

# **Anarchism as a Nationality**

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A few years ago, I wrote a small book that took a lot of work to publish. The text was entitled *Notes for a Libertarian Ethics*.

In that little book — basic, for beginners, limited, if you will — I put forward my reflections on the ethical nature of anarchism. I thought, and I think, that anarchism had a historical horizon that should be constantly reflected upon, something we are encouraged to do now. But I also considered that its trajectory must be brought up to the present day to ask ourselves: who are today's anarchists? What are they currently doing? From where and to where are they asserting themselves?

The result of that booklet was political suicide. To think of myself as an anarchist today is something as important or as useless, for me, as it is to assert myself as a Mexican. Does it imply the acceptance of a Nation-State model? Does it imply the acceptance only of the historical nationality excluding the State form? Does it have any redeemable appeal to claim a nationality that we did not ask for, that we do not want, a nationality that was assigned to us by the mere fact of being born in this geography and at this specific historical moment? To be Mexican is also to claim a position that excludes and limits you, a position that also sets you in confrontation against others, that turns you into a citizen or a foreigner. It places you in multiple situations of advantage or disadvantage, depending on the case.

## **Mazunte**

Let me give you an example: on a certain occasion I found myself chatting with a French comrade. After a recent visit to the coast of Oaxaca, she shared she had been delighted with the beauty of the area. She also told me that a friend of hers had fallen so much in love with Mazunte that she decided to buy a piece of land and build a house there, something that at the time was completely illegal, since by law foreigners could not buy border or coastal territories.

However, this was not a limitation, since there were paralegal ways to overcome this legislative criteria imposed by her citizenship. The comrade who told me this was very upset because she felt that her friend was colonizing Mexico, and that she was taking land away from the countryfolk of Mazunte.

Her position seemed purist and limited to me. I believe, and I told her, that anyone in the world should be able to live wherever they like, wherever they prefer. I think it is very good that this French girl, whom I don't know, can live in Mazunte if she wants to. But I find it very difficult to think that if a mazunteño wants to buy a house in, for example, the Côte d'Azur in France, she could do it with the ease of the French girl, without taking into account the legal paperwork that this would imply, and despite even having sufficient funds to do it, which of course is in an incalculable economic dimension for me or for any other costeña, or so-called Third-World-person who is not a bourgeois.

Taking this as an example, what difference does this categorization "Mexican" represent to the notion of gender, class or race? All these categories are determinant and determined. We did not decide to be born into any of these categories, yet we were born into them.

Recently some acquaintances of ours had a child. One of the parents is of European nationality, and although he was born in Mexico, this baby, just by being male, white, educated in a foreign language from an early age and possessing European nationality, although he is not bourgeois and although he is half-Mexican, already has, just by the very fact of being born, more

opportunities than the hypothetical girl born next door: a woman, brown and the daughter of Oaxacan migrants.

To say that “I wish the two new babies the best of luck in life” would be a hypocritical condemnation since “luck”, or historical precedence, in this case, has already rolled the dice for these newborns.

In the face of these categories, gender, class, race/ethnicity/nationality, the label “anarchist” would seem to be like the house in Mazunte, a wonder. A place where for the first time you can freely decide for yourself how to be named, from where and where to direct your life, your praxis, your thoughts. To be an anarchist seems to be a place claimed from within freedom, from non-determination, although in reality this implies a contradiction, and we’ll examine how together.

After much reflection, further reading and more hands-on experience, I have come to discredit the naïve position that an anarchist is a person who has decided, with total freedom, to be an anarchist and to claim to be one. Not only because many decisions in our lives are guided by unconscious and deep rooted structural factors. Not only because the world, the system, has forced us to seek to resist on the basis of anarchism. As far as the urban case is concerned, it seems that we had no other choice, but also because being an anarchist is not a category that is alien or distant from the determinations of gender or race/ethnicity/nationality, as it might seem. As much as one might think and argue to the contrary, being an anarchist, would rivet each of the parts of the chain. Being an anarchist, like gender, like nationality, like class, is first and foremost a historical construct. Anarchism has not always existed. That in a patriarchal society the male gender is considered superior is a historically constructed condition.

Being of Mexican nationality is a historically constructed condition, we are traversed by the history of our families, of the wars of our countries against others and of the same historical construction of the Mexican State.

Mexico has not always existed and will not always exist.

## **A Nation**

Class and race are things that have also existed in various forms throughout history, and someday they will cease to exist as categories of social determination and oppression against humanity.

But today, our condition is something that we cannot leave aside, that we cannot deny, that we cannot pretend does not exist. I have come to think, and this is not the first place I have pointed it out, that anarchism is configured in the same way as science, as the legitimately validated knowledge of the West, and that in the face of this, and this is a novelty, it configures a kind of nationality, a determining category if you want to read it this way, and it does so in the following way.

Anarchism is a historical response to a determined process, it is one of many responses of the West to the capitalism that was born in its heart. A more radical response, if one wants to see it that way, but not the only one. And that in essential terms would not be so different from Marxism, as many think.

Like the patriarchal discourse of a nation-state, anarchism would have built upon itself a foundational discourse, an “instituting perspective of the libertarian horizon” as it is pointed out in the program of the workshops: a genesis, an Egypt from which the great patriarch of

anarchism set out to liberate the oppressed, and from which he would pass the baton to the other great patriarchs-and-prophets who followed him. In the same way as Marxism, or any form of nationalism, anarchism, the anarchists, like to capture the profiles of their founding fathers in illustrated genealogies.

It is not difficult to find illustrations of Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, to which, in the same way as any national vision, patriarchs are added or removed according to the line of succession to be claimed. But despite the differences, one thing will remain the same: all will be men, all will be white and all will be educated in the West.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, and this reaffirms the previous point, the genealogy of anarchism has a directionality, or as they say in the program, it has a “perspective”.

That is to say that this can be projected as the history of a nation from the past to the present, but it cannot – because this would be subversive and unpatriotic – accept that there were many more emancipatory projects that did not configure the historical *nationalist* claim of anarchism. Nor can it accept that there exist, today, movements of great importance that are not anarchist,<sup>2</sup> because this would represent an attempt against the purity of the ideals of the *homeland*, that is to say, that like all nationalisms, anarchism is ethnocentric. And chauvinistic.

## The Tropical Fatherland

Up to this point,<sup>3</sup> my argument may seem exaggerated and unconvincing. But as I have pointed out, this is not a spontaneous reflection, it is the product of constant, daily and collective learning, which like any ethical aspect would not be in books but the daily practice of anarchism, and in the revision of the aforementioned “*from what position do we vindicate ourselves?*”.

I do not intend to repeat here my conclusions, suffice it to point out that the strong bulk of today’s anarchism, *insurrectionary anarchism*, is, like historical anarchism, the result of a process of reflection by men, white, western, and by the way, half-bourgeois, who do not accept that there is any other movement than their own, who reject any form of organization that does not align itself with their colonizing thoughts and in this way, even if they do not accept it, they constitute themselves in a vanguard.

I am not opting for the easy path of disqualification. I do not believe, as the bourgeois media or the bulk of *fancy people* think, including other anarchists, that these *insurrectionalists* are not worthy of being called anarchists, for some purist argumentation. On the contrary, I believe that they are anarchists. And that today this fashion composes most of the anarchist activity in Mexico.

It is based on this acceptance, of their anarchism’s validity, that I have investigated their demands, ideological origins, and positions in relation to other social movements, and I have come to the conclusion that this anarchism, this *tropicalized* version of European insurrectionalism, is not my path or my perspective of struggle. And that my place is to situate historically and to

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<sup>1</sup> «Let us not attempt to correct the equation by arguing that, for example, Magón is neither white nor Western [...]»

<sup>2</sup> Aguilar, Yásnaya. Validation as Capture. Originally written in Mexican-Castilian on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020 for El País. Translated by taller ahuehuete in solidarity.

<sup>3</sup> Rivera, Guadalupe. *El Anarquismo como Nacionalidad, a propósito del Taller de Estudios Libertarios*. Second edition: April 2017. Ediciones La Social, México. Translated and illustrated, in solidarity, by taller ahuehuete.

describe it to and other forms of anarchism that I believe should be left aside, neither behind nor ahead, simply aside.

But what I found is that in reality, this *tropicalized* expression would not be an exception. On the contrary, as an undeniable tendency anarchist nationalism operates within a colonizing, chauvinistic, patriarchal, rational, spatially, and temporally directed entity beginning from the European 19<sup>th</sup> century to the corners of the world where industrialization was arriving, and not the other way around.

From the West to the Non-West, from the White to the non-White, from the Rational to the non-Rational, from the Macho to the non-Macho. A very clear example of this is the structural framework of the program I am discussing today.

It can be said that I am doing an advantageous exercise and that I am generating an *a posteriori* discourse, but let me excuse myself by saying that the bulk of what I am writing here today is what I have been mentioning for several years in other forums.

The program is structured from that same historically-directed form. The same old song. That 100% of the authors proposed to be read in the anarchist programs are men, white and western, who start from the sacred "*instituting perspective of the libertarian horizon*", Proudhon-Kropotkin-Bakunin, is the strongest proof of my arguments and my concerns.

Only in its branches, as accessory and in result to the difficulty to heal the limitations of the wear and tear of worn-out anarchism is that new avenues are, I repeat, purely complementary, related as they are mentioned and not nodal: such as Zapatismo or feminism. It was only when political correctness required the inclusion of indigenous peoples and women that they were integrated into the program and not the other way around. Not unlike the State's ways, in which governments realize that is politically incorrect to leave "gender" "issues" out of their programs and thus, they create a special section to address them.

Anarchism as nationality is made to advance from back to front, in an evolutionary, linear, and upward movement, from its most incipient to its most developed stages.

It would seem that it cannot be thought that anarchism is, in reality, the set of very many divergent strands anchored very deeply in the history of humanity and that some of them, only some of them, converged as anarchism towards the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

It is idle to look for a "real" anarchism before Proudhon. Idle because before that time there was libertarian socialism, utopian socialism, etc., but not anarchism. Anarchism before the 19<sup>th</sup> century and outside Europe, "simply did not exist".

By the same token, we can comment that by integrating them into a program such as the one we are discussing, the non-European (sub-national) varieties of anarchism, will be disen-cumbered, exotic, forced into a mosaic that will show them more as isolated experiences than as experiences integrated to the great national trunk.

Going deeper into this, we will realize that anarchism arrives to Japan, Nigeria or Mexico at the time when industrialization and urbanization begin to make a dent in those countries. It is not by chance that Nigeria is the country with the most anarchist activity in Africa, just as it is no coincidence that Nigeria is the most industrialized country on the continent. Examine the program, all anarchisms are *workerist*. This is neither bad nor good, it is simply a historical condition.

## European Imports

Neither before the 19<sup>th</sup> century nor otherwise will we find the seed of anarchism implanted outside Europe. Therefore, it is difficult, very difficult to find a non-working class anarchism, read *agrarian*, outside the European examples. I repeat: the historical tendency is that outside Europe, anarchism arrives as a response of the artisan-to-industrial proletarianization. Its impact is fundamentally urban, and it usually arrives directly imported by European “missionaries” who for one reason or another are in those countries.

That is to say that the first anarchists in non-European countries, for example in Latin America, were Europeans.

In Mexico, but not only, the local anarchism also followed the great strands of anarchism that I have called of a nationalist form. It followed the same founding fathers, Proudhon and Bakunin, and was formed in the same way, workers’ circles, mutualists, and unions.

The geography might change, but the pattern was always the same: imported from Europe, anarchism had an impact on the workers’ struggles in other countries. But never, never, has it ever been the other way around.

Never, never, never, never have the ideas of a Latin American, African, or Asian anarchist impacted “mainstream” anarchism. I invite you to demonstrate the opposite. This is impossible because it would be a contradiction in terms, since “evolution does not go backward”.

If non-European anarchists are mentioned it is purely out of exoticism.

Never in history has any Latin-American revolutionary anarchist been received in Europe, and became an influential organizer and agitator to such an extent that she impacted the history of the global movement.<sup>4</sup> The opposite movement did happen, I insist, as a pattern in the rest of the world. What is worse, in peripheral anarchism few non-anarchist movements were recovered, vindicated, or even supported.

The case of Mexico is the exception that proves the rule because the Central Committee of the Mexican Liberal Party *did* support Zapatismo, an agrarian, non-identified-as-anarchist, indigenous and local struggle.

This support earned the PLM fierce criticism; “one cannot be an anarchist and support non-anarchist movements at the same time”. This statement can be extended even further, and point to the enormous skepticism and disdain that existed in European anarchism (or gringo anarchism, which for that matter is the same thing) towards the Mexican revolution. This disdain was so great that the PLM took on the defense of the Revolution in the international trenches, and this task justified the editorial line and how *Regeneración* was published.

## Tierra y Libertad

But let us return to a question we had pointed out above, why is there no agrarian anarchism outside Europe? The answer, it seems to me, is simpler than one might think. If we start from the fact that anarchism has its historical genesis in the urban transition from artisanal to industrial production, a phenomenon that became generalized from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, on the

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<sup>4</sup> Not ideologically, but as an active protagonist, a clear and celebrated actress illustrated next to Bakunin, a canonical figure in the anarchist Olympus.

contrary, the struggles for land and for what today we call “autonomy” are much older – and transcend anarchism itself.

When, several years ago, I became aware of this historical depth, when I wanted to know what existed before anarchism, I set myself the task of capturing what the landscape was before anarchism. I set myself the task of mapping all the popular struggles that had arisen in Mexico from 1521 to the present day. I must confess that I started from a tremendous naivety, I had no idea what I was getting into.

The bibliography quickly began to pile up.

I delved into history and the more rebellions I found, shorter or longer-lasting, were certainly more complex. Finally, the task collapsed under its weight. Rebellions, insurrections, mutinies, and whatever you want to call them, there had been all over the length and breadth of the Mexican geography, from rebellions in Baja California by the Jesuits, from the unity of Chichimecas, Blacks, and Spaniards who, allied in interethnic complicity, attacked the silver caravans in Zacatecas; to the guerrillas of Cimarrones in Veracruz who founded the first free black town in the Americas, to even the Mayans who had escaped Spanish colonization and remained hidden in the jungle for hundreds of years.

The map exists, but I do not believe that even 10% of all the rebellions that New Spain and Mexico experienced from 1521 to 1994 are captured there.

In that mixture of insurrections, anarchism became just a small star in a sky flooded with constellations. When in a purely mental act I transferred that exercise to the continent of Abya Yala, anarchism ceased to be the center of the universe, the center of the galaxy.

My anarcho-centric vision had been defeated by hundreds, perhaps thousands of stories of rebellion from the Arctic to Tierra del Fuego, from the Sioux-Lakota to the Quilombos in Brazil.

Stories that often had not structured their discourse in manifestos, that were not and could not have been anarchist, either because they had arisen before this ideology or because they were not anarchist.

In the case of agrarian, indigenous, or autonomous struggles, their historical depth had surpassed the gravitational force of anarchism, and had transcended it.

The case of Zapatismo is the clearest example of a struggle that is not anarchist, simply because it is not anarchist simply because it did not need to be.

The problem is that ethnocentric anarchism neither wishes nor will ever succeed in integrating all this very dense rebellious experience that exists in the world. It is a contradiction in terms, if it tries to do so, then it loses the importance of the anarchist claim and becomes something else.

The problem is that anarchism is not thought of as another form of struggle against oppression and that on the contrary, it becomes an approach that makes a clean slate of the past and that does not even allow us to understand that, for example, by claiming the anarchism of the agrarian rebellion of Julio Chávez López in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we are losing the lessons of the other 400 years of struggle for land in the states of Morelos and Mexico, and that these struggles are important because they existed, not because there were anarchists in them.

In other words, if a Maori, Mapuche or Ikoot anarchist were to have his or her anarchism taken away from him or her, they would be “simply” an indigenous person, valuable in their own right, with a proven perspective of struggle, with a deep history.

On the other hand, if a Mexican anarchist were to be stripped of her anarchism, there would be little or nothing left of that person, just a Mexican, urbanite, proletarian being.



## The Other

A first warning sign would therefore exist in this ethnocentric thermometer of anarchism: its incapacity to incorporate experiences of ethnic, pagan, non-national struggles into the history of its struggle. I refer to pagans by making a simile with evangelization. For Christianity, pagans are those people who could not have been baptized because they lived far from the reach of Christianity, as opposed to heretics, who did know Christianity and who rejected it. For America, the black and indigenous movements would be an example of this paganism, of this non-anarchism that remains anarchism which remains excluded, or that in order to be incorporated they resort to anarchist indigenism, that is to say, that these movements are only contemplated if they obtain homologation or can be incorporated into anarchist national struggles.

The opinions that different anarchist groups have against the Zapatistas are clear proof of this. One does not have to look far to find documents of this style, for example, a letter from the “Ricardo Flores Magón Insurgent Militias”, an alleged anarchist armed group, to the EZLN. The letter is a collection of quotes from the great patriarchs of anarchism, from Proudhon to Magón. The text is little more than this accumulation of unconnected phrases without a clear sense, which pretend to give a lesson or reconciliation from anarchism to Zapatismo, with results that I judge to be pitiful. I emphasize that there are more documents of this style, you can search and read them, there are in several languages. I do not intend to deal more with it, because the Zapatistas themselves have already spoken on the subject. Look them up and check them out, they are of an unfortunate orthodoxy.

You will also have to excuse me, but I find it very difficult to find, somewhere in the program, or in my own study of anarchism in general, conducted over the course of over a decade, that affirmation they make about *“Anarchism throughout history has not been enclosed in its own tradition, nor is it nourished solely by thoughts, meanings, and imaginaries that are explicitly situated and recognized as anarchist.”* Similarly to the rationalism that shuts out any knowledge deemed “non-rational,” Christianity shuts out any “pagan” vision of the world, as the nationality of a country that despises everything that in its judgment has not helped forge the mestizo or white homeland, anarchism shuts out forms of struggle not claimed as an anarchist.

A second warning sign is the (dis)incorporation of feminism. The classic manifestation of this I have already referred to above: An anarchist organizer notices how politically incorrect it is not to include feminism in his event and makes a special section for it. The result is a program in which the “really important” content is put forward by men (and white men), either because women are absent from the key debates or because they have been minimized and are considered theoretically secondary. If the program were done by female comrades I assure you that the outcome would be different. Women only have a voice until they are included in a table, session, or section of “feminism and anarchism”.

A second, more critical and deeper look will reveal that on the contrary women have not only been there, not only do they make up half the world, half of everything and that not only have they expressed their critical opinions for several decades already, yet their opinions have been minimized, devalued and dismissed. The very existence of “anarcho-feminism” shows that anarchism by itself did not solve and did not pretend to solve gender issues. As if that were not enough, the “classical” anarchists, those mentioned in the “instituting perspectives of the libertarian horizon”, had misogynist approaches that were in no way contrary to their anarchism.

We do not have to go very far, in multiple forums I have denounced the macho character of the Central Committee of the Mexican Liberal Party. It is enough to realize that the “truly important” positions of the PLM were occupied by men. Of course, there were women, but their place was always, as described by the PLM members themselves in their writings, more that of a comrade who supports the man than that of a militant fighter. As I pointed out in a brief essay that was not well received in any circle, the Pelemists, Praxédis Guerrero for example, insist on the “sweet” and “tender” nature of women and point out that their subordinate role is the fault of traditionalism and religion, which historically has been used by anarchists to point out the inability of women to make correct decisions.

Praxédis Guerrero declared himself against feminism because he understands it as a bourgeois ideology that pretends to equalize the roles of men and women in a capitalist society. Likewise, Ricardo Flores Magón, the great patriarch of Mexican Anarchism, wrote in September 1910, that a woman was a sweet and delicate being. For him, above all, she is the companion of man: mother, wife, daughter, sister, and in this sense she would be equally chained to the slavery of the male, that is why it is her task to “make your husbands, your brothers, your fathers, your sons, and your friends take up the rifle”. The above are not isolated opinions, nor mere occurrences of PLM, they are on the contrary writings founded in the western, macho, and rational tradition that is anarchism. I repeat it here clearly in case there was any doubt: Machismo is a founding part of anarchism. Anarchism has the little honorable merit of having split socialist struggles from feminist struggles. There was no contradiction between feminism and socialism, not until the arrival of the father of anarchism, Pierre Joseph Proudhon. This fact has been hushed up. Virtually no one has dared to write this truth so directly, only Simone de Beauvoir points it out loud and clear in *The Second Sex*:

In general, the reformist [socialist] movement that developed during the nineteenth century was favorable to feminism because of the fact that it sought justice through equality. There is one notable exception: that of Proudhon. No doubt because of his peasant roots, he reacts violently against Samsonian mysticism; he is in favor of small property and, at the same time, confines women to the home. “Housewife or courtesan”, here is the dilemma in which he confines her. Until then, the attacks against feminism had come from the conservatives, who fought socialism with the same harshness: Charivari, among others, found in this field an inexhaustible source of jokes; and it is Proudhon who breaks the alliance between feminism and socialism; he protests against the banquet of socialist women presided over by Leroux, he fulminates lightning and flashes against Jeanne Decoin. In the work entitled *La justice*, he argues that woman must remain under the dependence of man; only the latter counts as a social individual; in the couple, there is no partnership, which would imply equality, but a union; woman is inferior to man, first, because her physical strength only represents two-thirds of that of the male, and, then, because she is intellectually and morally inferior in the same measure: her value, as a whole, is  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  as against  $3 \times 3 \times 3$ , that is,  $\frac{8}{27}$  of the value of the stronger sex. Two women, Madame Adam and Madame D’Héricourt, replied to him, one with firmness, the second with less fortunate exaltation, and Proudhon took the occasion to reply with his *Pornocratie ou la femme dans les temps modernes*. However, like all anti-feminists, he addresses ardent litanies to the “true woman,” slave and mirror of man; despite

this devotion, he himself had to recognize that the life he imposed on his own wife did not make her happy: Madame Proudhon's letters are nothing but a prolonged lament.

Did the remainder of libertarianism do anything to dissociate itself from this position? Not at all, on the contrary, it was reaffirmed. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, this misogynist vision was re-projected, from the perspective of positivism and reason, advocating the clinical inferiority of women.

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Guadalupe Rivera  
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*The following essays are a critique of anarchism, but not an academic or theoretical critique, but rather an experiential and propositional contribution, ethnographic if you will, written out of the urgent need to (de)think anarchism from within the [designated] Third World.*

*Since 2006, in these ten years of practicing anarchism, I have found many potholes that I have always pointed out and consider necessary to overcome. These potholes are neither minor nor superficial, on the contrary, they are deep and of primary importance.*

– Guadalupe Rivera (2017)

The following essays have been curated by taller ahuehuete's Antijuras, Suttkin and Capanegra, all identifying within the heterodox anarchist tradition.

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