK
IN SOME-WAY
BREAK THROUGH
THE CUBED-ELECTRIC-CAGE
(NOISILLUSION)
REALITY FLOWS
OUTWARD-INWARD
COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS SEES
CREATED ANEW
THE SEA / THE BLOOD / THE BEATING HEART
PULSE AND MOTION
THE SEA
THE AIR & WIND
LIFTING US TO OUR
CYCLONE FURY
FUTURE VISION: THE LIBERATED
PLANET EARTH.
MOTHER-FUCKERS
THE CHANGING BODIES
(GREATER MASSES)
THE STRENGTH)
THE FOOD, THE FISH.


NOW

## THE TIME SEIZER

(For Hakim Tarik Tiwoni)

So you want to be a time seizer my son,
Well, a time seizer must
Collect his or her dossier
On the enemy before they
Collect their's on you
Find out their weaknesses,
Traits and places of relaxation
Then seize the time
Heighten your consciousness of
Vigilance to the point where
You can feel them around you
In their staked-out disguises
Then you become the hunter
Then, you seize the time.

Habib Tiwoni

# TASGUT BAS!

## A CONVERSATION WITH SUDANESE REVOLUTIONARIES

Sudan is located in northeastern Africa, bordered by Egypt to the north, Chad to the west, Eritrea and Ethiopia to the southeast, and the Red Sea to the northeast. It is rich with oil, iron ore, copper, chromium, zinc, tungsten, mica, silver, and gold, nearly all of which is privately owned or managed by foreign capitalists.

Human beings have lived continuously in the area now known as Sudan for at least 50,000 years. The land is mostly desert or arid plains, carved by the Nile River, which flows south to north. In the Nile Valley, beneath Lake Nasser, rests Jebel Sahaba, an ancient burial site. There lies the oldest known military conflict, a battle sparked by climate-driven scarcity around 12,000 BC— roughly 10,000 years before the Great Pyramids of Egypt, over 11,000 years before the founding of Rome.

Today, Sudan is home to about 50 million people. Two-thirds belong to the "Arabized" ethnic majority; the rest retain indigenous "African" tribal customs and identity, including the Fur, Zaghawa, and Masalit peoples. These groups live under apartheid-like conditions, facing discrimination and violence.

In Arabic, "bilād as-sūdān" means "land of the blacks." Prior to the mass settlement of Sudan in the 14th century by Arabic-speaking nomads, the land was long-known by the name Nubia. To the ancient peoples of neighboring Egypt, Canaan, and Assyria, the people of the region were known as the Kush.

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### THE CIVIL WARS

Sudan gained independence from Britain and Egypt in 1956, after nearly 30 years of riots, strikes, and sporadic anti-colonial resistance. In 1958, CIA-backed generals led by Ibrahim Abboud overthrew the civilian government and established military rule. Almost immediately, northern and southern Sudan clashed. The First Sudanese Civil War (1955–1972) erupted when the northern ruling classes sought to maintain control over oil and mineral resources in the southern, predominantly proletarian "African" regions. The Arabized ruling class laid the groundwork for years of racially motivated oppression in the country.

A million people died in the long Civil War. In October 1964, during the war, protests erupted in Khartoum, uniting angry liberals and the Sudanese Communist Party. They overthrew Abboud and established civilian rule. In 1969, Colonel Gafaar Nimeiry of the Sudanese Socialist Union (SSU) seized power in a military coup. He was supported by Libya, China, and the US. Nimeiry signed the Addis Ababa Agreement, establishing the Southern Sudan Autonomous Region and extending political rights to animist and Christian minorities, though without economic self-determination. Almost immediately, the SSU embraced Islamism and Pan-Arabism, shifting away from socialism and the Soviet Union. In 1971, the government attempted to take control of labor unions, arresting and threatening Communist Party members. That July, Communist officers failed to take control of the

# II
# درجة ثانيــة
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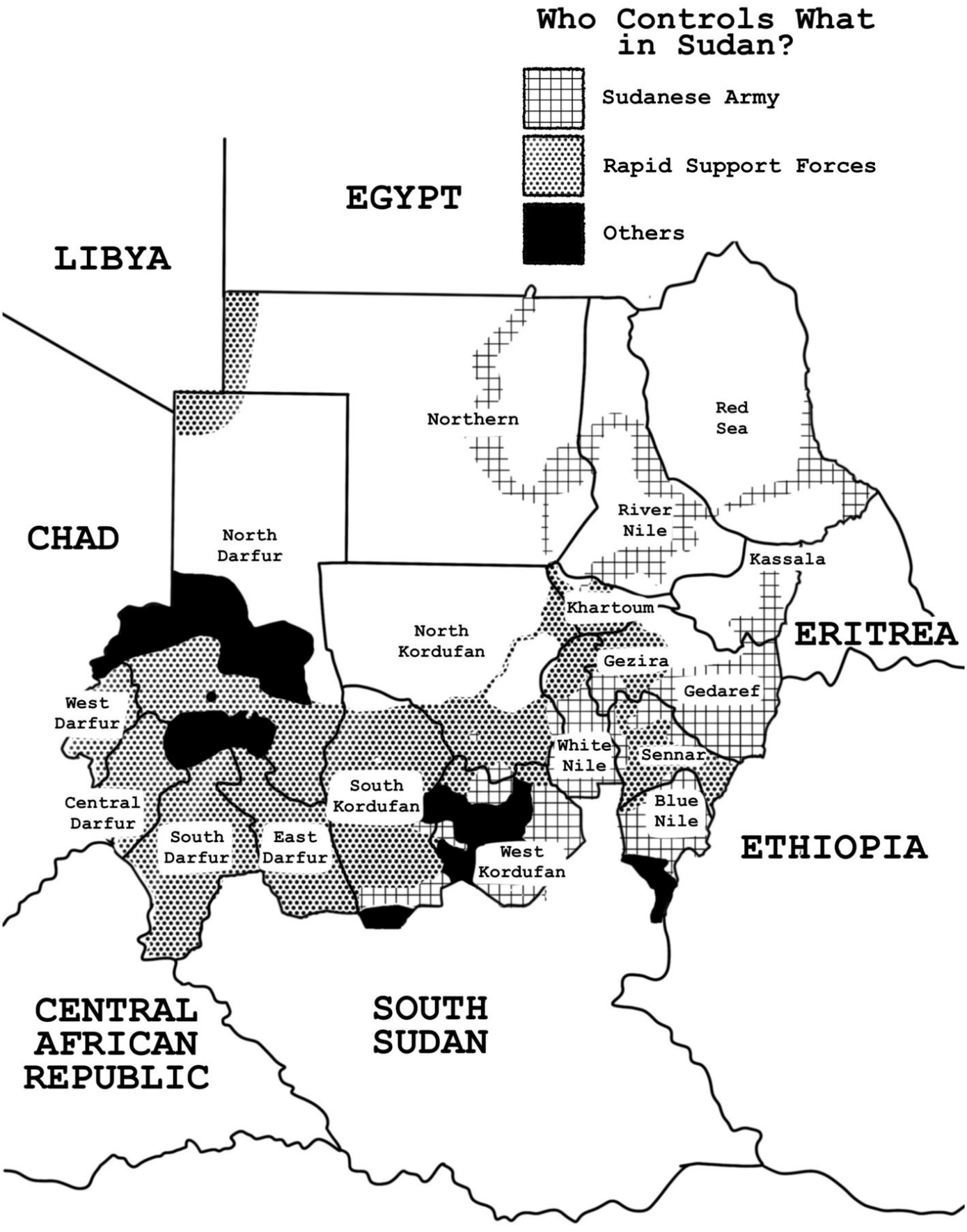
الخرطوم


Who Controls What in Sudan?
Sudanese Army
Rapid Support Forces
Others
EGYPT
LIBYA
CHAD
Northern
Red Sea
River Nile
North Darfur
Kassala
Khartoum
North Kordufan
ERITREA
Gezira
Gedaref
West Darfur
White Nile
Sennar
South Kordufan
Central Darfur
Blue Nile
South Darfur
East Darfur
West Kordufan
ETHIOPIA
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
SOUTH SUDAN

state via coup d'etat. The Soviet-aligned coup plotters were assassinated, marking the beginning of a long retreat for revolutionary left-wing politics in Sudan.

The Second Sudanese Civil War (1983–2005) began when the northern government imposed Islamic law on the south and sought to control the region's oil fields. This decision overturned the rights established by the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement. In 1989, Omar al-Bashir seized power in a military coup. More than 2 million people died in the long war over oil. Despite adopting the rhetoric of Pan-Arabism and anti-imperialism, Bashir's government in the 1980s and 90s relied heavily on trade and funding from the US and NATO-aligned countries (including China at the time), driving their push to refine oil at a higher rate within a nationalist politics that denied African tribes' right to self-determination.

The US-led War on Terror reshaped regional alliances. Bashir allied with the US, but this would not help him in the coming years. Sanctions soon followed, crippling his ability to operate internationally due to the bloody repression in Sudan and his ties to groups like al-Qaeda.

## WAR IN THE WEST: DARFUR AND THE JANJAWEEDS

Darfur is one of Sudan's least fertile regions, with a population of around 7.5 million and an area approximately the size of Texas. Aside from the lush Marra Mountains (Jebel Marra), the region receives little rain. Seasonal precipitation from June to September supports all agriculture in the region, primarily millet, sorghum, and tobacco.

The area is home to many communities and tribes, distinguished primarily by their language and methods of subsistence. Broadly speaking, the Fur live in the center of Darfur, the Tunjur in the north, the Masalit to the west, and the Zaghawa in the northwest. These are the peoples known as the "African" tribes.

Nomadic Arabic-speaking shepherds and herders have lived for centuries in the arid stretch between Chad, Libya, and Sudan. They share the land with sedentary farmers and the semi-nomadic Zaghawa tribes of northwest Darfur. The Arab nomads, known as the Baggaras, are further divided into sub-tribes such as the Messiria and the Rezeigat. These nomads are primarily cattle and horse herders, relying on grazing land for survival.

The division of people into "Arab" and "African" tribes largely stems from the Chad-Libya war. Muammar al-Gaddafi fueled Arab chauvinism among the Baggaras, some of whom, like the Messiria, already saw themselves as "dark ones" and "red ones." In the mid-80s, Gaddafi armed the Baggaras and convinced many they had the right to overthrow Chad's US-backed president, Hissène Habré. When they failed, the militias fled to Darfur, just as a deadly drought began to ravage the region. The water-poor province now hosted tens of thousands of desperately poor herders, heavily armed with machine guns and a racial ideology.

In 2003, violence erupted in Darfur. The Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA), led by the Zaghawa, Fur, and Masalit, rose up against the government, seizing most of Jebel Marra. The SLA allied with the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) to demand regional autonomy for Darfur. Together, they advanced on several cities, sparking an inter-ethnic insurgency against Bashir's regime. Bashir enlisted Baggara-led militias, supplying arms and money to tribal leaders. He exploited the rift between herders and farmers, turning the former into killers of the latter. These armed men became known as the Janjaweed—"devils on horseback."

The Janjaweed, officially known as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), came under the direct command of the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS). They fought not only in Darfur but also against the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-North (SPLM/A-N) in South Kordofan and Blue Nile. As the war in the south stalled, the Janjaweed escalated their violence against Darfurian villages. Gaddafi armed both the Sudanese Liberation Army and the Janjaweed.

In 2005, the United States, through USAID, the National Endowment for Democracy, and other agencies, supported sectarian, "pro-independence" groups and programs across the south. The long Second Civil War ended with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which passed in a questionable referendum with 98.8% approval. South Sudan was born. Since then, it has become a vassal state to both US and Chinese industrial interests. The world's newest country, half its population is under 18, and nearly half suffers from malnutrition. Despite vast oil reserves, the government lacks the political will to nationalize them, leaving its resources open to exploitation by international capitalists. To the north, the Bashir government lost one of its most lucrative revenue streams.

## WHY DO PEOPLE JOIN THE RSF/JANJAWEEDS?

The RSF has deployed across the country as a mobile force, terrorizing civilians with massacres, rape, and persecution. Why? Joining the militia is one of the few paths to stability. After 2010, austerity cuts slashed public spending, and the Janjaweed seized control of gold mines in Jebel Amir. The war in Darfur—and beyond—has opened opportunities to loot money, goods, and livestock from slaughtered and displaced communities. Ethnic cleansing has a clear economic motive, driven by a lack of jobs due to uneven economic development. The United Nations holds al-Bashir's regime responsible for at least 400,000 deaths and millions of displaced people. Much of this has been carried out by his paramilitary allies.

The RSF receives arms primarily from China, Russia, and Belgium. Under pressure from Saudi Arabia, the Sudanese government deployed the RSF to fight in Yemen. This support boosted the RSF's influence in Sudanese politics and drew young recruits with promises of high pay for impoverished families. Children now make up 40% of the militia.

The RSF has weaponized their socioeconomic marginalization, using looting as revenge against the "urban rich." Most victims are farmers or laborers. The RSF are mercenaries—an impoverished population that has made war their trade, a lumpenproletariat for sale to any political cause. In September 2013, the RSF was unleashed on peaceful demonstrators protesting the Sudanese government's removal of subsidies on basic goods. The crackdown left over 170 dead, exposing the regime's reliance on the militia to crush dissent.

In 2015, convinced of the RSF's effectiveness as a counterinsurgency force, the al-Bashir regime made it Sudan's primary force for patrolling borders and blocking migrant movement, as part of its deal with the European Union (EU). The RSF received EU funds to curb migration flows from Sudan to Europe. The EU also helped build detention facilities for migrants and supplied Sudanese border forces with cameras, scanners, and servers to register refugees. A law passed in January 2017 formally integrated the RSF into the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). This paradoxically made the RSF both autonomous and part of the army, while remaining under the command of President Omar al-Bashir.

On February 27, 2017, Sudanese police violently dispersed hundreds of Ethiopian refugees and asylum seekers protesting hikes in processing fees. The police arrested dozens, sentenced them to 40 lashes, and fined them $800. This is the essence of European interest in groups like the RSF: arm paramilitaries in Africa to trap refugees before they reach the Mediterranean.

## THE REVOLUTION

In December 2018, a new revolution began in Sudan after bread prices tripled. Protests erupted in Atbara, quickly spreading to Khartoum and beyond. Led by the Sudanese Professional Association (SPA), demonstrators rallied under the slogan "Tasgut bas" (just fall, that's all), staging day and night protests and sit-ins, while seeking diplomatic support from the diaspora.

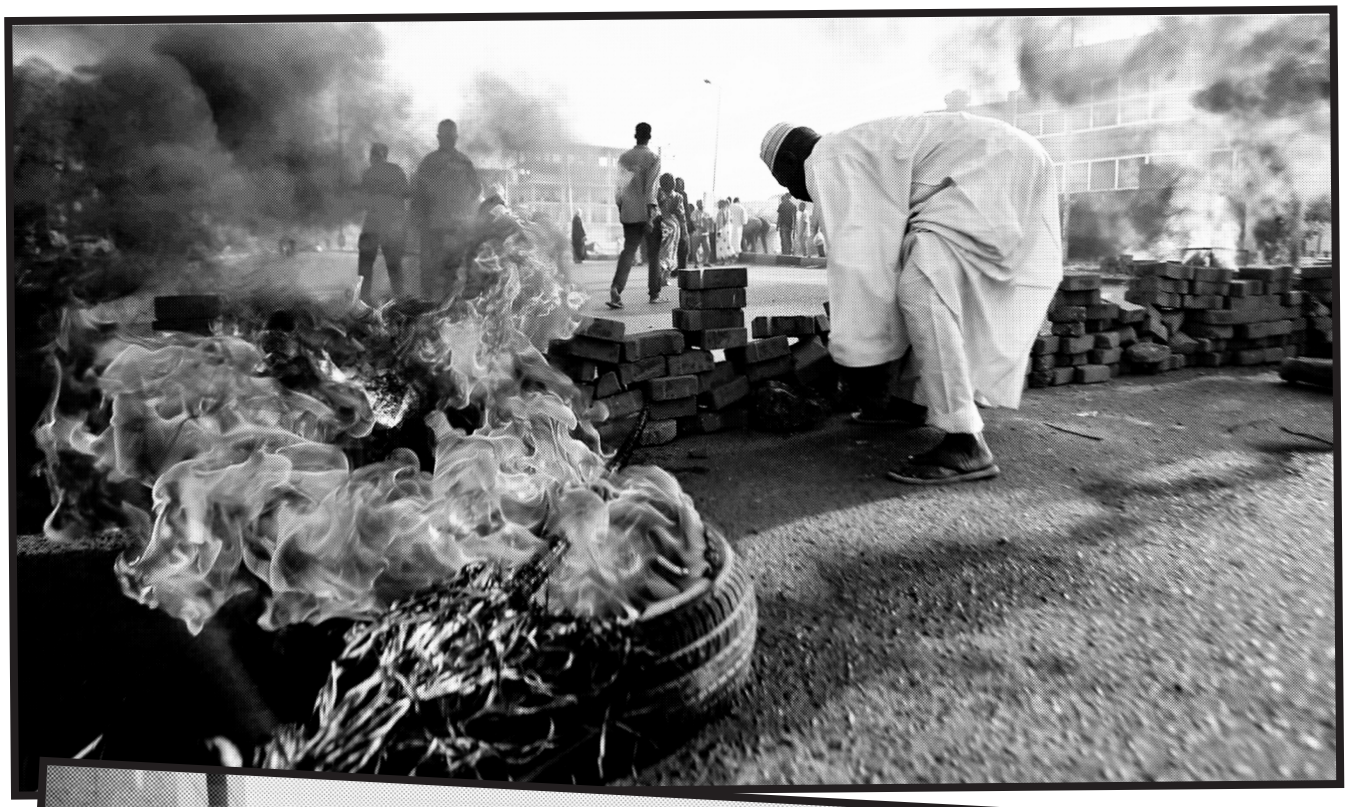
The same officials—Ahmed Harun, former interior minister and mayor of Al-Obeid—who oversaw the massacres of the Massalit people during the early days of the Darfur genocide, were still commanding brutal repression of 2018 protesters by the RSF. This explains the slogan in recent demonstrations: "Ali Osman, you coward! Nafi Ali Nafi, you're useless (ma nafi)."

The core demands were clear: dismantle al-Bashir's decades of authoritarian rule and establish a more democratic system. Protesters called for a transitional government, an end to RSF operations, accountability for human rights violations, and justice for the victims of al-Bashir's regime. These demands for his removal ultimately led to a military coup by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF).

After al-Bashir's ousting in 2019, hopes for a peaceful transition to civilian rule were shattered when the "Transitional Military Council" failed to convene civilian elections as promised. This failure sparked the current war between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

From where we stand, only a sweeping social revolution can end the violence in Sudan. Seize the oil and gold, and use the wealth to fund land reform in the West and South. That is the only way to bring the conflict to a real conclusion. But Sudan's political dependence on foreign powers makes this process impossible. Only a Pan-African war of independence could shatter the grip of foreign capital, allowing Sudanese people to unite for their common good, instead of slaughtering each other over their own resources. This can happen. These are not just problems for the Sudanese. The essential dynamics of world capitalism are visible in starkest relief there.

We reached out to Sudanese revolutionaries about the state of the revolution and civil war.



**R: Ok, so first I just want to give the context of why we're doing this interview. Obviously, there have been a series of uprisings happening around the world, including in Sudan. As far as what Westerners know, or are up to date on, Sudan is a blind spot. We're not very aware or educated about the current situation. There's a lot less news coming out. So the purpose of this interview is to help, particularly Westerners, get a better understanding of the current situation in Sudan.**

**If you want to introduce and contextualize yourselves, and your relationship to Sudan, do you currently live there, whatever is most comfortable for you…**

Alaa: My name is Alaa. I'm a lawyer, and I've been living in Rwanda since July 2023. I work providing legal aid for Sudanese refugees here. I've also recently been to Sudan, so I have a good understanding of the situation there. I know it's hard for people in the West to grasp what's happening in Sudan. The timeline is complicated—there's the revolution, the transitional period, the military coup, and now the war. The relationship between all these events isn't very clear to many outside Sudan.

Before I begin, I want to clarify something about the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), one of the main parties in the war. The RSF is a military group that was used by the government to repress people in Darfur. They were directly involved in the genocide in Darfur. The RSF has long been a tool of the government to carry out repression. What many people don't realize is that the RSF has been receiving support from the European Union through their migration control programs. The European Union has backed them, which has allowed the RSF to strengthen its forces. So now, we're facing a group that was essentially kept alive and empowered by foreign support, particularly from the EU and the West.

*Lt. Gen. Mohamed Hamdan, head of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, 2019*

**R: We know a little bit about the Professional Associations, we've heard about them. Can you talk about what their role was in the uprising and what the current status of them is?**

Alaa: The Sudanese Professional Association (SPA) is the Sudanese version of syndicate coalitions. It's made up of independent syndicates from various professions—doctors, engineers, journalists, and others. When the revolution began, Sudan's traditional workers' political party had already been co-opted by the regime. Or, more accurately, it had been weakened over 30 years of military dictatorship and Islamic rule.

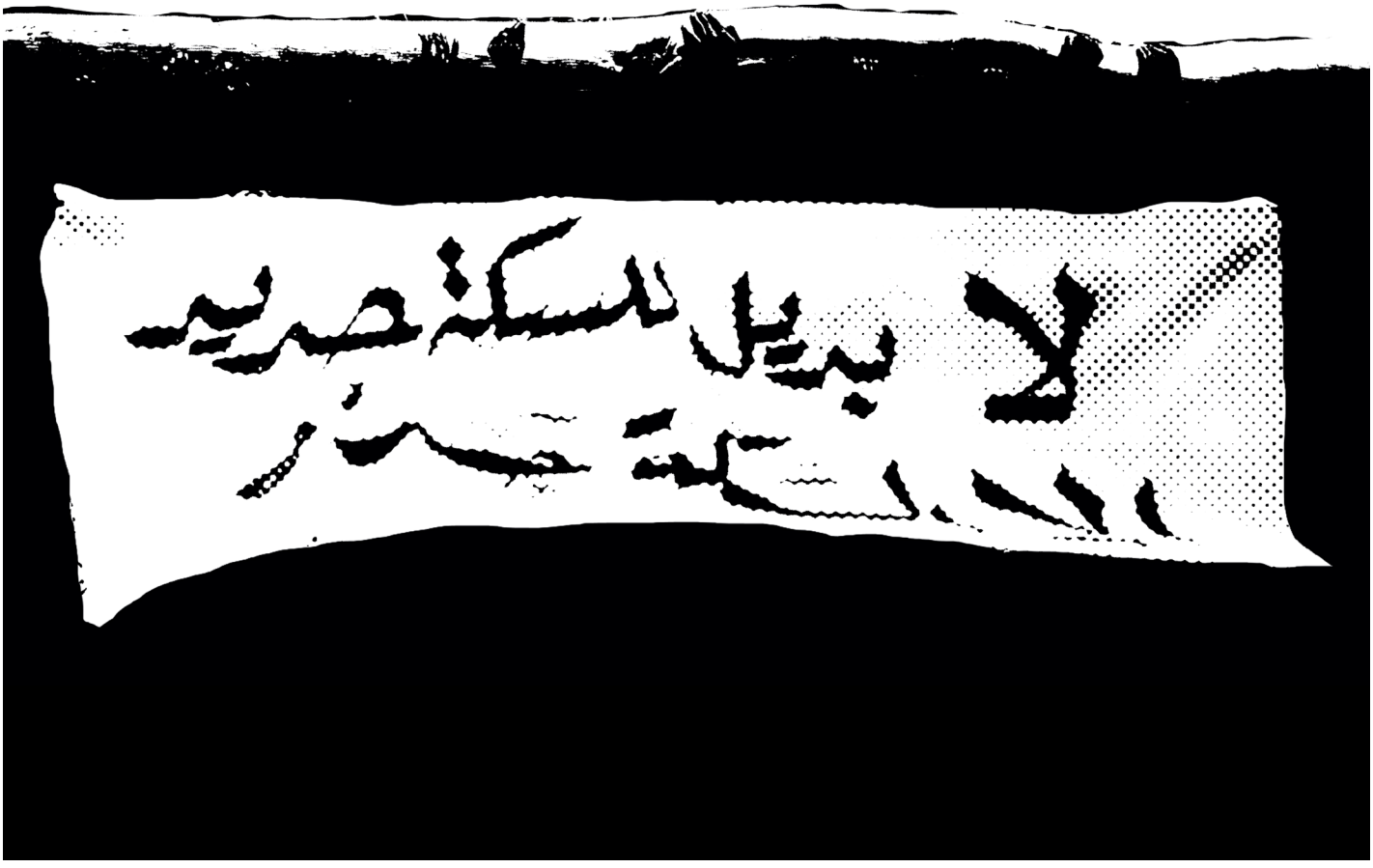
This created a vacuum and a need for an organization to lead the revolution. The syndicates, through the Sudanese Professional Association, stepped into that role and led the revolution. But as the revolution gained momentum, the Resistance Committees emerged. These were neighborhood-based groups that initially pressured the SPA to meet the revolution's demands. Eventually, the Resistance Committees took on the leadership themselves. So, in recent years, the real leadership of the revolution wasn't the Sudanese Professional Association, but rather the neighborhood Resistance Committees.

Ibrahim: Let me add some context to Sudan's history: Since the British left, military control has dominated the country. The Sudanese Armed Forces trace their origins to British colonial rule, and just two years after the British left, the military seized power. In fact, today marks the anniversary of Sudan's first revolution against military rule, which began with the Khartoum uprising, led by another syndicate. This syndicate demanded new elections, but the transitional military council held onto power for 16 more years.

Then another uprising erupted, calling for civilian rule—but that was followed by yet another military coup. This new military government worked to dismantle the popular syndicates and replace them with a government-aligned, pseudo-union movement.

The most recent revolution began with protests against food prices. It started as a grassroots movement in response to the rising price of bread, but it quickly grew. Those who resisted the government formed their own structure—a more centralized organization to coordinate demonstrations and marches—and that became the Professionals Association. Eventually, they began organizing their own protests and issuing statements condemning the military. After Bashir was ousted, the junta took control, and shortly after, the political parties aligned with the Professionals Association began fighting for influence, even attempting to dissolve the SPA.

The revolution had its share of opportunists, which is why, when the second coup occurred—leading to the war—the Resistance Committees rejected the SPA's leadership in the fight against the Transitional Military Council (TMC) and instead embraced the leadership of the neighborhood committees.



**R: What would you say have been some of the biggest obstacles dealing with counter-revolutionary forces following the uprising?**

Ahmed Isam: If I may add, the counter-revolution was made possible because the December revolution ended in a compromise between the military junta and the opportunists within the revolution itself. These opportunists became part of the government, creating a serious division within the revolution. The radical left rejected this arrangement and refused to collaborate with the government. Meanwhile, the EU and the US supported the coalition government between civilians and the military, calling it "a successful model for peace-building and democratic transition." But most Sudanese had already seen how the military could control politics. The revolution's leaders had become puppets of the armed forces, holding press conferences and meetings in places like Paris and the US. That was the first key issue: a deep division within the revolution. The counter-revolution was quick to exploit this rift.

Then came the issue of justice. The regime killed over 300 people during the protests, and more than 1,000 were still missing. The government created a fake committee to "investigate" these deaths, but it led to nothing. The people demanded justice. Even after the "transitional" government was formed, the demonstrations never stopped.

Then, Trump announced that sanctions on Sudan under Bashir could only be lifted if Sudan agreed to normalize relations with Israel. This, too, was deeply unpopular in Sudan. Of course, there are neoliberal forces and certain groups pushing for normalization, but by and large, the idea remains highly unpopular among the majority of Sudanese.

The counter-revolutionaries capitalized on these international pressures and threats to divide the movement even further.

Ibrahim: Another major obstacle facing the revolution has been timing. COVID struck right in the middle of the revolutionary process, triggering a severe economic crisis in an already fragile Sudan. The counter-revolutionary forces invested heavily in worsening this crisis, driving the transitional government toward failure. They also exploited historical tensions between rural and urban areas to fuel tribal conflicts. The RSF, for instance, is closely tied to some tribal interests in the east. They leveraged these connections to block key infrastructure, such as the ports in the east, deliberately deepening the country's economic struggles. They played different groups against each other, using ethnic chauvinist rhetoric to mobilize support.

The counter-revolutionaries framed the economic crisis not as a result of global dynamics or broader issues, but as the work of corrupt, secretive elites—small groups of individuals. They spread conspiracy theories to reinforce this narrative.

**R: Can you talk about the current role of the RSF and how Sudan civilians are responding to them?**

Ibrahim: The RSF is etched in the collective memory of the Sudanese people as the regime's enforcer. It is remembered for its role in the 2003 genocide in Darfur and again in 2011. It was the force that brutally suppressed protesters in the early months of the revolution. Eventually, the RSF tried to rebrand itself. During the period of the Transitional Military Council (TMC), the military was supposed to govern for two years, after which civilian rule would take over. But in those two years, the military worked to weaken any civilian counter-power. That's when the RSF "aligned" itself -- cynically -- with the civilian side. They claimed to be the true counter-power to the junta, with Hemedti, the RSF commander, presenting himself as the "guardian of the revolution."

And that's when the war truly began. In the early days, it was pure chaos. Ultimately, the fighting became a battle between the official Sudanese Army and the RSF. The initial clashes were deeply influenced by the ethnic makeup of the RSF, as they primarily recruit from tribal groups in the western parts of Sudan—groups historically used by the state for ethnic cleansing against African tribes in Darfur. In the first days of the war, the RSF swiftly launched another genocidal campaign against African tribes in Darfur.

The RSF specifically targeted the Masalit and Zaghawa tribes. These attacks have left the Sudanese people in a dire situation, facing two grim choices: either the RSF wins, continuing their massacres on a massive scale, or the "lesser evil"—the Sudanese Army—takes control. Unfortunately, the second option is the popular one, despite the fact that everyone knows it would mean a return to military dictatorship for another 30 years. These are the two stark choices facing the Sudanese people right now.

To put it plainly, the RSF has built its army on a foundation of racism, creating vast racist militias across the country. And that has set everything back.

**R: And are people responding to this dichotomy in any way?**

Alaa: Yes. I don't know the exact figures, because there are significant obstacles to analyzing the situation, including what [the other comrade] mentioned about the militarization of consciousness. At one point, the revolutionary forces were fighting against all forms of repression—fighting the RSF, the army, the Transitional Military Council... essentially, fighting the entire political system. Now, they're faced with a very limited, binary choice. The RSF, through massive and systematic attacks on working-class Sudanese communities, including farming communities, is trying to reshape the country demographically. So, a population that has never before resorted to armed struggle, or used violence to fight back, is now relying on one of their enemies to fight the other.

So, there are remnants of the Resistance Committees that have aligned with the army, along with factions within them that oppose the war altogether. Then, there are the traditional political parties, whose only aim is to maintain or return to power. Some of these parties seem to be aligning with the RSF, hoping that the RSF might create opportunities for them.

The RSF is now directly attacking the revolutionary leadership in the streets. During the war, the Resistance Committees have morphed into something like humanitarian aid groups, now calling themselves "Emergency Response Groups." This seems to be the only way to mobilize while still maintaining a connection to the revolutionary forces. In recent weeks and months, we've seen two parties begin arresting and attacking these humanitarian groups, which are essentially running soup kitchens. So, we now face two main enemies of the revolution, but we don't feel like we have a choice. We have to find a new way forward and rethink what comes next.

Ahmed Isam: The Janjaweed militia, which is how the RSF is mostly known in Sudan, translates to "armed men on horseback" or, in US parlance, perhaps "cowboys." The

Janjaweed were partly founded by Omar Bashir's regime to fight armed resistance groups in Darfur. These militias have been funded by the European Union through the "Khartoum Process," established in 2013 in Malta as a deal between Egypt and Sudan. At the time, Bashir funneled some of this funding to the Janjaweed paramilitaries to protect himself from the army. Later, Bashir sent RSF forces to fight in Yemen alongside Saudi forces against the Ansar Allah guerrillas in Sanaa. This became a major source of funding for the RSF, as they were receiving money not only from the EU but also from the Saudi monarchy.

The RSF is now heavily funded by Mohammed bin Zayed in Abu Dhabi, partly to exploit Sudan's vast mineral resources. The RSF controls the gold mines entirely, and these resources are sent directly to the EU, with none of the proceeds passing through normal tax channels.

The RSF has a long history of directly attacking supply lines, looting food and goods to starve and weaken the cities, which are the centers of the revolutionary movement. As a result, the Resistance Committees have mostly been displaced into neighboring countries. At one point, the frontline fighters of the revolution—known as الغاضبون ("The Angry")—who operated somewhat like Western black blocs, were often killed while fighting against the coup. Some of them have taken up arms by joining the military to fight the RSF. After all, war is just a continuation of politics by other means, and this is how the counter-revolution is advancing—by taking up arms against the people.

Ibrahim: The counter-revolution in Sudan is not just about the army. It was already in place during the period of the Transitional Military Council, and it's crucial to understand the broader forces at play. The extractive goals of international capitalism are driven by a global alliance involving the US, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. The RSF, as a militia, plays a central role in maintaining the extractive dynamics of Sudan's economy. So, the Sudanese revolution isn't just up against the RSF—it's facing these international powers as well. The UAE supplies the RSF with weapons. Now, the RSF is openly claiming that they are fighting "Islamic terrorists," accusing the Sudanese army of supplying arms and goods to Hamas, and positioning themselves as essential to Western powers in their global war on Islamic terrorism.

On the other hand, the Sudanese army is receiving drones from Iran. In this small example, we see how Sudan is becoming a battleground for regional powers, specifically Iran and the UAE (and by extension, the US). Amid this conflict, Sudan is fighting to protect its sovereignty—its control over its land, farming, resources, and its democratic future in general.

**R: What could be a positive outcome from this situation?**

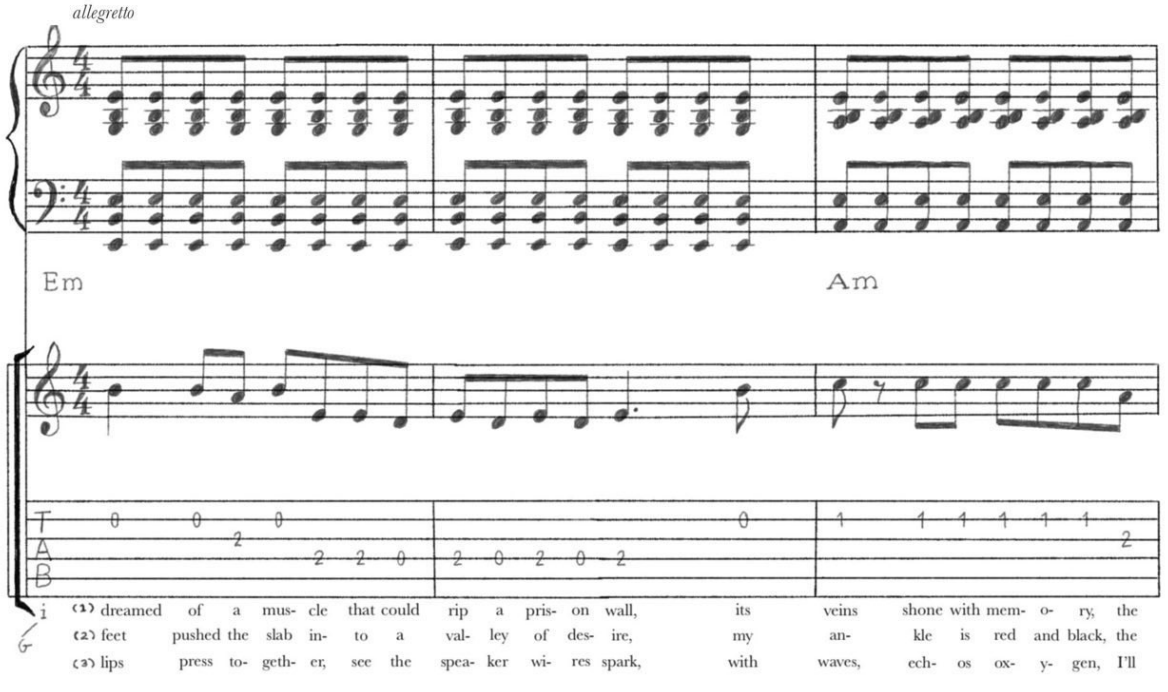
Ahmed Isam: I don't know. All I can say is that the Sudanese resistance structures, built over the past five years, now need to be reorganized around a new common vision. Whether in the diaspora or within Sudan, everything must be focused on ending the war and creating a new revolutionary framework and strategy.

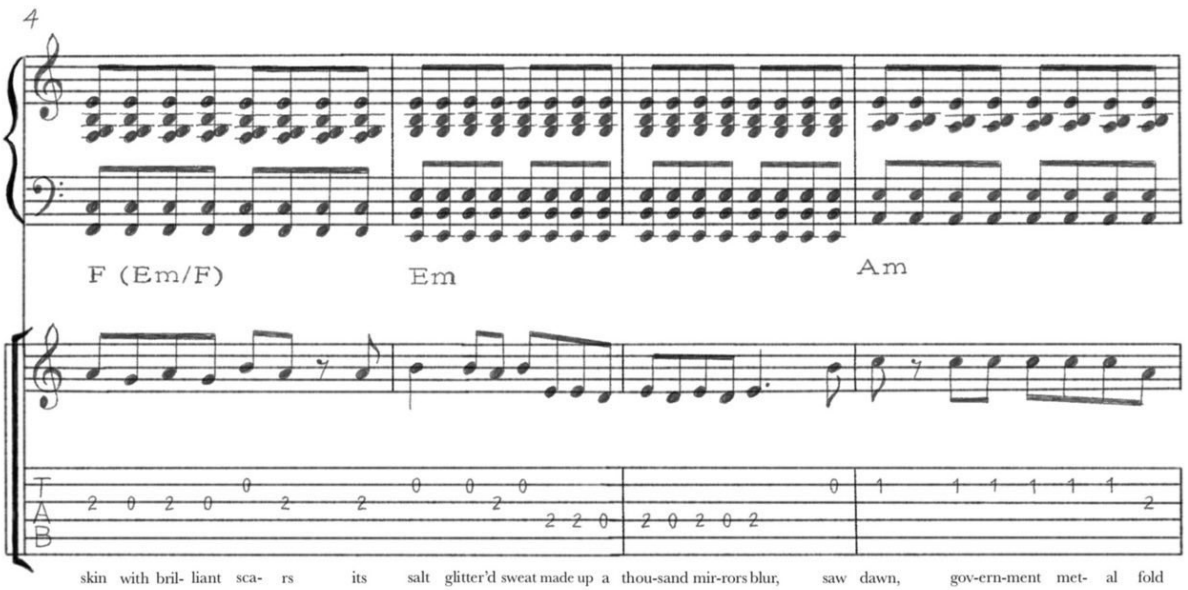
Ibrahim: My biggest fear is that the racial mobilization in this war will foster a lasting culture of separatism in Sudan, where people are expected to stay within their own regions. We need a peaceful resolution, and we need it immediately. The war isn't just about killing—it's about famine, cholera, yellow fever. Epidemics are spreading, and many are dying. The war is expanding, and the world is starting to forget, dismissing it as "just another conflict in Africa."

The Sudanese conflict and revolution cannot be separated from the support structures fueling the war. This isn't just another conflict in Sudan—it's part of a broader wave of extractive policies and struggles led by the US and Israel, impacting the entire region. Revolutionary forces still exist, and whenever the revolution is criticized, every side claims to represent it. No one can openly oppose the revolution; everyone feels the need to lay claim to it. In that, there is a small crack—a tiny opening through which the revolution might survive the war, through a peaceful resolution, and endure in memory after the war is over.

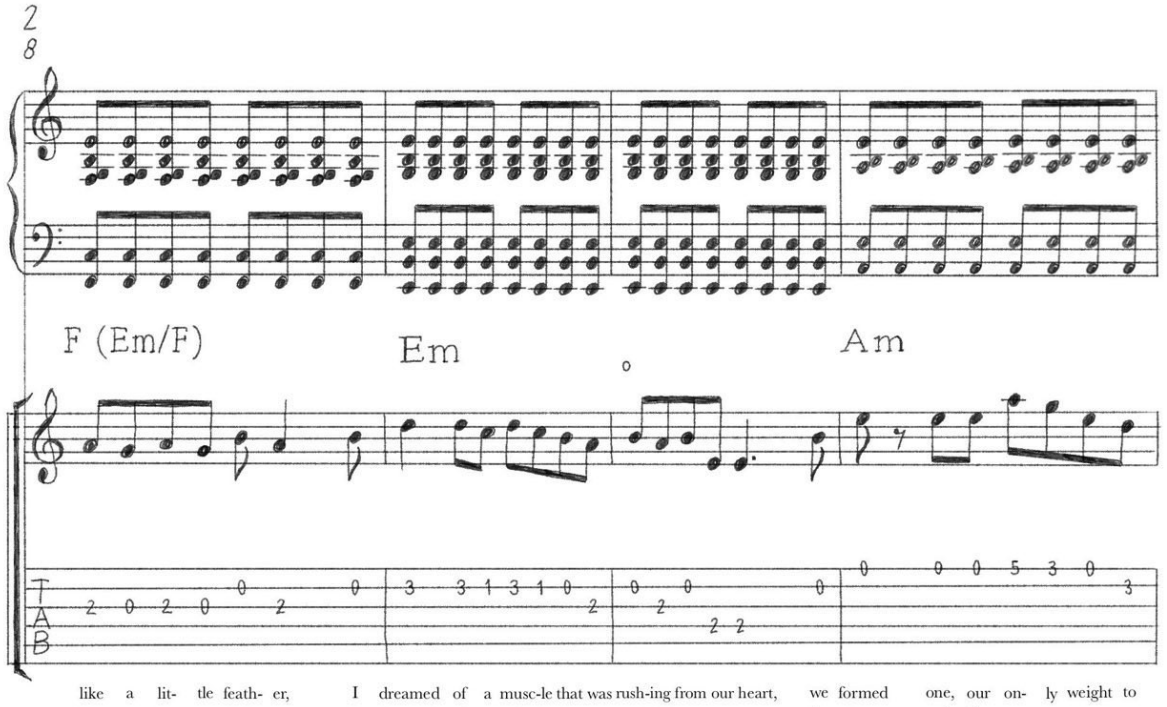
*Alaa, Youth in Action*
*Ibrahim, Sudan Uprising*
*Ahmed Isam, Sudan Uprising*

# YOU, US MAKING REVOLUTION

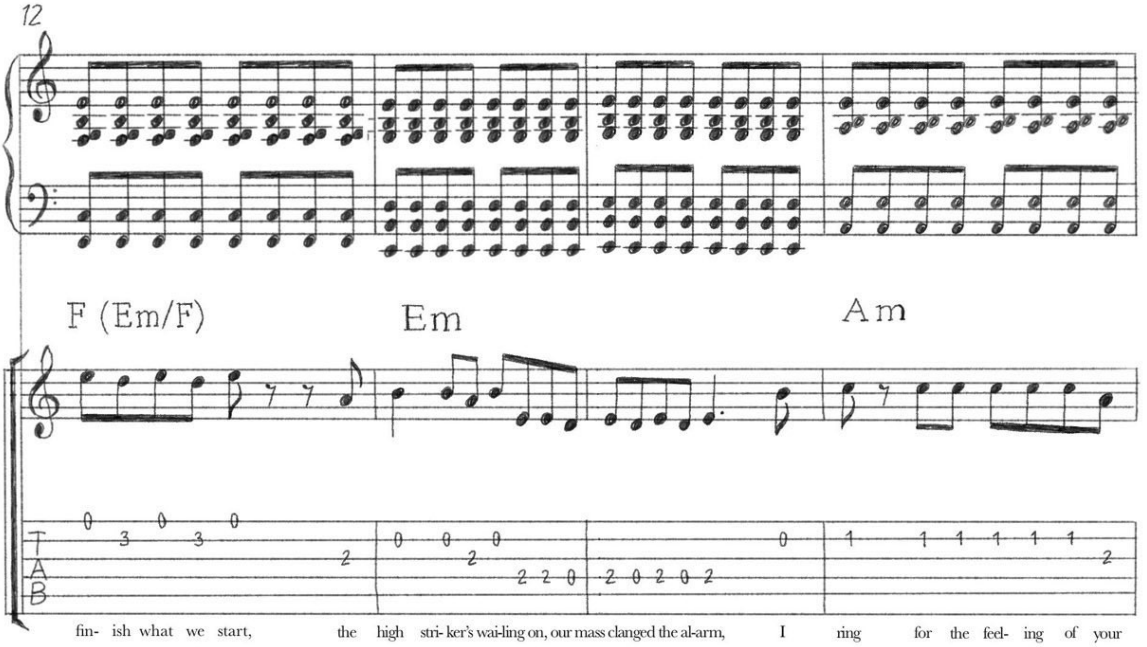




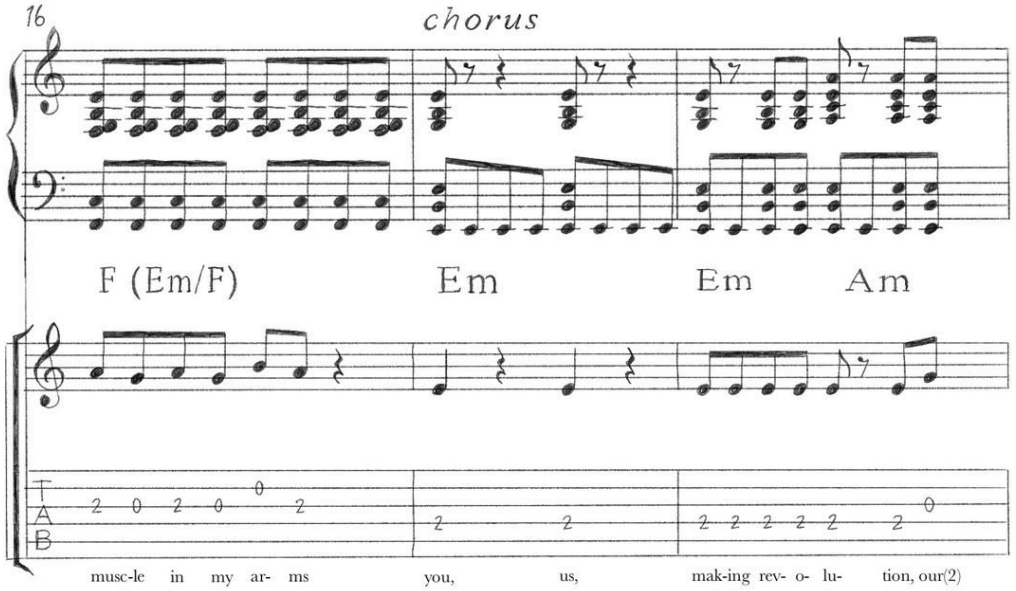

skin with bril- liant sca- rs its salt glitter'd sweat made up a thou-sand mir-rors blur, saw dawn, gov-ern-ment met- al fold
high-way's in a pi- le we walked to the o- cean in a ter- ri- fy- ing line, the sha- dow of ec- sta- sy, our
see you in the da- rk (jump to 8)




like a lit- tle feath- er, I dreamed of a musc-le that was rush-ing from our heart, we formed one, our on- ly weight to
knees a- bove the bri- ne I dreamed of a sprin-ter stri-king mat-ches 'cross the earth, the lung of the run- ners spun on
I dreamed of an i- ron string, the lou- dest vo-cal chord, the mag- net, our mel- o- dy a




fin- ish what we start, the high stri- ker's wai-ling on, our mass clanged the al-arm, I ring for the feel- ing of your
beat our breath is on the calf's rest- less watch-ing while the boss is on his heels, it burns in the mar- a- thon of
sal- i- va- ting oar (jump to chorus)




musc-le in my ar- ms you, us, mak-ing rev- o- lu- tion, our(2)
cha-sing what is ne- ar you, us, mak-ing rev- o- lu- tion, our(3)
you, us, mak-ing rev- o- lu- tion (repeat 4x)

# TIP of the SPEAR

## Looking Back on Looking Back: James "Yaki" Sayles and Organizing Politics Underground

by Revolutionary Intercommunalism Research Group

Authoritarianism is spreading across the globe. As the cost of living increases and ecological collapse displaces communities worldwide, the urgency to struggle against injustices and inequalities becomes ever more pressing. So too does the state's need to crush protest movements and organizers, to control, surveil, and demoralize entire populations. Disruptive protest movements and urban rebellions have not stymied this dynamic in the least, despite drawing in billions of people across the world. In some cases, national rulers and corporate oligarchs panic under the weight of social anger, prompting police and military leaders to take on greater responsibilities in governing daily life.

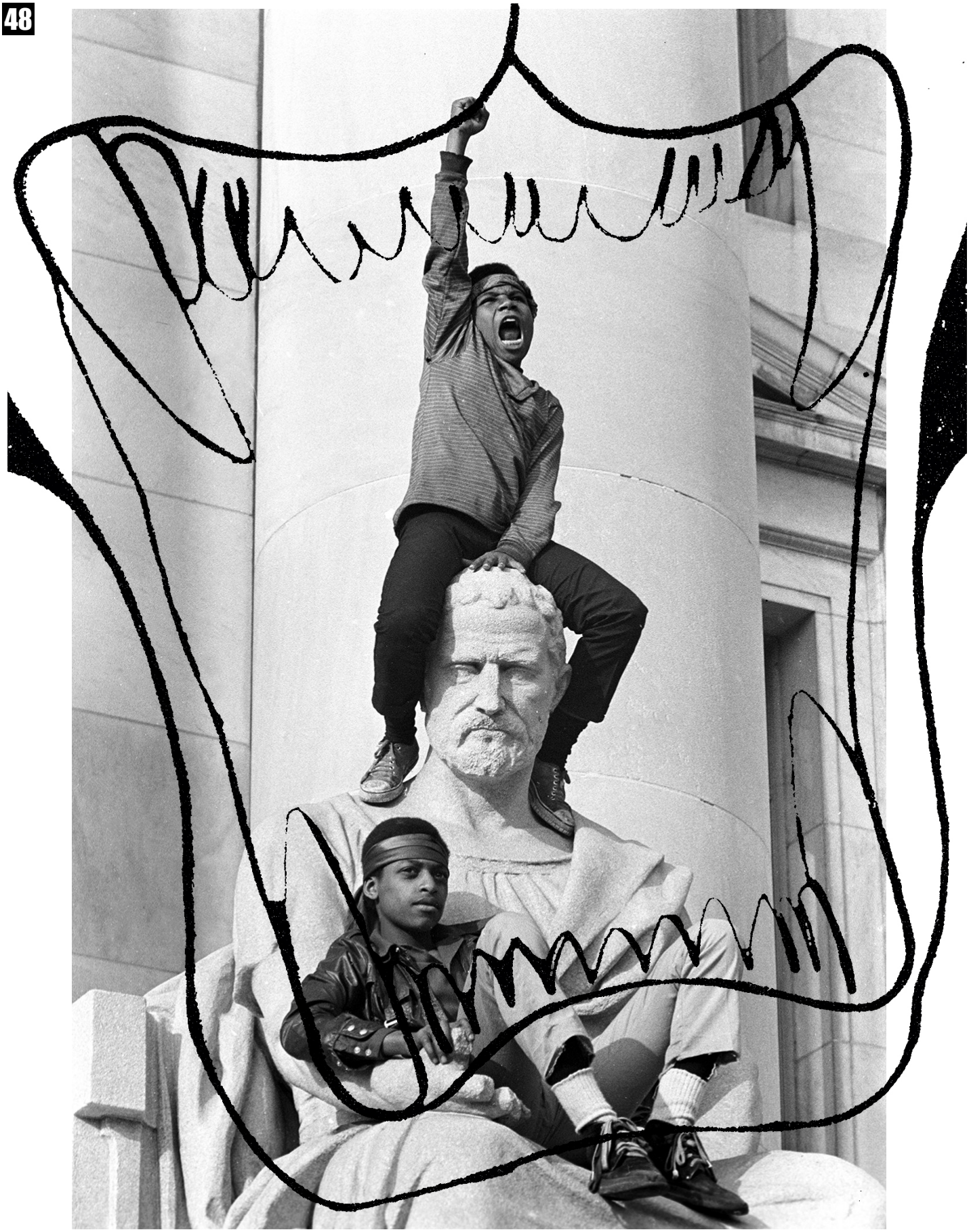
In light of all of this, the need for better organization is becoming clear to many people who have participated in protests, riots, and uprisings in the past years. But debates over what kind of organization are as central to radical and revolutionary movements as the goals and visions they espouse. This debate is not new. In the 20th century, subversive groups coordinated their efforts according to their platforms and theories of change. From their ideology emerged their theories of organization, tactics, and strategy. Today, things are a bit different.

Protest movements in the US have grown and sharpened since the 2009 riots in Oakland, California, following the murder of Oscar Grant III by Oakland police officer Johannes Mehserle. In each wave of resistance, loosely organized groups—friends, neighbors, students, anarchists, and spontaneity-oriented Marxists—have overcome ideological, tactical, and political hurdles in the heat of struggle. Together, these movements have brought tens of millions into the streets. Protest movements and riots have forced the ruling classes to alter their policies and plans, pushing them further toward authoritarianism as they remain unwilling or unable to cave to the pressures from popular rage below.

Participants in Occupy Wall Street or the 2013 Justice for Trayvon Martin protests may not have had a clear ideological direction or strategy. Today, millions of people have a much sharper understanding of the world—and what is needed to change it. Even Donald Trump has ascended to power by rebranding the Republican Party as a force of destabilization, rebelliousness, and rule-breaking. While the insurrectionists of decades past focused largely on tactical escalation, pitting the committed against the faint-hearted within movements, today, several competing currents are vying for prominence within society, and they are willing to take increasingly dire risks to do so.

Within these left wing currents—abolitionist, anarchist, communist, and democratic-socialist, the four most influential—there are obvious similarities, but also sharp political and strategic differences. Some of these currents differ more from themselves than from others. To understand how, we must look at the organizational theories that have emerged from these tendencies. We also have to appreciate that these are not hermetically-sealed groups. The liberatory movements of the last 15 years have produced a large area of activity and subversion, and the theories of those who populate this "area" often overlap: abolitionists with anarchist organizational models, anarchists with communist theories, democratic socialists with abolitionist ideas, and so on.

While much can be said about specific practices—decision-making, note-taking, facilitation, membership—we'll focus on how these organizations relate to non-members, to acquaintances, and to strangers.



*On May 1, 1970, thousands of protesters from across the country gathered on the New Haven Green and Yale's Old Campus in response to the kidnapping and murder of Alex Rackley, a Black Panther Party member, in 1969. The defendants, known as the New Haven Nine, were on trial for Rackley's murder.*

*Mass Organizations:* The primary goal of most groups, though often unrealized, is to create mass public organizations—"aboveground" groups with open membership, visible offices, websites, and accessible criteria for joining. The goal here is growth, reaching as many people as possible. In the midst of spontaneous upheaval, groups organized around this model use the opportunity to recruit. They are generally not the groups to spearhead or agitate for militant action, as their members' identities and infrastructure are easily accessible and therefore at a higher risk of repression. Moreover, recruiting a large number of people incentivizes organizers to appeal to popular interests and concerns, which are shaped by the status quo. This group risks becoming reformist. If it can resist the pressure to compromise, so the theory goes, they stand a great chance at influencing the direction of an uprising or even a revolution.

*Collectives:* Some groups prefer to stay small, public, with closed or hard-to-attain membership. Their ideas and activities are clear and visible, but their operations remain tightly controlled. Their focus is on precision and commitment. Their membership is often well-known to their community, but more or less secret or unpublicized.

This type of organization typically provides logistical support, media operations, and technical aid to struggles. Movements could not take place without them. Truly, they are the backbone of protest camps, demonstrations, jail support, and countless direct-action networks. While they sometimes lead, it's not usually their intent. They prefer to work within an "ecology" of efforts, specializing in a few tasks. Because they do not usually vie for influence over the political and strategic direction of the movements they support, their efforts are vulnerable to recuperation, as other forces shamelessly take control of struggles.

*Affinity Groups:* Particularly favored by anarchists, these groups are clandestine, small, and often invisible. They have no known membership, no clear entry points, no offices, and typically no reliable means of contact. Their goal is safety, agility, and effectiveness.

At high points in struggle, this form of organization is often associated with a strategy of "decentralized autonomy" or "diversity of tactics." When many such groups come together, they do not usually directly collaborate on specific plans. Instead, they respect each other's freedom and security to pursue their own initiatives, confident that their actions align with the movement's overall political goals. Due to their clandestine nature, these groups can employ militant methods safely, but generally at the cost of losing touch with a broader base of potential recruits or direct support. Struggles cannot do without groups like this. Still, affinity groups cannot by themselves lead, expand, defend, or accomplish all of the goals a liberatory movement may set for itself.

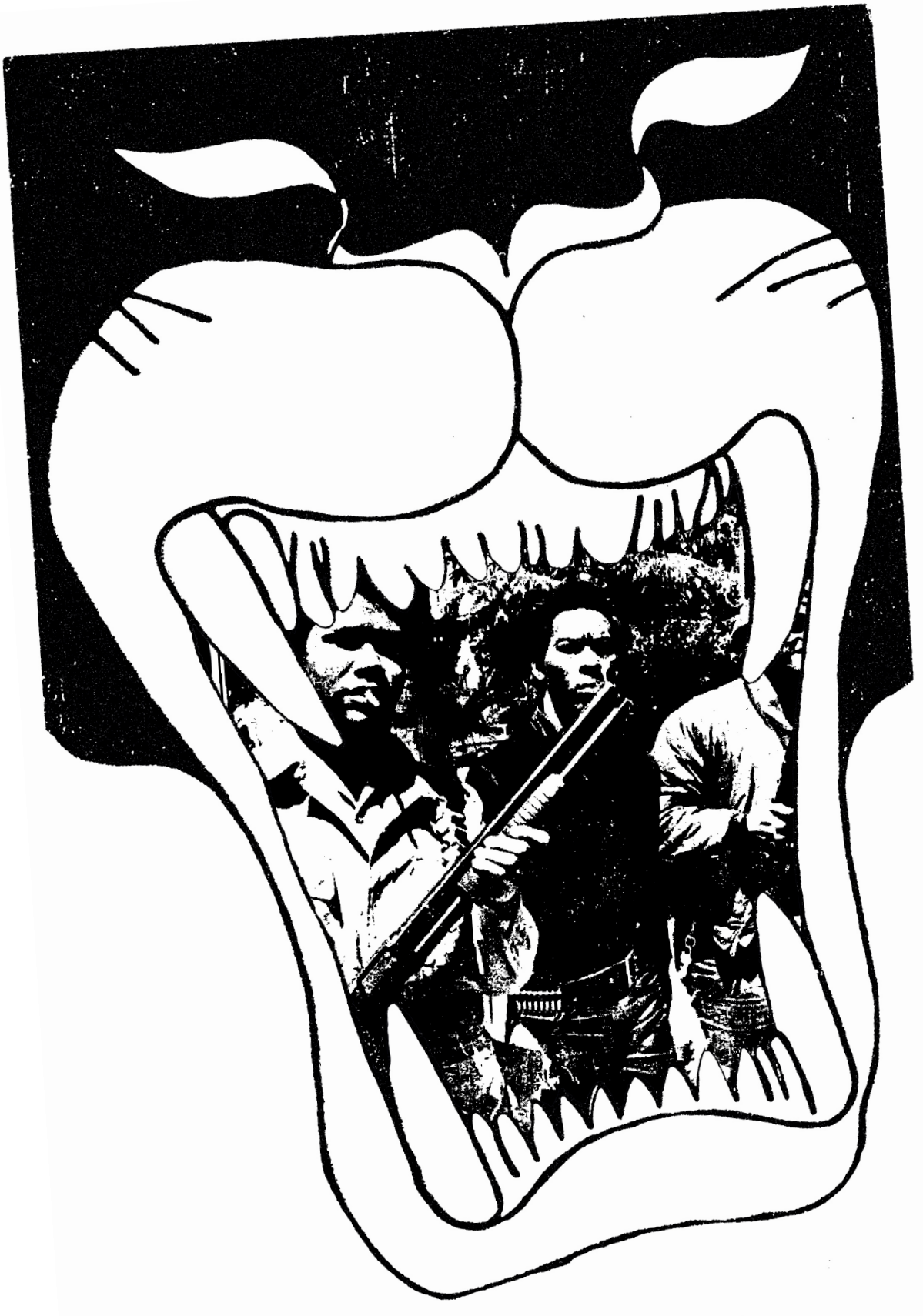
*Aboveground/underground coalition:* There is a growing desire to link aboveground and underground forms and styles of organizing. Some hope to create movements that can utilize separate strategies, based on different ideas of change, all linked together. The groups in this framework operate separately—aboveground groups work in the public sphere, while underground activists carry out direct action away from public scrutiny. Although it did not start out this way, this is somewhat similar to how the Stop Cop City movement operated. There are probably countless examples in, for instance, the so-called "anti globalization movement" of the 90s and early 00s of this arrangement as well. This model aims to involve large numbers in visible work while keeping clandestine aspects intact.

When the same people fill both aboveground and underground roles, the movement is vulnerable—easy to infiltrate, attack, and monitor. Split the roles, and division could follow. Logistically, the tasks are different, and require different skils. Ideologically, the challenges confronting each group demand different considerations. Functionally, the aboveground group may operate legally— solely handling media, fundraising, and recruitment. But if they are repressed, the underground is left exposed, without a rearguard to nurture it.

While this approach may seem practical, it risks fusing the three models improperly. It combines both the strengths and, more importantly, the weaknesses of each. History shows that, despite its appeal, this approach doesn't always deliver the desired outcomes.

In this essay, we will argue for the necessity of building movements and organizations based on the principle of mass clandestinity: groups that are both large and secretive. These movements would have no visible membership, no known leaders, and no headquarters. Nevertheless, they would be able to recruit new members and cultivate many forms of participation. Rooted in secrecy, they would have the strength and scope of a mass phenomenon, not just of a collective, specific project, or affinity group.

To support this argument, we will analyze the Black Liberation Army and an essay by New Afrikan former prisoner of war James "Yaki" Sayles. We will also explore the global context behind the theories and strategies of the BLA, specifically by focusing on the "foco theory" in Latin America, and its long global influence.




## WHAT WAS THE BLACK LIBERATION ARMY?

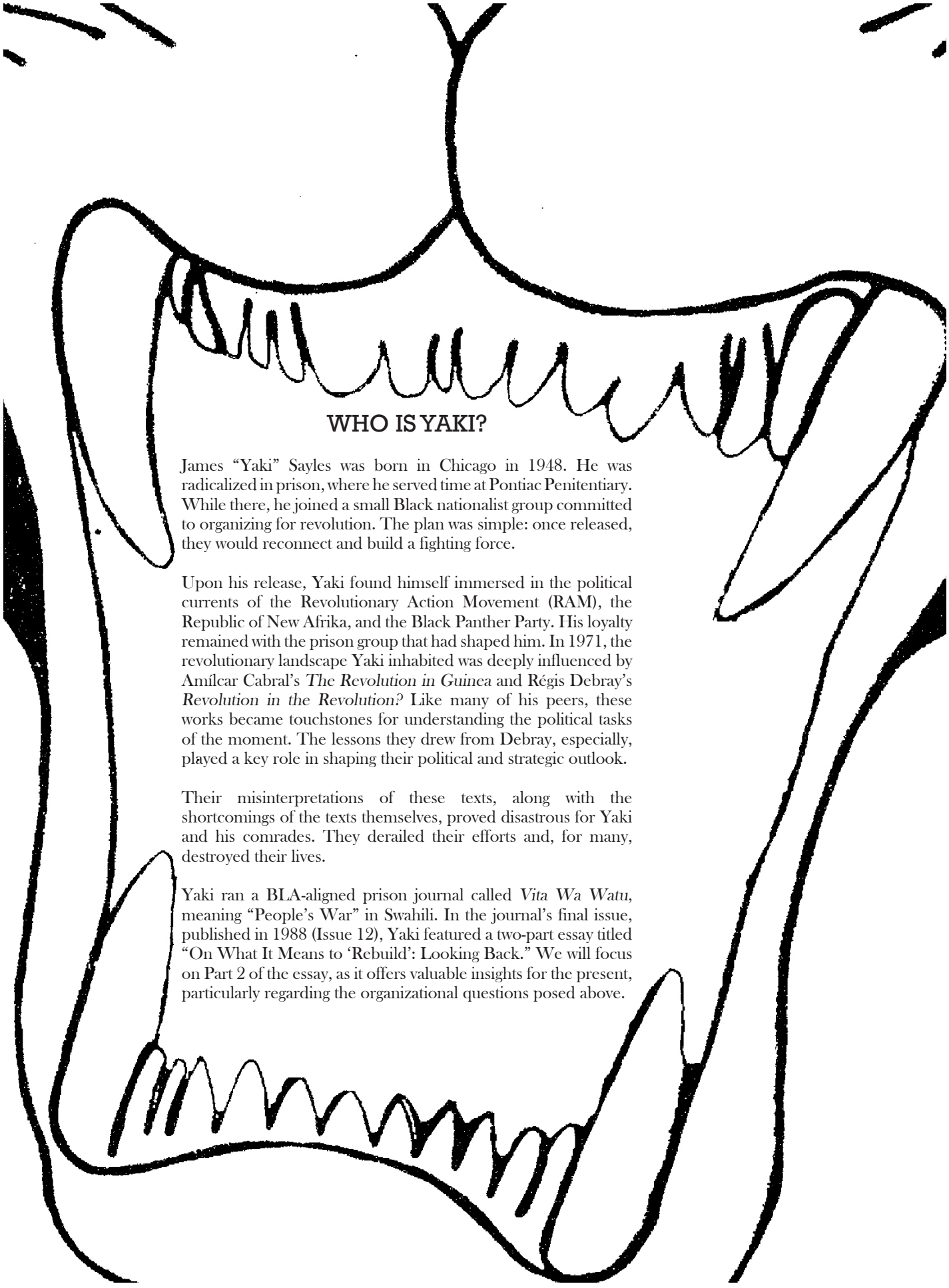
The origins of the Black Liberation Army (BLA) are contested. Most commentators agree on some basic facts: The BLA emerged in the early 1970s as a direct response to the systemic oppression and violent repression faced by Black communities in the United States. Born from the radicalized fringes of the Black Panther Party (BPP), the BLA was composed of militants who sought to dismantle the structures of white supremacy and capitalist exploitation through armed struggle. Rejecting the slow reforms of mainstream civil rights movements and the centralizing structure of the BPP, the BLA believed liberation could only be achieved through decisive, direct action—an armed confrontation with the forces of the racial state.

The BLA was a clandestine and decentralized organization. As repression of the Black revolutionary left, and of the militant New Left in general, became increasingly violent and desperate, some Panthers felt the Party's public orientation was no longer tenable. Chief among this camp were the Panther 21 defendants, most of whom lived in New York City. By 1970, at least 14 Panthers had been killed by police.

Throughout the 1970s, the BLA launched a series of bold, violent actions aimed at destabilizing the state. In 1971, they raided a New York City police station, seizing weapons and ammunition. In Atlanta, a police officer was ambushed, and BLA militants took his badge and weapon. Over the next year, they executed several bank robberies to fund their operations. In 1972, the BLA ambushed police officers in Queens, New York, killing one and wounding several others. That same year, they bombed police stations and courthouses, targeting law enforcement and the judiciary.

In 1973, the BLA engaged in a deadly shootout in San Francisco, killing two officers, then assassinated a police officer in Oakland. They also attempted a dramatic prison break, which ended in a shootout. Cells continued their attacks in 1974, bombing courthouses and orchestrating a successful jailbreak in Maryland to free Black Panthers and other radicals. In 1975, BLA commandos carried out another robbery and engaged in a violent shootout in St. Louis, killing and wounding several officers.

In 1979, the BLA liberated Assata Shakur from the NJ Clinton Correctional Facility for Women. As a result, several other members were eventually captured and sent to prison, including Sundiata Acoli, Sekou Odinga, Marilyn Buck, and Sylvia Baraldini; Shakur remains free, living in exile in Cuba to this day. By the end of the 1970s, despite their coordinated assault on state power, the BLA had been relentlessly pursued and crushed by the government.



## WHO IS YAKI?

James "Yaki" Sayles was born in Chicago in 1948. He was radicalized in prison, where he served time at Pontiac Penitentiary. While there, he joined a small Black nationalist group committed to organizing for revolution. The plan was simple: once released, they would reconnect and build a fighting force.

Upon his release, Yaki found himself immersed in the political currents of the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), the Republic of New Afrika, and the Black Panther Party. His loyalty remained with the prison group that had shaped him. In 1971, the revolutionary landscape Yaki inhabited was deeply influenced by Amílcar Cabral's *The Revolution in Guinea* and Régis Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution?* Like many of his peers, these works became touchstones for understanding the political tasks of the moment. The lessons they drew from Debray, especially, played a key role in shaping their political and strategic outlook.

Their misinterpretations of these texts, along with the shortcomings of the texts themselves, proved disastrous for Yaki and his comrades. They derailed their efforts and, for many, destroyed their lives.

Yaki ran a BLA-aligned prison journal called *Vita Wa Watu*, meaning "People's War" in Swahili. In the journal's final issue, published in 1988 (Issue 12), Yaki featured a two-part essay titled "On What It Means to 'Rebuild': Looking Back." We will focus on Part 2 of the essay, as it offers valuable insights for the present, particularly regarding the organizational questions posed above.

*Militants greeting a peasant in Guinnea Bissau*

# LOOKING BACK ON "LOOKING BACK"

*Analyzing ideological missteps within the BLA*

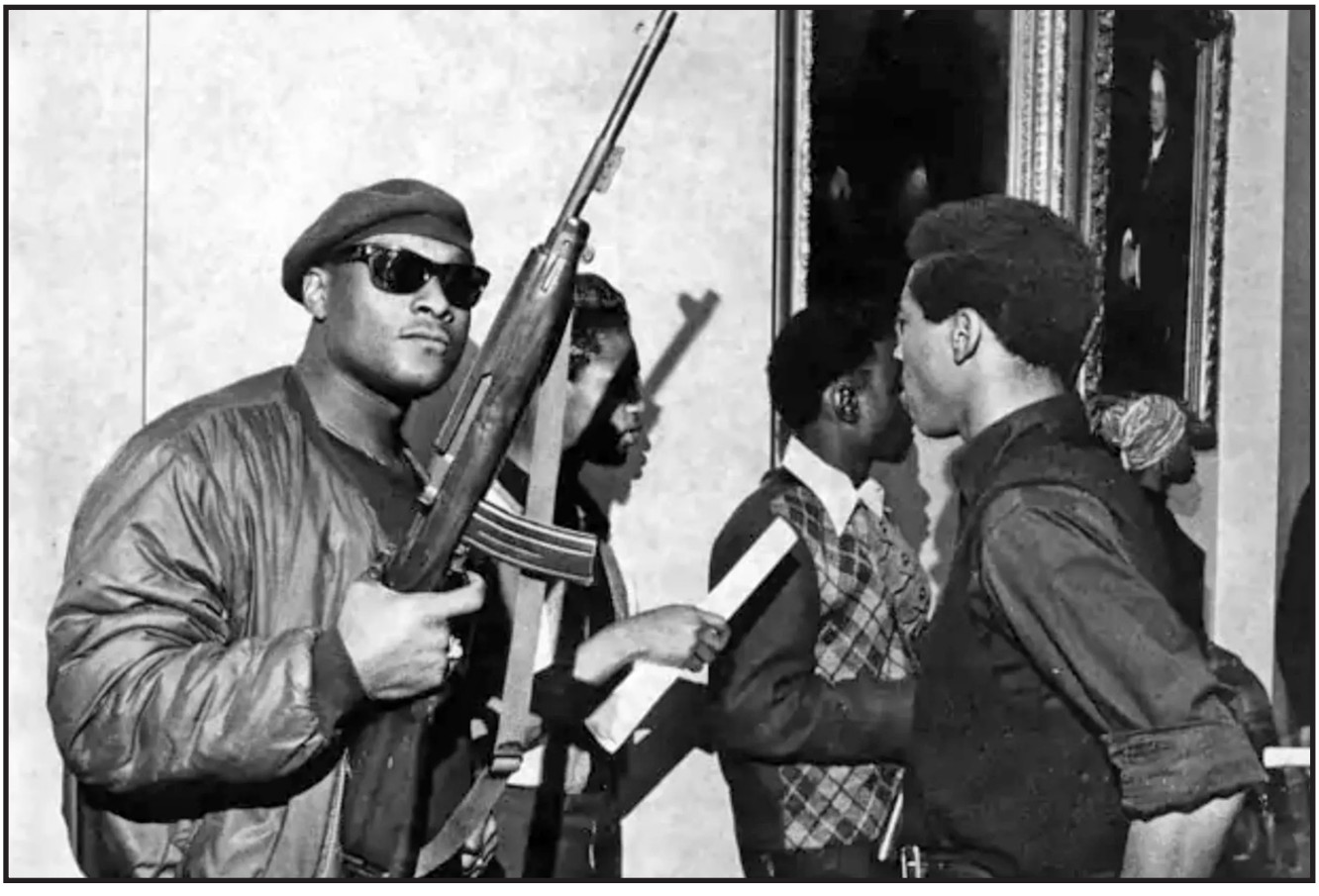
*"The BLA-CC became a vanguard without a rearguard, because it hadn't assumed total responsibility for the political as well as the military activity of the masses—just as it had left the sphere of providing a base for its own support... to forces outside its ranks."*

*"From its very beginning, the BLA was beset with contradictions not only over ideology, but over structural form. The definition of a 'politico-military' organization relates to both these areas, and has always been approached by two opposing points of view."*

Organizational and tactical proposals emerge from strategic ideology, which emerges from political conditions. Those who believe that tactics can be used at a certain juncture by groups or individuals "without a strategy" may be mistaken. The strategy of those who refuse to grapple with politics in a general sense is more grim than grandiose.

The animating premise of the BLA—to build the "armed front" without first building a party, to engage in militant tactics without waiting for a coherent strategy—was not a unique historical development, but rather an idea present throughout the world in the early '70s. This worldview remains extremely popular and may even be hegemonic within radical and militant circles globally. Yaki begins his analysis here, unsurprisingly, by connecting the BLA's early theories to the writings of Régis Debray. More specifically, he critiques their (incorrect) interpretation of Debray's "foco theory," as well as the context that gave that theory popularity: strategic collapse in the face of unrelenting repression.

By the early 1970s, the "entire movement was being forced underground," writes Yaki. Raids on offices, murders, beatings, and even massacres were increasingly used by the state against radical movements of the time, not just the BPP. The Students for a Democratic Society had already fragmented completely. Most of the national leadership abandoned mass organizing in favor of a decade-long bombing campaign as the Weather Underground Organization. The Black Mask/ Up Against the Wall! Motherfucker group also left New York City to participate in armed resistance elsewhere. Sections of



the Puerto Rican nationalist movement formed the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN), a clandestine, cell-based organization. Many believed the mass structures of the preceding years were untenable and that a new strategy, based completely in clandestinity, had to be developed. [Editor: for more, read "The Student Intifada and the Coming Revolution," Radar #1.]

Yaki tells us that this was the context in which the BLA began conducting its actions. Whereas the Black Panther Party held offices, ran a newspaper, hosted press conferences, and organized demonstrations, the Black Liberation Army was a completely decentralized "front." Despite its name, it was never an army. It was never really an organization at all. To avoid police infiltration or assassinations, members formed "cells" consisting only of those with whom they had the utmost trust. There was no chain of command and no formal structure for decision-making. The BLA functionally lacked a unifying theory, logistics, or overarching plans.

## STRATEGIC DISSENSUS

According to Yaki, the BLA was "fighting a war" without a unified conception of who their allies were—or even what their goals were.

A significant part of their later confusion stemmed from their lack of ideological and strategic clarity. There was no consensus on whether they were fighting to build a New Afrikan republic in the Black Belt or to overthrow the US government and establish Black power across society. This division not only muddled their strategic vision but also weakened their organizational coherence. Without agreement on long-term objectives, their actions lacked direction and were unable to withstand the setbacks and difficulties that followed.

As repression continued to mount against left-wing movements, BLA commandos escalated their retaliation against the state, especially the police. The impressive and justified actions of the movement were not enough to curb the tidal wave crashing down on them, as responding to every attack on the movement would have required a large, resourceful organization—precisely the kind of thing the BLA set out to avoid.

Their only clear unity was tactical: build the armed front, attack the police, expropriate banks to fund the guerrilla war. This "tactical" mentality may be familiar to some militant organizers today. To some extent, contemporary movements have sought to make a virtue of necessity, actively celebrating and pursuing organizational and theoretical models that presume great disharmony and confusion. No surprise, then, that they must reinvent themselves every few years.

*"Repression of the movement...was of a qualitative nature, demanding more than mere armed responses by an isolated section of the movement."*

## THE DIVISION BETWEEN POLITICAL AND MILITARY STRUGGLE

*"We saw 'armed struggle' one-sidedly and superficially from a theoretical as well as structural standpoint. On one hand, our tendency was to view armed struggle only in terms of armed actions, rather than as "politics with bloodshed," i.e., a political-social revolution employing armed forms of struggle as well as unarmed forms."*

The BLA did not simply reject bourgeois political parties; they rejected the entire idea of the party—of a single unifying organization that would bring together collectives, circles, groups, and individuals. They could not imagine an organization that operated in secrecy while simultaneously conducting both political and military actions. Instead, they believed that armed struggle could only occur independently of mass political movements. To protect themselves and others, they believed armed militants could rely only on a very loose network of guerrilla cells. Beyond a structural proposal, this perspective mistakenly treated tactics and "armed struggle" as entirely separate from other forms of politics.

This was a catastrophic strategic error. As Yaki puts it:

*"IN EFFECT, it was as if the Bolsheviks had said they'd build the armed front, and let the Mensheviks build the mass front; as if Mao had said the CCP would build the armed front, and they'd let Chiang Kai-Shek and the Kuomintang build the mass front. There is no way to insure that armed actions will operate 'in conjunction with the rising militancy of the masses' unless the vanguard party—the politico-military organization—is leading and coordinating both 'fronts'/all forms of struggle."*

The BLA had no shortage of moral support. Neighbors and civilians never betrayed their fighters to the police. But sympathy alone wasn't enough. Without a clear political strategy to turn that support into active participation, their efforts lacked the force needed for the "people's war" they envisioned. They believed the "armed front" would spark the revolutionary struggle's rebirth, but without the mass involvement required for such a transformation, their hopes were empty.

This should be a familiar pattern to some readers today. We might revise this section to add, "it would be as if the anarchists had said they'd build the armed front, and let the liberals build the mass front."

## THE BLA IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

In the writings of Yaki, the Weathermen, the Panthers, and other militants of the time, one refrain echoes through reflections, interviews, and memoirs: "...and then, we read *Revolution in the Revolution?* by Régis Debray..."

We don't want to overstate the book's influence on the events of the era, but no analysis of these groups is complete without understanding the spirit of the times that led so many young Americans to hold it in such regard. So, what was it?

*Revolution in the Revolution?* was released in 1967 and circulated at the Organization of Latin American Solidarity (OLAS) conference in Havana. Among those in attendance were Robert F. Williams, Kwame Ture, John Gerassi, Ted Gold, and a host of other US activists, joining thousands of socialists, communists, and organizers from across the hemisphere. Notably absent, however, were Che Guevara and the book's author, Régis Debray. The reason? Both were deep in the Bolivian jungle, in Ñancahuazú, laying the groundwork for an armed nucleus—or foco—to build the revolution in South America.

In the months that followed, Debray's booklet was widely distributed throughout the Caribbean and Latin America.

*Regis Debray, Bolivia, 1967*

Its ideas helped spark bold, controversial campaigns in Guatemala, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Argentina, Paraguay, Brazil, and Bolivia. A Fatah reading group in Beirut used it to develop armed PLO cadres, while fedayeen in the OIPFG in Iran studied it closely. So, what did the book propose? What arguments did it offer, and why did it resonate so strongly with those who read it?

## WHAT WAS THE FOCO THEORY?

In 1961, reflecting on the July 26th Movement's insurrectional campaign, Che Guevara wrote *Guerrilla Warfare*. The book outlined the theory, tactics, and strategy that had driven the Cuban Revolution. Though Guevara never used the term, his ideas came to be known as the Foco theory. These ideas were systematized at greater length by Régis Debray in his work *Revolution in the Revolution?* Early English translations retained the Spanish word "foco," meaning "focus," "spot," "source," or "nucleus."

The foco theory posits that a small group of guerrillas, by exploiting the strategic advantages of rural terrain, could evolve into a popular army and, ultimately, a proto-society that would challenge the state's legitimacy. The growth of this initial band would not depend on mass agitation or spontaneous struggles from unions, students, or civic movements—though Guevara and Régis Debray respected those efforts—but on military successes, on being "effective" in the course of their actions. This set Foco apart from conventional revolutionary models. The guerrilla band, in Guevara's view, would not be subordinate to a political party; it would be the Party itself in embryo, uniting both military and political power in a single structure.

Because Cuban guerrillas could not rely solely on the impenetrability of rural terrain, a strategy of mobility and clandestinity was essential to their successes. Prematurely establishing a fixed base or occupying territory could force them into a defensive position, allowing the state to encircle and crush them. With its vast resources, the state could easily root out the rebels once they had consolidated defensible positions.

Proponents of foquismo asserted that the initial phase of secrecy and mobility was only temporary. The next phase would involve the expansion of defensible territory, the development of counter-power through independent infrastructure, and the incorporation of new forces into the revolutionary ranks. Across the world, communist and socialist parties denounced proponents of the foco theory for "anarchist deviationism."

How did the Cuban revolutionaries develop this strategy and theory? It emerged from their own experiences within the Latin American left. It stemmed from their membership in political parties and radical organizations that always seemed to delay the real moment of confrontation. By examining the development of the foquista concept, we can understand why it would have appealed to young Black militants in the United States just a few years later.


BLACK LIBERATION ARMY

## APRISMO AND THE PRE-HISTORY OF THE FOCO CONCEPT

In 1924, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, a Peruvian political exile in Mexico City, founded the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA). Though he engaged with Marx and Lenin, he crafted a program tailored to Latin America's unique needs. Haya de la Torre drew his main inspiration from the Mexican Revolution. APRA's core mission was clear: political sovereignty and economic independence for Latin American nations, free from US imperialism. For Haya de la Torre, this meant forging an alliance between the domestic petty-bourgeoisie and the peasantry—not just the proletariat. This pan-American anti-imperialist struggle would give rise to a new social order—neither capitalist nor socialist.

Could Communist parties, whether independent or controlled by Moscow, be trusted to seize revolutionary opportunities as they arose? Were their structures and ideologies capable of adapting to the shifting tides around them? Could they be relied upon to act in the people's interest? Apristas across the continent seemed to offer a solution to this uncertainty—but they, too, would collapse under the weight of these same dilemmas.

In 1934, the Partido Revolucionario Cubano – Auténtico (PRC-A), or the Auténticos, emerged under the influence of Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, in opposition to Cuba's former dictator, Gerardo Machado. Fulgencio Batista, a sergeant in the Cuban military, also rose to power through the overthrow of Machado. Backed by the US, Batista would later govern Cuba. By 1944, the Auténticos had grown in strength, defeating Carlos Saladrigas Zayas (Batista's handpicked successor) in the polls and propelling Ramón Grau San Martín to the presidency.

With Grau's backing, a coalition of forces—socialists, Dominican exiles, Spanish Civil War veterans, and Cuban students—hatched a plan to strike against Rafael Trujillo, the US-backed dictator of the Dominican Republic. Fidel Castro, one of the student leaders, took charge of a platoon for the mission. The group assembled for the assault, setting up training camps across Cuba before converging on Cayo Confites, the launch point for the attack. Arms, explosives, and fighters arrived from all corners—Argentina, New York City, wherever they could be smuggled in. The stage was set.

Under mounting pressure from the US and the Dominican Republic, the expedition collapsed. Fidel Castro and his group, led by Juan Bosch, tried to press on, but they were unable to go it alone. Rather than renouncing armed struggle altogether, Castro's frustration focused on how the Cayo Confites mission had been hastily conceived and then abandoned by Grau and the Auténtico Party. It wasn't the strategy he condemned—it was the betrayal of it.

In 1952, just months before Cuba's scheduled presidential election, Fulgencio Batista staged a coup.

The Orthodox Party condemned Batista's coup, calling for resistance through civil means, legal action, and non-violence. The Cuban Communists, in contrast, were more lenient toward Batista and uncertain about opposing the coup. In response, Castro and other radical members of the Orthodox Party began organizing their own faction, complete with their own propaganda, and pushing for a revolutionary seizure of power. On July 26th, 1953, this group launched an attack on the Moncada military barracks in Santiago de Cuba. The plan was simple: seize arms and spark a nationwide revolt. It was a disaster. Soldiers killed dozens in the firefight. Some survivors fled to the mountains, hoping to establish a guerrilla base and rebuild their forces. Within a week, Bastista had encircled and captured them.

The Moncadistas—Castro and his comrades—set about rebuilding their efforts in Mexico after their release from prison. There, they encountered Alberto Bayo -- a veteran of the Spanish Civil War -- and a young Argentine named Ernesto Guevara. Bayo, with his experience in rural guerrilla warfare from the fight against Franco in revolutionary Catalonia, trained the insurgents in his methods and theories.

With fresh insight and a refined strategy, they formed the July 26th Movement, named after their failed attack on the Moncada Barracks on July 26, 1953. Several children of Spanish Republican exiles took up important positions within the group, including Camilo Cienfuegos and Haydée Santamaría. Their emphasis on armed insurrection and the crucial role of a tightly organized rural base was one outcome of the split within Aprismo.

When the July 26 guerrillas successfully seized power in January 1959, their focus on rural insurgency became a global blueprint. The conventional party model now faced serious competition within the international socialist movement.

## REJECTION OF FOQUISMO, RISE OF THE URBAN GUERRILLAS

In the early 1960s, the US developed new counter-insurgency strategies to combat rural-based guerrillas and quickly exported them to Latin America. US special forces conducted hundreds of counter-insurgency missions across the continent. In addition to providing air support and specialized training for US-backed governments, the US launched aid and propaganda programs targeting rural areas. These initiatives were carried out through political campaigns, USAID, and the Peace Corps.

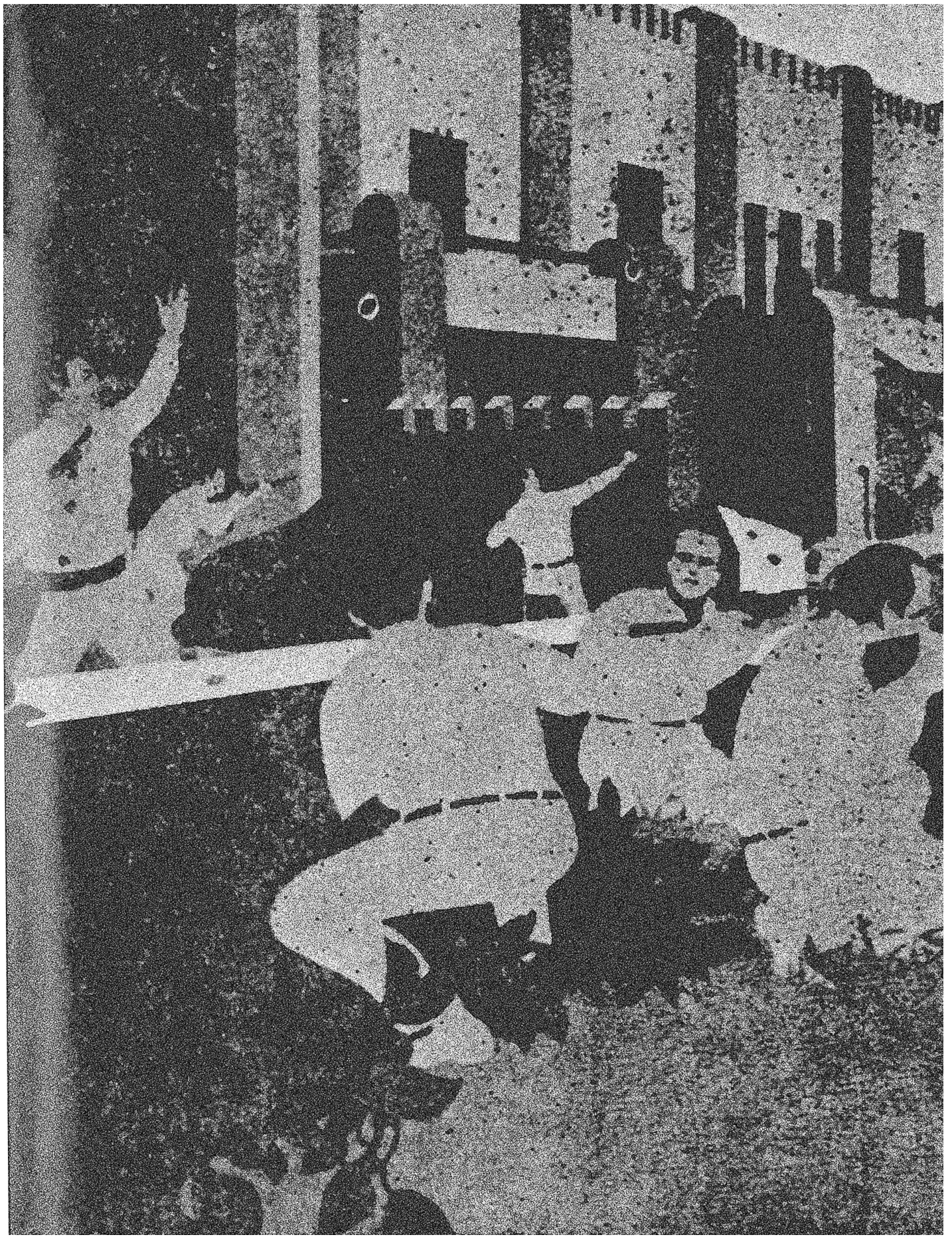
By 1966, when the Black Panther Party was formed, the rural guerrilla struggles in Latin America faced serious problems. Although each country was also victim to unique circumstances, in Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Paraguay, rural focos failed to spark the revolutionary upheaval they had envisioned, whether against strongman regimes or "pseudodemocratic" neocolonies. This was in no small part due to the inability of the guerrillas to understand the language, customs, and culture of the rural populations living where they operated. In Peru, for example, Hector Bejar remarks in his "Peru 1965: Notes on a Guerrilla Experience" that a large number of the Quechua peasants in Ayacucho did not speak Spanish, while many of the communist and socialist organizers of the time did not speak Quechua. This kind of oversight was common among the foquistas, since the subject of the revolutionary struggle they hoped to build were the guerrillas themselves. The surrounding populace, the terrain, the animals, plants, and precipitation rates were all treated ahistorically, as passive objects around which the heroic fighters must maneuver. These theoretical errors cost them dearly. One by one, the focos were rounded up, gunned down, and liquidated.

In response to these setbacks, Che Guevara proposed that only a "second Latin American war of independence" could effectively overthrow US imperialism and build socialism.

To achieve this, Che sought to create a continent-wide strategy centered around a single "politico-military" nucleus in the rural heartlands of Ñancahuazú, Bolivia. He envisioned revolutionaries from across Latin America joining his small band, receiving political and military training, and building a multi-front people's army spread throughout the continent. This army would operate independently of any single communist party or nationalist faction, which Che believed were no longer sufficient for the task of revolution.

Initially, Guevara's group relied on the support of Mario Monje's Bolivian Communist Party for basic logistical aid. This party vacillated continuously on its commitments to provide aid, recruits, and information. This dependence proved disastrous. The tragic outcome of Guevara's Bolivian campaign—his death and the destruction of the guerrilla nucleus—was recorded by survivors Pombo, Pereto, and Debray. Their reflections on the campaign offer crucial insights into the failures of the rural strategy—insights that remain valuable for those studying the theory of armed struggle in Latin America.

After Che's death, the strategy of armed guerrilla warfare shifted to the cities. Inspired by the ideas of Spanish anarchist exile Abraham Guillén, Cuba-aligned revolutionaries launched urban guerrilla operations in Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil. The actions and writings of groups like the Tupamaros and figures like Carlos Marighella gained global traction. In the US, they were translated and republished



in journals such as Leviathan, Radical America, Monthly Review, and elsewhere. Their theories became a blueprint for revolutionary movements worldwide, influencing groups such as the Provisional Irish Republican Army, the Brigate Rosse, and the Red Army Faction. In the end, the urban guerrillas were even less successful than their rural counterparts.

In 1968-1969, as translators brought powerful stories and articles from Uruguay and Brazil to the English-speaking world, activists in the United States were searching for new ideas amid ever-mounting repression.

## FROM "BUILD TO WIN" TO "REBUILD"

*"The slogan 'Build to Win' was formed and used on the basis of particular internal and external, subjective and objective conditions. Those conditions no longer exist."*

The Black Panther Party aimed to develop a secret armed wing to advance the political goals set by the organization. This approach aligned them with Moscow-supported Communist Parties worldwide, as well as with groups like APRA in Latin America. In contrast, the Black Liberation Army (BLA) envisioned small urban guerrilla cells that would inspire the masses to form a revolutionary movement through their bold, heroic actions, much like their Latin American counterparts in Brazil and Uruguay. The phrase "Build to Win" encapsulated this approach, serving both as a guiding principle and a strategic assessment of their revolutionary path.

As conditions changed, some within the BLA recognized that their current strategy was failing. By the late 1970s, dozens of BLA participants were sitting in jail cells, and the entire movement was in retreat. This led a faction calling itself the Black Liberation Army - Coordinating Committee (BLA-CC) to revise their approach and adopt a new strategy under the banner of "Rebuild."

The shift in strategy was first outlined in a document titled "A Message to the Black Movement." According to Yaki, the concept of "Rebuild" emerged from the realization that armed struggle had to be fully integrated with mass political organizing — not as an "armed wing," as the Panthers had envisioned, nor as an "armed nucleus" of the revolution, as the early BLA had believed. The "Rebuild" faction argued that the movement could not remain fragmented into isolated fronts — one clandestine, one mass; one armed, the other political. Both had to merge into a unified force.

Yaki argues that the failure of the BLA lay in their inability to build a mass underground movement capable of integrating both political and military tasks under the same banner.

## ISOLATION WAS QUALITATIVE

As noted earlier, Yaki distinguishes between the BLA's isolation in terms of moral support and its strategic isolation as a political catalyst. While many, especially within Black communities, sympathized with and supported the BLA—offering shelter, public solidarity, and logistical help—their actions remained disconnected from the broader mass struggles that could have provided real force and meaning. The BLA failed to bridge the gap between guerrilla fighters and the larger revolutionary social movements. There was no clear path for meaningful participation, and their guerrilla tactics did not create a mass armed insurrection capable of toppling the US government.

Like their contemporaries in the Weathermen and the Black Panther Party, the BLA never developed a concrete relationship with the spontaneous riots, uprisings, and blockades that marked the late 1960s and 1970s. Instead, they viewed these phenomena with, at best, suspicion. Though these were pivotal moments of political violence and resistance, the BLA remained detached from them. Yaki doesn't address this gap in his essay, perhaps because, even by 1988, he had not fully recognized the political mistake it represented. Revolutionary action, in this context, required systematic and organized participation in large-scale social disaffection—which included riots, strikes, and uprisings.

## THE RIOTS NEVER ENDED

Because many New Left groups shifted focus in the early 1970s—from mass revolt to organized subversion and sabotage—many today assume that riots and uprisings stopped around 1970 or 1971. This is wrong. After the May 4, 1970 uprising, sparked by the killing of four students at Kent State, riots, rebellions, and community-led class combat continued. From 1970 to 1979 (and well into the 1980s), large-scale uprisings—broken windows, rock-throwing, burning barricades, looting, gun battles with police, and tear gas—rocked cities across the country, driven by the same rage that had fueled the late 1960s. Radical groups in the counterculture, labor, feminist, and student movements remained active into the '70s. But by 1971, after George Jackson's death and the Attica revolt, a clear pattern had emerged. The Weathermen, the Black Liberation Army, the George Jackson Brigade, and countless others turned their focus to sabotage, bombings, and political violence. We can hardly blame them for the impasses the liberation movements encountered. Many more retreated into spectatorship, cheering on, celebrating, or propagandizing around these actions from the sidelines; or else, criticizing them without charting alternate paths forward.

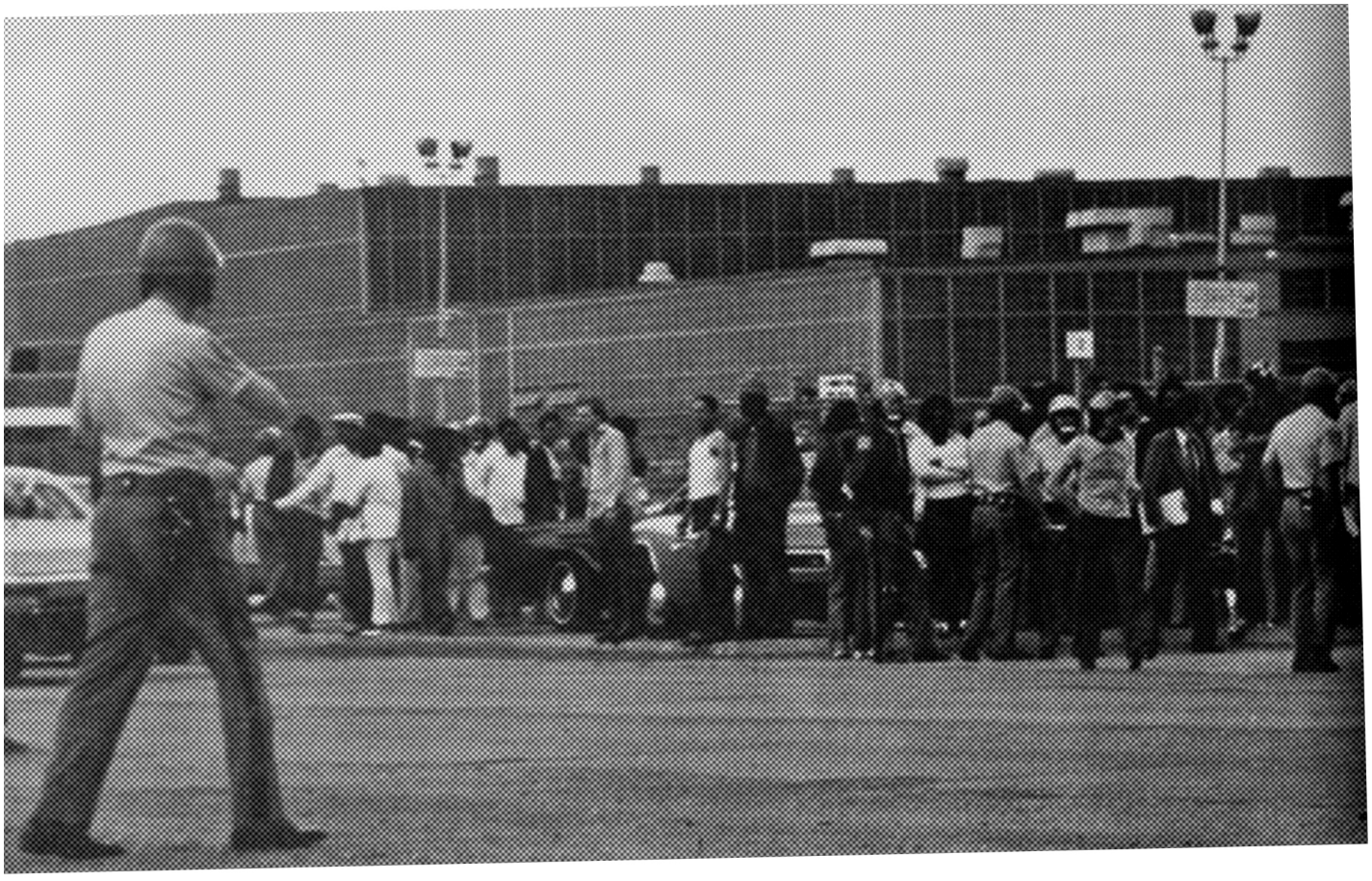
Let's briefly examine a few urban revolts that took place after Attica, without the clear involvement of organized militant groups. For this discussion, we'll exclude organized insurrections, standoffs, and raids—events like the Second Wounded Knee. We don't intend to cheapen or ignore these acts of organized militancy, but we want to focus on spontaneous uprisings, driven by unruly crowd dynamics—poor, racialized, and angry people acting without elaborate planning, coordination, or programs.

In February 1972, hundreds of Latinos in Pharr, TX, rioted against police brutality, flipping cars and breaking windows. The police responded by firing on the crowd, killing one person. In April, Chicanos in Santa Paula, CA, clashed with the police, using guns and Molotov cocktails. In May, over 200 arrests were made after thousands of anti-war protesters fought with police for hours in Gainesville, FL. The following year, in April 1973, 10-year-old Clifford Glover was murdered by the NYPD in South Jamaica, Queens, catalyzing days of rioting. In response, the Weathermen bombed the 103rd precinct the next month. In 1974, racist riots broke out in Boston over school busing. Thousands of white students burned cars and threw stones at Black residents, who defended themselves in kind. In August 1975, after a white bar owner killed Black teenager Obie Wynn in Detroit, days of rioting followed near Livernois-Fenkell. In February 1976, Pensacola, FL, erupted after high school students clashed over the Confederate Rebel mascot at Escambia County High School. When Chicago police killed two Puerto Ricans in June 1977, thousands in Humboldt Park fought the cops with Molotov cocktails and stones for two days. During the riots, the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN) bombed the Cook County government building, even before the fighting started. The events go on and on. Days of rioting and looting in NYC during the 1977 blackout. Widespread unrest in Miami following the 1979 killing of Arthur McDuffie by police. The 1981 uprising in Wilmington. Justice for Eugene Walker riots in Chicago in 1983...

If we include self-organized wildcat labor resistance—like the Atlanta Mead Corporation strike (1972), the Kentucky Brookside Mine strike (1973), or the Detroit Dodge wildcat strike (1974)—the list could go on for many pages. The uprisings didn't stop, and many continued into the 1980s and 90s.

The BLA, along with their contemporaries, failed to connect with the popular tactics of subversion, isolating themselves from the very people they needed to build a revolutionary organization. This mistake cannot be repeated.

Revolutionaries today must recognize the necessity of engaging with mass acts of spontaneous unrest. Whether riots, strikes, blockades, or occupations, these eruptions of popular resistance are critical moments when people take their struggle directly into the streets. Revolutionaries must be humbly linked to these actions—not merely as supporters, but as active participants, helping to shape the course of uprisings and pushing them toward revolutionary goals. The clandestine organization, both political and "military," must remain accountable to the forces of popular insurrection and unrest. The revolutionary organization—mass yet secret, popular yet covert—finds its true purpose only in streets choked with tear gas, littered with bricks and broken glass, cars overturned, and helicopters buzzing overhead.



## TOWARD A MASS CLANDESTINITY

The central argument of "On What it Means to 'Rebuild': Looking Back" is that the entire revolutionary movement must be rebuilt in secrecy. Yaki stresses that armed struggle cannot be separated from political struggle, and vice versa. Many, perhaps most, veterans of the BLA, the BPP, and similar formations have concluded that their primary failure stemmed from inadequately separating legal from illegal fronts or activities. In his brief yet informative history of the BPP, Sundiata Acoli summarizes this position succinctly: "There should have been a clear separation between the above-ground Party and the underground armed apparatus." This idea is gaining traction once again—but it is mistaken. It misdiagnoses the political problems confronting militant resistance. The revolution cannot succeed by relying on anonymous guerrilla cells or affinity groups. It cannot be led by spokespersons, democratic groups, or civic organizations. Simply connecting these two types of groups through covert communications or anonymous liaisons will not suffice.

So what does this mean? How can something be "mass" if it is hidden? How can a movement or organization be secret if everyone knows about it? If it operates in the shadows, how can it be participatory? According to conventional thinking, these ideas cannot coexist. By certain standards, they are outright contradictions.

The Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), or the Zapatistas, offer a powerful example of a large, secretive organization—an underground mass movement. Campesinos, teachers, guerrillas, spokespeople, and entire support networks operate in the shadows, intricately woven into the fabric of Chiapas' Mayan society. Thousands gather for meetings, dances, and markets, all while masked in balaclavas, their true identities concealed within a complex web of social ties.

The Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), or Sandinistas, followed a similar path. Their approach to organizing allowed union leaders, student activists, poets, saboteurs, and rural guerrillas to sustain a decade-long guerrilla war with only a few hundred members. Their strength lay in their ability to seamlessly integrate new participants, bringing thousands into their ranks throughout 1978 alone.

The Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA, or Provos) coordinated around 10,000 volunteers in Belfast alone during the late 60s and early 70s. Confronting the full force of British colonial terrorism and paramilitary violence, membership in their ranks was kept entirely secret. Restaurants, grocery stores, churches, bars, and apartment complexes became hidden meeting places where the movement thrived in the shadows.

The Underground Railroad offers another example. More a network than an actual organization, this secretive web of relations allowed African slaves to escape from plantations across the South, relying on a vast conspiratorial system dedicated to ending human bondage. Comprised mostly of free Black people and white abolitionists, the Underground Railroad connected drivers, churches, safe houses, lawyers, farmers, and armed insurgents. Members identified themselves as "agents," "conductors," "stations," and "stockholders," based on their respective responsibilities. Their clandestine network helped over 100,000 escape to freedom.

## LOOKING FORWARD

For anarchists and other anti-authoritarians, organizing collectives, media projects, and even mutual aid initiatives under relative anonymity and secrecy comes almost naturally. This stems partly from the regular cycles of repression within anarchist spaces and partly from political reasoning. Anarchists oppose authority, figureheads, and representatives. As a result, even groups with relatively open membership models rarely have spokespeople. The leadership dynamic that spokespeople represent is believed to breed undesirable power imbalances within groups and movements. While this approach has benefits, it also carries a cost—many anarchist groups remain deeply misunderstood by the public.

In contrast, most radical groups from other theoretical traditions openly reject clandestinity. Meeting notes are shared on Google Docs; internal conversations take place on Slack. Press releases carry real names, and members regularly post from their social media accounts. Spokespeople give speeches without any attempt to obscure their identities or affiliations. This transparency has benefits but also drawbacks. Many radical groups become deeply invested in lawfulness due to their constant exposure to surveillance. Repression never even enters the picture, because these groups often restrain their political imagination to law-abiding means alone.

For those accustomed to organizing anti-repression groups, mutual aid committees, publishing projects, or small affinity groups, the principle of mass clandestinity can be difficult to grasp. Are they "above ground" when distributing fliers to the families of prisoners? Are they "clandestine" because they operate closed collectives with no legal identities attached?

Similarly, it may be hard for those involved in "mass" organizations to understand what they stand to gain from protecting their members' identities—and what they risk by failing to do so.

We believe forming collectives and organizing groups, as is common in anarchist networks, is important. Working with undocumented people, prisoners, antifascists, and abortion access groups is essential. But this approach alone is insufficient for a revolutionary struggle. It allows people to accomplish specific tasks, often well. But in times of heightened social polarization and crisis, it can't address society's broader needs. A social revolution requires a guiding orientation for specific projects and fronts. In such a context, tasks shaped by social strife, class conflict, and possibly civil war will be necessary. We must focus on building emancipatory communities, infrastructures, unions—and eventually entire regions. A revolutionary organization dedicated to fighting class domination and the state must be built, distinct from the specific needs of a collective, union, or affinity group.

Attempts to form an "open" revolutionary party or federation are drawn from a troubled, ultimately doomed history. The state will not allow activist listservs, Instagram personalities, NGO staffers, or elected steering committees to overthrow the most unequal society in history. Leaders will be rounded up, members scattered. The organization will struggle to reconstitute itself in secrecy, as morale will be low and panic high. We do not believe we can persuade those invested in

publicity to change course. But those of us who operate under the radar, maintaining political independence, should focus on building mass revolutionary federations and networks—groups dedicated not just to activism or propaganda, but to revolutionary strategy—in secrecy.

One person can carry out an assassination, but they are unlikely to escape alive or free. A small group can break someone out of prison, but they cannot liberate all the cages or destroy the facility. 500 people can vandalize a shopping center, but they cannot topple a police department. An unruly crowd can destroy a police station, but they cannot defeat the National Guard. In revolution, the oppressed will rise up to do all of this—and much more. They will seize warehouses, farmland, and factories; demolish penitentiaries and courthouses; dismantle barracks; take over media stations; collectivize resources. These tasks will unfold over months or years, in parallel to the capitalist state, which will unleash terror and misinformation against the revolutionaries. The two forces will compete for influence in the same cities, the same neighborhoods. Anyone who believes in revolution must admit that specific structures are necessary to facilitate participation and action on this scale. When the streets are lined with tanks and barbed wire, when helicopters hover overhead and snipers line rooftops, improvisation will be difficult.

Rebuild the underground!

*Revolutionary Intercommunalism Research Group*

## SAUDADE DE SENHOR MARIGHELLA

**(For Carlos Marighella)**

The quick growls
the sad realities
of the Favelas,
that even on hundred
days and nights of
Jaeno could never
wash away.

Saudade

The agogo bell
Echoes the news
“MARIGHELLA, MARIGHELLA,
the Heroico Guerilla
died in a hail of reactionary bullets.”

Saudade

Ate longo Marighella,
master strategist, great
man of the Brazilian
underground
I will sing this saudade
for you to the masses
in America de Norte.

Saudade

The oligarchy pisses a
libation of fear in
their boots, because
they know that Brazil
will one day become
another Viet Nam.

Saudade

Rumbas of victory
will be danced throughout
Santos, Rio, Belo Horizonte,
Itapoa, Bahia, Sao Paolo,
Brasilia, yes, the entire
country, when the power is
wrenched from the imperialist
clench of the Latifundista.

Saudade

Nothing can impede
this struggle for libertad
in our America. No,
not even the life-time
sentences, electrodes on
The vaginas and scrotums
nor the heavy hail
of bullets from the assasinados.

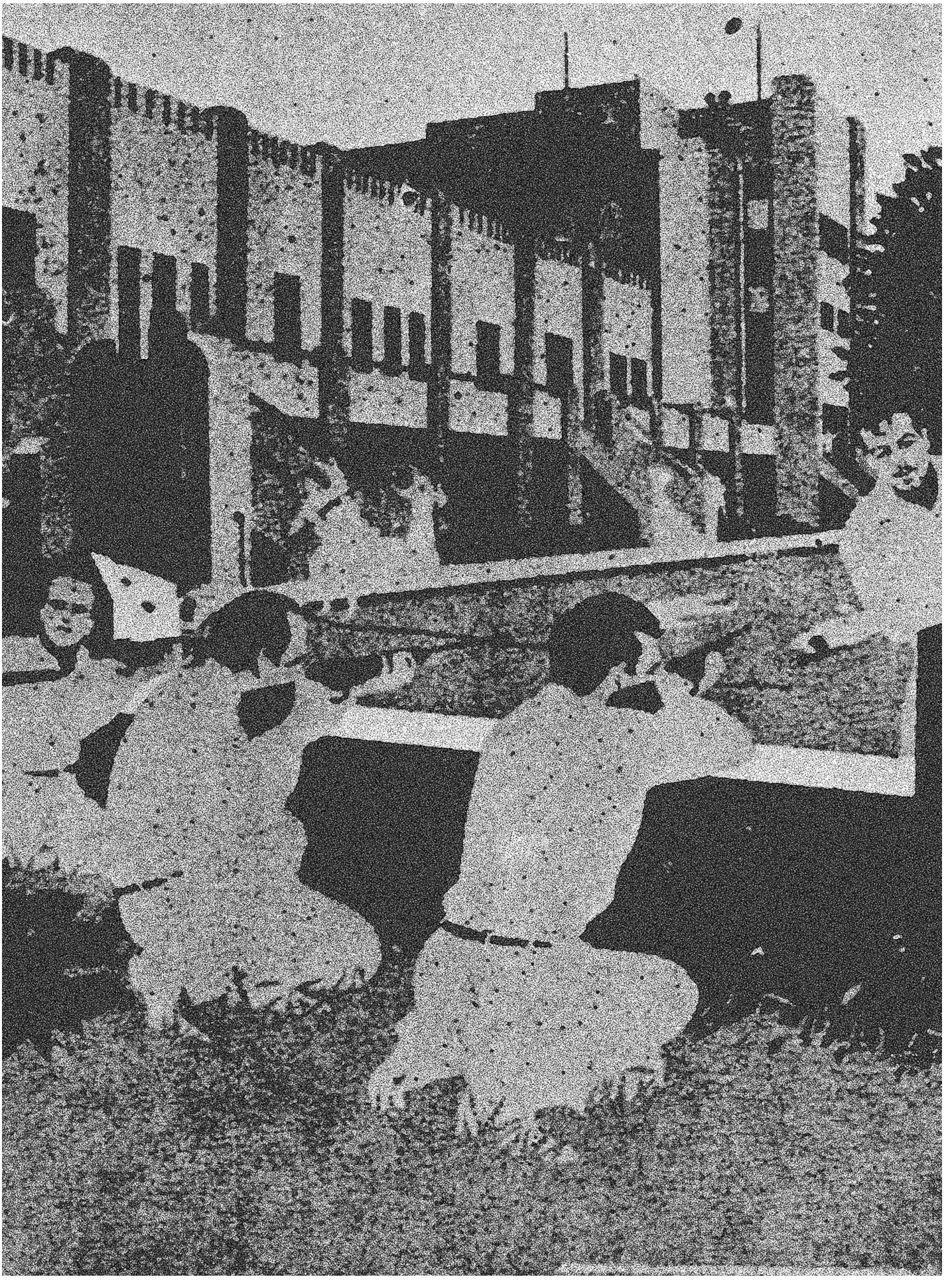
Saudade

Oil from the terrorist’s
tears of vengeance will
burn and light up the
asses of the Latifundistas
in America Latina.
Your skill and valor
as a leader will
never be forgotten.

Saudade

New Sambas and Maracatus
written for you, will be
danced on the ashes of
the reactionary dead.
There will be no more
need for Jaeno, Favelas,
or Latifundia
Not after the dignity of
mankind is restored.
“We wil win” SENHOR
MARIGHELLA!

**Habib Tiwoni**
January 27, 1970
New York



# FUE EL ESTADO

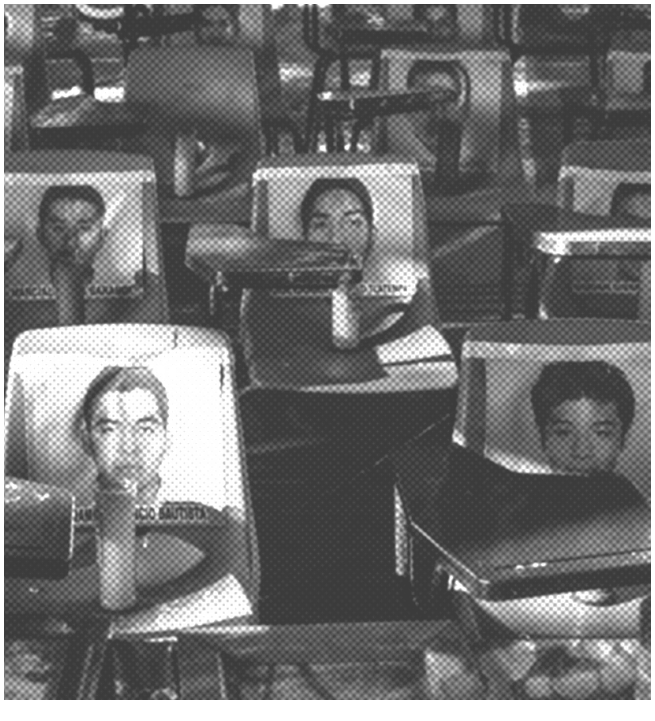
by Rami Cami

According to a November 2024 article by the UK Independent, the Biden-Harris administration deported, expelled, or otherwise involuntarily removed 4.7 million immigrants from the United States. Using Title 42 "public health" exceptions, the administration was able to bypass normal immigration processes, justified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Donald Trump has appointed Tom Homan as the new border czar. Homan acted as head of ICE under Barack Obama and Trump during his first presidency. The Homan-Obama border policy earned that administration the all-time record in deportations. In 2018, Homan underwrote policies separating thousands of parents from their children at the US-Mexico border.

The incoming Trump administration pledges to conduct "shock and awe" against migrant communities. In the first week of his presidency, ICE raids across the country targeted elementary schools and hospitals. The president claims he will deport 15-20 million people, using the National Guard to do so. The administration is also alluding to its goal of expanding the already-draconian mass detention centers near the US-Mexico border and of revoking "birthright citizenships" from millions of people.

On January 27, 2024, US border patrol exchanged gunfire with a small group of armed men at the border.

In recent decades, Mexican politics have apparently taken a left-wing turn. However, the country remains embroiled in violent repression. Someone is killing unionists, land defenders, and activists with the same counterinsurgency tactics that have driven state terror for the last 50 years. The Mexican Red Scare, or Guerra Sucia (the Dirty War), began in the 1970s. It has now taken the form of the "War on Drugs." The following essay, written by Rami Cami in Mexico City will examine how these tactics function and the forces behind them.



## THE FOURTH WORLD WAR: FROM COLD WAR TO THE WAR ON DRUGS

As Subcomandante Marcos, the anonymous spokesperson of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), said in 2003, we are living through the Fourth World War. The Third World War, often called the Cold War, saw the USSR and USA locked in irregular confrontations through proxy wars in over 100 instances, affecting countries and peoples worldwide. From the early 1940s to 1990, the US sought to destroy revolutionary movements globally and carried out extensive cultural and policing operations domestically to make revolutionary politics unthinkable. The Cuban Revolution, the Vietnam War, and the Algerian independence struggle became symbols of resistance, as they threatened to directly challenge US military power. In South America, students, intellectuals, and guerrillas prepared for a "second Latin American war of independence"—this time, against the dominance of North American capital across the continent.

In 1975, US counterinsurgency efforts launched Operación Condor when Chilean Pinochetista Manuel Contreras invited 50 military officers from across the region to meet with his allies in the CIA in Santiago. During this time, US-funded soldiers and paramilitaries killed 60,000 leftists in Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador. These covert operations became infamous for the frequent use of "death flights," in which dissidents were thrown from planes or helicopters. Condor lasted until 1983, when the US and Chile supported Britain against Argentina in the five-week Falklands War.

Condor was just the beginning of a new phase of US terrorism in Latin America. In Nicaragua, 30,000 Sandinistas died during the Contra War. In El Salvador, 40,000 people were murdered in targeted attacks on the FMLN and their supporters. In Guatemala, the US-backed puppet state and its CIA-trained paramilitaries killed a staggering 200,000 people, mostly in Mayan peasant communities.

In Mexico, we know this red scare as the "War on Drugs." Since 1986, nearly 400,000 people have been killed in the Condor-inspired counterinsurgency campaign.

## A DECLARATION OF WORLD WAR

The United States established legal methods to conduct research and warfare against domestic and international threats with the passage of the 1947 National Security Act. The act centralized the US armed forces into the Department of Defense and unified various intelligence agencies, leading to the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Fourty years later, in 1986, Ronald Reagan signed the National Security Decision Directive 221. This directive shifted the focus of CIA covert operations from "fighting communism" to "fighting drug trafficking." With this directive, the Agency was not abandoning the war against communism; rather, it was giving it a new front. A quote from the Directive itself: *"...the same networks used to smuggle drugs are also employed to*

*bring in illegal weapons...Some insurgent groups finance their activities through taxing drug activities...Of primary concern are those nations with a flourishing narcotics industry, where a combination of international criminal trafficking organizations, rural insurgents, and urban terrorists can undermine the stability of the local government; corrupt efforts to curb drug crop production, processing, and distribution; and distort public perception of the narcotics issue in such a way that it becomes part of an anti-US or anti-Western debate."*

Following Subcomandante Marcos, we argue that National Security Decision Directive 221 marks the start of the Fourth World War. This war is no longer just about combating leftist movements; it targets ordinary people and anything that deviates from the white, Western, individualist ideal—a core element of the modern, productive, subservient lower class.

## THE CIA, CRACK COCAINE, AND THE NARCO MYTH

To justify the war on narcotics, the DEA and CIA needed an enemy. In Mexico, figures like Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, Don Neto, and Rafael Caro Quintero became symbols of the drug trade, their names mythologized by the media and the state. In Colombia, Pablo Escobar embodied the empire the press loved to demonize. The media turned the mundane logistics of drug trafficking into a spectacle of power struggles, rival kingdoms, and Godfather-style drama. The "cartels" were blamed for the violence and poverty unleashed by market liberalization and the repressive measures that followed.

## FROM CONTRA WAR TO NARCO WAR

In 1962, US General William Westmoreland brought French Lieutenant Colonel David Galula to study at the Harvard Center for International Affairs. At Harvard, Galula became close friends with Henry Kissinger, who would later serve as National Security Advisor and US Secretary of State. During his time there, Galula frequently consulted with US officials and even hosted a four-day symposium at the RAND Corporation in Arlington, Virginia, where he shared his counterinsurgency theory, developed from his experience in French colonial campaigns in Vietnam and Algeria.

By the late 1960s, the US began viewing domestic movements for social justice and Black power as a growing insurgency. After the 1967 summer uprisings, the FBI started searching for ways to suppress these movements. The French had formalized a strategy called the Urban Protection Dispositive (DPU), designed to control populations through surveillance, psychological warfare, and paramilitary force. The US adopted this framework, with the CIA specifically targeting Black organizers and communities. COINTELPRO, the FBI's covert program, borrowed heavily from the DPU, including tactics like the "Ghetto Informant Program," which funded nearly 7,000 agents to spy on low-income Black neighborhoods.

In 1979, a shift in global politics pushed US tactics into even murkier territory. The Sandinista revolution overthrew


*Demonstration in front of US consulate in Amsterdam against Reagan proposal for aid to contras in Nicaragua, February 3, 1988*

*FMLN guerrillas on New Year's Day, Tenancingo, El Salvador, 1985*

the US-backed Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua, while the Iranian Revolution ousted the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran. President Reagan seized the opportunity to illegally sell arms to the new Iranian regime, using the profits to fund the Contra rebels in Nicaragua. When those funds ran short, the US State Department turned to narco-traffickers to finance the Contra war effort. In this context, the War on Drugs became more than just a domestic narcotics battle—it became an extension of colonial strategies, retooled for a new kind of international warfare.

The myth-makers tell us the drug trade is a well-oiled machine, running smoothly like some rural cooperative. In "Drug Cartels Do Not Exist," Osvaldo Zavala tells us a different story. These networks are a mess -- chaotic, fragmented, and ruled by competing and unstable hierarchies. The dealers themselves are mostly young, poor men from cities like Monterrey, Tijuana, and Ciudad Juárez. They're there because the border is close, and the money's easy to make.

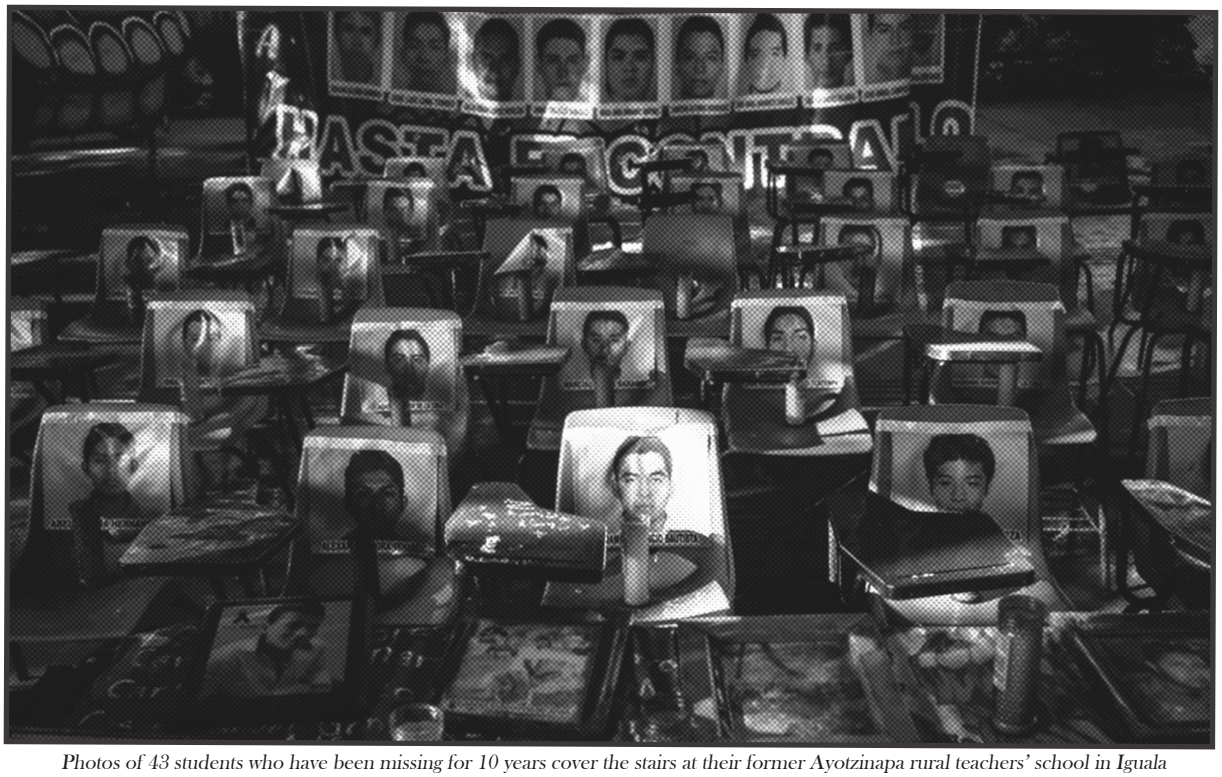
The Narco Myth is the foundation of systemic violence and displacement in Mexico, fueled by the United States. Rural land, rich in resources and once collectively owned, could have supported sustainable livelihoods for local communities. But the myth has paved the way for corporate exploitation and privatization—after residents are killed or driven off through brutal terror. Meanwhile, the real urban drug networks, linked to governments, the military, and the ruling elite, remain largely untouched by scrutiny.

## MÉRIDA INITIATIVE AND THE LEGALIZATION OF GENOCIDE

In 2006, the US and Mexico signed the Mérida Initiative, a "security cooperation" plan. It wasn't just about fighting drugs. The US sent equipment—x-rays, helicopters, jets—and hundreds of millions of dollars, along with advisors. The plan was clear: militarize Mexico, secure migration routes, and push capitalist priorities deep into the countryside.

Salvador Cienfuegos played a pivotal role. From 2005 to 2007, he protected the Sinaloa and Beltrán Leyva cartels in Guerrero. When he became head of the 1st Military Region in Mexico City, the cartels expanded their influence. As Secretary of National Defense, Cienfuegos worked closely with Mexico's Secretary of Public Security, Genaro García Luna—both key figures in the Mérida Initiative—allegedly advancing the US-backed "War on Drugs."

Juan Francisco Patrón, aka El H2, led the Beltrán Leyva cartel, but in 2017, Mexican Marines killed him in a staged operation. The story was simple: the state was fighting the cartels. But the truth was darker. The cartels didn't oppose the state; they were part of it. In 2020, the DEA arrested Salvador Cienfuegos in Los Angeles on charges of drug trafficking and money laundering. The arrest revealed that, despite the massive investment in the Narco myth and the War on Drugs, US and Mexican authorities still needed a scapegoat to take



*Photos of 43 students who have been missing for 10 years cover the stairs at their former Ayotzinapa rural teachers' school in Iguala*

the blame for the hundreds of thousands of campesinos, girls, and rural workers killed or disappeared.

Mexico operates as a Narco-State, aligned with US imperial interests. Both governments support paramilitary forces and military campaigns that obscure accountability for genocides, clearing large swaths of land. Mass killings and violence pave the way for widespread privatization and capitalization. Brown lives, Indigenous communities, and migrants are systematically erased from media narratives. While US media broadcasts images of violence in the Middle East, Mexican genocides are deliberately concealed.

The disappearance of bodies is both a tactic of violence and a mechanism of propaganda. The US uses its geopolitical influence to remain invisible in its role as both funder and executioner of these acts.

## AUTONOMOUS RESISTANCE IN THE WAR ON DRUGS

In the context of the Mérida Initiative, autonomous movements fought back. Students, indigenous people, women, campesinos, and anarcho-punks organized protests, blockades, occupations, riots, self-defense patrols, and veritable insurrections in Oaxaca, Michoacan, Cheran, Mexico City, and elsewhere.

In 2006, the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (CNTE), one of Latin America's largest unions, led 80,000 teachers to occupy Oaxaca's central square. Their demands focused on labor conditions for public school teachers, but they soon sparked one of the largest insurrections in 21st-century Mexico. The popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca formed a network of democratic communes, taking control of the city and expelling the police. United against Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, they faced his brutal retaliation: death squads and widespread human rights abuses. Around 30 people were killed.

In 2011, led by women, the Purépecha town of Cherán rose up to defend their forest. Armed and determined, they expelled both political parties and criminals, and, like in Oaxaca five years earlier, kicked the police out. Today, Cherán remains one of the safest towns in Michoacán, still protecting its community.

On September 26, 2014, 43 students were kidnapped from the Ayotzinapa rural teachers' school in Iguala. The students, part of a long tradition of militant youth activism, were on their way to Mexico City to commemorate the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre. On the highway, local police confronted them, accusing them of trying to hijack passenger buses. The police opened fire. The students claimed they were simply hitchhiking. The ones who were detained in the chaos never made it to the police station. Instead, they were handed over to the Guerrero Unidos cartel. The mass kidnapping sparked riots, strikes, blockades, and clashes across Mexico.

On October 14, government offices were ransacked and set ablaze in Chilpancingo, Guerrero. A week later, more offices were burned in the same city. On the 21st, protesters destroyed the headquarters of the ruling party. The next day, 50,000 people marched in Mexico City. In Iguala, masked rioters set City Hall on fire. On November 9, thousands gathered in the

*A protester in Mexico City in front of the burning Presidential Palace, November 2014*

Zócalo, central Mexico City. Anarchists overturned barriers, throwing Molotov cocktails at the National Palace's historic doors. For weeks, the parents of the disappeared traveled the country, demanding justice for their sons. They joined three separate marches on November 20, each drawing thousands to the Zócalo. Police responded with tear gas and water cannons. Anarchists retaliated, throwing Molotovs, stones, and fireworks.

To this day, protesters carry banners for the 43, pasting posters with their names and faces across the country. The parents of the disappeared continue their search for justice. In the wake of the tragedy, the truth of the killings and disappearances — once concealed by the Narco myth — was revealed in a simple slogan: Fue el estado ("It was the state").

In 2016, the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (CNTE) fought against the privatization of education in Nochixtlán. Over a hundred were injured and at least six were killed in the violent crackdown.

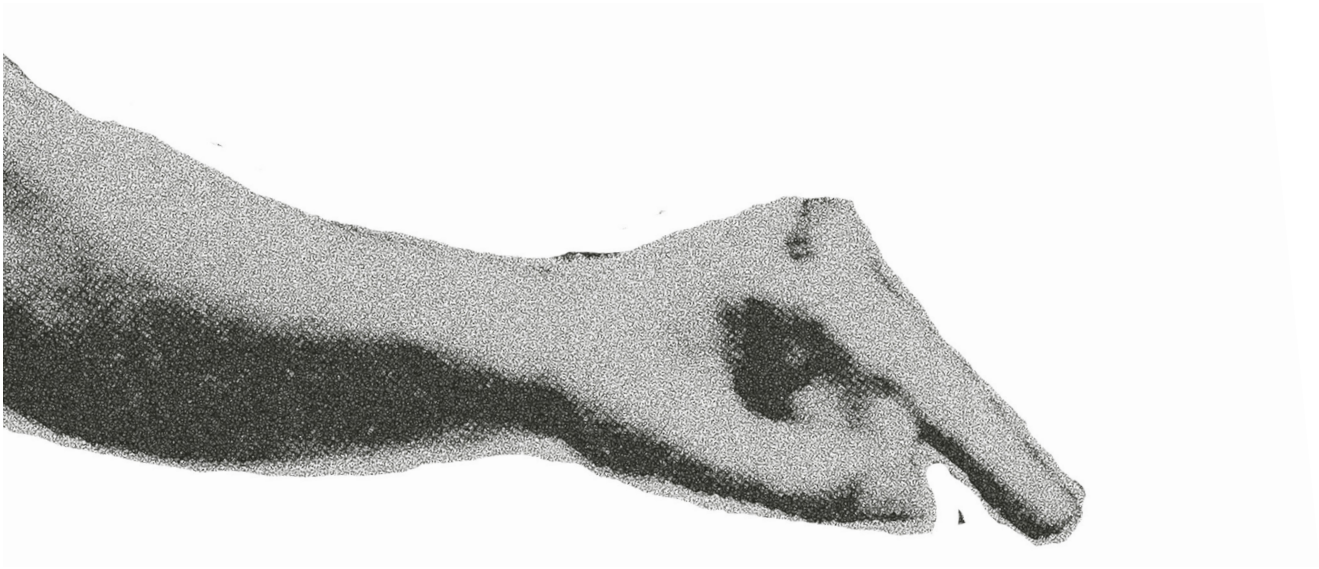
That same year, inspired by Argentina's Ni Una Menos movement, Mexican feminists took to the streets on March 8th to protest femicides and machismo. It marked the start of the largest and most significant social movement in Mexico over the past decade. Occupations, riots, and clashes with police erupted at universities across the country. All-women's black blocs regularly fight the police during the Women's Day march. By the end of 2024, more than half of Mexico's territory had won access to free abortion services.

## THE MORENA GOVERNMENT: SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AS A FRONT

In 2018, Mexico's political landscape shifted as Morena, a social democratic party, came to power. This was seen by many as a break from the PRI-PAN duopoly that had dominated Mexican politics for decades. While offering increased social services and welfare, the government has preserved the essence of the Mexican state, repressing activists and criminalizing dissent.

In his first year in office, Andrés Manuel López Obrador ("AMLO") claimed to have ended the War on Drugs by halting dramatic drug busts of notorious figures like H2. His stance on the drug trade was summed up by the phrase "hugs, not bullets." That same year, Genaro García Luna was arrested on multiple charges, including drug trafficking and organized crime, linked to the Beltrán-Leyva and H2 cartels. Meanwhile, police agencies across the country underwent rapid militarization.

In 2022, people in unmarked vehicles arrested Yorch, a key figure in Mexico City's punk and anarchist scene. Yorch, a member of Okupa Che, the city's oldest surviving anarchist squat, has been targeted along with fellow activist Miguel Peralta since the start of the Morena government. In 2023, the government evicted Okupa Chiapas, an anarchist squat located in the heart of the financial district. Later that year, police arrested Hortensia Telesforo, a teacher and activist from Xochimilco, for occupying a library in her neighborhood. Local residents resisting the privatization of public water sources have clashed with police multiple times.



Despite these crackdowns, Morena won a landslide victory in the most recent election, electing Mexico's first female president. The party has used past union struggles and leaders to present itself as a social democratic force, a narrative embraced by the international community as a progressive, feminist left-wing movement. In reality, Morena is no different from the other political players who continue to control the country behind the scenes, suppressing inconvenient truths, allowing the United States to control Mexico, and driving the country deeper into debt.

In 2024, Genaro García Luna was convicted in a US court and sentenced to 38 years in prison. It's hard to believe the Empire funding the War on Drugs didn't know from the start that the Narco and the State have always been one and the same. The same Empire that financed this genocide now shifts the blame onto García Luna.

AMLO lied. The genocide against Brown, Indigenous, and poor people has never stopped. The number of disappearances in Mexico rises daily. The state holds more than 70,000 unidentified bodies, while families wait for their loved ones to be found. As it stands, someone disappears in Mexico every hour. The country is a living graveyard.

Morena has simply shifted its strategy in relation to the US. The government killed Samir Flores Soberanes, a leading figure in the fight against Proyecto Integral Morelos, a key part of the broader infrastructure push backed by the ruling class and Morena. Other projects in this initiative include the Tren Maya and the Corredor Interoceánico, both designed to militarize vast areas of the country, displace rural, Indigenous, and poor communities, and turn them into cheap urban labor. At the same time, the plan aims to stop the flow of Central American and Caribbean migrants passing through Mexico on their way to the US.

With the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (T-MEC) in place, Mexico and the US have adopted a clientelist strategy, blending militarization with industrial foreign investment. Half of the corn consumed in Mexico today comes from the US, and that number will likely rise. Yet, Morena insists Mexico is autonomous, sovereign, and that the War on Drugs is over. In reality, the genocide continues, the body count rises, and US interventions—along with the discovery of massive clandestine graves—only deepen.

## THE STRUGGLE FOR INDIGENOUS LAND AND AUTONOMY

Half of Mexico's land remains collectively owned, inherited from the Mexican Revolution. This social ownership offers an opportunity for Indigenous and poor populations to build autonomy, linking resistance to climate change and systemic racial oppression. However, the Mexican state continues to suppress these efforts through its alliances with US imperial interests.

The War on Drugs serves as a tool to undermine the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) and its demand for autonomy and land rights. The US and Mexican governments continue to use violence, displacement, and migration as weapons to suppress these struggles.

The United States has spent millions on military and paramilitary campaigns that displace migrants and Indigenous communities. Now, grassroots movements must decide whether to accept these imperialist narratives or to organize for change. This struggle isn't just about survival—it's about completing what the Mexican Revolution began: true land sovereignty and social autonomy for the Indigenous, poor, and marginalized.

The Narco Myth, used to divide and conquer, continues to displace communities, destroy autonomy, and obscure the real economic and racist interests at play. The war being fought across borders is not only about drug trafficking but about systemic oppression, displacement, and genocide.

The fight continues.

*Rami Cami*

References

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# AFTER THE FLOOD

by Aube Alisk

When the ground caved in we dug down deep.
In the dirt was no oasis. Only cigarette butts and
empty cans and Cheeto bags and plastic cups
from McDonalds. In the dirt there were bones.
They were not our bones, but we dug them.

There was no ground. Nothing left to stand on.
We were covered in mud. Chemical burns. A
tangle of arms and legs. An entire army of one
thing. Tensing. Pulsing. Heaving. Falling towards
what no longer existed. In all directions, a violent
green that devours anything. Car seats in the
front yard. The neighbor's squatted house.
Several stray cats and occasionally a small child.

The river swelled. We were sitting on rocks.
Dangling our feet in the rusty water and drinking
Bud Lite. There was fire in the streets. Smoke over
the trees. Thick air. Permanent sweat. Heat.

We were swinging our feet and cutting our toes
on the edges of things below the surface. We were
going real fast. Faster than humanly possible.
Holding onto the lit ends of bottle rockets.

In the moonlight a roach shone white like a flying dove. We wanted the brightest light and darkest shadow. We wanted to reach the very edge. We wanted the infinite and more. They say you are used to coming up against a thing. Crashing into it again and again as if it's an insurmountable force.

They say all this was created. It was created from dust and now it will never not be created. They say you can still see the origin somewhere but it only exists historically. They say a circle has no end. A black hole is infinitely dense. There is no other side.

Watching the flood carry old newspapers and bottles of piss you said, when it comes it'll be like tears. Or it will be like crying without tears. It will be red. It will be bright red. It will be force.

Dusk came on like a curtain. That pale purple of indistinct. Vague ocean of being. From the mountainside the fireflies made the sky closer to us than before. Laughing at the idea of endings in the face of vastness.


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