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How Do You Say 'Especifismo' in English?

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oppressed peoples, in their struggles on the social level, with liberatory political practices that meet the immediate needs of the community.²⁶

Conclusion

This is not a definitive study of especificismo. It is a close analysis of a single text. If this theory is to have an influence on the revolutionary strategies of social anarchists around the world, we must continue to expand our research on the subject. Today, this usually requires working in multiple languages or with translations. For this reason, anglophone anarchists quickly arrive at the end of the available literature on the subject. This text is intended to add to an amassing canon of English-language writings on the subject. So, rather than a conclusion, let this be an invitation for readers to become students of especificismo and social anarchism more broadly.

There is no reason for our knowledge and methods to remain isolated in localized camps. If unified strategy is to become an international force, we need to learn from Latin American contexts in order to reproduce theory, in our own context. Our work can, in turn, be studied by others, informing them about us and our struggles. In this way, writing about especificismo can help to spread these ideas and to foster the formation of an international militant flow.

²⁶ “This organisation of well-defined lines joins the anarchists at the political and ideological level, and develops their political practice at the social level – which characterises an organisation of active minority, seeing as though the social level is always much larger than the political level.” (p. 41)

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resources, but as necessary components of a collective power, a power that is an impossibility for one person on their own. Radical political spaces, with well-defined lines, are capable of modelling transformative practices, internally and externally. In this way, well-defined lines encourage individual militants to commit to the program because they see personal value in the dependable persistence of the group.

The political lines of a specific group are not strictly about strategizing to influence revolutionary movements, in the future. Organizational clarity is multifaceted. Despite the fact that revolution remains a long-term objective of *especificismo*, the tools of *especificista* militants have immediate uses today, on both the political and the social levels.

For example, through actively encouraging people with common affinity to organize themselves, the strategy of *especificismo*, which is based on unity on the political level, becomes a tool that can be used by any political grouping within a mass movement. And through mobilizing week after week to define a political program, an ideologically unified group can simultaneously provide safe social space for people who are not accepted by contemporary popular culture. These people could be outcasted politically, culturally, racially, etc., and for them, ideological and theoretical unity may provide a continuity of support that is not possible in other groups. This has value for the individuals as well as the political agenda since continuity will make the flow of militants and radical ideas as obvious and as open as possible.

In a capitalist society, simply dialoguing with others, in an effort to form agreements, demands militant commitment and rigor. But making decisions that involve other people is a normal, unavoidable part of everyone's personal and social lives. Resolving the contradictions between the need for unified militancy and the need for pluralism in mass movements is the task of the specific anarchist organization. It must meet anarchists at the political level, with a unified strategy. And it must meet

the most active minority is more equipped to maintain its commitment to addressing these needs.²⁵

Understanding material needs is essential to an ethical approach to working with others in their liberatory struggles. This is in contrast to an “ideological approach” by which militants attempt to convince the masses to adopt their radical politics. Especificismo is firmly against dogmatic politics because:

“[an] anarchist social movement, or one of any other ideology, would only tend to split the class of the exploited, or even those that are interested in struggling for a particular cause. That is, the force that must drive the creation and the development of social movements is necessity, and not ideology.” (p. 35)

Since needs are unavoidable factors of our daily existence, addressing them is not an option. All militants, like all people, have needs. Therefore, the most basic part of human life is also the best place to begin doing social work and strategizing about change. In this way, militants can ensure that the foundation for their final objective is built on the most enduring part of the social level. And anarchism will have the opportunity to gain support by adapting its strategies to address the reality of current necessities.

6: Social and Political Relations

A transformation in society that is capable of revolutionizing its most powerful structures will undoubtedly include drastic changes to the way that we interact with each other. In the struggle to overcome capitalist exploitation and state domination, we must learn to find value in each other, not as potential

²⁵ “The political practice of social movements translated into the struggle for short-term gains brings the pedagogical sense of increased consciousness to the militants, in the event of victories or even defeats.” (p. 41)

Organizational Dualism

The term “especificismo” can potentially evoke strong feelings from anarchists of all stripes. In the English-speaking anarchist movement, the term is sometimes used as a gatekeeping mechanism. People can name drop this single, non-English word into political discourse and get immediate internationalist credentials. For certain opportunistic individuals, especificismo is a vague concept that requires a lot of study to understand but, when applicable, always seems to line up nicely with their own political views. Others are scared by the term’s untranslatability. They might be more comfortable with “specifism,” or they might prefer the more general term “social anarchism” for exactly this same reason. But without much information published on this particular anarchist current, English speakers are left to answer certain questions on their own. What is especificismo? Is it anarchism? What is an especificist organization? What does it do? Is it a political party? These basic questions, which may seem elementary to some, are not unheard of in the United States or in Brazil.¹ Using the Anarchist Federation of Rio de Janeiro’s (FARJ) *Social Anarchism and Organisation*, we can arrive at a more concrete understanding of the ideology, theory, strategy, and final objectives of especificismo.

While some basic concepts from especificismo, such as strategic unity and social insertion, are commonly cited, today, a lot of the confusion and gatekeeping around the term is related to the mistaken assumption that it is an entirely new take on anarchism. In the text, we find the concise explanation that:

¹ “Since the term ‘especificismo’ arrived in Brazil in the mid1990s there has been a series of polemics or even confusions around it. There were, and unfortunately still are people who say that especificismo is not anarchism; they accuse especificista organisations of being political parties, among other absurdities.” (Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro, *Social Anarchism and Organisation*, Trans. by Jonathan Payn, p. 69)

“The term *especifismo* was created by the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (Federación Anarquista Uruguaya – FAU) and, by it, we refer to a conception of anarchist organisation that has two fundamental axes: organisation and social work/insertion. These two axes are based on the classical concepts of differentiated actuation of anarchism in the social and political levels (Bakuninist concept) and specific anarchist organisation (Malatestan concept). Therefore, the term *especifismo*, besides having been recently conceived, refers to anarchist organisational practices that have existed since the nineteenth century.” (p. 69)

In the current English discourse on the subject, there is an insufficient distinction between the social and political levels. Our organizing typically occurs in a political limbo that can’t accurately be called a popular organization or a grouping of tendency. And similar to the way that bringing up the “specific anarchist organisation” is often reduced to the self-righteous mentioning of Bakunin and Malatesta, it is difficult to justify to anarchists (in the United States at least) the unavoidability of doing complex theoretical work in order to distinguish political organizing from popular movements. It typically devolves into historical references which inevitably include more name dropping (Marx, the International, the Platform, etc.) Nevertheless, the fact that *especifismo* has a tradition and a past is essential for distinguishing it from both individualism and vanguardism, as well as freeing it from the novelty of being a trendy buzzword amongst anarchists online.²

Organizational unity is an essential principle of *especifismo* and is therefore key to understanding the difference between

² “Not everything that was produced or is produced theoretically within anarchism serves the practice we want.” (p. 56)

small as possible, and so that the high level of discussion within the organisation is not adversely affected by these differences. In general terms, political education promotes the theoretical and ideological development of the organisation and ensures unity.” (p. 60)

This does not refer to a mass spreading of this education, nor does it establish the goal of equality of knowledge amongst militants.

Education within a political organization should aim to reduce the negative effects and hierarchies created by the varied personal experiences of the militants. However, it should strive to maintain the presence of these same personal perspectives in the discussions of the group. Therefore, a key part of the curriculum for new militants has to be a thorough introduction to the group’s methods for moderating and facilitating individual perspectives. For militants practicing social insertion, personal experiences will be essential, as they defend organizational unity, outside of the formative political space.

5: Conception and Implementation of Strategy

In theorizing about libertarian socialism, which is a long-term objective, *especifist* militants are not intending to develop a strategy for quickly and immediately realizing these aims. Rather, because of the role of the social level of engagement in revolutionary transformation, *especifismo* places societal needs at the center of both its conception of strategy and its implementation. Through organizing to address needs, the people learn. And through strategizing around this learning,

problem for libertarian socialists since the final objective will inevitably depend on other people's input and work.²⁴

While propaganda can be an effective general spreading of *especificismo*, it is obviously limited when it comes to supporting mass movements (on the social level) and building unity (on the political level.) Nevertheless, spreading ideas and publicizing critiques allows participants in popular organizations to determine their own relationship to the militancy of a specific anarchist organization. Our revolutionary perspectives cannot remain culturally obscure if they are to have a revolutionary effect on society.

4: Political Education

Unlike political propaganda, which is aimed at influencing the social level, education is aimed at the political level. Political education is about forming militants so that they are able to participate in the work and discourse of the specific anarchist organization. This means that every organization will have its own educational process. Unfortunately, this process is usually unofficial, indirect, and more of a DIY approach. For the *especificist* militants, however, education is a political act of solidarity and is fundamental for building unity and developing relationships amongst comrades. As an explicit attempt to address the hierarchies created by knowledge and experience, while not ignoring the indisputable necessity of these characteristics in revolutionary work, we can say that:

“[Education] gives support to new militants so that the differences in the level of education between the less and more educated should be as

²⁴ “We understand that any process of social transformation with final objectives like those that we propose will depend on acceptance, or at least on “non-rejection” of large sectors of the population. And propaganda, in this sense theoretical, educational and/or cultural will contribute significantly to this.” (p. 59)

the social level and the political level. A specific anarchist organization is not working to build a political force that can go out and nudge society, as a whole, toward something better. Societal transformation will require mass movements, but with *especificismo*, politics is about organizing an active minority along an explicit, political line. This is organizing around common ideology and collective plans of action.³ Since the social level is a more encompassing concept than the political level, it involves organizing more people, under a larger tent. That kind of organizing which happens on a mass scale cannot possibly be based on the same kind of unity that can be achieved on the political level.⁴

Nevertheless, the politics of *especificismo* require social engagement. After establishing ideological, theoretical, and strategic unity, a specific group can more effectively engage (collectively) on the social level. In this way, the political level serves as a level of training, educating, unifying, and planning. Political-level organizing is a tool that bolsters and helps sustain popular movements. It is not a leadership cadre or a power center of its own. For this reason, membership in a specific anarchist organization depends fundamentally on agreement with the political line of the group, not because anarchists should not work with other ideological currents, but rather that these collaborations and coalitions should happen at the social level of organizing, where unity is based on a lower common denominator.⁵

³ “Unlike the social level, the political level is an ideological level; an anarchist level.” (p. 62)

⁴ “This organisation of well-defined lines joins the anarchists at the political and ideological level, and develops their political practice at the social level – which characterises an organisation of active minority, seeing as though the social level is always much larger than the political level.” (p. 41)

⁵ “At the political level, the anarchist organisation seeks to relate to organisations, groups and individuals from all locations, such that this can contribute to its practice.” (p. 60)

A liberating ideology is the only way for these movements to survive reactionary and authoritarian counterforces and grow to their revolutionary potential. This is the basic strategy of *especificismo*: to encourage the liberating tendency of mass movements so that they will gain enough force to transform society. This strategy does not require converting people to anarchism, nor does it aim to persuade participants in movements to become anarchists.⁶ *Especificismo* is about anarchists organizing to work on societal liberation from exploitation and domination. These anarchists not only organize on their own terms but also as equal participants within larger social movements.

Ideological and Theoretical Unity

Especificismo presents unity as something that is not strictly theoretical. It is the beneficial effect of developing a shared political line together, a kind of organizational fitness. For *especificist* militants, politics is about the articulation and defense of this line, as well as their own personal commitment to its foundations and its details.⁷ Because of their direct participation and input in the development of a shared political line, the members of a specific anarchist organization are not coerced or made to feign ownership of someone else's ideas.

In activist spaces, tactics and strategy can be difficult to differentiate. At times, loyalty can be so dependent on employing and defending the use of a single tactic that questioning the

⁶ "The objective of the anarchist organisation is not to turn all activists into anarchists, but to learn to work with each of these activists in the most appropriate way." (p. 48)

⁷ "This unity occurs through the decision-making process of the anarchist organisation and has as an objective to determine a clear political line (theoretical and ideological) that must, necessarily, guide all the activities and actions of the organisation which, "both as a whole as well as in the details, should be in exact and constant agreement" with the line defined by the organisation." (p. 56)

determining what our next, most immediate steps should be. Under a capitalist system, our material conditions do not resemble our societal ideals. Therefore, we have to theoretically work together to formulate and refine the transformations we want to see in our society.²²

The development of this theory requires unified ideology and strategy. Producing theory without this unity (or importing theory from other organizations) does not encourage the collective commitment necessary to realize political action, nor does it benefit from the multiplicity of perspectives that strengthen a political line. Through the process of defining a political line and articulating a political program as an organization, unity of action and degree of commitment are made clear. Concretely, these processes occur through a dialogue amongst militants. This dialogue depends on the highest degrees of trust so that ideas and critiques can be shared openly. Trust also allows for everyone's individual responsibilities to be clearly stated.²³

3: Anarchist Propaganda

Propaganda is the material distribution of ideas. It can be theoretical, educational, or cultural, but because it aims to increase the general acceptance of these ideas on the social level, propaganda is always political. Additionally, general acceptance of radical ideas is not the same thing as "nonrejection." The social level involves such large numbers of people that it is unlikely that anyone would be able to convince most people in society to agree with their specific visions of the future. This is not a

²² "The conception of libertarian socialism and the revolutionary process of transformation can only be thought of, today, from a theoretical perspective, since in practice we are not living in a revolutionary time." (p. 55)

²³ "In seeking to understand the reality in which one operates theory arranges information and data, formalises the understanding of the historical moment in which we operate and the definition of the social, political and economic characteristics." (p. 55)

applying these terms to our own historical, social, and political situations cannot be done by someone outside of our unique context. Theory has to be homemade, so to speak. In their own context, FARJ describes the process as follows:

“The specific anarchist organisation aims to put into practice a revolutionary politics that conceives the means of reaching the final objectives (social revolution and libertarian socialism) with action always based on strategy. For this, it organises as active minority, co-ordinating the ideological militant activities that work as yeast for the struggles of the social level. The main activity undertaken by this political level is the social work that occurs when the political level interacts with the social level. In this contact the political level seeks to influence the social level as much as possible, causing it to function in the most libertarian and egalitarian way possible. We have seen that this can happen directly between the anarchist organisation and the social movements, or through groupings of tendency.” (p. 62)

Tendency can thus be understood as another route for the potential influence of revolutionary ideas on the social level. This could be a tactical, strategic, or ideological agreement between participants in a popular organization and a specific anarchist organization, a kind of inter-organizational tendency. However, it could also be an inadvertent or incidental unity formed through struggle itself.

Given the unavoidable relationship between means and ends, any liberating attempt to influence social movements must be informed by final objectives. Understanding what we mean when we describe libertarian socialism is important in

strategy behind it seems like a political attack. But truly revolutionary politics must be based on deeper and more developed interpretations of current events and situations. Tactics alone cannot define political lines. Theory and ideology define political lines. It is for this reason that *especificismo* emphasizes the unity of a specific anarchist organization because, without theoretical and ideological unity, there can be no strategic or tactical unity.⁸ Since even our mass movements tend to lack cohesive action over time, it is clear that activism alone is insufficient for bringing about revolutionary change.

Tactical allegiance is insufficient for organizing revolutionaries because there must also be a place, in addition to the activism, for revolutionaries to cultivate militancy. However, most political organizing today is not structured around clearly formed and stated political lines. And if members of an organization know that there is disagreement in the group as a whole, where can they go to explicitly work on a collective agreement and articulate a clear stance? If politics concerns the organizing of people as groups, why are we usually expected to articulate political positions on our own, in private, and then go foraging for others with our same take? *Especificismo* uses the specific organization as the place for building, strengthening, and strategizing with others around a common line. This avoids confusion and debate about fundamental positions in the future, making the established line easier to hold over time, something which is necessary when collaborating and compromising with a popular coalition.⁹

⁸ “To constitute this tool of solid and consistent combat, it is essential that the anarchist organisation has well-determined strategic-tactical and political lines – which occur through theoretical and ideological unity, and the unity of strategy and tactics.” (p. 41)

⁹ “The absence of this theoretical and ideological political line leads to a lack of articulation or even to conflicting articulation in the set of concepts, the result of which is incorrect, confusing and/or inefficient practice.” (p. 56–57)

In *Social Anarchism and Organisation*, the Anarchist Federation of Rio de Janeiro (FARJ) addresses a common fear of activists and dissidents new to the concept of militancy, explaining the reality that serious work cannot be done alone:

“The model of the specific anarchist organisation implies that the militants have to do things that they do not like very much or stop doing some of the things they like. This is to ensure that the organisation progresses with strategy. Progressing with strategy makes the anarchist organisation a coherent and effective organisation; an organisation dedicated to serious, committed militancy in which the militants do that which they have established as priority and work on the tasks that contribute in the most effective way possible to the consolidation of their strategic objectives.” (p. 67)

Since especificist militants are not directed to hold but rather develop and form the organizational line themselves, the specific anarchist organization does not threaten or compromise anyone’s individual liberties. It is, instead, an example of individuals freely forming and maintaining a radical position together.

In many ways, especificismo presents a meticulously developed ideology about the importance of strategy. This includes studying the present as well as making the long-term objectives as clear as possible. FARJ talks of the relationship between means and ends, as well as potential “cycles of struggle.”¹⁰ This ideological rigor is sometimes mistaken by other social anarchists as being overly prescriptive and limiting. They

¹⁰ “The specific anarchist organisation should seek to perform a diagnosis of the reality within which it operates, set the final long-term objectives and, most importantly, determine the different periods and cycles of struggle, each one with their respective objectives.” (p. 65)

about political ideas and organization being strategically (and successfully) introduced to the social level.²¹

But what are the differences between the social insertion of especificist militants and the kind of influence practiced by other “revolutionary” political ideologies?

First, especificismo is different from insurrectionary ideologies because it promotes the use of social movements as revolutionary forces. Societal transformation is not the automatic effect of an election, a coup-d’état, or the mechanical playing out of History. Society must change itself.

Second, especificismo is different from vanguardism because it does not have the objective of creating a leadership class within mass movements. Popular organizing must be a practice in self-government, otherwise it will re-establish centralized means of control. In places where there is leadership, the people should determine its scope democratically. The oppressed do not need a cadre of leaders to usher them into their future. Societal transformation requires a revolutionary ideology that comes from the oppressed classes themselves, not from an educated minority.

Finally, especificismo is different from entryism because influencing the social level through participation does not require seizing control of an organization and leading it to your own ends. Social influence does not have to imply unethical indoctrination or coercion. It can simply be about interacting with others as equals to promote and develop the most liberating ideas. Influence is not a synonym for unjust force.

2: Production and Reproduction of Theory

Social Anarchism and Organisation mentions concepts like libertarian socialism, revolution, militancy, social work, etc. But

²¹ “Thus, the anarchist organisation has social work when it creates or develops work with social movements, and social insertion when it manages to influence movements with anarchist practices.” (p. 52)

respect of others to think, to organize, and to take sides in the way that they see fit.

Political Activities

So, what exactly is it that especificist militants do? In *Social Anarchism and Organisation*, the Anarchist Federation of Rio de Janeiro lays out six categories that characterize the activities of a specific anarchist organization. These include: [1] social work and insertion, [2] production and reproduction of theory, [3] anarchist propaganda, [4] political education, [5] conception and implementation of strategy, and [6] social and political relations (p. 41). In studying especificismo, distinguishing these different kinds of work from each other helps to define common terms such as theory, propaganda, and education.

1: Social Work and Insertion

Here, some distinctions are necessary since the term “social insertion” can be a very difficult concept for some radicals to comprehend and for some anarchists to support. At its most basic, social insertion is the name for the entire process of influencing social movements.²⁰ But it does not refer to the passive or unique influence that everyone inherently exercises in everyday social life. Social insertion is the intentional and collective act of influencing social movements. The specific aims and organization of this collective action are formulated on the political level, but for this influence to have revolutionary potential it must be exercised on a larger scale. So, social insertion is

²⁰ “We call the process of influencing social movements through anarchist practice social insertion.” (p. 51–52)

consider the ideas to be too niche and the texts to be too dense. Still, this precision has two primary benefits that make especificismo an important current which needs to be more thoroughly studied by anarchists around the world.

First, through the articulation of such complex concepts, especificist groups develop their own ideological and theoretical unity. The texts created by these organizations are the by-product of forming a unified front; they are the documentation of the work to arrive at clearly defined positions. Because they are sometimes internal documents chronicling long, dense debates, the texts of especificismo serve as proofs of the fact that certain anarchists have successfully cultivated organizational unity. If the finished products had been created in a way that was more digestible for readers who weren’t part of this process, they would have been less formative for the militants creating them and may only have demonstrated the personally formed political ideas of the most skilled writers, not the organization as a whole. On top of that, the concern of an especificist organization is political unity and social engagement. Especificismo is less concerned with growing a particular anarchist group than it is with strengthening a unified strategy of anarchists participating in mass movements.

The second benefit that the exactness of especificismo offers social anarchists today is its depth of thought, in a contemporary context. This shows the rest of the international anarchist movement, how much work must go into group study, how much work must go into articulating theory into written words, how much work must go into debating and compromising and learning, just to form the political tool (the specific anarchist organization) which can eventually be applied to the social level. While it is common for activists and organizers to think that there is no time for this kind of “internal” work, whether they mean theorizing, strategizing, reflecting, thinking, or learning in general, the strategic critiques presented by especificismo make clear that militancy requires unity, that mil-

itants need formation, and that long-term objectives inform short-term action. Therefore, revolutionary change demands an ideological level of organizing. The ideological level is the political level, the anarchist level.

Political Fronts

Discussions about the relationship between short and long-term objectives are common amongst anarchists. But this relationship is typically only referenced ideologically, as a foundational principle, without any way of applying it to the current situation. In *Social Anarchism and Organisation*, the Anarchist Federation of Rio de Janeiro (FARJ) emphasizes “need” as a focal point for gathering and mobilizing people.¹¹ Needs radically reveal the uncompromising forces of the current system. It is through struggling collectively to manage our needs that long-term objectives can be understood more concretely. And it is also through this struggle to address immediate necessities that we will develop the organizing methods and social force required to transform society.

However, needs are not uniform. They vary over time and from person to person. The challenging reality is that the different sectors of society have vastly different needs. If a political organization aims to engage in different movements within society, these movements will require their own knowledge, study, theory, and strategy. Especifist militants have to prepare themselves to engage in these unique spaces, giving them the full respect and genuine effort that they deserve and require to become effective social forces. By organizing their activities into “fronts” of engagement, a specific group can stay

¹¹ “Therefore, the role of anarchist organisation is to explain necessities and to mobilise around them. Be it in the creation of social movements or working with existing movements the central idea is always to mobilise around necessity.” (p. 41)

connect these instances over time. In this way, the specific organization serves as a motor for the reoccurrence and repetition of collective moments of political action. FARJ describes support for the specific anarchist organization as a time when:

“[...] people who have affinities with the anarchist organisation and its work have contact with other militants, are able to deepen their knowledge of the political line of the organisation, better get to know its activities and deepen their vision of anarchism, etc.” (p. 46)

This mutual and reciprocal influence characterizes the “flow of militants” described in *Social Anarchism and Organisation*. Both the “contact” with anarchist ideas as well as the prospective “get to know” outlook emphasize the potential for the politics of *especifismo* to spread amongst radicalized and radicalizing people. The specific anarchist organization is a destination for those looking to engage deeper with revolutionary politics, but it is also a source from which revolutionary political ideas can be emitted to the social level.

It is important to note that the concentric circles neither establish nor reinforce superiority or power of one level of engagement over another.¹⁹ This is true in both directions of the flow of ideas between the social and political levels. A specific anarchist organization does not aim to establish a political line so that it can be forced upon others who have chosen to freely participate in a mass mobilization or popular organization. These people may not agree with the ideas of the specific anarchist organization. Still, since we all find common ground in the larger social movement, the most committed militants, like the single-issue supporters, require and deserve the

¹⁹ “There is not a hierarchy between the circles, but the idea is that the more “inside”, or the closer the militant, the better are they able to formulate, understand, reproduce and apply the lines of the organisation.” (p. 46)

will also be able to operate with the confidence that the people that are most militantly committed to long-term transformation are well organized amongst themselves.

An essential aspect of the flow of militants into a revolutionary organization is the education and formation of radicalizing people. Again, this has nothing to do with indoctrination or coercion of any kind. Critics of organized, militant formation emphasize a person's free participation as "voluntary." But without information and resources about political militancy and *especificismo*, how can casual supporters make an informed decision to change their level of commitment and voluntarily become more militant?

The theory of concentric circles provides a way to understand one's place in relation to a specific, unified, and ideological political group. This positionality determines one's role in the decision-making process as well as one's commitment to the final decisions of the group. This ensures that "the organisation has clear criteria for entry, clearly defining who does and does not take part in it, and at what level of commitment the militants are" (p. 47.) This allows activists, dissidents, and organizers to clearly know when and in what ways they can meaningfully combine forces with a specific anarchist organization. Likewise, as anarchists, it is only by theoretically understanding our relationship to the specific group that we can make the free decision to commit ourselves to an organizational program. So, a thorough understanding of political positionality is equally important for radicalized militants as it is for less engaged supporters in society at large.¹⁸

Support, like militancy, is not a promise you make one time, and that's it. Rather, political engagement is made up of instances of commitment. The strategy of *especificismo* aims to

¹⁸ "In any event, the anarchist organisation always has to concern itself with the training and guidance of the supporters and militants so that this may allow them to change their level of commitment, if they so desire." (p. 47)

acutely aware of its organizational capacity and its positionality within popular struggles. For this reason, *especificismo* consists of militants ordering and organizing themselves as well as their engagements.¹²

Within a specific anarchist organization, militants depend on each other to relay relevant information and updates about important happenings. This information could concern a variety of different organizing spaces. Being able to specifically reference "Front X" and "Front Y" allows for more concise and exact summaries and reports. Additionally, the spatial connotation of different fronts which are spread out around the community, connects the theoretical conception of social engagement to the actual place where we live. Fronts imply an organizational geography as well as a topography of struggle. The more exact a point of engagement on a particular front becomes, the more the rest of the organization depends on accurate mapping to show exactly where and how the different fronts relate to each other.

Each political front must be maintained if social-level organizing is going to grow into a popular force capable of revolutionizing society. While these movements will inevitably be created and developed, the ideological influences which drive them may be influenced by capital, the state, or some other centralized authority. For this reason, political space must be occupied by unified ideological forces that can defend and promote liberating methods and ideas. Since the powers that be are explicitly organized to defend their ideas in public, anarchism must also be ideologically and theoretically prepared to engage in this sphere.¹³

¹² "This political practice in different camps requires that the anarchist organisation divides itself into fronts, which are the internal groups that carry out social work." (p. 43)

¹³ "The fronts are responsible, in their respective area of work, for the creation and development of social movements as well as for ensuring that

Concentric Circles

The Anarchist Federation of Rio de Janeiro (FARJ) mentions the importance bringing together militants who have common “affinity” to begin organizing in a specific way.¹⁴ But if this organization is to be built on common ideology and unity of strategy, what are its limits? Who can join, how, and why would they want to? These questions cannot be answered ideologically because simply sharing a set of beliefs with others does not determine each person’s degree of commitment. In other words, ideology alone does not inform us of our positionality in the struggle. Especificismo employs a theory of concentric circles to resolve this problem.¹⁵

Some anglophone anarchists may be uncomfortable with theoretical concepts. They might have only associated (or clashed) with other anarchists on ideological grounds. The especificismo current of anarchism is certainly more theoretical than is common in anarchist spaces found in the United States.¹⁶ In *Social Anarchism and Organisation*, concentric circles, in particular, can pose problems to the English understanding of especificist theory. Nevertheless, the issues of positionality addressed by this analysis should not be ignored by militants who are serious about the potential for mass movements to liberate society. Being able to place oneself in

anarchists occupy political space – space that is in permanent dispute – and to exercise due influence in these movements.” (p. 43)

¹⁴ “The grouping of tendency puts itself between the social movements and the specific anarchist organisation, bringing together militants of distinct ideologies that have affinity in relation to certain practical questions.” (p. 47)

¹⁵ “In short, the concentric circles seek to resolve an important paradox: the anarchist organisation needs to be closed enough to have prepared, committed and politically aligned militants, and open enough to draw in new militants.” (p. 45)

¹⁶ “Theory necessarily carries ideological aspects and ideology necessarily carries theoretical aspects. There is, therefore, a direct link between one another.” (p. 56)

relation to a specific political group, as well as in relation to larger social groups, is integral to the organizational dualism (the distinction between organizing on the social and political levels) of especificismo.

The struggle to transform society includes militants, activists, organizers, sympathizers, etc. In order to understand the relationship between these groups and the specific anarchist organization, FARJ uses a visual representation that depicts a path, crossing layers of increasing political unity, by which committed militants come into the specific organization. Another path, going in the opposite direction, shows the flow of anarchist ideas and practices back out to the larger social movements. Each concentric circle represents a degree of agreement and commitment to the political line of the specific organization. Some people might not agree with all of the ideas of the group, or they might not be willing to commit as much of themselves and their time. However, the opposite may also be true, so organizing around this concept can increase the contact that a revolutionary group has with potential militants, as well as help to make interactions with comrades and allies a more intentional endeavor for everyone involved.¹⁷

It is only within the innermost circle that ideological and theoretical unity exist. At that level of organization, every single militant is able, on their own, to “elaborate, reproduce and apply the political line of the organisation internally, in the fronts and in public activity” (p. 45.) This means projecting the ideas and positions of the specific group back out to the circles surrounding it. The activists, organizers, and supporters at the outer levels will have the benefit of using the tools and resources created by the specific anarchist organization. They

¹⁷ “The concentric circles are intended to provide a clear place for each of the militants and sympathisers of the organisation. In addition, they seek to facilitate and strengthen the social work of the anarchist organisation, and finally, establish a channel for the capture of new militants.” (p. 45)