Break the Laws/Break the Chains: Political Reflections on Mike Brown and White Supremacy from Oakland, CA

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To be free is to break the law

“Nobody in the world, nobody in history, has ever gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them.”

-Assata Shakur

I write to you from a humbled place. Striving to be a warrior for my people; looking and listening. This is an attempt to share some political reflections as a Black womyn in the struggle since I left the womb. The last two days Turtle Island (United States) has been on fire in solidarity with Mike Brown’s family and Ferguson, Missouri to protest the murder of Mike Brown by pig Darren Wilson, who continues to live freely with no charges filed against him. Mike Brown, like many of my brothers and sisters before me, was murdered for being a Black man in the White man’s system. A system built out of the genocide of Black and Native folks. No justice will ever be served in their courts. This week in particular is a powerful week to be remembering and honoring native resistance, and Indigenous resistance all over this earth to white supremacy and state violence. Nothing has changed including the lies and bullshit holidays they try to feed us to distract us from these truths. We honor by continuing to resist.

My consciousness took a deep and important shift when Oscar Grant was murdered nearly 6 years ago now at Fruitvale Bart Station on New Years of 2009. I begin building community here in Oakland to fight back against white supremacy shortly after. It is within this journey that certain political truths have been crystalized within me, which have helped root out reformism and liberalism, which serves to distract from the truth. There are many authoritarians within the spectrum of the left, who seek to manage and point out correct lines and such. Fuck them. That is not my purpose in these political reflections to gain ideological power over ‘the revolution’. That’s also not possible. The people will liberate themselves. But I do see too many of my own folks, (melinated, womyn, queer, combos of all) who fall into these liberal traps of seeking change through passive reformism and non violence. I see too many of my own folks who know the system is wrong or has to go in some kind of way, but aren’t sure what that is or are still too incarcerated within it, ideologically, to imagine what it would mean to truly break free and what it would take. We live in a world built out matter when 12 year old Tamir Rice was shot and killed by a pig in Cleveland Ohio on November 24th. What does it mean to say Black lives matter when on the same day Mike Brown’s pig murderer, Darren Wilson, is charged with nothing. What does it mean to state that Black lives matter in a system based off of the exploitation and genocide of Black life, Indigenous peoples life, all life? This system was not built for us so why should we protect it? In the words of Mike Brown’s stepfather it’s time we “burn this bitch down!”

Self-determination is fought for in the streets not in the courts. Our actions must not legitimize a system that stands opposed to us. That is a distraction. We must connect and build with homies in other spaces too, who are resisting and decolonizing so that we may support each others work. I’ve learned from Zapatismo and compas in Mexico that you resist colonization through actively building the alternative. You don’t just pontificate about it like an academic. Autonomy is the unity of theory and practice. Let’s not be afraid to think and tap into our brilliance and knowledge. Let’s not be afraid to imagine something radically different. Especially as Black and Indigenous womyn, because our lived experience is ripe with powerful wisdom and truths for our people. Our ideas and visions are our guides for action.

Let’s not be afraid to burn it all down. Let’s not be afraid to hold space and take it back for good. Not just for a day of protests, where we do something inspiring and then go home feeling good about ourselves. Liberation is a daily struggle and a collective one. Let’s break the law. Let’s Break everything. But take back space too and take it back longer. Take it back forever. From Oakland to Seattle to Klanada to LA to Ferguson to Mexico to Palestine, todo el mundo. All power to the people. Always.
grant struggles when some folks were pushing police reform. I ask what would Harriet Tubman do? What would Nat Turner do? Certainly not ask the slave master for freedom. We take it. It’s time we start valuing each other enough to struggle for one another so that we may live for one another. We do not need to convince the slaveholding system of shit. But with the legalist and reformist strategies also comes a certain policing of militants by ‘activists’ in the streets. Unfortunately a lot of times this policing comes from more liberal or non-profitized folks of color, who want to keep things non-violent. For me as a Black womyn this policing takes away my agency to get turnt up in the streets, which I need to do, because that is healing too. Black people aren’t just victims of white supremacy, we also fight back and rage against the system too. Always. And it isn’t just White people or ‘outside agitators’ breaking stuff. These claims disempower our people.

On monday night during the march I got in between these womyn of color, who were attempting to snatch a bandanna off this white boys face, who had attempted (and failed) to break some stuff. They yelled at him for taking up space in an event for Black people. Used the same condescending arguments that it will be Black people, who are arrested first (as if Black people aren’t also expressing a certain dignified rage in the streets). Then they demanded he show his face. I jumped between them then so they yelled at me too. I said I feel the arguments around White boys and space, but still, we can’t be snitches they didn’t get it. A few hours later I smiled in a sea of fire and broken glass as I saw Black faces loot back. It made me think of those womyn from earlier and my peoples who fear these tactics, who want to contain some sense of ‘peace’ In the streets.

Peace for what? Whose streets are these? Whose banks are these? Why are we more concerned about keeping the peace towards private property we don’t own, rather then letting people do their thing in the streets? And policing tactics in the name of protecting Black people and our vulnerability to the state? We don’t need that. We’ve been smashing against this private property thang since our ancestors burned down plantations. Monday and Tuesday night in Oakland, CA was no different and we should be proud of that.

**Burn it all Down**

What does it mean to say that Black lives of white supremacy; manifested from the White mans vision, and implemented through deep violence. That is the only way the White man has won the world. Fanon said it concisely in *The Wretched of the Earth*,

“Colonialism is not a machine capable of thinking, a body endowed with reason. It is naked violence and only gives in when confronted with greater violence.”

We live within colonial capitalism. A psychotic exploitative system designed to continually rob and take to keep a ruling elite in power. This system was created through European conquest, which helped set puppet governments up all over the world, who will act in accordance with these capitalist laws of domination over the earth and its peoples. All laws that exist are designed to protect this system. Protect the white supremacist hierarchy at its foundation. Protect the stolen wealth through genocide. As a people we are confronted with two choices, to integrate into the system and therefore legitimize slavery or to destroy it, which means breaking their slaveholder laws.

This can be a scary step for some folks to take, but it is a necessary one to truly break free, and it begins within our own consciousness and spirits, which guide our actions. For most, the way this practically happens is through the process of struggle itself. Sure, most of us are politicized through our identities and lived experiences as powerful, creative beings, who have survived generations of trauma caused from colonization. But that doesn’t change the fact that we live in the White mans world and are manipulated through his institutions, such as skkkoool, and have his media all around us. It messes up our mind. Materially and physically we are dependent on this system, because capitalism creates dependency. We all are integrated into it just through the need to survive. We have to work hard for crumbs just to afford the basic necessities of life. Its expensive to be poor in a system opposed to life and we are not free to leave it or to live differently according to *their* laws. That type of liberation will come through a larger decolonial struggle that has been in existence for over 500 years.

When we take to the streets. When we fight back in direct ways, in offensive ways, not just passive marches, boycotts or petitions, then something changes within us. Our spirits are awakened when we take back space, whether it be...
buildings, freeways, walls, parks, etc. Confidence is built through taking risks. And when confidence is built we can do it better and larger and deeper. We can start to imagine what it might be like to not live in fear of the backlash of the state. We can begin to imagine what it might be like to live without a state altogether. To be truly free and autonomous. To not just take back space for a few hours, but to really decolonize and live with the earth. All we need is each other and that bravery and so much can happen, but it’s hard to imagine without the practical experience. Without seeing your comrades beat down and/or kidnapped in the streets by the racist pigs you were out there protesting or when you see over a 1000 people in Oakland, CA take the 580 freeway twice, because why the fuck not. We are powerful and can do anything with the right experience and mindset, and some organization. Not revolutionary organizations or vanguard parties that seek to manage the people, but through being organized together and finding unity through struggle. Lets stop legitimizing the system and giving them power. All they have is their violence and their lack of feeling, which allows them to employ that violence in the most disturbing ways to enforce their laws. That’s real and scary, but we also have so much more. As a people we have a deep brilliance and creativity, and our own hearts and ancestral blood to guide us as we fight back. We stay protected. We would not have survived this long if we weren’t. Our ancestors want us alive.

**Black lives fight back**

Monday and Tuesday night in Oakland was inspiring, because it is a reminder of the dignified rage that flows through our people. That rage is the source of our power and magic. A righteous destruction we must employ against our oppressors, as well as a creative power to imagine and build something new. This is the beauty of militant decolonial struggle.

The ways it builds upon itself through time and space. Nothing is purely spontaneous when the people have been self-organizing for 100s of years. What is important to me is how we build upon that energy so it hits the pressure points of the system as well as uplift one another. A chant I heard over and over again throughout the protests is ‘black lives matter’. The slogan seems to be a rallying cry for this movement of solidarity with Mike Brown against white supremacy. Historically slogans have been important reflections of politics to inspire the people. The Black Panther Party said ‘All power to the people’ (Black, Brown, Red, Yellow, Poor, Womyn, Queer). To me that slogan reflected a radical politic that claimed the source of political power comes from the people; not bourgeois political parties and the police thugs who protect their money and hustle. The Black Panther Party and Black Power movement was also a youth movement. Radical struggles have always sprung from the youth. If our struggles are not centering the visions and actions of the youth then our struggles will lead to nowhere. There are a lot of non-profits that engage with young Black and Brown people and even seek to talk about ‘social justice’ and ‘activism’ but this work often stifles the movement of the youth narrowing it into the fields of education and assimilation, rather into freedom fighters. Outkast said it best, ‘youth full of fire and got nowhere to go’. The non-profitization of parts of the bay area left seeks to take out the fire of the youth and militant struggle, but young people see through these contradictions too. Especially young Black and Brown youth, who know what its like to not have political and social power within this white supremacist system; who see through the contradictions of the amerikkkan dream denied to them. The youth of Oakland have always represented in the streets and I’m proud to struggle alongside them.

So when we claim Black lives matter, who are we really talking to? I don’t need to tell another Black or Brown brother and sister that our lives matter. We know that. We are committed to that. Because if we weren’t committed to it then how would we have been able to survive and continue to survive genocide all these years? Through valuing ourselves in a system that doesn’t value life at all, let alone Black and Native life. We are alienated and isolated, but we are also strong and build our communities up out of nothing, and still have enough energy to take to the streets and resist. Our lives matter so how do we fight back against a system of genocide? We do not need to plea with the slave masters to recognize our humanity. These politics and tactics have come up time and time again during social upheavals against white supremacy and state violence. I saw it during Oscar.