

An Historiography of Anarchism

**Global anarchist history reveals the fundamental unity of the tradition, along
with its key lines of debate and disagreement**

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Contents

A Critique of Sources and Definitions	3
Problematic Methods...	4
...Result in Mistaken Conclusions	6
A New Approach to Anarchist History	8
Great Debates Between Anarchists	13
Key Debates and Positions	14
The Real Currents within Anarchism	18
Final Considerations	19
Author	20

This article summarizes many years of research which culminated in the publication of the book *Bandeira Negra: Rediscutindo o Anarquismo* [*Black Flag: Rediscussing Anarchism*].¹ The book is the fruit of a collective global research project on anarchism, involving international researchers within the Institute for Anarchist Theory and History (IATH). The simple yet tricky unifying research question was: *what is anarchism?*

The book was structured around three central goals:

1. Developing a critical assessment of reference studies on anarchism (in Spanish, Portuguese, English, and French).
2. Proposing a new theoretical-methodological approach for studies on anarchism.
3. Redefining anarchism and clarifying its great historical debates and trends; based on the written production of more than eighty anarchist authors and organizations, and the global history of anarchism since its inception nearly one hundred and fifty years ago.

Below are the main arguments of the book, arranged according to the three aforementioned fronts.

A Critique of Sources and Definitions

References were identified using the bibliographies of works used in the development of *Bandeira Negra*. Using Google Scholar's bibliometric tools, seven primary reference studies were identified. These include: *Anarchism* (1900) by Paul Eltzbacher; *Anarchy Through the Times* (1934) by Max Nettlau; *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (1962) by George Woodcock; *Anarchists and Anarchism* (1964) by James Joll; *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (1965) by Daniel Guérin; *Demanding the Impossible: a History of Anarchism* (1991) by Peter Marshall; and *An Anarchist FAQ* by Iain McKay (a collective project started in 1995 on the Internet and published as a printed book in 2008) (cited chronologically, with the title translated into English and the year of publication of the original text).

A considerable number of these studies—all sympathetic to anarchism—were of outstanding importance at the time, particularly the work of Max Nettlau.

However, these authors did not enjoy the opportunities and resources that exist for academic and other researchers today. It is necessary to critique them, generously, without disqualifying them, and to seek to solve the problems derived from the repetition of false claims regarding anarchist history. A more in-depth and critical analysis allowed us to identify shortcomings and drawbacks that must be corrected and complemented in order to advance research and refine the public's understanding of anarchism.

¹ Felipe Corrêa, *Bandeira Negra: Rediscutindo o Anarquismo*. Curitiba: Prismas, 2015. [Black Flag: Rediscussing Anarchism]

Problematic Methods...

Historiographic methodology has tended to focus on “great men,” producing what could be called “histories from above.”² Frequently, the “history of anarchism” boils down to biographies of the lives of these “great men,” or to descriptions of their ideas and theoretical conceptions, without accounting for historical context, the practices of popular movements, or the diffusion and historical influence of actions and ideas. In terms of geographic scope, past studies have focused almost exclusively on Western Europe or the North Atlantic axis, diminishing or completely ignoring authors and episodes from other parts of the world. These studies frequently operate with a small set of authors and episodes, often making broad generalizations from limited datasets.

Eltzbacher is a typical example of this: he describes the “seven sages” of anarchism, drawing mostly from European thinkers (William Godwin, Max Stirner, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, Pyotr Kropotkin, Leo Tolstoy, and Benjamin Tucker), and does not consider any case studies of historical episodes in which anarchist thought shaped action.³ Nettleau escapes this lens somewhat, as beyond his discussions of great thinkers, his work considers a broad set of initiatives and movements. Even so, he focuses primarily on Western Europe, Russia, and the United States, and less than 10% of his work touches on the rest of the world.⁴

Woodcock dedicates almost the entire theoretical thrust of his study to six great thinkers, all of whom are European; the same thinkers as Eltzbacher excluding Benjamin Tucker. 60% of his writings on practice concern France, Spain, Italy, and Russia, and only a few pages cover Latin America and the United States.⁵ Joll bases his theoretical writing almost exclusively upon Proudhon and Bakunin; and his practical writing upon European debates over the so-called “propaganda by the deed,” syndicalism, and the Russian and Spanish revolutions.⁶ Guérin’s theoretical writings are dedicated to three authors: Stirner, Proudhon, and Bakunin; and his practical writing concerns the Russian Revolution, Italian Factory Councils, and the Spanish Revolution.⁷

Marshall dedicates more than two hundred pages of his theoretical reflection to an analysis of ten authors: the six authors covered by Woodcock with the addition of Élisée Reclus, Errico Malatesta, Emma Goldman, and Mahatma Gandhi. In over eight hundred pages, less than 10% is dedicated to Asia and Latin America, while Africa and Oceania are not mentioned.⁸ McKay mobilizes a larger set of authors than most others studies, but European and North American classics still predominate.⁹

Thus, the predominant approach within the reference studies has tended to boil anarchism down to its “great classics” and a few historical episodes, which are usually chosen arbitrarily. Likewise, within most works it is uncommon to consider what are known as “social vectors” of

² This term is clearly a reversal of the “history from below” promoted by E.P. Thompson and other historians. To learn more about this historiographic trend, see: Edward pp. Thompson, “History From Below.”

³ Paul Eltzbacher, *The Great Anarchists: Ideas and Teachings of Seven Major Thinkers*. New York: Dover, 2004.

⁴ Max Nettleau, *História da Anarquia*. 2 vols. São Paulo: Hedra, 200. [Anarchy Through the Times]

⁵ George Woodcock, *História das Idéias e Movimentos Anarquistas*. 2 vols. Porto Alegre: L&PM, 2002. [Anarchism: a history of libertarian ideas and movements]

⁶ James Joll, *Anarquistas e Anarquismo*. Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 1970. [The Anarchists]

⁷ Daniel Guérin, *O Anarquismo: Da Doutrina à Ação*. Rio de Janeiro: Gernival, 1968. [Anarchism: from theory to practice]

⁸ Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*. Oakland: PM Press, 2010.

⁹ Iain McKay, *An Anarchist FAQ*. 2 vols. Oakland: AK Press, 2008.

anarchism: mass expressions in which the positions of anarchists were decisive or hegemonic in strategic terms.

The theory and history of anarchism should reflect its status as a 150-year global phenomenon. Regarding the classic texts of anarchist theory; an appropriate method is required to identify classic texts, to relate them to the movements of their time, and to the anonymous people who were essential to the existence of anarchism. Regarding historical episodes, it is essential to study those initiatives established by or involving anarchists which would prove to be the greatest episodes of anarchism in the world, using and developing similarly appropriate methods. It is essential to observe the aforementioned social vectors carefully, without which anarchism cannot be understood, especially syndicalism (revolutionary syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism). For the classics as well as for the episodes and social vectors, it's essential to look beyond the axis of the North Atlantic and towards Latin America, Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Oceania.

Two methods further complicate the problem of writing a robust history of anarchism: firstly, the predominance of definitions that are so broad that they become imprecise, and secondly, ahistorical approaches to the subject.

A common tic among historians of anarchism is the decontextualized etymological analysis of the term “anarchy” and its derivatives. Although Guérin and McKay also appeal to the etymological meaning,¹⁰ it is Woodcock and Marshall who do so in a *decontextualized* way, considering it relevant to their definitions of anarchism, without wrestling with the complications of breadth and imprecision.¹¹ It is impossible to define a historical phenomenon exclusively from the etymology of its referent term, without historical contextualization. The etymological definitions of anarchism are ahistorical as the term has been used at least since Ancient Greece, although an historical tradition only emerged in the second half of the 19th century. In addition, etymological definitions only characterize anarchism in terms of opposition to or criticism of authority, domination, governments or states. These definitions exclude essential aspects of the tradition that are constructive, purposeful, and strategic.

A similarly decontextualized technique used by past historians is listing adherents based on their self-identification as anarchists, rather than identifying adherents based on the ideas and practices which they advanced. One cannot take self-identification at face value. The inclusion of Proudhon in the anarchist canon, as Woodcock argues, is based on the “positive meaning” that the Frenchman gave to the term anarchy in his work *What is Property?* (1840).¹² Another example is found in McKay's study which, although not absolutist in his assessment, includes individualists such as Susan Brown, Benjamin Tucker, or the newspaper *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*, as well as primitivists such as John Zerzan or the newspaper *Green Anarchy*. However, beyond self-identifying as anarchists, these authors and publications do not have much in common with the mainline historical anarchist tradition.¹³

Finally, there is, what one might call, the ahistorical approach to anarchist history. This historical approach is fuelled by followers of Kropotkin,¹⁴ who famously argued that anarchism is

¹⁰ Daniel Guérin, *O Anarquismo: da Doutrina à Ação*, pp. 19-20; Iain McKay, *An Anarchist FAQ*, vol. 1, pp. 19-21.

¹¹ George Woodcock, *História das Idéias e Movimentos Anarquistas*, vol. 1, p. 8; Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*, pp. 3.

¹² George Woodcock, *História das Idéias e Movimentos Anarquistas*, vol. 1, p. 10.

¹³ Iain McKay, *An Anarchist FAQ*, vol. 1.

¹⁴ Reference studies on anarchism frequently make use of ahistorical approaches, such as the argument that anarchism has always existed, or (relatedly) of broad definitions, such as those that say that anarchism is synonymous

rooted in a mutual aid instinct that is universal to the human species and therefore manifests itself in many times and places across all of history.¹⁵ By defending the timeless universality of anarchism, this approach gave rise to a “legitimizing myth,” a “metahistory” that, consciously or unconsciously, sought to strengthen its own ideology by refuting the notion that anarchism is incompatible with human nature. However, I argue that anarchism *does* have a history, one intimately related to a particular context. Its emergence and development, successes and failures, ebbs and flows, can only be understood and explained in historical terms. It’s essential to make use of an historical method and to develop a robust relationship between theory and history. For this reason, ahistorical approaches to anarchism should be abandoned.

In short, it is essential to operate with a definition of anarchism that is not only historical but also precise, in a way that, among other things, rules out absurdities such as the idea of anarcho-capitalism—derived from an understanding of anarchism as synonymous with anti-statism—and differentiates anarchism from other ideologies, including liberalism and Marxism.

...Result in Mistaken Conclusions

Various mistaken conclusions derive from the aforementioned problematic approaches. These can be found in reference studies and other works. Some of these are highlighted below.

Eltzbacher, Woodcock, and Joll argue that anarchism is an incoherent ideology. For the Joll in particular, “it is the clash between these two types of temperament, the religious and the rationalist, the apocalyptic and the humanist, which has made so much of anarchist doctrine seem contradictory.”¹⁶ Marshall, McKay, and Guérin also affirm the existence of such contradictions but believe they are ultimately positive—that they derive from anarchist anti-dogmatism and can

with the struggle against authority, with anti-statism, with defense of freedom. Among other things, as Lucien van der Walt argues, these approaches, beyond the innumerable logical inconsistencies, are not in a position to explain why anarchism arises and develops in some contexts and not in others, nor to differentiate anarchism from other ideologies; some even commonly operate with too great a gap between theory and history. (See: Lucien van der Walt, “Global Anarchism and Syndicalism: theory, history, resistance.” *Anarchist Studies*, vol. 24, num. 1, 2016. pp. 86-91.) Marshall maintains—according to the argument that anarchism always existed—that “the first anarchist was the first person who felt the oppression of another and rebelled against it.” (See: Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: a History of Anarchism*. Oakland: PM Press, 2010. pp. 3-4.) Nettleau and Woodcock walk in a similar direction, as do other influential studies, like the book *Anarcho-Syndicalism* by Rudolf Rocker and, especially, the article “Anarchism” by Kropotkin, who present anarchism as a universal feature of humanity. (See: Max Nettleau, *História da Anarquia*; George Woodcock, *História das Idéias e Movimentos Anarquistas*; Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcosindicalismo: Teoría y Práctica*. Barcelona: Picazo, 1978. [Anarcho-Syndicalism: theory and practice]; Piotr Kropotkin, «Anarquismo».) In a broad definition, Eltzbacher concludes that “anarchist teachings have in common only this, that they negate the State for our future.” (See: Paul Eltzbacher, *The Great Anarchists: Ideas and Teachings of Seven Major Thinkers*, p. 292.) Broad and imprecise definitions are also present in studies by Nettleau, Woodcock and Marshall, as well as others, such as *The Anarchists*, by Roderick Kedward, and *The Black Flag of Anarchy*, by Corinne Jacker. (See: Max Nettleau, *História da Anarquia*; George Woodcock, *História das Idéias e Movimentos Anarquistas*, vol. 1, pp. 7, 16; Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*, p. 15; Roderick Kedward, *The Anarchists: The Men Who Shocked an Era*, London: Library of the Twentieth Century, 1971. pp. 5-6; Corinne Jacker, *The Black Flag of Anarchy: Antistatism in the United States*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1968.p. 3.)

¹⁵ Piotr Kropotkin, «Anarquismo».

¹⁶ Paul Eltzbacher, *The Great Anarchists: Ideas and Teachings of Seven Major Thinkers*, p. 270; George Woodcock, *História das Idéias e Movimentos Anarquistas*, vol. 1, p. 14; James Joll, *Anarquistas e Anarquismo*, pp. 29, 325.

be reconciled with each other. This validation of incoherence even allowed authors such as Caio T. Costa¹⁷ and Ricardo Rugai to argue that there are multiple *anarchisms*.¹⁸

According to Irving Horowitz, anarchism did not have a significant popular impact, and he spoke of its “virtual disappearance [...] as an organized social movement.”¹⁹ Kedward went even further arguing that “the ideal of anarchy was never popular” and that it “encountered opposition from all classes and from all ages.”²⁰

Although over time Woodcock modified his position slightly, he argued that anarchism practically ended after the Spanish Revolution (1936-1939). He thus declared “the end of this history of anarchism in the year 1939,” a moment that “marks the true death” of the “historical anarchist movement.”²¹ Guérin, who largely agreed with Woodcock, argued that “the defeat of the Spanish Revolution deprived anarchism of its only stronghold in the world,” since “from this experience, the anarchist movement was crushed.”²² Broadly speaking, such an argument is similar to another, more forceful, yet analytically distinct one: that the Spanish Revolution was an exception in anarchist history, having been one of the few cases in which anarchism became a broad mass movement.

Joll and Woodcock argue, like many Marxist authors (Hobsbawm for example), that anarchism mobilized a limited class base, restricting itself to decaying peasants and artisans, and failed to adapt to industrial capitalism.²³

Other conclusions supported by such studies are that anarchism is founded on the basis of idealism,²⁴ spontaneity,²⁵ individualism,²⁶ and youth.²⁷ Interestingly, these conclusions—which are rarely meant as dismissals by the historians themselves!—resemble Leninist critiques of anarchism (for example, Kolpinsky²⁸), which are anecdotal, not at all scientific, and designed to promote Leninism at the expense of an adversary. Whether one takes such conclusions as proof that anarchism is impractical or foolish, they are ultimately not grounded in historical evidence, amounting merely to ideological assertions.

¹⁷ Caio T. Costa, *O que é Anarquismo*, São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1990, pp. 7, 12; Ricardo Rugai, *O Anarquismo Organizado: as concepções práticas da Federação Anarquista Uruguia (1952-1976)*. Campinas: UNICAMP (master’s thesis), 2003, p. 2.

¹⁸ Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*, p. 3; Iain McKay, *An Anarchist FAQ*, vol. 1, p. 18; Daniel Guérin, *O Anarquismo: da Doutrina à Ação*, p. 12.

¹⁹ Irving Horowitz, *Los Anarquistas*, Madrid: Alianza, 1982. [The Anarchists] p. 9.

²⁰ Roderick Kedward, *The Anarchists: the Men Who Shocked an Era*, p. 120.

²¹ George Woodcock, *História das Idéias e Movimentos Anarquistas*, vol. 2, pp. 288, 295.

²² Daniel Guérin, *O Anarquismo: da Doutrina à Ação*, p. 155.

²³ James Joll, *Anarquistas e Anarquismo*, pp. 327-328; George Woodcock, *História das Idéias e Movimentos Anarquistas*, vol. 2, pp. 290, 293; Eric Hobsbawm, *Revolucionários: ensaios contemporâneos*.

²⁴ Paul Eltzbacher, *The Great Anarchists*, p. 273; George Woodcock, *História das Idéias e Movimentos Anarquistas*, vol. 1, p. 15.

²⁵ Paul Eltzbacher, *The Great Anarchists*, p. 280.

²⁶ James Joll, *Anarquistas e anarquismo*, pp. 32-33; Irving Horowitz, *Los anarquistas*, p. 16; George Woodcock, *História das Idéias e Movimentos Anarquistas*, vol. 1, p. 36 and vol. 2, p. 292.

²⁷ James Joll, *Anarquistas e Anarquismo*, p. 330; Roderick Kedward, *The Anarchists: the Men Who Shocked an Era*, p. 120.

²⁸ N.Y. Kolpinsky, «Epílogo», p. 333.

A New Approach to Anarchist History

Bandeira Negra proposes a new methodological and theoretical approach for the study of anarchism, one which not only allows for a more robust focus on this object but also clarifies the confusion resulting from previous conclusions. It develops a precise, historical definition of anarchism that looks at the common aspects of its authors and episodes, differentiates it from other ideologies, clarifies its continuities in history, and contributes to its long term persistence.

Bandeira Negra makes a clear *distinction* between two different entities: an historical anarchist tradition and a broader (and not necessarily historical) libertarian universe, the first being part of the second. Thus, every anarchist is a libertarian, but not every libertarian is an anarchist. The historical anarchist tradition, according to this conception, involves a set of historical phenomena that develop and spread from a common set of social relations underpinning a history of ideas. These include face-to-face contact, letters, books, the press, etc., and their present manifestations depending on the context. The libertarian universe, on the other hand, is not necessarily related in historical terms and includes all anti-authoritarian struggles and initiatives opposed to domination and in defense of egalitarian forms of relationships.²⁹

Several recommendations for historiographic methodology and geographic scope follow from this approach – techniques which can also be found in academic works from the new and global histories of labor, as well as in the theoretical-methodological production of anarchist organizations, researchers, and militants.³⁰ It is essential to develop concepts capable of fortifying studies on anarchism—whose authors need not be anarchists. These concepts may include *totality* and *interdependence*, which in the case of anarchist studies are applied to the relationship between theory and history, between thought and action, between authors and episodes, between form and content, anarchism and social struggles, critiques and proposals.

It is necessary to operate with an historical method—one that utilizes the techniques of histories from below;³¹ that emphasizes the connections between classic texts and the movements and

²⁹ In this sense, it would not be pertinent to say, like David Graeber in “The New Anarchists,” that the Zapatistas are “new anarchists.” It is true that they are libertarians (in this broad and ahistorical sense), but including them in the role of anarchism implies explaining, historically, how they related to this tradition and incorporated, at least considerably, their positions. What Graeber does is identify the thoughts and practices of the Zapatistas, definitely libertarians, with anarchism, through a theoretical-logical approach, not a historical one. This is the same method, criticized in *Bandeira Negra*, performed by authors who included William Godwin and Max Stirner in the anarchist canon.

³⁰ Among these contributions, some are worth mentioning. In terms of general historiographic knowledge, the production of Marcel van der Linden stands out—see *Trabalhadores do Mundo: Ensaio Para Uma História Global do Trabalho* Campinas: UNICAMP, 2013. [Workers of the World: essays toward a global labor history]; “História do Trabalho: o velho, o novo, o global,” *Revista Mundos do Trabalho*, vol. 1, num. 1, 2009. [Labour History: the old, the new and the global]—; in terms of the application of this knowledge to studies of anarchism, the works of Lucien van der Walt stand out—see “Global Anarchism and Syndicalism: theory, history, resistance” *Anarchist Studies*, vol. 24, num. 1, 2016.; “Contrapoder, Democracia Participativa e Defesa Revolucionária,” *Institute for Anarchist Theory and History*, 2015. [Counterpower, Participatory Democracy, Revolutionary Defense]; *Black Flame: the Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism*. Oakland: AK Press, 2009; (Editor with Steven Hirsch) *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870-1940*. Leiden: Koninklijke NV, 2010.; and, in theoretical-methodological terms, it is worth highlighting the works of anarchists linked to South American and South African *especificismo* and the Institute for Anarchist Theory and History (IATH).

³¹ According to the aforementioned Thompsonian tradition, which today involves a whole generation of researchers, some anarchists among them, who complement this knowledge with other specifically libertarian and anarchist productions.

struggles of their time; that makes precise connections between anarchism and anarchists with the context in which they existed; that considers global reflections on anarchism where necessary, taking into account the wide ranging events from its emergence in the nineteenth century to the present; that identifies the routes for spreading anarchism, through contacts among resistance fighters, letters, shared readings, etc., and addresses to what extent the general features were maintained and adapted to local realities, incorporating other traditions of struggle and resistance; that makes it possible to assess the continuities and permanence of anarchism in time and space, as well as its contextual modifications resulting from social relationships. Wherever possible it must go beyond the axis of the North Atlantic and encompass all the continents, making comparisons where necessary.

Through this approach, it is clear that anarchism is a type of socialism, characterized by a particular set of principles, which is expressed historically in the modern and contemporary world. Anarchism encompasses an opposition to the state, a defense of individual freedom (though importantly one that is dependent on and related to collective freedom), and an historical differentiation from Marxism (although sharing some similar positions). It cannot be summarized as anti-statism, individualism, or as simply the antithesis of Marxism. Instead:

Anarchism is a socialist and revolutionary *ideology* that is founded on specific principles, whose bases are defined by a critique of *domination* and a defense of *self-management*; in structural terms, anarchism advocates a social transformation based on *strategies* which must allow for the substitution of a system of domination by a system of self-management.³²

“Ideology” here, does not refer to the Marxist idea of false consciousness, but rather is meant in the sense of *praxis*; a combination of thought and action that emerges in the relationship between popular and theoretical movements. Anarchism is a historically shaped praxis that can be expressed in a body of political-ideological principles centered on revolutionary social transformation, around which there is significant agreement and unity among anarchists.

Anarchism is not, then, a homogeneous way of interpreting reality, a dogmatic body of theory and method. However, it is based on rational analyses, methods and theories that have elements in common and that can be characterized neither as idealistic, in the sense of theological or metaphysical explanations, nor as a *corpus* that generally prioritizes ideas over facts. Anarchism’s constituent features include openness, plurality, and anti-dogmatism in terms of theory and method for understanding reality.

The critique of domination, defense of self-management, and fundamental strategy form the trilateral conceptual core of our definition of anarchism, within this text and within *Bandeira Negra*.

The **critique of domination** rests on the critique of hierarchical relationships, in which some decide for many or all, involving chains of command and obedience. Relationships of domination are the foundation of inequality and social injustice, among which there are several types: labor exploitation, physical coercion, political-bureaucratic domination, cultural alienation, oppression based on class, nationality, gender, race, or ethnicity, among others. This generalization implies the existence of a system of domination.

³² Felipe Corrêa, *Bandeira negra: Rediscutindo o Anarquismo*, p. 117.

Defense of self-management, is the antithesis of domination, and is characterized by participation in decision-making processes to the extent to which one is affected by them. That is, to structure all decisions so they are made from the bottom up, delegations rotate and are controlled by the base. A self-managed society would be characterized by the socialization of property, having been reconciled with family-owned property in the countryside; by democratic self-government, involving the socialization of politics, managed by associations of workers and rotating delegations with control by the base; by self-managed culture, supported by a new ethic and in a new libertarian forms of education, communication, and leisure. Its generalization implies the existence of a system of self-management.

Fundamental strategy is characterized by a set of means and ends—that is, objectives, strategies, and tactics—conceived to escape systems of domination and enter into systems of self-management, in which there is subordination of the means to the ends. This set includes the mobilization of dominated classes as a whole—city workers, peasants, all the precarious and marginalized—understanding that social classes go beyond the relations of production or those within the economic sphere. It also includes the permanent quest for transformation, in three spheres (the economic, political-legal-military, and cultural-ideological), the transformation of the capacity for action of these classes in concrete social forces and the fight for the establishment of a non-dominating self-managing power. It rejects individual or sectoral mobility in capitalism or in the state and it advocates social transformation through self-managed processes of struggle that imply a potentially violent revolution, which may have a longer or shorter duration.³³

This trilateral understanding can be expressed in a relatively clear set of ten political-ideological principles that have been accepted continuously by anarchists. These principles constitute the fundamental bases of this definition of anarchism and allow us to understand where its coherence lies.

1. **Ethics and values.** An ethical conception is advocated, capable of embracing criticism and rational proposals, drawing on the following values: individual and collective freedom; equality in economic, political and social terms; solidarity and mutual aid; permanent encouragement of happiness, motivation and will.
2. **Critique of domination.** This includes the critique of class domination—constituted by exploitation, physical coercion, political-bureaucratic and cultural-ideological domination—and of other types of domination (gender, race, imperialism, etc.).
3. **Social transformation of the system and of the power model [or mode of power].** This concerns recognizing that the systemic structures of the different types of domination constitute the system of domination, and of making the determination, by means of a rational critique, based on the specified ethical values, to transform this system into one of self-management. This requires the transformation of the current power model, from a dominating power to a self-managing power. In contemporary societies, this critique of domination implies a clear opposition to capitalism, the state, and other institutions created and sustained for the maintenance of domination.

³³ The detailed conceptualization in *Bandeira Negra* of the so-called “central categories” (ideology, strategy, social force, power, domination and social classes) and related concepts, although it cannot be reproduced here, is very important for understanding these arguments. See Felipe Corrêa, *Bandeira Negra: Rediscutindo o Anarquismo*, pp. 118-143.

4. **Classes and class struggle.** In the various systems of domination, with their respective class structures, the identification of class domination allows one to conceive of the fundamental division of society in two broad global and universal categories, constituted by classes with irreconcilable interests: the ruling classes and the dominated classes. The social conflict between these classes characterizes the class struggle. Other dominations must be fought concomitantly with class domination, since the end of the latter does not necessarily mean the end of the former.
5. **Class orientation and social force.** Social transformation with a class orientation implies a political practice oriented toward intervention in the forces which constitute the basis of existing power relations. The intention is to transform the capacity of the social agents who are members of the dominated classes into a social force, applying it to the class struggle and seeking to increase its capacity permanently.
6. **Internationalism.** This point advocates a class struggle that is not restricted to national borders, but is based on internationalism. Thus, in contexts dominated by imperial relations, nationalism is rejected and, in struggles for social transformation, the mobilization of dominated classes is expanded beyond national borders.
7. **Strategy.** This consists of the rational understanding of appropriate strategies for the project of social transformation, involving a strategic analysis and the establishment of pathways for struggle.
8. **Strategic elements.** Although anarchists advocate different strategies, some strategic elements are considered as axial principles: the formation of revolutionary subjects in specific social classes of each place and era—which comprise dominated classes—through processes that include the stimulation of class consciousness and the will to transform; efforts to increase the social force of the dominated classes, in a way that allows a revolutionary process of social transformation; the coherence between objectives, strategies, and tactics and, therefore, the coherence between means and ends and the construction of a desired society; the use of self-managed means of struggle that do not imply domination, either among anarchists themselves or in the anarchists' relationship with other actors; the advocacy of autonomy and class independence, which implies opposition to the relations of domination established by political parties, the state or other institutions or agents, guaranteeing popular leadership from the dominated classes, which must be promoted through building the struggle from the base, from the bottom up, including direct action.
9. **Social revolution and violence.** In the quest for a social revolution that transforms the current system and power model, violence, understood as an expression of a higher level of confrontation, is accepted, in most cases, as it is considered inevitable. The revolution implies combative struggles and fundamental changes in the three structured spheres of society, and it is not within the framework of the current system of domination—it is beyond capitalism, the state, and the dominant institutions.
10. **Defense of self-management.** Self-management, which is the basis for anarchist political practice and strategy, constitutes the basis for the future society to be built and implies the

socialization of property in economic terms, democratic self-government in political terms, and a self-managed culture.³⁴

To define anarchism in this way pretty clearly challenges the idea that it can be considered a synonym for simple anti-statism, individualism, or an antithesis to Marxism, and it refutes the idea that anarchism advocates the negation of politics or power.

This way of understanding anarchism, although assessed as restrictive by some authors, such as Robert Graham and Nathan Jun, is actually not. Lucien van der Walt rebutted this idea, arguing that if on the one hand this conception implies the exclusion of some thinkers and episodes that have been presented as anarchist, on the other hand it allows for the inclusion, with much more methodological coherence, of a myriad of other anarchists in the canon of its great representatives, as well as several other episodes in its trajectory of struggles.³⁵

Thus, for example, according to the approach of *Bandeira Negra*, William Godwin and Max Stirner should not be considered anarchists—not only because of their non-identification with the theoretical definition mentioned above, but primarily because they had no influence on existing social movements and thinkers in anarchism’s formative period, between 1868 and 1886; they were instead rescued afterward, in an effort to bolster the aforementioned “legitimizing myth.”

However, on the other hand, *Bandeira Negra* proposes that many other anarchists ought to be included in the canon, alongside the familiar duo of Bakunin and Kropotkin. These include: Ricardo Flores Magón (Mexican, 1874-1922); Ida Mett (Russian, 1901-1973); Edgard Leuenroth (Brazilian, 1881-1968); Ba Jin (Chinese, 1904-2005); Mikhail Gerdzhikov (Bulgarian, 1877-1947); He Zhen (Chinese, 1884-1920); T.W. Thibedi (South African, 1888-1960); Kim Jwa-Jin (Korean, 1889-1930); Sam Dolgoff (Russian-American, 1902-1990); Emma Goldman (Lithuanian, 1869-1940); Enrique Roig de San Martín (Cuban, 1843-1889); Constantinos Speras (Greek, 1893-1943); Monty Myler (Australian, 1839-1920); Lucy Parsons (American, 1853-1942); and many others, including recent additions, that had or have importance in the field of anarchist thought or action.

Furthermore, although what occurred in Western Europe and the United States in the twentieth century is undoubtedly significant—notably the Russian Revolution (1917-1921) and the Spanish Revolution (1936-1939)—it is necessary to look beyond, to other episodes from these places and times, and from other times and places. The book suggests that many other historical episodes should be included, alongside these, as prominent illustrations of anarchism in action.

A starting point for the enumeration of these episodes is the bibliographic references found in the online book *Surgimento e Breve Perspectiva Histórica do Anarquismo, 1868-2012* [*Emergence and Brief Historical Perspective of Anarchism, 1868-2012*], made in support of *Bandeira Negra*.³⁶ Such an evaluation of episodes with a significant presence and influence of anarchists affirms that the impact of anarchism is broad and extends from 1868 to the present in all continents, with ebbs and flows. It also affirms the claim that anarchism has mobilized workers of all kinds; primarily urban proletarians, but also rural proletarians, peasants, and those called “lumpenproletariat” by the Marxist tradition.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-189.

³⁵ Lucien van der Walt, “(Re) Construindo um Cânone Anarquista e Sindicalista Global.” *Institute for Anarchist Theory and History*, 2013. [(Re)Constructing a Global Anarchist and Syndicalist Canon]

³⁶ Felipe Corrêa, *Surgimento e Breve Perspectiva Histórica do Anarquismo (1868-2012)*. São Paulo: Faisca [Biblioteca Virtual], 2013

Anarchists developed and strengthened distinct initiatives and tools of mobilization and struggle: syndicalism, political organizations and affinity groups, urban and rural insurrections, occupations and takeovers of companies and regions, workers' councils, producer and consumer cooperatives, schools and social centers, books, newspapers, informational flyers, attacks against authorities, strikes, street demonstrations, etc.

To complement the aforementioned episodes of anarchism in action, one could mention, in a list that is neither definitive nor exhaustive, a wide set of events in which there anarchists participated more or less decisively: the International Workingmen's Association (between 1868 and 1877); the Commune of Lyon (France, 1870); the Paris Commune (France, 1871); the Cantonalistas Revolts (Spain, 1873); the Bologna Insurrection (Italy, 1874); the Benevento Insurrection (Italy, 1877); participation in Confédération Générale du Travail (France, 1895-1914) and in the Industrial Workers of the World (United States, since 1905); the Macedonian Revolt (1903); the Mexican Revolution (particularly in 1911); the Ukrainian Revolution (1919-1921); the coordinating committees that involved many countries, such as the East Asian Anarchist Federation (founded in 1928), the Continental American Workers Association (founded in 1929) or the Continental Commission on Anarchist Relations (founded in 1948); the Revolution in Manchuria (Korea, 1929-1932); the militancy around the Federation of Anarcho-Communists of Bulgaria (1920-1940); international organizations of the Syndicalist International (IWA-AIT), strengthened in the decade 1950, and the International Anarchist Federation (IFA), founded in 1968; the Cuban Revolution (1959); militancy around the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (especially between 1963 and 1973); May 1968 in France. Later, there have been and continue to be other major episodes with anarchist presence and influence. An example is the movement of global resistance in general (known as the 'anti-globalization' movement), particularly Peoples' Global Action, founded in 1998.

Great Debates Between Anarchists

To claim that unity exists among anarchists around certain principles does not imply there weren't or aren't significant differences among them. Quite to the contrary, the history of anarchism in the sense defined thus far is full of robust and detailed debates over a number of important theoretical and practical subjects, many of which are still directly relevant to movements today. *Bandeira Negra*, in its analysis of the most relevant differences that appear between anarchists (where relevant refers to differences that have historical permanence and significance) presents the following reflections.

Due to the aforementioned openness and plurality in understanding reality, these most important debates of anarchism should not be sought in the field of social theory, social-scientific methodology, philosophy, etc. produced by anarchists. Here there are great differences, many interesting controversies, and a surprising amount of anarchist influence—but these are not what *define* anarchism. Rather, the key debates are those key disagreements and controversies fall directly within the trilateral concepts that are essential to anarchism. Regarding the anarchist critique of domination, there are no relevant debates; the positions are, in general, quite similar. There are four debates related to the anarchist defense of self-management and another three related to fundamental anarchist strategy which I will attempt to reconstruct briefly below. It is important to note that, despite the polarizations, in many cases there are intermediate and conciliatory positions.

Key Debates and Positions

Regarding the functioning of the future society, there was an economic debate between, on the one hand, those advocating a **self-managed market**—as in the case of Abraham Guillén, who argued that the market is not necessarily capitalist, but rather an environment of circulation and distribution, a space where there is data on supply and demand, and that planning would not be possible given the complexity of modern societies³⁷—and, on the other hand, those who advocated **democratic planning**, as in the case of Alexander Berkman and Kōtoku Shūsui, who upheld the need for planning done by producers and consumers and for consumption without the use of money.³⁸

Along the axis of debate on self-management, there was another controversy around **how the fruits of labor should be distributed**. On the one hand, **collectivism**—advocated by Bakunin, among others—held that remuneration should be in accordance with the work performed (logically, this would mean there would be a universal equivalent of some sort such as labor vouchers in which to set prices, wages, and a power structure that would be self-managed and would control this process).³⁹ On the other hand, **communism**—championed by authors such as Shifu, Carlo Cafiero, and Kropotkin—were in favor of remuneration according to needs (meaning, logically, that there would be no money, wages, etc.).⁴⁰ Anarchists like James Guillaume, Errico Malatesta, and Neno Vasco maintained intermediate positions, stating that, depending on the case or the moment in question, one could switch between collectivism and communism or opt for coexistence between regions or groups that each adopted their own versions of one or the other, or even, in a same region, different policies for types of products, depending on their abundance (communism for abundant products and collectivism for scarce products).⁴¹

A third debate on self-management contrasted two ideas about **where political decisions should be made**—in other words, about the **basic political units** of a future society. On the one hand, the idea that politics should be carried out exclusively **from a place of residence** was defended by Murray Bookchin, who advocated for formations developed by communities and municipalities, which would be the ideal forums for direct democracy and would minimize the threats of economism and corporatism.⁴² And, on the other hand, the idea that politics should be carried out exclusively **from the workplace** was a position defended by Rudolf Rocker and Diego Abad de Santillán, among others, who argued that unions should be responsible for social reorganization and the decisions of society, since they would be the privileged meeting spaces

³⁷ Abraham Guillén, *Economía Libertaria*; “Socialismo libertário.” Móstoles: Madre Tierra, 1990.

³⁸ Alexander Berkman, *What is Anarchism?* Oakland: AK Press, 2003., p. 217; Kōtoku Shūsui, *Abolish money!*, *Anarchist Library*, 2012, p. 2.

³⁹ Mikhail Bakunin, “Programa da Sociedade da Revolução Internacional.” *Catecismo Revolucionário / Programa da Sociedade da Revolução Internacional*. São Paulo: Imaginário / Faísca, 2009.

⁴⁰ Liu Shifu, “Goals and Methods of the Anarchist-Communist Party.” Graham, Robert (ed.). *Anarchism: a Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, vol. 1. Montreal: Black Rose, 2005. pp. 46, 51.

⁴¹ James Guillaume, “Ideas on Social Organization.” Guérin, Daniel (ed.). *No Gods, No Masters*, vol. 1. Oakland: AK Press, 1998.; Errico Malatesta, “La Prosperidad.” Richards, Vernon (ed.). *Malatesta: Pensamiento y Acción Revolucionarios*. Buenos Aires: Anarres, 2007. [Property], pp. 100-103; Neno Vasco, *Concepção Anarquista do Sindicalismo*. Porto: Afrontamento, 1984, pp. 191-205.

⁴² Murray Bookchin, “The Ghost of Anarcho-Syndicalism,” *Anarchy Archives*, 1992.; “Para um novo municipalismo,” *Municipalismo Libertário*. São Paulo: Imaginário, 1999. [Toward a New Municipalism], pp. 33-34.

of workers.⁴³ Other anarchists, such as Lucien van der Walt, uphold **mixed formations**, which link places of residence and workplaces together into some greater body politic.⁴⁴

A fourth debate involved the question of the limits and possibilities of **culture** in a future society. Some, such as Bakunin and the Federation of Anarchist Communists [Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici] (FdCA), claimed that **culture is secondary**, since they believed that culture and all that it implies—ethics, values, propaganda, communication, leisure, etc.—is extremely limited by political and, above all, economic elements.⁴⁵ Others, such as Wu Zhihui and Élisée Reclus, argued that **culture is absolutely central**, since they believed that it has a determining role in the development of economic and political self-management.⁴⁶ Defenders of the first position commonly prioritized militancy in unions or cooperatives, while those of the second prioritized education and propaganda. There were also innumerable intermediate positions, with many militants trying to reconcile both positions and initiatives.

A few general trends can be seen across these debates. The market versus planning debate did not have a considerable historical and geographical impact and the positions in defense of the market were insignificant. The collectivism versus communism debate was relevant in Europe from the 1870s to the early twentieth century—but then, communism took on a completely hegemonic position, largely due to the influence of Kropotkin, and the intermediate positions, who saw this problem as secondary, were also strengthened. The debate around political units—whether decisions should be carried out by place of residence versus by workplace—did not imply great polarizations, since strict defenders of community and municipal politics were completely marginalized and there was a prevalent conciliatory position, at least in practice, of formations between unions and neighborhoods, places of work and residence. Those debating culture as secondary versus central tended to converge on intermediate positions, which attributed an relevant role to culture, without tending to either economism or extreme culturalism.

Bandeira Negra argues that the four debates related to the defense of self-management may be considered relevant, but not to mark permanent differences between anarchists in historical and geographical terms.

Regarding debates around **strategy** there has historically been a contrast between positions **favorable to organization**, such as those of José Oiticica and Lucy Parsons, who advocated the need for organization of anarchists at the social, mass, or political-ideological level (specifically anarchist),⁴⁷ and positions **contrary to organization**, such as those of Alfredo Bonanno and Luigi Galleani, which warned that formal and structured organizations of mass mobilization carry

⁴³ Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcosindicalismo: Teoría y Práctica*, pp. 96, 102; Diego Abad de Santillán, *Organismo Económico da Revolução: a autogestão na Revolução Espanhola*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1980. [After the Revolution], p. 87.

⁴⁴ Lucien van der Walt, “Speech to Metalworkers: anarcho-sindicalism for South African unions today.” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review*, num. 61, 2014.

⁴⁵ Mikhail Bakunin, “Carta ao Jornal *La Liberté* de Bruxelas,” *Escritos Contra Marx*. São Paulo: Imaginário, 2001. [Letter to *La Liberté*]; “Escrito contra Marx,” *Escritos Contra Marx*. São Paulo: Imaginário, 2001; “Instrução Integral.” *Obras Escolhidas*. São Paulo: Hedra, 2015, pp. 93-94; Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici (FdCA). “Anarchist Communists: a question of class,” *Anarkismo.net*, 2005, pp. 33-34.

⁴⁶ Wu Zhihui, “Education as Revolution.” Graham, Robert (ed.). *Anarchism: a Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, vol. 1. Montreal: Black Rose, 2005. pp. 347-348; Élisée Reclus, *A Evolução, a Revolução e o Ideal Anarquista*. São Paulo: Imaginário, 2002. [Evolution, Revolution and the Anarchist Ideal]

⁴⁷ José Oiticica, “Críticas e Proposições Organizacionistas.” *Anarkismo.net*, 2009; Lucy Parsons, *Freedom, Equality & Solidarity: Writings and Speeches, 1878-1937*. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2004, p. 131.

risks of bureaucratization and recommended acting individually or in small groups or informal networks.⁴⁸

Among the advocates of organization, or **organizationists**, there have also been considerable differences, among which three stand out. On the one hand, they contrasted **exclusive syndicalism** or **communalism**. This position was defended by Pierre Monatte among others, who argued that the organization of anarchists would be necessary only at the social, mass level, and that anarchist organizations would be somewhat redundant, since popular movements would have robust conditions to promote anarchist strategy.⁴⁹ On the other hand, **organizational dualism** was proposed by authors such as Errico Malatesta and Amedée Dunois. These thinkers argued that, in addition to massive and class-based pluralistic social organizations, specific anarchist organizations would also be necessary to promote their positions more consistently among workers.⁵⁰

Another point of discrepancy was that some supporters of mass social organizations opposed **revolutionary syndicalists**—such as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the General Confederation of Labour [Confédération Générale du Travail] (CGT), which had no explicit programmatic link to anarchism—to **anarcho-syndicalists**—such as the Argentine Regional Workers’ Federation [Federación Obrera Regional Argentina] (FORA) and the National Confederation of Labour [Confederación Nacional del Trabajo] (CNT)—which were linked, the first since 1905 and the second since 1919, to anarchism (or libertarian communism) as an official set of ideas programmatic and explicitly promoted among its members.

And finally, there was a third point of disagreement regarding ideologically specific anarchist organizations in particular. On the one hand, there were defenders of a **programmatic (homogeneous) organization**—such as Juan Carlos Mechoso and the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation [Federación Anarquista Uruguaya], and Ida Mett and the Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists—who advocated a strong organization model, with broad affinity among members and focused on influence within mass struggle. These self-managing organizations would work with a well-defined organization, relationship of rights and duties, self-discipline, responsibility, and unity between thought and action, and would seek consensus while opting for majority vote if necessary.⁵¹ On the other hand, there were defenders of **flexible (heterogeneous) organizations**—such as Volin and Sébastien Faure—who advocated a federalist model of organization, with limited organizational structures, for the purpose of ending conflicts between anarchists. These organizations tried to ensure the potential participation of all anarchists and a high degree of autonomy for individuals and groups, without unity of action (that is, without

⁴⁸ Alfredo Bonanno, “Insurreccionalist Anarchism (Part one)” *Anarchist Library*, 2012. pp. 9, 19; “A Critique of Syndicalist Methods.” *Anarchist Library*, 2012, p. 45; Luigi Galleani, “The Principal of Organization to the Light of Anarchism.” *Anarchist Library*, 2011, pp. 2, 3-6.

⁴⁹ Pierre Monatte, “Em Defesa do Sindicalismo.” Woodcock, George (ed.). *Os Grandes Escritos Anarquistas*. Porto Alegre: L&PM, 1998. [Syndicalism: an Advocacy], pp. 206-207.

⁵⁰ Errico Malatesta, “Sindicalismo: a crítica de um anarquista.” Woodcock, George (ed.). *Os Grandes Escritos Anarquistas*. Porto Alegre: L&PM, 1998. [Syndicalism: an anarchist critique], p. 208; “A Organização II.” *Escritos Revolucionários*. São Paulo: Imaginário, 2000. [Organization II], p. 56; Amedée Dunois, “Anarquismo e Organização.” *Anarkismo.net*, 2010. [Anarchism and Organization].

⁵¹ Juan C. Mechoso, *A Estratégia do Especificismo: Entrevista a Felipe Corrêa*. São Paulo: Faísca, 2015. [The Strategy of Especificismo]; Dielo Trudá, “Plataforma Organizacional dos Comunistas Libertários.” Makhno, Nestor et alli. *Anarquia e Organização*. São Paulo: Luta Libertária, 2001. [Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists], pp. 57-59.

obligation to adhere to majority positions in case of divergences), and accepting a broad diversity in theoretical, ideological, strategic and practical terms.⁵²

The second major area of debate relative to paths of change pits **possibilism** against **impossibilism**—terms which refer to their respective wagers on the likelihood of achieving revolutionary changes to society through the pathway of **reforms**. Supporters of reforms as a possible way to reach the revolution—such as Ōsugi Sakae, Ba Jin, and Sam Dolgoff—argued that struggles for immediate conquests can serve to exercise a certain kind of revolutionary gymnastics, and that the reforms thus conquered by radical movements not only make life less hard for workers but also improve conditions for mobilization with a pedagogical effect, strengthening workers for a revolutionary project.⁵³ On the contrary, those who believe that reforms should be rejected in general—such as Alessandro Cerchiai, Luigi Galleani, and Émile Henry—argue that reforms generally strengthen the system rather than weaken or destroy it. Therefore they think that even strikes are not useful for a revolutionary project; the eventual conquests against the bosses would be neutralized with the increase in the prices of products that the workers themselves consume, and conquests against the State would only result in strengthening it and continuing its process of domination.⁵⁴

Finally, a third debate focused on the strategic role of **violence**. Some, like Nestor Makhno and Pierre Besnard, understood revolutionary **violence as a concomitant and derivative element** of mass movements, essential for revolutionary transformation, and recommended that it be used to strengthen popular movements in the class struggle, and not as a simple spark to promote the creation of these movements, nor as an exclusive means of effective propaganda.⁵⁵ Others, on the other hand, such as Severino di Giovanni and Ravachol, conceived of **violence as a trigger and a mobilizing element**, beyond the question of popular revenge, as a propaganda element capable of involving workers in more radicalized processes of struggle.⁵⁶

As a final assessment, it can be affirmed that these three great debates on strategy—organizationism versus anti-organizationism, possibilism versus impossibilism, simultaneous and derivative violence versus violence as a trigger—are the most relevant and divisive among anarchists around the world. It is precisely on the basis of these three debates that I propose a redefinition of anarchist currents based on positions taken in these specific debates.

⁵² Volin. “A Síntese Anarquista.” Raynaud, Jean-Marc. *Apelo à Unidade do Movimento Libertário*. São Paulo: Imaginário, 2003. [Synthesis (Anarchist)]; Faure, Sébastien. “A Síntese Anarquista.” *Anarkismo.net*, 2009. [The Anarchist Synthesis]

⁵³ Ōsugi Sakae. “Del Ideal Social.” *Anarkismo.net*, 2011. [Social Idealism]; Ba Jin. “O Anarquismo e a Questão da Prática.” *Anarkismo.net*, 2013. [Anarchism and the Question of Practice]; Sam Dolgoff, *A Relevância do Anarquismo para a Sociedade Moderna*. São Paulo: Faísca, 2005. [The Relevance of Anarchism to Modern Society], pp. 34-38.

⁵⁴ Carlo Romani, *Oreste Ristori: Uma Aventura Anarquista*. São Paulo: Annablume, 2002, p. 175; Luigi Galleani, “The Principal of Organization to the Light of Anarchism,” p. 7; Émile Henry, “A Defesa de um Terrorista.” Woodcock, George (ed.). *Grandes Escritos Anarquistas*. Porto Alegre: L&PM, 1998. [A Terrorist’s Defense], p. 180.

⁵⁵ Nestor Makhno, “The ABC of the Revolutionary Anarchist.” *The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays*. Oakland: AK Press, 1996. pp. 212-215.

⁵⁶ Oswaldo Bayer, *Severino di Giovanni: el Idealista de la Violencia*. Buenos Aires: Booket, 2006. [Anarchism and Violence: Severino di Giovanni in Argentina, 1923-1931], p. 83; Jean Maitron, *Ravachol e os Anarquistas*. Lisbon: Antígona, 1981, p. 36.

The Real Currents within Anarchism

Discussing anarchist currents implies, as in the case of the definition of anarchism, rethinking the whole issue. The reference studies on anarchism present an enormous set of anarchist currents. As common as it is to talk about anarcho-individualism, anarcho-syndicalism, and anarcho-communism, there are a host of other labels floating about: pacifist anarchism, cultural anarchism, anarcho-collectivism, mutualism, terrorist anarchism, social anarchism, anarchism without adjectives, peasant anarchism, green anarchism, anarcho-feminism, reformist anarchism, utilitarian, conspiratorial, lifestyle, etc. The list is immense.

These terms carry a variety of problems. Beyond the names created to define the theory of a “great man” (“anarcho-pacifism” for Tolstoy, for example), there are, problems of understanding how any given label might fit, if at all, within the mainline anarchist tradition: for example, pacifism (opposition to violence in all cases), reformism (reforms understood as an end in themselves), and individualism (pursuit of individual emancipation far from a project of collective liberation) are not even part of the historical anarchist principles, as we’ve seen in my relatively precise redefinition of anarchism.

There are also problems with the criteria chosen for defining these currents. Due to their extensive overlap with one another, they cannot helpfully be compared. There are criteria relative to the distribution of fruits of labor in the future society, including communism or collectivism. There are other criteria based on strategies of struggle, including individual or collective interventions; unions, neighborhoods or cooperatives; violent or peaceful means; economic, political, or cultural means. There are also positions on reforms, on the model of anarchist organization, on the classes and subjects capable of propelling the process of change. There are also criteria that refer to political-philosophical elements, such as spiritualism and religion, the conception of individual freedom, or environmentalist and feminist struggles.

In the traditional distinction between anarcho-communism and anarcho-syndicalism, for example, communism refers to the form of distribution of the fruits of labor and syndicalism generally refers to a strategy. Neno Vasco, who advocated the organization of unions as means and communism as an end, presents very clear differences with Luigi Galleani, an anti-organizationist in terms of his path of struggle, but also communist in his perspective on the future. Would they both be “anarcho-communists”? Would Neno Vasco be an “anarcho-communist” and an “anarcho-syndicalist” at the same time? You could offer an endless number of examples derived from this problem.

To escape this quagmire, it is necessary to return not only to my redefinition of anarchism, but also to the discussion on the great debates among anarchists and their historical and geographical relevance. As has been argued, there are three issues that distill the most important debates: *organization*, *reforms*, and *violence*. Moreover, it can be seen, in global terms and from 1860 to the present, that there have been many circumstances in which positions on these issues have converged. Thus, it has been very common for organizationists to champion possibilist positions and the need for derivative and simultaneous violence, and for anti-organizationists to defend anti-possibilist positions and violence as triggers.

Bandeira Negra argues that these two groups, the historical positions concerning the three aforementioned debates, form the foundation of the redefinition of anarchist currents. The first group (organizationism, possibilism, simultaneous, and derived violence) constitutes **mass anarchism**, historically the largest current of anarchism. The second group (anti-organizationism,

impossibilism, and violence as a trigger) constitutes **insurrectionary anarchism**, historically a less prevalent, but still considerable current of anarchism. Anarchists such as Lucy Parsons, Mikhail Bakunin, Neno Vasco, Thibedi, José Oiticica and Ba Jin, among many others, fall into the category of mass anarchism; while Severino di Giovanni, Émile Henry, Ravachol, Luigi Galleani, Clément Duval, Bartolomeo Vanzetti and many others would be representatives of insurrectionary anarchism. Kropotkin and Malatesta, depending on the time of their lives, belonged to one or the other current.

However, the occurrence of these positions in debates and currents in anarchism is not an historical constant. In particular contexts, one may find the aforementioned debates appear or that they don't; and when they do, they may or may not be related to each other in exactly this way. It seems clear that such a redefinition does not apply to all contexts and should not be used as a "straight jacket" to be forced onto real and concrete history. At the same time, these debates and this redefinition of currents *can* function as hypotheses regarding the issues that are liable to arise, the debates surrounding these issues, and the positions that are likely to go together with one another if such debates emerge. This perspective can, used non-dogmatically, offer tools for analyzing particular historical struggles, conjunctures, and thinkers.

For example, if we consider anarchism in the First Brazilian Republic (1889-1930), the hypotheses of this model is not largely validated, based on the historiographical work of Alexandre Samis.⁵⁷ The debates on display allow us to identify what the most consistent, and significant differences among the anarchists of that context were, revolving around the question of organization. Thus, organizationists and anti-organizationists were the two primary currents. Also, among the organizationists there was another relevant debate between revolutionary syndicalists (inspired by the French CGT) and anarcho-syndicalists (inspired by the Argentine FORA).

Final Considerations

Bandeira Negra and this article reinforce three important strands of research into anarchism.

First, reference studies on anarchism have significant theoretical and methodological problems: the basis of data (historical and geographic) with which they work; the ways in which they situate and read anarchism in history; the definitions of anarchism that are developed and adopted; the conclusions drawn from their analyses. Such problems make research difficult and do not allow us to adequately define anarchism, its debates, its currents, and its historical development.

Second, an approach based on a historical method and a broad data set, which interacts with notions of totality and interdependence, allows us to solve the existing problems in reference studies and to conduct robust research into anarchism.

Third, in this article asserts that anarchism is a coherent ideology, a type of revolutionary socialism that can be described with a precise set of principles, and that it carries a rational development of fundamental criticisms, proposals and strategies, in relation to which its two currents are established: mass anarchism and insurrectionary anarchism. In addition, it should be noted that anarchism has had a wide popular impact among workers and peasants, in urban

⁵⁷ Alexandre Samis, "Pavilhão Negro Sobre Pátria Oliva." Colombo, Eduardo (ed.). *História do Movimento Operário Revolucionário*. São Paulo: Imaginário, 2004.

and rural areas, and a permanent and global historical development from its emergence in the second half of the nineteenth century to the present.

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