

Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

Barry Maxwell and Raymond Craib (eds), *No Gods, No Masters, No Peripheries: Global Anarchisms*, Oakland: PM Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-62963-098-4 (paper)

It is not an easy thing to make an old refrain ring anew—to take a well-worn and understood phrase, loaded with specific histories, tied up with particular traditions, and to add to it, straining to make a connection to new and more diverse discourses. That is precisely the task that Barry Maxwell and Raymond Craib, the editors of *No Gods, No Masters, No Peripheries*, undertake when they assert that the imperialist core-periphery divide that continues to haunt much anarchist theory and study must be deconstructed and deposed as firmly as anarchists have rejected gods and masters. Arranged around five thematic sections, and spanning from traditional archival histories of labour and anti-statist movements, through literary “interventions” into the connections between capitalism, genocide, and some particularly scary stories about vampires, to surrealist grappling with Nietzsche’s “mercenary” words, this is a wild, fun, and varied collection. How much it contributes to a breaking down of core-periphery tensions and inequalities is debatable, but it is certain to show new perspectives on anarchism to even the most radical reader.

The five thematic sections of the book divide up the chapters into different clusters based on interesting and important—if occasionally vague—criteria. Titled, respectively, “Learning From Indigenous Experience: Anarchism and Indigeneity”, “A Thousand Links: Transnational Lines in an Anarchist Age”, “The Horizon at the Centre: No Peripheries”, “The Black Mirror: Anarchism, Surrealism, and the Situationists” and “Black, Red, and Grey: Anarchism, Communism, and Political Theory”, these sections have in common only their commitment to conjoin anarchist discourses with those potentially parallel or intersecting strands of libertarian thought beyond the recognized anarchist milieu. Many of the chapters are standard scholarly essays, including some very rich archival explorations related to labour movements or thinkers and leaders important to particular causes, but not all. First, the book

Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

is shot through with illustrations and photos, some related directly to chapters in the book and others to larger discursive frameworks. Further, two “interventions” push the collection beyond the expected: the first, a reflection on May Day by historian Peter Linebaugh that winds through terrifying tales of vampires, through critiques of austerity and the ties between capital and colonization, to argue for a need to slay the “monsters” of the global economic crisis (p.80-113); the second, a photo essay by Egypt-based artist Bahia Shehab of her sustained activist campaign that involved spray-painting an evolving series of protest slogans and symbols such as “No to military rule” and “No to stealing the revolution” in a public space in Cairo (p.233-241).¹ In addition to these methodological departures, the sheer diversity of topics and research makes this collection a veritable carnival of interesting and surprising ideas, though like any carnival some of the prizes are easier to win than others: in some of the dense archival histories and the highly-conceptual engagements with surrealism or political theory, the level of detail and specific knowledge required to see exactly what the chapter is trying to do can be daunting to those (like myself) who do not regularly work in those registers.

Across the five thematic sections, there are several apparent cross-cutting subject matters. First, there are those historical works that seek to excavate or expand our understanding of the way that anarchism has been particularised in specific place-based struggles or cultural-national-ethnic contexts. The majority of these studies are rooted broadly in Latin America, which is unsurprising given the strong history of Leftist organising throughout that region. There is: an investigation into the importance of the mestizo identity of “libertarian ideologue” Luis Cusicanqui in Boliva (p.12-21); an examination of the relationship between Indigenous and socialist thought in the practices of the Zapatistas (p.22-43); a critical refutation of the myth of the “itinerant, stateless radical” exemplified through

¹ In some editions of the book (including mine), the pictures associated with the “Spraying No” intervention are misplaced, appearing in the middle of the previous chapter.

Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

the persecution of Spanish-born Chilean organiser Casimiro Barrios Fernandez (p.158-179); an unearthing of the vibrant and powerful anarchist-syndicalist alliances among marine and river-front workers in Brazil during the early 20th century (p.180-214); an exploration of urban-rural solidarity behind anarchist movements at the same time in Peru (p.215-232); and a complex mapping of the “articulation” of anarchist praxis in Mexican political discourses (p.336-348). That accounts for nearly half of the 14 “academic essay” chapters in the book, establishing that, for lived examples of anarchist practices, scholars should not only look to the common examples of the Spanish Revolution and the Paris Commune, but at the century and a half of Leftist struggle throughout Latin America. These chapters, while not methodologically homogeneous, often rely on reading against the archival grain and paying close attention to the lives and words of activists and organisers to show how theories that are articulated in simple terms in the abstract can become both more powerful and also far more complex upon application.

Another cluster of works pursues an interrogation of anarchism itself, in an attempt to figure out how it can be used to find “meaning” across seemingly disparate struggles in the global present. Many of these chapters are more theoretical or conceptual in nature, while still speaking to the quotidian, material realities of people and communities in struggle against the state and capital. These include: an intense and necessarily partial recounting of the interactions between the IWW-inspired Chicago Surrealist group and French surrealists spanning about four decades (p.244-262); a re-reading of Bakunin through the works of surrealist poet Will Alexander in the hope of receiving “signals from places of life that we can hardly imagine” (p.282); a challenging meeting-of-the-minds between one-time situationist Raoul Vaneigem and anarchist bugbear (or bad boy?) Friedrich Nietzsche (p.283-313); and Silvia Federici’s closing chapter that meditates on the importance of seeing global anarchism as both always already present and also dynamically shifting, as anarchism, Marxism, and feminism are articulated in increasingly complex relational formations (p.349-

Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

357). Perhaps also in this section we could place Adrienne Hurley's chapter, which draws out transnational links between student-driven protests in Quebec, Canada, and Japan, through the lens of educational institutions as part of new regimes of securitisation and the policing of dissent (p.116-130). While not as specifically probing of "anarchism" as the other chapters discussed here, Hurley's chapter is a challenge to many anarchists who fall into one of two broad camps—those who have been radicalised through student politics and exposure to radical scholarship who often overlook their own role in reproducing social hierarchies, and those grassroots activists who dismiss universities as inherently oppressive and in so doing may miss the vibrancy and potential of university-incubated student and youth activism.

The remaining chapters, while not unified by approach or content, mark some of the most intriguing contributions of the volume, thinking through anarchism not as a primary current or referent, but as something that can be appended to or provide fresh critical perspectives on existing struggles. As Craib makes clear in the Foreword to the book, these chapters are not "looking for anarchism" in existing struggles—a worthwhile pursuit, and a vibrant one within geography thanks to the popularity of works like *Weapons of the Weak* by James Scott (1985), and recent provocations by Simon Springer and colleagues (2012) in this journal and elsewhere, but also a pursuit that reveals only a limited part of the wider spectrum of libertarian and autonomous action. So it is that the 2004 insurrection in Kabylia, Algeria, is examined not to find anarchist tendencies within it, but rather to reveal horizontalist practices, successes, and failures that many anarchists will not be aware of, and will undoubtedly find useful in their organising and critique (p.131-155). Likewise, two concepts—"revolution", a term close to many anarchist hearts, and "enlightenment", a term usually rejected as associated with liberalism—are brought into conversation through the framework of the Arab Spring (p.316-335). Rather than recuperating an anarchistic version of liberal enlightenment, this chapter demonstrates how the dialectics of "revolution"—the interplay between social and scientific paradigm shifts—require us to think through liberal and

Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

totalitarian interpretations of “enlightenment thinking” which inform the imaginations even of people seeking radical breaks with (some) social and political traditions. Finally, in what is for me the stand-out chapter of the book, Maia Ramnath deftly weaves together anarchist and anticapitalist theory, with social and cultural histories of India and Brahmanism, frameworks of indigeneity and belonging, and a strong dose of critical analyses of race and colonialism, into an open-ended discussion of these intersecting, conflicting, complicating trajectories (p.44-79). This chapter, more than any other in the volume, challenges the “stale formalism” of many anarchist inquiries, raising questions of how religion, culture, caste, race, indigeneity, and capitalist development all complicate and shift the frame of liberatory and autonomous thought. After underlining nearly every sentence in the chapter, I am convinced—not of any particular argument, as the chapter makes few set claims, but of the need for the conversation to progress.

The book overall is not without flaws. While the Foreword and framing of the first thematic section make clear that addressing the existence, persistence, and revolutionary aspirations of Indigenous peoples in the Americas is both a priority for this book and should be for anarchism more generally, there seems to be an obvious gap or hole in the text around this issue. While the first thematic section opens with a quote from Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred, whose 2005 book *Wasasé* sought to begin sketching a political philosophy of “anarchoindigenism”, and the acknowledgements note that Yellowknives Dene political theorist Glen Coulthard—whose 2014 book brings Marx and Fanon into sustained dialogue—participated in the original conference, the absence of articles or interventions from them or their contemporaries is noted. The tradition of “indigenous resurgence” that they, along with Audra Simpson (Mohawk), Leanne Simpson (Anishinaabe), and similar scholars, are articulating is to me one of the most important developments for anarchist thought generally. In a different vein, while the volume is explicitly set as an exploration of the messy, mutable entanglements between anarchism and other forms of thought and modes of social

Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

mobilisation, it does occasionally stray towards the “looking for anarchism” tendency that the editors obviously hope to avoid. Especially in some of the detailed histories, and perhaps out of necessity given that these often excavate little-understood moments of resistance and rebellion, anarchism and anarchists seem constantly thrust to centre stage. This is not always a failing: for example, in Geoffroy de Laforcade’s engagement with anarchist and syndicalist organising among marine workers in Brazil, the sustained focus on anarchism allows for a clarification of the dynamic relationship between anarchism and other forces at work in the Brazilian labour movement, both those hostile to and supportive of labour autonomy. de Laforcade’s chapter brilliantly shows how many anarchist victories came through cooperation with trade unions of various kinds and relied on tactics that many “purist” anarchists might reject out of hand (voting, negotiating with government officials, and so on). Perhaps, though, what this demonstrates is that there still is a need to “look for” anarchism in diverse social movements, but that—as de Laforcade demonstrates—this should be because partnerships with other social movements often hold the key to making anarchist ambitions into realistic activist goals.

In sum, this is book that anyone interested in radical politics should read. Not all of the contributions will inspire the same levels of excitement—or outrage—but they are likely to provoke some manner of response. And that, I think, is the point of an edited volume such as this one: by adding the demand to reject peripheries along with gods and masters, Craib, Maxwell, and their contributors are saying that even the radical vision of the world presented by “classical” anarchism may still need further radicalisation. The book does not collapse the core-periphery dialectic any more than it eliminates divine beings with the force of its logic—but it does demand that we consider looking for the locus of radical struggles in new and very different places, and in fact, almost everywhere.

Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

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