



**HAL**  
open science

# An anarchist critique of the Indigenous of the Republic in France

Philippe Corcuff

► **To cite this version:**

Philippe Corcuff. An anarchist critique of the Indigenous of the Republic in France: Towards an intersectional anarchism. Anarchist Studies Network 5th International Conference: “Decolonise!”, Anarchist Studies Network, Sep 2018, Loughborough, United Kingdom. hal-04031197

**HAL Id: hal-04031197**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04031197>**

Submitted on 15 Mar 2023

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Public Domain

Anarchist Studies Network (ASN) 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference: "Decolonise!"  
University of Loughborough (UK), 12-14 September 2018  
Session "Anarchist Critiques", 13<sup>th</sup> September, 11h-12h30 (AM), Stewart Mason  
Building, room 103

\*\*\*\*\*

## **An anarchist critique of the Indigenous of the Republic in France. Towards an intersectional anarchism**

**Philippe Corcuff**

Reader of Political Science, Political Studies Institute of Lyon  
Coorganizer of the seminar of militant and anarchistic research ETAPE (Theoretical  
Pragmatist Anarchist Exploration for Emancipation)

### **Introduction: the problem and the context**

The Indigenous of the Republic Party was born in February 2010 from a transformation of the Indigenous of the Republic Movement, created in December 2005. The Indigenous of the Republic Movement itself stems from the public appeal of January 2005 "We are all The Indigenous of the Republic!" This appeal had a significant audience with thousands of signatures. I was a signatory of this appeal, which opened the possibility of the emergence of a postcolonial and decolonial social movement in France. But the Indigenous of the Republic Movement and then the Indigenous of the Republic Party became marginal, sectarian and dogmatic organizations. This party counts only dozens of activists today, stemming from postcolonial immigration, endowed with a high cultural capital. And it develops regressive themes compared with certain contributions of intersectional and emancipatory perspectives.

Nevertheless the provocative logics that it develops in the public debates contribute to attracting a lot of attention. The group is less numerous than the small anarchist political organizations in France, such as the Anarchistic Federation and Libertarian Alternative. But it is very visible publicly and the anarchists are almost invisible. The provocations of this group mean that it tends to be demonized in the dominant media and political field, but defended by a minority of "white" intellectuals and activists of the radical left, in a logic of postcolonial culpability.

Outside France the view is often blurred on the Indigenous of the Republic Party. Particularly since the publication of the translation in English of Houria Bouteldja's book, *Whites, Jews, and us* in 2017 (2016 in France) in a well known, "postmodernist" American publishing house, Semiotext(e), with a foreword by a recognized Afro-American philosopher, Cornell West. Houria Bouteldja is the spokeswoman of the party. The logic of the intellectual fashions on American campuses quickly transforms Houria Bouteldja at the same time:

- 1) into a leader of a social movement, while she represents a very small group with almost no echo in the concrete struggles of the postcolonized;
- And 2) into a decolonial theorist, although her book is insubstantial in theory, ambiguous politically and embodying a regressive variant of the decolonial, directed against intersectionality.

In France, the polarization around this party contributes to the fact that on the dominant side any postcolonial and decolonial antiracism is stigmatized and that near the critical

sectors which support it its regressions are little criticized. The radical left and the anarchist galaxy are profoundly divided between opponents of postcolonial and decolonial antiracism and supporters of this type of antiracism. But this opposition often turns around the Indigenous of the Republic Party, in a misunderstanding of postcolonial and decolonial studies as well as local struggles led within the postcolonial immigration.

The anarchist galaxy is particularly affected by this polarization. Certain activists use the notions of "racization" and of "islamophobia", others refuse them. For example, an anarchist associative place in Marseille saw physical confrontations on these questions in October 2016. The anti-"racization" and anti-"islamophobia" anarchists can be even driven to reject intersectional perspectives, which is a nonsense because the Indigenous of the Republic Party is also hostile to intersectionality. These activists tend then to fall back onto the question of class as the main question, in the style of archaic Marxists. This appears as a regression compared with the recognition of a plurality of dominations and the multi-dimensional character of emancipation. The difficult commitment of an important component of the anarchist galaxy in the fight against islamophobia is in particular in connection with a certain dogmatic atheism, very strong in France, and which then has difficulty in understanding discriminations aiming at a supposed religious membership.

In this paper, I am going to summarize and to update a long critical study published in French in July 2015 on an anarchist website and dedicated to the speeches of the organizers of the Indigenous of the Republic Party, and particularly Houria Bouteldja. This study was realized in the seminar called "Theoretical Pragmatist Anarchist Exploration for Emancipation", combining researchers and activists interested in anarchist ideas. I defend the point of view of the integration of postcolonial and decolonial antiracism, in an intersectional perspective, while criticizing the regressions of the Indigenous of the Republic Party. It will be a contribution to an intersectional anarchism in political theory, in a double meaning, academic and activist.

The principal interest of the appeal of 2005 is to have put its finger on the specificities of a postcolonial oppression and to have incited the left generally and the anarchists in particular to decolonize more profoundly, in particular against the blindnesses of French republicanism. But, after this positive starting point, the Indigenous of the Republic Party gradually turned to theoretical dead ends. I shall indicate briefly only four main problems, which are tendencies in the Indigenous of the Republic texts, albeit with contradictory les important elements. I shall finish on the possibility of an intersectional alternative, with the concept of *immanence with a compass*.

### ***First point: Postcolonial oppression as the main contradiction***

The Indigenous of the Republic correctly call on the other emancipatory forces to decolonize themselves, that is to get rid of colonial adhesions which most of the time they are not aware of: the labor movement, the feminist movement, the gay movement, the anarchistic movement, etc. But they refuse, conversely, the fact that these emancipatory forces call on them to get rid of prejudices and of practices inspired by other modes of domination. Other indications show that the Indigenous of the Republic give implicitly the priority to the decolonial fight over the feminist fight, over the class fight or over the fight against homophobia. For example, Houria Bouteldja gives priority to solidarity with indigenous men over feminist solidarity. She writes in *Whites, Jews, and us*: "The radical criticism of indigenous patriarchy is a luxury" (2016, p. 84).

A temptation drawing from a certain Marxist vulgate is apparent here, which paradoxically served a lot historically to marginalize the anticolonial and antiracist struggles: the theme of a "main contradiction" with regard to which the other contradictions are seen as secondary sectors. But here "the main contradiction" would be the postcolonial contradiction, and not the contradiction capital/labour as with the Marxists.

### **Second point: Communitarian essentialism and the marginalization of individuality**

The notion of "community" is variable-geometry with Houria Bouteldja. It can be the native immigrants from the Maghreb to France, all Muslims, all non-"whites", etc. This "community" tends to be taken as a homogeneous block, to be essentialized. She speaks then about "community allegiance" (*ibid.*, p. 84). It is a reason for her hostility to "intercommunity marriages" and to the theme of "interbreeding".

One of the main thinkers of the Indigenous of the Republic Party, Sadri Khiari, claimed in May 2015, answering a question on the political oppositions within the Islamic field: "Islam IS decolonial. I have nothing more to say on the subject." In this way he denies the conflicts between authoritarian, even totalitarian, conservative and emancipatory currents within Islam, to the benefit of a supposed homogeneous positive essence.

A young philosopher and activist of the Indigenous of the Republic, Norman Ajari, goes farther by positively embracing "essentialism", in a text entitled "Faire vivre son essence [Let one's essence live]" (June 2016).

Correlatively in this communitarian essentialism, individualities do not exist as an important dimension of the discourse of the Indigenous of the Republic. The *I* tends to merge in the *We*. Houria Bouteldja said: "A decolonial project cannot be thought from the individualities, but from cultures and oppressed identities." (Spring 2015, p. 66) And individualities are almost absent in political speeches of this group. I don't speak here about "the individual" of political liberalism, of "the homo oeconomicus" of economic (neo-)liberalism or the dominating and self-sufficient "I" of Marx Stirner, all situated outside social relationships. I speak about an individual understood sociologically, whose peculiarity is made by a plurality of collective memberships and experiences. Yet the community ascendancy does not allow, for Houria Bouteldja, to give a place to this individuality, contrary to a number of anarchist perspectives. By contrast, in my sociological way, the individual's uniqueness is at the intersection of various collective threads, but is reduced to none of them. It is the way of thinking that we find in the underestimated conception of "individual *habitus*" in Pierre Bourdieu's sociology: an inflexible singular shape made with collective materials (Corcuff, 2003).

### **Third point: The unspoken problem of political representation**

The Indigenous of the Republic Party (and Houria Bouteldja in particular) sees itself as the obvious representative of the famous variable-geometry "community" (postcolonized stemming from the Maghreb to all non-"whites", via all Muslims). The "community" tending to be homogeneous and singular, the representative discourse also tends to be homogeneous and singular.

The clashing voices are then reduced to the figure of "treason", according to the expression of an activist of the party, Louisa Yousfi (June 2015), or the figure of the "traitor to the race", according to the expression of another activist, Azzedine Benabdellah (June 2015). And there we get closer to Stalinist vocabulary.

The "general political principles of the Indigenous of the Republic Party" of February 2010 make moreover a necessity of the representative logic: "The constitution of a common political identity of the indigenous requires the existence of a representative unified pole." Yet, the representative logic already appears at the heart of the modern and colonial state model in Thomas Hobbes and his *Leviathan* : "to give all their power and all their strength to a single man, or to a single assembly, which can reduce all their wills, by the rule of the majority, in a single will" (1971, p. 177).

In so doing, the leaders of this party underestimate the specifically political domination implied in political representation. This political domination was criticized from an anarchist point of view, as with Bakunin, or by sociologists, from Robert Michels to Pierre Bourdieu. In this way the indigenous leaders render invisible the system of power-knowledge from which they benefit compared with those whom they claim to represent.

#### ***Fourth point: An ambiguous game with the borders of antisemitism***

The Indigenous Party is often accused of antisemitism in France. It is more complicated and the activists of this party were never condemned by the French antiracist laws. But this party plays a dangerous game with the frontiers of antisemitism. In March 2015 Houria Bouteldja got in the public debate the notion of "philosemitism of State". Etymologically, "philosemitism" means "friendship for the Jews", and it would mean in this case a supposed "friendship of the colonial State for the Jews".

We observe here a semantic closeness with the traditional antisemitic theme of the "Jewish lobby", reactivated today by figures of a new extreme right such as the humorist Dieudonné and the essayist Alain Soral, with frequent slidings between "Zionist lobby" and "Jewish lobby", by aiming in particular at the State. So the notion of "philosemitism of State" is not sufficiently cleansed of the essentialist and conspiratorial connotations of the figure of the "Jewish lobby", with effects of the antisemitic components of the current context of orientation toward extreme right.

It also participates in the current competition between the fight against islamophobia and the fight against antisemitism which divides profoundly today in France the antiracist movement and, beyond, the left and the anarchists. This competition of antiracisms contributes to disarming the left in face of the progress of a xenophobic ultra-conservatism.

#### ***Final point: Intersectional anarchism and immanence with a compass***

Contrary to the Indigenous of Republic Party, an intersectional anarchism would be led to take into account a double pluralism: a pluralism of autonomous dominations and a pluralism of autonomous emancipatory movements without preliminary hierarchy. It follows then a path of immanence: the possible and contingent convergences between emancipatory movements, in the respect for their respective autonomy, can be born only in practice and not from a conceptual architecture defined in advance, aspiring to transcendence. However we would not have to deal with a pure logic of immanence. Because this immanence would suppose preliminary reference points, debatable along the way, to help us orient ourselves. At a minimal level, it would be about a consciousness of the plurality of modes of domination and of components of emancipation, of their crossing in individual peculiarities, of the desirable character of convergences between emancipatory movements and of the international opening of

emancipatory struggles. It is in this perspective that my concept of *immanence with a compass* (*immanence à boussole* in French) can show itself to be heuristic. In a global context of stiffenings and confinements diversified by identities (nationalist and xenophobic ultra-conservatism, islamisms and jihadisms, etc.), of which the communitarian essentialism of the Indigenous of Republic Party constitutes only a marginal modality, the emancipatory compass would also need an opening of the being to that which is *other*. The work of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (Corcuff, March 2017) could here be precious for lucid anarchists in face of the dangers of the identitarian present.

*The translation was revised by David Berry (University of Loughborough, UK): special thanks!*

## Bibliography

- Ajari Norman, « Faire vivre son essence », website of the PIR, 22 June 2016, <http://indigenes-republique.fr/faire-vivre-son-essence/>
- Benabdellah Azzedine, « "Le Métis" et le Pouvoir Blanc », website of the PIR, 22 June 2015, <http://indigenes-republique.fr/le-metis-et-le-pouvoir-blanc/>
- Bouteldja Houria, « Revendiquer un monde décolonial », interview with C. Izambert, P. Guillibert et S. Wahnich, review *Vacarme*, n° 71, Spring 2015, <http://www.vacarme.org/article2738.html>
- Bouteldja Houria, « Racisme(s) et philo-sémitisme d'Etat ou comment politiser l'antiracisme en France ? », website of the PIR, 11 March 2015, <http://indigenes-republique.fr/racisme-s-et-philosemitisme-detat-ou-comment-politiser-lantiracisme-en-france-3/>
- Bouteldja Houria, *Les Blancs, les Juifs et nous. Vers une politique de l'amour révolutionnaire*, Paris, La Fabrique, 2016 ; English translation : *Whites, Jews, and us. Toward a Politics of Revolutionary Love*, foreword by the african-american philosopher Cornell West, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2017
- Corcuff Philippe, *Bourdieu autrement. Fragilités d'un sociologue de combat*, Paris, Textuel, 2003
- Corcuff Philippe, « Indigènes de la République, pluralité des dominations et convergence des mouvements sociaux. En partant de textes d'Houria Bouteldja et de quelques autres », anarchistic website Grand Angle, 9 July 2015, <http://www.grand-angle-libertaire.net/indigenes-de-la-republique-pluralite-des-dominations-et-convergences-des-mouvements-sociaux-philippe-corcuff/>
- Corcuff Philippe, "The Divine "Synthesis" of the Progressivists: Proudhon, Merleau-Ponty and Lévinas Make An Anti-hegelian Movie" (traduction by Jesse Cohn of French text from Autumn 2006), draft paper, Academia.edu, March 2017, [https://www.academia.edu/31923234/Philippe\\_Corcuff\\_The\\_Divine\\_Synthesis\\_of\\_the\\_Progressivists\\_Proudhon\\_Merleau-Ponty\\_and\\_L%C3%A9vinas\\_Make\\_An\\_Anti-Hegelian\\_Movie\\_coauthor\\_invite=5963c67b41de1860969d4be93ce846df&src=view\\_btn](https://www.academia.edu/31923234/Philippe_Corcuff_The_Divine_Synthesis_of_the_Progressivists_Proudhon_Merleau-Ponty_and_L%C3%A9vinas_Make_An_Anti-Hegelian_Movie_coauthor_invite=5963c67b41de1860969d4be93ce846df&src=view_btn)
- Hobbes Thomas, *Léviathan. Traité de la matière, de la forme et du pouvoir de la république ecclésiastique et civile* (1<sup>e</sup> ed.: 1651), Paris, Editions Sirey, 1971
- Khiari Sadri, « Nous avons à nous libérer de la modernité », interview with A. Benabdellah, S. Moucharik et S. Nadi, website of the PIR, 11 May 2015,

<http://indigenes-republique.fr/%E2%80%AFnous-avons-a-nous-liberer-de-la-modernite%E2%80%AF-entretien-avec-sadri-khiari-a-loccasion-des-10-ans-du-pir/>

PIR, « Principes politiques généraux du Parti des Indigènes de la République », Adopted at the constituent Congress of February 27th and 28th 2010, website of the PIR, <http://indigenes-republique.fr/le-p-i-r/nos-principes/>

Yousfi Louisa, « Politiser la trahison : le cas Sophia Aram », website of the PIR, 4 June 2015, <http://indigenes-republique.fr/politiser-la-trahison-le-cas-sophia-aram-2/>