

THE THEORIES, CONCEPTS AND  
PRACTICES OF DEMOCRACY

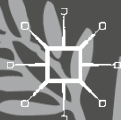
Series Editors: Jean-Paul Gagnon  
and Mark Chou

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**ANARCHIST  
CRITIQUE  
OF RADICAL  
DEMOCRACY**

The Impossible Argument

**Markus Lundström**



# The Theories, Concepts and Practices of Democracy

Series Editors

Jean-Paul Gagnon  
University of Canberra  
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“This book offers a powerful critical inquiry into the relationship between anarchism and democracy. Lundström traces a genealogy of critique that sheds new light on the conflict at the heart of democracy and its imperative to govern. Anarchism, he contends, must be understood as elsewhere to such appeals to authority. In placing anarchism outside of these bounds, Lundström compellingly argues that we must move beyond the enchanting discourse of democracy, even in its radicalized form, to accept anarchism on its own terms.”

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There are many types of democracies and many types of democrats. Though contemporary Western scholars and practitioners of democracy have tended to repeat a particular set of narratives and discourses, recent research shows us that there are in fact hundreds of different adjectives of democracy. What one theorist, political leader or nation invokes as democracy, others may label as something altogether different. Part of this has to do with the political nature of democracy. As a practice and concept, it is always contested. Yet instead of exploring these differences and ambiguities, many democrats today retreat to the well-worn definitions and practices made popular by Western powers in the twentieth-century.

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Markus Lundström

# Anarchist Critique of Radical Democracy

The Impossible Argument

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*to the ungovernable*

## PREFACE

My drive for writing this book comes from personal encounters with democratic, state violence. Though comparably mild, these experiences awoke in me an urge to understand, to study, the very nature of domination, hierarchy, and conflict. That voyage took me deep into the political tradition that struggles for no less than to make every form of domination impossible. While studying the sundry history of anarchist thought, I soon began to notice vivid, ungovernable weeds of resistance, growing even in the most democratic of environments. When listening to the people of Husby, a Stockholm city district, located at Sweden's socio-political periphery, I glimpsed the depths of that compound, collective experience. And by reading radical-democratic theorists, not least Jacques Rancière, I found tools to identify here a certain conflict—a democratic conflict. In this book I look at that precise social antagonism: the trenchant division between government and those it tries to govern.

The first chapter begins on this personal note, before soon introducing radical-democratic theory and its ideas on democracy's conflictual nature. The following empirical chapter brings that theoretical endeavor to Husby through ethnographic interviews documenting the so-called Husby Riots. In the Swedish spring of 2013, "The Husby Riots" came to embody a local-historical antagonism, a deep conflict between the people of Husby and their alleged governors. The Husby events expose a democratic conflict, and in this book we travel farther into the very historical tradition that is emblematically concerned with that governors-governed divide, namely anarchism. From a probing interrogation of anarchist thought, the third chapter sketches a divergent and discontinuous relation between

democracy and anarchy. The concluding chapter puts these findings into dialogue with Husby's democratic conflict, offering to radical-democratic theory *The Impossible Argument*: a compound anarchist critique of radical democracy.

In addressing a seemingly ever-topical social conflict, that between the governors and governed, this book has obviously been inspired by uncountable people across time and space. Yet some have specifically contributed to its making. First of all, the empirical inquiry into the realm of democratic conflict is greatly indebted to the experiential analyses shared by the people of Husby. Being hospitable to question-asking scholars, in times of intense police and media presence, is no easy thing; yet without the clear-headed courage of those Husby residents who were interviewed, this book would not have been written. Here I also want to acknowledge the ad hoc research team that set out to document community-informed narratives on the Husby events. Apart from inviting me to participate in a most educative field study, enabling the empirical backbone for this book, I am very much indebted to the persistent, encouraging close readings of the following research collaborators; Paulina de los Reyes, Magnus Hörnqvist, Marcus Lauri, Alejandro Gonzalez, Kristina Boréus, Janne Flyghed, and Felipe Estrada. By this same token, I must also express my sincere gratitude to the unfailing input from Jonas Lundström, always rigorous, knowledgeable, and never disheartened. Furthermore, Daniel Berg has contributed to the manuscript with enormously precise, usable comments, along with Tomas Poletti Lundström, Sandra Hellstrand, and the two anonymous reviewers assigned by Palgrave Macmillan.

On a different, complementary level of acknowledgment, I also wish to convey my sincere, continuous appreciation of being invited to share with Sanna, and now Märta and Gösta, an ever-deepened journey into the indefinite realms of life itself. And so the final, and very deepest, acknowledgment concerns my closest companion in conceiving this book. By spending so much time with you, Gösta, my dear two-year-old teacher, I have had the opportunity to discover not only the limits of governance, but the limitless possibilities that comes with the art of mutual cooperation. This book is dedicated to you—and all the people—who patiently struggle to remain ungovernable.

Skärholmen, Sweden

Markus Lundström



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## CHAPTER 1

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# The Search for Radical Democracy

**Abstract** This introductory chapter displays the school of radical democracy. Guided by the political theory of Jacques Rancière, the chapter links democracy’s conflictual nature to its division between governors and governed. From this critical inquiry into the search for radical democracy, the chapter introduces the book’s ethnographic case study—the democratic conflict in Husby—and how such a conflict has been construed within the anarchist tradition.

**Keywords** Democratic theory • Anarchism • Jacques Rancière • Chantal Mouffe • Radical democracy

My very first encounter with a large-scale rally, as an active participant, was in December 2009. We were about 100,000 people that had gathered in Copenhagen to demonstrate and draw attention to the urgency of political-ecological issues, so obviously ignored by the governors of our democratic nation-states; we wanted more people to act as if our world(s) mattered. At the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference—the Copenhagen Summit—international cooperation again proved unable to deal with the severe threat of environmental degradation. In the shadow of that intense presence of global governance, I became introduced to ungovernable resistance making, enacted right in the midst of apparent powerlessness.

A few blocks down the march road, I saw police break into the demonstration, hindering both the way forward and the way back. A certain segment of the rally, about 1000 individuals, had deliberately been isolated since we apparently represented, as the police recurrently told us, “the problematic part of the demo.” Perhaps that was not incorrect. Some of us were, indeed, masked and dressed in black, confirming an iconic imagery of anarchist troublemakers; some of us would, for definite, affiliate with that enduring anarchist tradition. And as we were sitting there, hour after hour, in temporary (and even, as it later turned out, illegal) confinement, people began chanting, cunningly, the very characteristic call-and-response of the late Alterglobalization Movement:

“Show me what democracy looks like!”

“This is what democracy looks like!”

Echoing between the house walls, in the twilight of mid-winter Copenhagen, the chant delivered a rather cynical subtitle to that confined part of the rally. As a sarcastic reference to the leitmotif associated with the acclaimed “non-problematic” part of the demo, the democracy chant asserted, when coming from our restrained black block, an anarchist critique of radical democracy.

The aim of this book is to trace the genealogy of that critical thought, to expose and theorize a social conflict embedded in democracy itself: the antagonism between the democratic government and those it tries to govern. The starting point for this exploration derives not from the self-identified anarchist milieu, but from the collective experiences of democratic conflict in Husby, a Stockholm city district, located at Sweden’s socio-political periphery. This empirical study shows what democracy looks like, in a place like Husby, displaying how political activities are ignored, and suppressed, by municipal and state governors. We will see how democratic conflict has been historically intense in Husby, culminating in May 2013 in what become known as the Husby Riots, triggering one of the fiercest police interventions in Swedish history.

The Husby case, then, exposes the conflictual nature of democracy, a conception that is central to ongoing scholarly theorizations of—and searches for—a *radical* democracy. Our inquiry into democratic conflict is accordingly guided by the radical-democratic theory of Jacques Rancière, exposing an antagonism between the *democratic life* of the Husby community, and the ignorant and repressive response from the *democratic*

*state*. Yet these collective experiences also exemplify resistance: Husby residents continue to find ways to be ungovernable. This book digs deeper into this resistance phenomenon—the experiential critique of the democratic state—by interrogating a political ideology targeting that very antagonism. In the historical tradition of anarchism, then, we will trace critical approaches to democracy in relation to anarchy. As we shall see, this ideological tradition defies not only the social divide between governors and governed, but also nurtures a critique of even the most radical democracy. By connecting that anarchist critique—what I call The Impossible Argument—to the scholarly exploration of democratic conflict, this book adds critical theory to the search for a deeper—that is, *radical*—form of democracy.

The search for radical democracy is, of course, closely linked to the discursive centrality of the concept itself: actors all across the political spectrum situate their projects in a democratic framework. We recognize *anti-democratic* and *non-democratic* as pejorative ascriptions, reserved for political adversaries. For the modern nation-state it appears rather difficult—if not impossible—for it not to present itself as democratic. The same could certainly be said for non-governmental organizations, social movements, and other agents of the so-called civil society. For state and non-state actors alike, appropriating democracy, to attain legitimacy, appears to be at the very center stage of political action.

Since the concept became a subject for the scholarly community, most notably through the writings of political economist Joseph Schumpeter, it has been particularly defined through the procedural nature of political representation.<sup>1</sup> Though widely debated throughout the twentieth century, democratic theory produced in the Global North typically denotes democracy as a certain political condition,<sup>2</sup> which, as Robert Dahl declares, is particularly apt for large-scale nation-states.<sup>3</sup> Democratic theory has therefore been, as it were, the tonality of potential, of promising opportu-

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Schumpeter, 2005 [1943], *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Routledge), 269–73.

<sup>2</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Leonardo Avritzer, 2005, “Introduction: Opening up the Canon of Democracy,” in *Democratizing Democracy: Beyond the Liberal Democratic Canon*, ed. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (London: Verso), xxxiv–li; Graham Smith, 2009, *Democratic Innovations: Designing Institutions for Citizen Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Dahl, 1998, *On Democracy* (New Haven: Yale university press), 10.

nity, indexed by a vigorous civil society.<sup>4</sup> But after the collapse of state socialism in the early 1990s, left-leaning academic scholars soon began theoretical explorations to answer, in the words of David Trend, democracy's crisis of meaning.<sup>5</sup>

A notable development in that reconceptualization is this notion of *radical democracy*, construed as a path beyond both liberal and communitarian forms of democracy.<sup>6</sup> The prefix "radical" denotes the etymological root of democracy, people's rule, and therefore evokes, as Chantal Mouffe puts it, "extension and deepening of the democratic revolution initiated two hundred years ago ..., a radicalization of the modern democratic tradition."<sup>7</sup> The notion of advancing already existing democratic tendencies, for instance through progressive participatory practices, represents one particular branch of contemporary democratic theory.<sup>8</sup> But the connotations of radical democracy also encompass a pluralist feature, a theory of difference, heterogeneity, and social antagonism.

This pluralist nature of democracy answers to the theory of deliberative democracy, most famously promoted by Jürgen Habermas, which presumes, or at least aims at, overall political consensus.<sup>9</sup> The universalist feature of this democratic theory is severely challenged in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's now epic book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, which asserts political dissensus, or pluralism, as a key pillar of radical

<sup>4</sup> See Robert Putnam, Robert Leonardi, and Raffaella Nanetti, 1993, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 182.

<sup>5</sup> David Trend, 1995, "Democracy's Crisis of Meaning," in *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship and the State*, ed. David Trend (London: Routledge).

<sup>6</sup> Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen, 2005, "Introduction: Rethinking Radical Democracy between Abundance and Lack," in *Radical Democracy: Politics between Abundance and Lack*, ed. Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 3–5; See also Trend, 1995, "Introduction," 2–3.

<sup>7</sup> Chantal Mouffe, 1992, "Preface: Democratic Politics Today," in *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London: Verso), 1.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance Ank Michels, "Citizen Participation in Local Policy Making: Design and Democracy," *International Journal of Public Administration* 35, no. 4 (2012); Georgina Blakeley, "Governing Ourselves: Citizen Participation and Governance in Barcelona and Manchester," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 34, no. 1 (2010); Smith, 2009; Sousa Santos and Avritzer, 2005, lv–lxix.

<sup>9</sup> See Seyla Benhabib, 1996, "Introduction: The Democratic Moment and the Problem of Difference," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 6–8; Aletta Norval, 2001, "Radical Democracy," in *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought*, ed. Paul Barry Clarke and Joe Foweraker (New York: Routledge), 587–90.

democracy.<sup>10</sup> For some time, the academic literature has been defined by the divide between the Habermasian and this post-Marxist interpretation,<sup>11</sup> though it is probably fair to say that most scholars now associate radical democracy with a contentious societal process.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, the search for radical democracy is also catalyzed by an unblemished political inclination, the age-old dream of envisioning “the people” as actually taking over the state apparatus. Douglas Lummis contends that “radical democracy is more frightening even than anarchism [as it] does not abolish power, it says that the people should have it.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed loyal to the Marxian tradition, though in the vein of reasserting Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, Laclau and Mouffe declare that the “socialist strategy” ultimately crystallizes into “the people” taking over state power; the *demos* becomes reinvoked, in the words of Ernesto Laclau, as “the central protagonist of politics.”<sup>14</sup> This elevation of left-populism, continuously endorsed by Chantal Mouffe, quite naturally “presupposes allegiance to the political principles of modern democracy and the commitment to defend its key institutions.”<sup>15</sup> From this theoretical perspective, which permits unity and autonomy as tandem political goals,<sup>16</sup> radical-democratic pluralism validates through its materializations—and this precisely in the state arena. Following this line of thought, Mouffe distinctly warns about “exodus theorists,” scholars—and radical movements—inclined to, as Mouffe sees it, withdrawing from existing political institutions, thereby paving the way for continued neoliberal rule.<sup>17</sup> In place of such a “total rejection of representative democracy,” Mouffe suggests that “the state and representative institutions, instead of being an obstacle to social change, can contribute to it in a crucial way.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, 2001 [1985], *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso), xvii–xviii, 159–71.

<sup>11</sup> Adrian Little and Moya Lloyd, 2009, “Introduction,” in *The Politics of Radical Democracy*, ed. Adrian Little and Moya Lloyd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 1–7.

<sup>12</sup> See for instance Tønder and Thomassen, 2005, 3–5.

<sup>13</sup> Douglas Lummis, 1996, *Radical Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 27.

<sup>14</sup> Ernesto Laclau, 2005, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso), 249.

<sup>15</sup> Mouffe, 1992, 11.

<sup>16</sup> See discussion in Anna Marie Smith, 1998, *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary* (London: Routledge), 30–35.

<sup>17</sup> Chantal Mouffe, 2013, *Agonistics: Thinking of the World Politically* (London: Verso), 66–71.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 76–77.

Mouffe's alarmist reading of beyond-state politics discloses an understanding of radical democracy as a left-populist project to "radicalize democratic institutions and establish a new hegemony."<sup>19</sup> Such a defense of state politics answers, in turn, to critical grassroots explorations of democracy, particularly noticeable within the broader Alterglobalization Movement. According to Marianne Maeckelbergh, democracy within this movement is typically understood as "a non-state democracy, for some actors an anti-state democracy."<sup>20</sup> Maeckelbergh observes how democracy here is "intentionally prefigurative," attempting to reinvent democracy aside from the state by creating, as David Graeber puts it, "viable models of what functioning direct democracy could actually look like!"<sup>21</sup> Here we recall our anarchist critique of radical democracy, displayed by the sarcastic chant, "This is what democracy looks like!" which echoed during the heavy police repression at the Copenhagen Summit.

It is precisely this political inclination—to avoid or bypass the state-political arena—that has alarmed radical theory scholars like Chantal Mouffe. In this vein, Barbara Epstein too expresses unease at avoiding state politics, since "standing aside from this arena means leaving it to the right."<sup>22</sup> So has also Judith Butler, read as an advocate for radical democracy, been sharply criticized for disqualifying the state arena, by overemphasizing the processual nature of democracy.<sup>23</sup>

In between these troubled discussions, concerning the political imperatives of radical democracy, dwells the theorization of democracy's conflictual nature. Mouffe famously diagnoses politics as *agonistic*, instead of antagonistic; (radical) democracy is an arena for constant negation and social friction, rather than an enforced factory for political consensus.<sup>24</sup> In the same vein, Laclau construes radical democracy as "the impossibility of

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>20</sup> Marianne Maeckelbergh, 2009, *The Will of the Many: How the Alterglobalisation Movement Is Changing the Face of Democracy* (London: Pluto Press), 140, 29–40.

<sup>21</sup> David Graeber, "The New Anarchists," *New left review* 13 (2002): 70.

<sup>22</sup> Barbara Epstein, 1995, "Radical Democracy and Cultural Politics: What About Class? What About Political Power?," in *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship and the State*, ed. David Trend (London: Routledge), 136.

<sup>23</sup> See for instance Moya Lloyd, 2009, "Performing Radical Democracy," in *The Politics of Radical Democracy*, ed. Adrian Little and Moya Lloyd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 48–50; Birgit Schippers, *ibid.*, "Judith Butler, Radical Democracy and Micro-Politics," 75–77.

<sup>24</sup> Mouffe, 2013, 91–94, 119–23.

mastering the contingent forms in which it crystallizes.”<sup>25</sup> This line of thought draws on select writings of Karl Marx, in order to reactivate, as Simon Critchley points out, “the moment of the political within Marxism.”<sup>26</sup> Democracy thereby becomes, Critchley continues, “a manifestation of dissensus, a dissensus that disturbs the order by which government wishes to depoliticize society.”<sup>27</sup> From this perspective, any search for radical democracy must embrace the pluralist nature of democracy as a process, what Mouffe calls agonistics, although that process, in contrast to Mouffe’s notion of the political, can never be found in the state arena; democracy is the very process that disrupts the state of order. By that token, Miguel Abensour, in his Machiavellian reading of the political Marx, overtly contrasts *democracy* and *the state*. For Abensour, democracy “is not a political regime but primarily an action, a modality of political agency,” whereas state power “is a menace to democracy or even tends toward its destruction.”<sup>28</sup> This radical-democratic line of thought, constructing democracy as a subversive political process, rather than a state of political conditions, is particularly articulated by political philosopher Jacques Rancière; and as we will see in the following, empirical chapter, the Rancièrian scheme proves quite useful for detecting and analyzing such a democratic conflict.

In his book *Hatred of Democracy*, Rancière detects two interconnected functions of democracy. The first aims to conjure a particular state of society, in opposition to governments built on dictatorship, tyranny, and totalitarianism. The subsequent function of democracy is to produce institutionalized practices to defend this societal state against relentless threats. Rancière focuses not on external threats to the democratic state, but on an endemic threat that is embedded in democracy itself. For Rancière, the democratic state of society is under constant attack from what he calls *democratic life*: the disruptive collective practices that challenge governmental authority, and the social division between governors and governed. Rancière discerns in democracy an embedded notion of

<sup>25</sup>Ernesto Laclau, 2005, “The Future of Radical Democracy,” in *Radical Democracy: Politics between Abundance and Lack*, ed. Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 261.

<sup>26</sup>Simon Critchley, *ibid.*, “True Democracy: Marx, Political Subjectivity and Anarchic Meta-Politics,” 229.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>28</sup>Miguel Abensour, 2011 [1997], *Democracy against the State: Marx and the Machiavellian Moment*, trans. Max Blechman (Cambridge: Polity), xxiii, 97.



“the power of the people, which is not the power of the population or of the majority, but the power of anyone at all.”<sup>29</sup>

The democratic government is threatened, Rancière continues, by the disruptive aspects of democratic life. To tackle this subversive threat, the democratic government actively opposes “the double excess of political democratic life and mass individualism.”<sup>30</sup> The defining social hierarchy of the democratic state—the division between governors and governed—is here motivated by notions of people as being apolitical, individualistic consumers, in desperate need for political representation. Offstage political activities—that is, politics aside from the state arena—are not only understood as excessive, but as a direct threat to governmental authority. Democratic government is therefore especially concerned with restraining this “double excess” of consumerist idleness and extra-parliamentary democratic life. As Rancière puts it, “the ‘government of anybody and everybody’ is bound to attract the hatred of all those who are entitled to govern men by their birth, wealth, or science.”<sup>31</sup> This power of “anyone at all” destabilizes the fundamental division between governors and governed, by attacking the very heart of state authority. This is, Rancière concludes, an outright scandal to democratic government; the public–private distinction, so essential for the democratic state, is defied through the political nature of democratic life. In other words, decisive challenging of the constitutive division between the governors, and the people they seek to govern, threatens the very foundation of the democratic state.

Jacques Rancière’s radical democratic theory accordingly captures key dimensions of democratic conflict. Whereas Miguel Abensour recognizes a conflict between democracy and the state,<sup>32</sup> Rancière theorizes the conflictual nature of democracy itself. By depicting democratic life as a severe threat to the democratic state, Rancière encourages us not only to explore the political processes of radical democracy, but also to dispose and study democracy’s endemic conflict between the government and those it tries to govern. Rancière’s radical-democratic theorization exposes, as we will see in Chap. 2, the very boundaries of any political project submitted to the logic of governance. In this regard, the Rancièrian scheme also finds

<sup>29</sup> Jacques Rancière, 2006, *Hatred of Democracy*, trans. Steve Corcoran (London: Verso), 49.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>32</sup> Abensour, 2011 [1997], xl, 100.

some clear resonance, as we will see in Chap. 3, with the historical tradition of anarchism, the political ideology advocating anarchy.

This book, then, springs from the theoretical dissensus of the radical democratic school to further explore democracy's conflictual nature. Such an endeavor involves, in this book, two empirical inquiries: an ethnographic case study of intense democratic conflict, and a textual analysis of that conflict construed within the anarchist tradition. Rancière's theorization informs the case study through an analysis of the collective experiences of the vivid democratic life in Husby and the confining responses of the democratic state. We will deepen this critical analysis by interrogating a political ideology concerned with that social conflict: the historical tradition that is generically adverse to every form of governance, namely anarchism. The tandem inquiry accordingly employs two scientific methods. The case study of democratic conflict, in Chap. 2, draws on in-depth interviews, ethnographically conducted in relation to the Husby Riots. Chapter 3, which composes the main part of this book, links that conflictual nature to the anarchist tradition, analyzing the genealogy of democracy within the sundry history of anarchist thought. Building on these two empirical analyses, the concluding Chap. 4 conveys a layered anarchist critique of democracy—and of *radical* democracy—as The Impossible Argument.

So our journey begins with the democratic conflict experienced by the people that live and work in Husby, the socio-politically marginalized city district that—through the May riots of 2013—came to challenge the image of Sweden as a peaceful and inclusive state of democracy.



## Democratic Conflict

**Abstract** This chapter analyses democratic conflict in Husby, a Stockholm city district, located at Sweden’s socio-political periphery. The so-called Husby Riots, enacted in the Swedish spring of 2013, mark the analytical entry point from which the author traces, through ethnographic interviews, its local-historical roots. The chapter conveys, guided by the radical-democratic theory of Jacques Rancière, how Husby’s *democratic life* triggers resistance from the *democratic state*; Husby residents recount being continuously ignored, disqualified, or repressed. Through the Rancièrian lens, the Husby case exposes how democratic conflict—between governors and governed—became intensified in the 2013 events, challenging the grounded social division of democracy itself.

**Keywords** Democracy • Husby • Riot • Jacques Rancière • Urban policy

On a quiet Sunday night, in May 2013, at a deserted parking lot in central Husby, multiple cars are set on fire. When police arrive to investigate arson, they are attacked. Retreating from down-pouring stones, the police call for immediate backup. When additional forces arrive, they too are confronted by unidentified stone throwers. The attack sites appear to be strategically well-chosen. Police cars are repeatedly hit, and officers fail to incarcerate the

vanishing aggressors. After a long night under attack, the police forecast an escalation of the civil unrest in Husby. The following May night, in the blooming Swedish spring, 500 armed police officers enter the neighborhood, decisive about restoring social order.

As the police scale up their operation, now including severe beatings of community residents, accompanied with overtly racist insults, people in Husby, themselves out on the streets to defend social order, become increasingly provoked. The conflict in Husby escalates, as predicted; it fades out during the third night of confrontation, instead to recur in other parts of Sweden.

The contagious, unruly conflict, the government soon declares, means no less than a severe threat to democracy.

This account of the intense May nights, in the Swedish spring of 2013, builds on official police accounts, media reports, and in-depth informant interviews, which constitute the empirical components of a collective research project which analyzed these events.<sup>1</sup> That collective study documents how those May nights of confrontational social uprisings, framed in the media as urban riots, immediately called for an official debate in the Swedish Parliament concerning the structural problems that allegedly triggered the conflict.<sup>2</sup> Across the political spectrum, state governors agreed upon the causal explanation of socio-economic problems, concentrated in Husby, albeit (unsurprisingly) disagreeing on how to address these issues; elected politicians eagerly competed on how best to answer their self-defined social problem. And, at the same time, governmental officials were unanimously silent on one point: the police.

Yet one week before the riots, as reported in national media, a tragic police shooting had taken place in Husby, where 69-year-old Lenine Relvas-Martins was not only killed by the police, his death was also deliberately covered up. When the police officially claimed and verified that Martins was transported in an ambulance to hospital, witnessing neighbors reported that he, in fact, had been carried out on a stretcher into a hearse, obviously having been killed by the police in his own home. Local organizations and social movements swiftly organized demonstrations to expose, and protest against, the police violence. The national media

<sup>1</sup>For empirical details, see my chapter in the anthology presenting our study results; Markus Lundström, 2016, "Det demokratiska hotet," in *Bortom kravallerna: konflikt, tillhörighet och representation i Husby*, ed. Paulina de los Reyes and Magnus Hörnquist (Stockholm: Stockholmia).

<sup>2</sup>See Kristina Boréus, *ibid.*, "Husbyhändelserna i nyheter och politisk debatt."

reported that these anti-police demonstrations were non-violent, though sharp in critique. Yet for community organizers in Husby, violent clashes with the police were expected. The weekend before the riot, community barbecues and festivities had been arranged to dampen the predicted confrontation. On Friday and Saturday, nothing happened; but on Sunday night, May 19, when few people were out on the streets, the police were attacked.

This chapter situates democratic conflict in a local-historical context. Guided by Rancière's theoretical vocabulary, we will first discern how Husby's *democratic life* is recurrently suppressed by Sweden's *democratic state*. We will then see how that *democratic conflict* intensifies in the so-called Husby Riots, which will inform our analysis, in the final section of this chapter, of the conflict's potential *threat to democracy*.

As briefly mentioned, the inquiry into Husby's democratic conflict draws, empirically, on collective ethnographic research. The weeks following the initial uprisings in Husby, a self-organized ad hoc team of eight researchers, myself included, began documenting emic explanations of this spectacular event. Our ambition was to gather stories and accounts from Husby as soon as possible, when interpretations were more fluid and had been less submitted to established historiography.<sup>3</sup> A methodological obstacle here was the profound suspicion in Husby about sharing information and experiences with unknown people asking questions. During these dramatic days in May, national and international media more or less invaded Husby, eagerly speculating about the intentions and forces that prompted the riot.<sup>4</sup> Such a question-asking agenda was, of course, in tandem with parallel inquiries conducted by the police. In our research, we therefore had to approach the Husby community carefully when introducing our project and searching for interview participants. We gradually became more accepted, and eventually ended up with 30 in-depth interviews. To distinguish ourselves from the parallel police and media inquiries, we soon abandoned our initial ambition to identify and interview people who had been attacking the police. More in concert with our research focus—emic explanations of what journalists called “The Husby

<sup>3</sup> Our approach was deeply inspired by the rigorous, though far more resourceful, British research project “Reading the Riots.” See Paul Lewis et al., 2011, *Reading the Riots: Investigating England's Summer of Disorder* (London: The Guardian / London School of Economics and Political Science).

<sup>4</sup> However, the police eventually represented the largest source in media reports, despite the dense journalist presence in Husby. See Boréus, 2016, 74–75.

Riots”—we instead searched for interviewees that had been on site when confrontations unfolded. Among these interviewees (made anonymous in our transcriptions), people presented themselves as male and female, aged between 16 and 81, and as living or working in Husby.

The initial findings of our study was first published as a popularized report and presented at a well-attended public meeting in Husby. Apparent at this gathering, as in our interview study, was the great yet unanimous inaccuracy of official representations (by the media and government) of Husby residents. For their part, the Husby community encompassed numerous individual and organizational voices, who articulated themselves on a variety of religious, political, and cultural axes. Acknowledging this heterogeneity, our ethnographic study nonetheless identified collectively accumulated experiences. The following chapter focuses on the experiences specifically linked to the theme of this book: the democratic conflict between governors and the people they try to govern.

### HUSBY'S DEMOCRATIC LIFE

As we saw in the introductory chapter, radical-democratic theory typically acknowledges the contentious, conflictual nature of democracy. Jacques Rancière offers in this vein a theoretical scheme in which *democratic life*, people's political activity outside the state arena, is recurrently targeted by the *democratic state*: the police-accompanied decision makers of municipalities or nation-states. The Rancièrian notion of democratic conflict—the antagonism between governors and governed—finds notable resonance in the Husby case: interviewed residents emphasize how local organizing and political initiatives are repeatedly suppressed by, as one interviewee put it, “the people in power.” Typifying this antagonism, Husby residents recall the struggles around the state-instigated housing project called Järvalyftet (The Järva Vision). The objective of Järvalyftet, as formulated by its architects at Stockholm City Hall, is to transform Husby and the neighboring suburbs into “an attractive city district to which people want to move, and settle down.”<sup>5</sup> Interviewed residents in Husby, however, casually describe Järvalyftet as something of a collaboration between state and capital, between the government and housing companies.

<sup>5</sup>Stockholm Stad, “The Järva Vision”, <http://bygg.stockholm.se/Alla-projekt/Jarvalyftet/In-English/>, accessed 2016-09-26.

One interviewed Husby resident recalls how “they just approached us with a letter, stating that our houses would be rebuilt, with an updated standard and price, and that we had to move somewhere else.”<sup>6</sup> The interviewee, a politically engaged Husby resident, now in his early 80s, overtly questions the housing company’s right to govern the residents’ living situation. He further describes how this defiance was backed up by massive protests against the upcoming evictions. Social mobilization against the housing project thus challenged, with Rancière’s theoretical vocabulary, the entitlement to govern on the basis of wealth; the property owner, Svenska Bostäder, was given no legitimacy to dictate the residents’ basic living situation. On a similar note, the joint knowledge production of municipal urban planners and commercial housing companies has been called into question. Illuminatingly, interviewees describe how Svenska Bostäder arranged a so-called “residential dialogue” and that people across the community actually took the dialogue notion seriously and forwarded their own opinions on Järvalyftet. The interviewed residents portray how they soon discovered that dialogue simply meant the announcement of ready-made decisions. Despite the amount of critical analyses and suggested modifications produced by genuine experts on Husby—the residents themselves—the housing project was eventually carried out precisely as planned by its original architects.

In Husby, Järvalyftet has accordingly been understood as a poorly informed project. The entitlement to govern, here on the basis of science, therefore becomes increasingly illegitimate. From the Rancièrian perspective, the governors–governed hierarchy, the social division incarnated in Järvalyftet, was clearly challenged by the democratic life stirring in Husby. A notable example here is the overt resistance against the dislocation of Husby Civic Hall, described by interviewees as an important meeting point for the community, which is built and maintained by those using it. Interviewees describe how government politicians, without further ado, decided to displace and scale down the Civic Hall. When decision makers continued to ignore the disapproving objections from Civic Hall users, a large group of Husby residents chose to occupy the house in order to, as stated in their press release, “manifest enhanced self-determination.”<sup>7</sup> The

<sup>6</sup>Interview no. 2, conducted in Husby on June 26, 2013.

<sup>7</sup>*Husby kräver respekt* (Husby demands respect), January 2012, “Pressmeddelande: Ockupationen av Husby Träff – En seger för folket”, <http://husbyockupation-blog.tumblr.com/>, accessed 2016-04-10.

government responded to this surge of democratic life by scaling up its displacement plans, eventually imposing the decision in spite of the residents' distinct acts of defiance. Interviewed residents describe this procedure as frustratingly familiar. They recall how the Care Centre was removed despite a petition with thousands of signatures, which in turn invoked collective memories of dismantled health and swimming centers, as well as the local library.

Nonetheless, our reading of the Husby Riots should not be reduced to the frustrated collective experience of those denied access to governmental decision making. As suggested by Paulina de los Reyes, the social conflict in Husby also exemplifies how the state of society can be actively challenged.<sup>8</sup> For instance, on the day after the initial attacks against the police, a local organization named Megafonen called for a press conference, in Husby, to provide media and government actors with a locally rooted contextualization of the riots. Megafonen here construed the events as inevitable frustrations caused by “blocked democratic channels,” an open conflict, as they put it, “between the police and the residents of Husby.”<sup>9</sup> Their swift initiative—to broadcast a locally rooted account, ahead of the usually acclaimed government, media, and academic experts—certainly forced journalists to search for narratives that complemented the typical criminalizing explanations.<sup>10</sup> The unusual press conference, and its underlying organizational rigor, have generated scholarly interpretations of the Megafonen phenomenon as “the emergence of a new urban social movement”<sup>11</sup> and “an autonomous, non-violent and organizationally embedded movement for social justice.”<sup>12</sup>

Though the role of Megafonen should not be underestimated, neither can it be reduced to simplistic representation of some unanimous Husby resident. People that live and work in Husby do, of course, express and

<sup>8</sup> Paulina de los Reyes, 2016, “Husby, våldet och talandets villkor,” in *Bortom kravallerna: konflikt, tillhörighet och representation i Husby*, ed. Paulina de los Reyes and Magnus Hörnquist (Stockholm: Stockholmia).

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 168.

<sup>10</sup> see Kristina Boréus, *ibid.*, “Husbyhändelserna i nyheter och politisk debatt.”

<sup>11</sup> Ove Sernhede, Catharina Thörn, and Håkan Thörn, 2016, “The Stockholm Uprising in Context: Urban Social Movements in the Rise and Demise of the Swedish Welfare-State City,” in *Urban Uprisings: Challenging Neoliberal Urbanism in Europe*, ed. Margit Mayer, Catharina Thörn, and Håkan Thörn (London: Palgrave Macmillan), 150, 64–66.

<sup>12</sup> Carl-Ulrik Schierup, Aleksandra Ålund, and Lisa Kings, “Reading the Stockholm Riots: A Moment for Social Justice?,” *Race & Class* 55, no. 3 (2014): 1.



construe their collective experiences quite differently. In spite of this obvious social fact, Megafonen was quickly assigned the function of representing Husby. The Swedish media soon reduced that representation to a binary position: either to encourage or to condemn the violence directed at the police. Megafonen insistently refused such a one-dimensional positioning, instead forwarding their own analysis, before finally becoming disqualified as a useful representative for the national media. De los Reyes argues that this insubordination defied the very preconditions for speaking in representative democracies,<sup>13</sup> in turn fueling the governmental imagery of riots in Husby as a threat to democracy itself.

This notion of *democratic threat* becomes quite conspicuous from a Rancièrian perspective. Interviewees repeatedly express frustration over how their political activity—Husby’s *democratic life*—is constantly bypassed by the government. One interviewee, with extensive non-European life experience, describes Sweden as “a democratic country without democracy in everyday life.”<sup>14</sup> On this note, interviewed Husby residents typically emphasize, one way or another, how vibrant democratic life is either ignored or suppressed by the government. In response to the government’s *hatred of democracy*, to use the language of Jacques Rancière, Husby residents have developed practices that foster mutual aid beyond that offered by the state:

In need of help, none of us would ever call the cops. No, we call each other. And we don’t have some leader, if that’s what you think. We’re not some kind of gang. We’re just people that are raised here, and we support each other. Society cannot be trusted, because we know how it works, so we’ll have to do everything ourselves.<sup>15</sup>

The quoted interviewee, a Husby resident in his early 40s, here emphasizes how affinity characterizes local relations, regardless of state initiatives that provide alleged welfare and social security. His distrust in “society,” here particularly referring to majority rule in Sweden, stems from, as we have seen, a collectively experienced inability to participate meaningfully in the procedures of governmental decision making. Magnus Hörnqvist shows how discontent is propelled by collective memories of a

<sup>13</sup> de los Reyes, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Interview no. 18, conducted in Husby on June 24, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Interview no. 11, conducted in Husby on June 20, 2013.

functioning Swedish welfare state, from which Husby residents, and particularly its racialized factions, are fiercely excluded.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, as underlined in the above excerpt, the people of Husby cannot afford to settle with mere discontent; instead they organize themselves, on their own terms, to address political problems directly.

In the Rancièrian scheme, it is precisely these political activities of mutual aid and direct action—democratic life aside from the state arena—that, for the democratic state, become excessive, if not outright threatening. This conflict, in Rancièr’s radical-democratic theorization, is a defining contour of democracy itself. In Husby, as we will see in the following section, the long-lived social conflict between those entitled to govern, and those that defy such entitlements, composes an imperative historical background to the intensified conflict in May 2013.

### INTENSIFIED CONFLICT

Husby’s conflictual May nights were immediately conceptualized and broadcasted as “The Husby Riots”; yet our interviewees, by contrast, use a variety of alternative wordings to avoid the pejorative stigma typically attached to riot terminology. With our Rancièrian analysis, however, we acknowledge that people with sufficient power to govern others most certainly understand riots as problematic. Joshua Clover’s economic-historical reading in *Riot. Strike. Riot* postulates accordingly: “the riot, comprising practices arrayed against threats to social reproduction, cannot be anything but political.” So in the modern political realm, Clover concludes, “police and riot thus come to presuppose each other.”<sup>17</sup> Yet across society, we should not forget, the scale of positions stretches from those that completely embrace the riot (most clearly, participants themselves), to those that willingly use their own bodies, or command others’ bodies, to restore social order (most typically, the police). And in between dwells everyone that navigates these confrontational positions.

In the Swedish spring of 2013, violent confrontations between the police and their attackers produced a variety of opinions, interpretations, and positions among the people that live and work in Husby. As pointed

<sup>16</sup> Magnus Hörnqvist, “Riots in the Welfare State: The Contours of a Modern-Day Moral Economy,” *European Journal of Criminology* 13, no. 5 (2016).

<sup>17</sup> Joshua Clover, 2016, *Riot. Strike. Riot.: The New Era of Uprisings* (London: Verso), 47, 150–52.

out by Sernhede et al., the Husby events must be understood in the context of “rapidly increasing social inequalities, racialized territorial stigmatization and lack of democracy in urban-restructuring processes.”<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, our interviewed residents, despite all their diversities, typically regard social explanations as deeply rooted in the conflictual political experience accumulated in the local community. As one interviewee puts it:

The people that started this—this revolution, as we call it—are human beings. It’s no coincidence that this is people that feels completely ignored, deprived of their voice and ability to participate.<sup>19</sup>

This contextualization, connecting the violent May confrontations to collective memories of deprived political influence, is recurrently elaborated by interviewed Husby residents. Furthermore, interviewees witnessing the confrontations first-hand offer explanations about the subsequent conflict escalation and the shockingly explicit state violence. As shown by Janne Flyghed and Kristina Boréus, interviewees recall how the police, clearly haunted by their failure to handle the attack during the first night’s upheaval, soon directed their violence against mere onlookers. Flyghed and Boréus document how the police combined dog attacks, baton beatings, and malicious racist insults with a fierce disinclination to communicate with residents.<sup>20</sup> Interviewees recall, as in the excerpt below, these shocking collective experiences so as to explain why the streets of Husby, as cars began to burn the following night, soon became packed with people:

The fires continued. Many parents had no problem with this, believing that the police got what they deserved. On the first night, the police had the dogs attacking civilians. When the youngsters threw stones, and the parents stood between them and the police, they sent out the dogs. “Bite! Bite!” they shouted. “Fucking monkeys! Fucking niggers!” I heard many of these degrading insults. The police certainly pushed for the situation to worsen the following day.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Sernhede, Thörn, and Thörn, 2016, 163.

<sup>19</sup> Interview no. 29, conducted in Husby on August 7, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Kristina Boréus and Janne Flyghed, 2016, “Poliskultur på kollisionskurs,” in *Bortom kravallerna: konflikt, tillhörighet och representation i Husby*, ed. Paulina de los Reyes and Magnus Hörnquist (Stockholm: Stockholmia).

<sup>21</sup> Interview no. 7, conducted in Husby on June 20, 2013.

The quoted interviewee portrays youth and parents as momentarily united, thus unanimously targeted by the police. State violence directed against non-violent parents, obviously concerned with maintaining public safety, clearly destabilized the distinction between observers and participants. In this particular situation, attacking and counter-attacking the police appears to have emanated from a certain level of social legitimacy. Our interviews indicate that the attack on the police was silently approved, at least to some extent, by people on the street. Such legitimacy becomes quite noticeable in an interview with a police-friendly Husby resident, clearly frustrated with people that “just stood there and watched, not stopping them nor telling them to drop the stones and walk away.”<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, that social legitimacy was indeed restricted, carefully confined by distinct temporal and spatial boundaries.

A silent approval for the police attack, albeit fragile and recognized only momentarily, must be understood, I believe, in the light of Husby’s democratic life, constantly suppressed by the democratic state of Sweden. When an armed police force aggressively enters Husby, people experience, as documented by Alejandro Gonzalez, an invasion of their public space.<sup>23</sup> The invasive state violence thereby embodies the collectively accumulated experiences of repressed democratic life; the moment of violent confrontation—between stone throwers and the police—intensifies the social antagonism so vividly remembered in Husby. And when this conflict intensifies, so does the search for functional political tactics. One resistance tactic, in particular, is recalled from the local-historical repertoire:

We, some youth, went to the office of Svenska Bostäder. We threw stones, we attacked their entire office with stones and that was only directed at them, nothing else, no people were targeted, because this was about discontent. That was on a Friday. On Monday they call me and announce “We are ready to discuss with you. What do you want?”<sup>24</sup>

This interview excerpt illustrates how stone-throwing is already on the resistance repertoire in Husby (as in so many places across the globe). The interviewee explains that precision is key for this particular tactic, which

<sup>22</sup> Interview no. 3, conducted in Husby on June 12, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Alejandro Gonzalez, 2016, “Husby, mostånd och gemenskap,” in *Bortom kravallerna: konflikt, tillhörighet och representation i Husby*, ed. Paulina de los Reyes and Magnus Hörnquist (Stockholm: Stockholmia).

<sup>24</sup> Interview no. 1, conducted in Husby on June 20, 2013.

indicates how stone-throwing is carefully conditioned. According to the interviewee, the recollected attack on Svenska Bostäder, addressing the housing company's severe reduction in youth employment, was deliberately executed without harm to human beings or neighboring facilities. And when this tactic was reactivated, in May 2013, targeted property destruction once again became an instrument of enhanced precision. In the following interview excerpt, I (ML) have just asked a 20-year-old Husby resident (R) why he thinks cars were targeted:

- R:** What else is there to burn? Houses? Apartments? No, there are people living there. That would be far out. Cars were put to fire to entice the police. When the police didn't come, people continued burning until they came. The purpose was to get to the police, not to burn some guy's car, a neighbor's car. Burning cars wasn't the purpose, but it had to be done.
- ML:** What do you mean by "get to the police"?
- R:** They entrapped the police to deal with them in their own way
- ML:** With stones?
- R:** Yes, by throwing stones.<sup>25</sup>

The quoted interviewee patiently explains how people burned cars only to target the police. By enticing the police to specific sites, the attackers had an important strategic advantage: police cars could efficiently be attacked from above footbridges, allowing safe escape routes. For the interviewee, the destruction of cars was a sheer instrumental enterprise, unfortunate for individual cars owners, but relatively safe compared to alternative police baits.

Yet it was precisely these car burnings that drained the social legitimacy of the attack. As one interviewee puts it, anti-police fury should target "the police station, not people's cars."<sup>26</sup> The burning of cars in Husby, notwithstanding its enhanced precision as a police attack, was generally disliked among our interviewed residents. Direct violence against the police, however, is much more delicately discussed. Some interviewees describe the attacks as a way to "speak up" and "protest" against a political system that disables meaningful participation. Others emphasize that violent attacks against the police are in fact counter-productive. What the

<sup>25</sup> Interview no. 13, conducted in Kista on July 1, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Interview no. 1.

interviewees nonetheless are careful to highlight, and this cannot be emphasized enough, is that the violent confrontation between the police and Husby residents must be understood in its local-historical context.

The experiences from Husby articulate that democratic life, with Rancière's theoretical vocabulary, has for long been suppressed; the hatred of democracy is enduring. The conflict embedded in democracy—between government and those it tries to govern—has a remembered history in Husby. Subsequently, when the government's police force invades the neighborhood, in May 2013, the conflict intensifies. Even though most residents *do not* partake in violence against the police, the historical antagonism seems to inform a significant legitimacy, albeit conditioned and highly fragile, for these attacks. During the third night of intensified conflict in Husby, this already fragile legitimacy dissolves rapidly. Interviewees report that youngsters became increasingly criticized for their actions at home, that parents had had enough. After two nights of violent confrontation, now drained of social legitimacy, people start to intervene more actively to restrain the stone-throwers:

I see riot police on one side. On the other I see maybe eight, ten elderly women, some with veils and others without, Chileans, Swedes, Moroccans, and Tunisians. They form a human chain, standing there crying. They don't want the cops to get hurt. Although the cops deserve this—they are pigs—that was it for me. These youngsters were so close to hit [the people of the human chain], although they were shouting at them to get out of the way. When I see these people there, crying, I run over to shout "That's enough! Walk away! People's mums could get stoned."<sup>27</sup>

This interview excerpt illustrates the draining of legitimacy for violent confrontation. The symbolism of "people's mums" getting hurt obviously called for a tactical drawback regarding the attacks. Alejandro Gonzalez argues that such family imagery, typically used by Husby residents in reference to their community, reinforces a sense of intimacy and mutual responsibility.<sup>28</sup> Even though "the cops deserve" additional attacks, the interviewee evaluates confrontations as too dangerous, with community members being put at severe risk. On a similar note, other interviewees describe how people became increasingly concerned about conflict escalation, in which additional non-Husby residents began to partake in the

<sup>27</sup> Interview no. 11.

<sup>28</sup> Gonzalez, 2016.

uprisings. Although understanding that people arrived “to get back at the police,” as one interviewee put it, the residents of Husby seem to have been quite unsure about these foreigners’ ability to read local legitimacy signals. When rumors began to spread about outsiders arriving, to join the struggle against the police, local control over the situation apparently became jeopardized. It seems that, in order to preserve democratic life in Husby, the intensified conflict with the democratic state had to be restrained.

From the government’s perspective, however, the police eventually restored social order in Husby; after a few nights of strong police presence, people stopped burning cars and throwing stones. Associated parliamentary discussions soon returned to the usual theme of how to aid poor urban areas, an ongoing political issue for the government. Yet what had happened in Husby also denoted, as governmental representatives so keenly pointed out, a severe threat. A threat to democracy. Our Rancièrian reading, I would argue, actually validates that democratic threat: defiance of the governors–governed division taunts the very foundation of democracy itself.

### THREAT TO DEMOCRACY

I think the dividing line spans right across Husby: between people that desire peace, who want to stop perpetrators, have their assets respected and move freely in their own neighborhood, and the few violators that actually believe in the workings of violence.<sup>29</sup>

In a peculiar way, the above statement from Sweden’s Prime Minister apparently coincides with the Husby experiences. Although portraying, most certainly, a division among Husby residents, Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt inadvertently reflects the Rancièrian distinction between democratic life and democratic state. Husby residents surely struggle for “peace,” “respect,” and “to move freely in their own neighborhood.” The residents’ counterpart consists of people that “believe in the workings of violence” so strongly that it has become their profession. This dividing line, between police and people in Husby, represents a well-remembered social antagonism. In May 2013 that conflict intensified into fierce confrontation. The state responded accordingly, rapidly mobilizing

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Kristina Boréus, *ibid.*, “Husbyhändelserna i nyheter och politisk debatt,” 90.

state violence on a massive scale in order to, as the police officially put it, restrain the “severe threat to democracy.”<sup>30</sup>

For politically engaged Husby residents, the official discourse on defending democracy becomes a downright insult. Interviewees starkly renounce explanations about riots deriving from some indifferent, uneasy youth culture,<sup>31</sup> while government officials insist on blaming restive and adrenaline-seeking youngsters as the riot triggers. Marcus Lauri shows how governmental politicians called for enhanced disciplinary measures to address such disturbing social elements. The mandate of the police, politicians argued in the wake of violent confrontations, had to be accompanied by programs that took youngsters off the streets and placed them in employment or education. The *soft policing* of Husby was, Lauri continues, to be enacted in concert with what government officials referred to as “the good forces”: parents, social workers, imams, priests, and civil society overall.<sup>32</sup> “The Husby Riots” were accordingly construed as apolitical expressions of an individual, consumerist youth culture, which requires disciplinary activities like school or work in order to avoid social unrest. At the same time, riots were also portrayed in terms of political violence, in order to motivate and legitimate massive police intervention. In defense of democracy, the government swiftly aimed to suppress what Rancièrè calls “the double excess of political democratic life and mass individualism.”<sup>33</sup>

Our interviewees depict the massive police invasion as yet another attack on Husby’s vibrant political activity, ignored or suppressed by municipal and state governors. Invasive police forces merely embody that collective experience; the state’s violent response answers to the very foundation of democracy, the division between governors and governed. Political activity aside from the state arena, what Rancièrè calls democratic life, threatens the legitimacy of the democratic state. Democratic life means democratic threat, and governors respond accordingly.

<sup>30</sup> On May 21, after two intense nights of violent confrontations in Husby, Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt officially declared his antipathy for “groups of young men that believe they can and should change society by violent means.” The police, less subtle still, stated that “stone-throwers pose a severe threat to democracy. We are here to stay!” See Markus Lundström, *ibid.*, “Det demokratiska hotet,” 27.

<sup>31</sup> Paulina de los Reyes and Magnus Hörnquist, *ibid.*, “Introduktion. Konflikt, tillhörighet och representation.”

<sup>32</sup> Marcus Lauri, *ibid.*, “Vad är problemet med Husby?.”

<sup>33</sup> Jacques Rancièrè, 2006, *Hatred of Democracy*, trans. Steve Corcoran (London: Verso), 29.



The experiences from Husby illustrate how governmental defense of democracy translates into arrogant disqualification, alongside violent repression, of people's political activities. With that collective memory, violent confrontations between police and stone-throwers, in May 2013, intensified the ongoing democratic conflict in Husby. The attack against the police was understood, though decidedly problematized, as temporarily challenging the hierarchical division between police and people, the governors and the governed. Experiences of suppressed political activity thereby fueled the bounded legitimacy of what official voices so keenly labeled "The Husby Riots." The violent confrontation with the police was, in fact, restricted specifically through Husby's democratic life. Drained of legitimacy, stone-throwing quickly became a non-functional resistance tactic; within a few days, attacks against the police had completely died out. It was, in other words, the people—and not the police—that initiated, restrained, and ended the intensified democratic conflict.

But Husby residents do not speak of victory. One interviewee poetically expresses that "cars are burning, yet problems persist."<sup>34</sup> The aggregate experience of political activity in Husby articulates a lack of meaningful political influence and collective self-determination:

We definitely don't decide for ourselves. It's always been like this. Democracy allows us to put a note in a box every fourth year, but in reality we don't decide anything at all. We don't take decisions, we vote for others to decide on our behalf. That is our beautiful democracy.<sup>35</sup>

The quoted interviewee, a social worker and Husby resident in his early 20s, portrays democracy as deeply problematic. Democracy, he reasons cynically, is not people deciding for themselves; it is people deprived of that very power. This critical analysis finds some clear resonance in Rancièrian radical-democratic theory; it exposes democracy's endemic conflict between governors and governed, police and people. And this analysis, too, carries a profound critique of the state of democracy. The following chapter deepens this critique of the governors–governed antagonism; by interrogating the history of anarchist thought, we will now explore the meanings of democracy, in relation to anarchy.

<sup>34</sup> Interview no. 26, conducted in Husby on August 7, 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Interview no. 6, conducted in Husby on June 26, 2013.



## CHAPTER 3

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# Democracy and Anarchy

**Abstract** Furthering the critical analysis of the governors–governed divide, this chapter interrogates the sundry history of anarchist thought, its emblematic defiance of governance, and its diverse relations to democracy. The chapter outlines an *anarchist critique* of democracy, a composition targeted against governmental authority, representation, and majority rule. That compound critique translates, in post-classical anarchist thought, into an *anarchist reclamation*; notions of direct, participatory democracy become equivalent to, or perceived as a step toward, anarchy. But a divergent tendency has also developed in contemporary anarchist thought, again dissociating democracy from anarchy. By examining this *reclaimed critique*, in relation to non-human life and radical democracy, the chapter revisits anarchism’s classical critique of governance and the crux of The Impossible Argument.

**Keywords** Anarchy • Democracy • Malatesta • Goldman • Anarchist history

To be GOVERNED is to be kept in sight, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right, nor the wisdom, nor the virtue to do so. To be GOVERNED is to be

at every operation, at every transaction, noted, registered, enrolled, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished. It is, under the pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general interest, to be placed under contribution, trained, ransomed, exploited, monopolized, extorted, squeezed, mystified, robbed; then, at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, despised, harassed, tracked, abused, clubbed, disarmed, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed; and, to crown all, mocked, ridiculed, outraged, dishonored. That is government; that is its justice; that is its morality.<sup>1</sup>

The above portrait, depicting the experiential meaning of being governed, is formulated in one of the first, pioneering publications of the anarchist tradition. The epilogue of Pierre Joseph Proudhon's *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*—produced in the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions—elaborates a stark aversion for every manifestation of governance; it sets the anti-authoritarian tone of the anarchist tradition. And, in parallel with that defiance, anarchism too nurtures a desire, a hope—a political struggle—for the people ungovernable. “You poor judges, poor slaves of the government,” writes imprisoned anarchist Kanno Sugako, charged with high treason for plotting against the Japanese Emperor. On the eve of her execution, carried out in January 1911, Sugako voices a distinct anarchist defiance of governance, entailed by the notion of being ungovernable: “I should be angry at you, but I pity you instead. Here I am bound by this barred window, but my thoughts still spread their wings in the free world of ideas. Nothing can bind my thoughts or interfere with them. You may live for a hundred years, but what is a life without freedom, a life of slavery, worth?”<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter we will deepen our analysis of the governors–governed antagonism—recognized through the Husby case as a catalyst for democratic conflict—by outlining its elaboration in the anarchist tradition. Our journey throughout the history of anarchist thought, then, traces critical approaches to democracy, in relation to anarchy. We will see how the anarchist tradition nurtures an emblematic defiance of governance, while the

<sup>1</sup>Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, 1969 [1851], *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Haskell Hous Publishers), 294.

<sup>2</sup>Kanno Sugako, 1988 [1911], “Kanno Sugako,” in *Reflections on the Way to the Gallows: Rebel Women in Prewar Japan*, ed. Mikiso Hane (Berkeley: University of California Press), 67–68.

relation between democracy and anarchy is notably diverse, and discontinuous. In this chapter we will explore these variances and changes over time: the classical *anarchist critique* of democracy; the post-classical *anarchist reclamation* of democracy; and the *reclaimed critique*, noticeable in contemporary anarchism. Our study of democracy's genealogy—within the history of anarchist thought—will travel back and forth through the anarchist chronology, here recognized as classical anarchism (1840–1939) and post-classical anarchism (1940–2017), in order to trace the variety of ideological strands that compose multifaceted understandings of democracy and anarchy.

The amorphous contours of *anarchism*, the political ideology advocating *anarchy*, allows a broad variety of ideological strands, in being what Spanish anarchist Federica Montseny calls “an ideal without boundaries.”<sup>3</sup> The anarchist tradition accordingly targets compound strays of domination: economic, political, and social. As formulated by one of England's most prominent anarchist organizers in the late nineteenth century, Charlotte Wilson, anarchism means a struggle against the tendency to dominate:

The leading manifestations of this obstructive tendency at this present moment are Property, or domination over things, the denial of the claim of others to their use; and Authority, the government of man by man, embodied in majority rule; that theory of representation which, whilst admitting the claim of the individual to self-guidance, renders him the slave of the simulacrum that now stands for society.<sup>4</sup>

A key effort of anarchist thought, then, is to extend the socialist critique of capitalist property relations; anarchism detests, as the excerpt from Charlotte Wilson underlines, the very idea of authority, the instrument of government. Anarchism is thus, as Voltairine de Cleyre puts it, the “belief that all forms of external authority must disappear to be replaced by self-control only.”<sup>5</sup> In quite a similar vein, Emma Goldman defines

<sup>3</sup>Federica Montseny, 1931, quoted in J. G. Casas, 1986, *Anarchist Organisation: The History of the F.A.I* (Montréal: Black Rose Books), 157.

<sup>4</sup>Charlotte Wilson, 2012 [1886], “Anarchism,” in *Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader. Third Edition*, ed. Dark Star Collective (Edinburgh: AK Press), 90.

<sup>5</sup>Voltairine De Cleyre, 2004 [1903], “The Making of an Anarchist,” in *The Voltairine De Cleyre Reader*, ed. A. J. Brigati (London: AK Press), 106.

anarchy as “the negation of all forms of authority,”<sup>6</sup> encompassing “freedom from government of every kind.”<sup>7</sup> In the early 1900s, Emma Goldman became a well-known proponent for anarchism in North America. In the aftermath of the 1901 assassination of President McKinley, Goldman was accused by the authorities to have incited the self-claimed anarchist assassin. She was soon referred to as an Anarchist Queen, famously labeled the most dangerous woman in America.<sup>8</sup> To the governments of her time, Goldman—and the anarchist movement she was involved in—represented a severe threat.<sup>9</sup>

Emma Goldman was, like Voltairine de Cleyre, and several other key anarchists of her generation, radicalized in the aftermath of the Haymarket tragedy.<sup>10</sup> In Chicago, in early May of 1886, a demonstration in support of an eight-hour working day ended with violent clashes between police and workers. When eight anarchists were eventually accused, and later hanged, for the police deaths caused by the clash,<sup>11</sup> the anarchist movement was injected with renewed energy. In what political scientist Kathy

<sup>6</sup> Emma Goldman, 2003 [1900], “Some More Observations (Published in Free Society, 29 April 1900),” in *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years. Volume 1: Made for America, 1890–1901*, ed. Candace Falk (Berkeley: University of California Press), 402.

<sup>7</sup> 2003 [1893], “The Law’s Limit (Published in New York World, 17 October 1893),” in *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years. Volume 1: Made for America, 1890–1901*, ed. Candace Falk (Berkeley: University of California Press), 182.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Avrich and Karen Avrich, 2012, *Sasha and Emma: The Anarchist Odyssey of Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 156–62; Candace Falk, 2003, “Forging Her Place: An Introduction,” in *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years. Volume 1: Made for America, 1890–1901*, ed. Candace Falk (Berkeley: University of California Press), 73–81.

<sup>9</sup> As observed by Kathy Ferguson, the label launched by President J. Edgar Hoover in fact displayed Goldman, along with Alexander Berkman, as “two of the most dangerous anarchists in America.” Ferguson argues that the shift from “anarchist” to “woman,” in the public image of dangerous individuals, served not only to downplay Goldman’s political affiliation, but also to dislocate the severe violence against laborers in the USA. Kathy Ferguson, 2011, *Emma Goldman: Political Thinking in the Streets* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers), 21–29, 44–57.

<sup>10</sup> Falk, 2003, 6–7; see also Sharon Presley and Crispin Sartwell, 2005, *Exquisite Rebel: The Essays of Voltairine De Cleyre--Anarchist, Feminist, Genius* (New York: SUNY Press), 47; Vivian Gornick, 2011, *Emma Goldman: Revolution as a Way of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 14–17.

<sup>11</sup> See Paul Avrich, 1984, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 181–215.

Ferguson calls “the Haymarket effect,”<sup>12</sup> this historical event sparked the anarchist tradition; it fueled critique of governance and struggles by the ungovernable. In this chapter, then, we will deepen our critical analysis of the governors–governed conflict by exploring the various approaches to democracy produced within the unfolding history of anarchist thought.

It should be noted that the ideological tradition of anarchism is, as Maia Ramnath points out, “one contextually specific manifestation among a larger—indeed global—tradition of antiauthoritarian, egalitarian thought/praxis.”<sup>13</sup> Considering that anarchism should certainly not be understood as the only ideological tradition, in which we may look for an anti-authoritarian critique of democracy, it is, nonetheless, a living tradition that remains considerably consistent, widespread, and textually resourceful. In its very take-off as a social movement, in the 1870s, anarchism was a thoroughly global movement. Benedict Anderson suggests that “following the collapse of the First International, and Marx’s death in 1883, anarchism, in its characteristically variegated forms, was the dominant element in the self-consciously internationalist left.”<sup>14</sup> On a similar note, Kathy Ferguson observes that anarchist journals in the Global North frequently reported affiliated struggles in Africa, South America, and all across Asia.<sup>15</sup> Given the transnational character of the continuous anarchist movement, this ideological tradition has fostered plural and at times divergent evaluations of, and responses to, the democratic state. And given the extensive amount of text produced by anarchists over the years, we find good reason to interrogate precisely the anarchist tradition in our ensuing analysis of democratic conflict.

Textual analysis of an ideological *tradition*, and not merely of a sole thinker, immediately raises questions about how to detect, weight, and categorize the textual canon. The initial method is obviously to include the most recurrent cross-references: text and statements thus canonized by anarchist writers themselves. The key texts of the anarchist tradition have successively been identified by historians like Paul Eltzbacher, Max

<sup>12</sup>Ferguson, 2011, 133–38.

<sup>13</sup>Maia Ramnath, 2011, *Decolonizing Anarchism: An Antiauthoritarian History of India’s Liberation Struggle* (London: AK Press), 6.

<sup>14</sup>Benedict Anderson, 2005, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (London: Verso), 2.

<sup>15</sup>Ferguson, 2011, 229–37.

Nettlau, George Woodcock, and Peter Marshall.<sup>16</sup> The literature review, presented in this chapter, accordingly outlines how key anarchist thinkers approach the applied phenomenon known as democracy. However, and this I find methodologically imperative, we must guard against uncritical reproduction of some static, textual canon; anarchism, like any ideological tradition, is constantly revised by those that siphon its sources. Emma Goldman, for instance, actively sought to link individualist thinkers to her political theory, just as anarchists in the late 1960s revitalized Goldman's nascent anarcho-feminism, which all contributed to the continuous modification of the canonizing process. Contemporary anarchists now tend to view Goldman as one of the movement's key figures.<sup>17</sup> This assertion has, in turn, enlightened the account of female participation in the anarchist movement. Kathy Ferguson documents that, even though most canonized text are written by male-associated anarchists, "the anarchist's groups during Goldman's time and place were roughly one-third or even one-half women."<sup>18</sup>

In other words, lack of written sources unfortunately forces our literature review to encompass a disproportionate ratio of women's contributions to the anarchist tradition. Analytical focus on internally important texts thereby carries the risk of excluding important anarchist thinkers,

<sup>16</sup>Paul Eltzbacher, 1960 [1911], *Anarchism: Seven Exponents of the Anarchist Philosophy* (London: Freedom Press); Max Nettlau, 2000 [1932], *A Short History of Anarchism*, trans. Ida Pilat Isca (London: Freedom Press); George Woodcock, 1962, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company); Peter Marshall, 2008 [1992], *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: Harper Perennial).

<sup>17</sup>See for instance Penny Weiss and Loretta Kensinger, 2007, *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman* (Pennsylvania: Penn State Press). The content of Goldman's contribution is, however, still debated. Some of Goldman's readers would agree with Vivian Gornick (2011, p. 140) in that "Emma Goldman was not a thinker; she was an incarnation. It was not her gift for theory or even strategy that made her memorable; it was the extraordinary force of life in her that burned, without rest or respite, on behalf of human integrity." Other readers, myself included, rather stress Goldman's innovative ability to synthesize different strands of anarchist—and extra-anarchist—thought into her own political thinking, what Kathy Ferguson (2011, pp. 5–6) conceptualizes as "a *located* register: it is situated, event-based and concrete." In addition to Ferguson's observation that Goldman breached the theory/practice dualism, I would argue that her open acknowledgment of individualist thought fueled the anarchist critique, not only of the state communism to come, but of the democratic state itself.

<sup>18</sup>Ferguson, 2011, 268.

and reproducing a disproportionately male-dominated anarchist canon.<sup>19</sup> Our following literature review, while incorporating the typical canonized anarchist texts, therefore aims at disposing oft-forgotten contributions from female anarchist thinkers. This probing reading of original anarchist texts will furthermore be complemented by scholarly analysis, commentary, and contextualization, emanating from the field of Anarchist Studies.<sup>20</sup> These scholarly texts are not, I would argue, easily distinguishable from original anarchist writings; researchers within this field often tend to situate their own contributions in the anarchist tradition. Our study of democracy and anarchy, then, weaves together key anarchist texts (from the early nineteenth century onwards) with affiliated scholarly research on the anarchist tradition. And this selective, textual analysis is primarily guided by the drive of this book: to further the radical-democratic theorization of democratic conflict, stemming from the division between governors and governed, a social antagonism located at the very heart of the anarchist tradition.

With this analytical focus, I believe that Emma Goldman's theorization, along with Errico Malatesta's unblemished critique of democracy, provide especially fruitful entry points for our examination of the anarchist tradition. Malatesta and Goldman inventively combined, as we will see, the individualist and communist strands of classical anarchism. They also cultivated well-established linkages to key thinkers across the anarchist movement; Malatesta had a tremendous network through his work with the First International,<sup>21</sup> Goldman had a wide editorial influence that extended also into post-classical anarchism.<sup>22</sup> Since Malatesta and Goldman were both dynamic political thinkers, reflecting in direct relation to the various

<sup>19</sup>For an intriguing, critical discussion on this precise theme, see Ruth Kinna and Süreyya Evren, 2013, *Blasting the Canon* (New York: Punctum books), and especially Michelle Campbell's (2013, 75–77) advocacy for canonizing Voltairine de Cleyre, due to her pioneering urge for “anarchism without adjectives.”

<sup>20</sup>For an introductory overview of this scholarly field, see Randall Amster et al., 2009, *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy* (London: Routledge).

<sup>21</sup>Vernon Richards, 1965, “Notes for a Biography,” in *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas*, ed. Vernon Richards (London: Freedom Press), 237–40; Marshall, 2008 [1992], 346–50.

<sup>22</sup>Historian Robert Graham makes a similar note about Goldman and Malatesta, though also including Herbert Read, as bridging classical and post-classical anarchism. Robert Graham, 2005, “Preface,” in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas. Vol. 1, from Anarchy to Anarchism (300ce to 1939)*, ed. Robert Graham (Montreal: Black Rose Books), xiii.



political struggles they attended, they too become useful for apprehending an anarchist critique of the democratic state. Hence, we will deepen our study of democratic conflict, in this chapter, through the profound anarchist critique of *governance*, the “violence, coercion, forcible imposition of the will of the governors upon the governed,” as Malatesta so tellingly puts it.<sup>23</sup>

The first part of this chapter introduces the *anarchist critique* of democracy, a composition arrayed against governmental authority, representation, and majority rule. As we will see, this compound critique soon translates into a reinterpretation, a radicalization—an *anarchist reclamation*—of the democracy concept. The second part of this chapter outlines the notions of direct, participatory democracy, made equivalent to, or perceived as a step toward, anarchy. In parallel with these inclinations to radicalize and (re)claim democracy—ideas that still linger in contemporary anarchist thought—a divergent tendency develops, again dissociating democracy from anarchy. By examining this *reclaimed critique*, in relation to non-human life and radical democracy, the third part of this chapter revisits the classical critique of governance and the crux of The Impossible Argument.

## ANARCHIST CRITIQUE

This is why we are neither for a majority nor for a minority government; neither for democracy nor for dictatorship. We are for the abolition of the *gendarme*. We are for the freedom of all and for free agreement, which will be there for all when no one has the means to force others, and all are involved in the good running of society. We are for anarchy.<sup>24</sup>

When Malatesta’s polemical article “Neither Democrats, nor Dictators: Anarchists” was published, in May 1926, Italy had turned into a full-fledged fascist regime, under the leadership of Benito Mussolini. Precisely in this political environment, Errico Malatesta chooses to attack not only

<sup>23</sup>Errico Malatesta, 2014 [1897], “From a Matter of Tactics to a Matter of Principle,” in *The Method of Freedom: An Errico Malatesta Reader*, ed. Davide Turcato (London: AK Press), 216.

<sup>24</sup>1995 [1926], “Neither Democrats, nor Dictators: Anarchists,” in *The Anarchist Revolution: Polemical Articles 1924–1931*, ed. Vernon Richards (London: Freedom Press), 76.

dictatorship, which would be the obvious adversary in this context, but also democracy; he calls for total abolition of the *gendarme*, the state's police and military forces.<sup>25</sup> In opposition to democracy, Malatesta calls for anarchy. And his motivation is simply the fact that “where there is government, namely authority, that authority resides in the majority.”<sup>26</sup> As we will see, Malatesta extracts his categorical rejection of democracy from a compound *anarchist critique* of governance, deep-rooted in the tradition's denunciation of authority, representation, and majority rule. Our ensuing examination of the governors–governed antagonism so begins with the classical anarchist struggle against authority.

### *Against Authority*

In the influential, widespread pamphlet “Anarchy,” written in 1891, Errico Malatesta locates the anarchist struggle in opposition to “the very principle of government, the principle of authority.”<sup>27</sup> And by this token, critique of authority legitimates, and transcends, the anarchist defiance of government, in turn propelling a struggle against various forms of oppression. “The authority that prevails in government,” states the classical anarchist Élisée Reclus, “corresponds to that which holds sway in families.”<sup>28</sup> The same antipathy for authority is formulated already by Proudhon (as we saw in the opening quote of this chapter),<sup>29</sup> which set the characteristic, anti-authoritarian tone of anarchism. Proudhon is actually accountable, too, for the movement's self-identification with the term “anarchy,” then as now commonly associated with disorderly, violent chaos.

In a famous passage from his magnum opus, *What is Property*, first published in 1840, Proudhon consecutively denounces every form of state government. “Well you are a democrat?” he lets the reader ask him. “No,”

<sup>25</sup> Malatesta defines *gendarme* as “any armed force, any material force in the service of a man or of a class, to oblige others to do what they would otherwise not do voluntarily.” 1965 [1920], “Article Excerpt from *Umanità Nova*, July 25, 1920,” in *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas*, ed. Vernon Richards (London: Freedom Press), 26.

<sup>26</sup> 1995 [1926], “Neither Democrats, nor Dictators: Anarchists,” 74.

<sup>27</sup> 2014 [1891], “Anarchy,” 113.

<sup>28</sup> Élisée Reclus, 2013 [1905], “The Modern State,” in *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity: Selected Writings of Élisée Reclus*, ed. John Clark and Camille Martin (Oakland: PM Press), 189.

<sup>29</sup> Proudhon, 1969 [1851], 294.

Proudhon replies, “I am an anarchist.”<sup>30</sup> Owing much to this passage, the anti-authoritarian socialism of the late nineteenth century soon became articulated precisely as *anarchism*, a political movement advocating, as Proudhon puts it, “anarchy, the absence of a master, of a sovereign, such is the form of government to which we are every day approximating.”<sup>31</sup> The ensuing formation of the anarchist *movement*, and its ideological tradition, is also very much indebted to the iconic, larger-than-life, anarchist revolutionary, Mikhail Bakunin. Stemming from a radical reading of Friedrich Hegel, Bakunin polemically declares that the state “is the most flagrant, the most cynical and the most complete negation of humanity.”<sup>32</sup> On this note Bakunin conveys, in “The Illusion of Universal Suffrage,” how social antagonism inevitably derives from governance:

The instincts of the rulers, whether they legislate or execute the laws, are—by the very fact of their exceptional position—diametrically opposite. However democratic may be their feelings and their intentions, once they achieve the elevation of office they can only view society in the same way as a schoolmaster views his pupils, and between pupils and masters equality cannot exist. . . . Whoever talks of political power talks of domination; but where domination exists there is inevitably a somewhat large section of society that is dominated, and those who are dominated quite naturally detest their dominators, while the dominators have no choice but to subdue and oppress those they dominate.<sup>33</sup>

From this Bakunist notion of government-caused social antagonism—clearly resembling our governors–governed conflict—stems the anarchist struggle against multiple, parallel, and interlinked forms of domination: the struggle against authority. Malatesta, for one, extracts from Bakunin a “radical criticism of the principle of authority and the State which embodies

<sup>30</sup> 1970 [1840], *What Is Property?: An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government* (New York: Dover Publications), 271–72.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 277. Proudhon’s understanding of anarchism in the sense of order, (in)famously portrayed as a circled A, was very much indebted to the pre-Marxian socialism of Charles Fourier and Henri de Saint-Simon. See for instance George Woodcock, 1987 [1956], *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Biography* (Montreal: Black Rose Books), 40–41.

<sup>32</sup> Mikhail Bakunin, 2013 [1867], “Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism,” in *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, ed. Sam Dolgoff (London: Routledge), 133.

<sup>33</sup> 2016 [1870], “The Illusion of Universal Suffrage,” in *Democracy: A Reader*, ed. Ricardo Blaug and John Schwarzmantel (New York: Columbia University Press), 167–69.

it; living [in Bakunin] is always the struggle against the two lies, the two guises, in which the masses are oppressed and exploited: democratic and dictatorial.”<sup>34</sup> For Malatesta, government becomes “the consequence of the spirit of domination and violence with which some men have imposed themselves on others.”<sup>35</sup> It is the “spirit of domination,” as Charlotte Wilson also puts it, which incites anarchists to “declare war against its present principal forms of expression—property, and law manufactured and administered by majority rule.”<sup>36</sup> Wilson announces that “this battle is for freedom, for the deliverance of the spirit of each one of us, and of humanity as a whole, from the government of man by man.”<sup>37</sup> In classical anarchism, then, governance typically codifies as a particular structure—conspicuously embodied in the State—and a relationally situated principle of domination, called authority.

To identify an anarchist critique of democracy, especially in regard to its direct, participatory expressions, we must understand, I believe, the tradition’s enduring struggle against authority; anarchism targets, characteristically, authority’s supreme concentration in governments, especially in our modern nation-states. It is actually against this backdrop that anarchism become, in the second half of the nineteenth century, articulated as a political movement. Along the lines of Proudhon, anarchists share with socialists the critical analysis of power asymmetries produced by capitalism, but with an equally important addition: the social hierarchies sustained by institutions such as the Church and, not least, the state. Returning to Bakunin, we recognize the state as no less than “the ritual sacrifice of each individual and of every local association, an abstraction which destroys living society. It is the limitation, or rather the complete negation, of the so-called good of everyone.”<sup>38</sup> In “Statism and Anarchy,” Bakunin advances—in deliberate opposition to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels—his critical evaluation of state power into a compound critique of government:

<sup>34</sup> Malatesta, 1965 [1926], “Article Excerpt from *Pensiero E Volantè*, July 1, 1926,” 209.

<sup>35</sup> 2014 [1899], “An Anarchist Programme,” 289.

<sup>36</sup> Wilson, 2012 [1886], “The Principles and Aims of Anarchists,” 91.

<sup>37</sup> 2012 [1886], “Social Democracy and Anarchism,” 84.

<sup>38</sup> Mikhail Bakunin, 2005 [1869], “What Is the State,” in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas. Vol. 1, from Anarchy to Anarchism (300ce to 1939)*, ed. Robert Graham (Montreal: Black Rose Books), 86–87.

Every state power, every government, by its very nature places itself outside and over the people and inevitably subordinates them to an organization and to aims which are foreign to and opposed to the real needs and aspirations of the people. We declare ourselves the enemies of every government and every state power, and of governmental organization in general. ... No state, however democratic—not even the reddest republic—can ever give the people what they really want, i.e., the free self-organization and administration of their own affairs from the bottom upward, without any interference or violence from above.<sup>39</sup>

Bakunin's uncompromising approach towards state power—democratic states included—is hence fueled by the critique of authority, the social foundation for the governors–governed division; Bakunin concludes that every form of government must be abolished. Élisée Reclus, along with Bakunin one of the most prominent figures in the early anarchist movement, argues, on an ensuing note, that revolutionaries often fail to “imagine a free society operating without a conventional government, and as soon as they have overthrown their hated masters, they hasten to replace them with new ones.”<sup>40</sup> Hence, the adamant critique of government, so characteristic for classical anarchism, seems to allow no pardon for the democratic state. Proudhon declares that even “with the most perfect democracy, we cannot be free.”<sup>41</sup> For Proudhon, the political goal is “neither monarchy, nor aristocracy, nor even democracy itself ... No authority, no government, not even popular, that is the Revolution.”<sup>42</sup> Luigi Fabbri writes in a similar vein, another 70 years into the anarchist tradition, in the essay “Fascism: The Preventive Counter-Revolution,” critically reflecting on the democratic state in 1920s Italy:

Democracy has been chasing its shadow for over a hundred years and devised all sorts of shapes for it; but, no matter what the form, the state has remained the champion of the interests of one class against another, the supporter and ally of the ruling class against the oppressed classes. Fascism in Italy has been an obvious instance of this, laying the democratic view of the state to rest once and for all.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> 2013 [1873], “Statism and Anarchy,” 328, 38.

<sup>40</sup> Reclus, 2013 [1894], “Anarchy,” 121.

<sup>41</sup> Proudhon, 1970 [1840], 33.

<sup>42</sup> 1969 [1851], 126.

<sup>43</sup> Luigi Fabbri, 2005 [1921], “Fascism: The Preventive Counter-Revolution,” in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas. Vol. 1, from Anarchy to Anarchism (300ce to 1939)*, ed. Robert Graham (Montreal: Black Rose Books), 414.

We recognize, then, how the anarchist critique of authority may translate into a variety of political struggles, targeted against the ever-occurring social divide between governors and governed. But although classical anarchism, in this vein, typically denounces democracy, construed in its electoral, representative guise, a few exceptions stand out in the history of anarchist thought. A prompt endeavor to appropriate democracy, played out in the early 1870s, is the International Alliance of Socialist Democracy, a short-lived faction of the First International, in which both Élisée Reclus and Mikhail Bakunin were central figures.<sup>44</sup> Here, the term “Socialist Democracy” presumably draws on Bakunin’s previous call for a “social and democratic revolution.”<sup>45</sup> Based on these writings, one could certainly read Bakunin’s anarchism as democratic.<sup>46</sup> However, this temporary appropriation of the term democracy is clearly used polemically, contrasted against what Bakunin understood to be a Marxian notion of democracy. Historian Robert Graham argues that the late Bakunin, following the First International debacle, abandons his advocacy for association-based direct democracy, instead developing an overall critique of binding policies.<sup>47</sup> Bakunin clearly expressed a profound disbelief in the alleged Marxian notion of democracy, arguably established “through the dictatorship of a very strong and, so to say, despotic provisional government, that is, by the negation of liberty.”<sup>48</sup> Hence, Bakunin’s severe critique of government manifestations, in whatever form, would never allow a full-fledged democratic state; Bakunin argues, as we will see further on, that states not only maintain, but also produce, undesirable class structures. Consequently,

<sup>44</sup> A few additional people of the international anarchist movement became involved in this alliance, among them Giuseppe Fanelli and Alberto Tucci. See Josep Termes, 2000 [1977], *Anarquismo y sindicalismo en España: La Primera Internacional (1864–1881)* (Barcelona: Crítica), 14; Nettlau, 2000 [1932], 115–16.

<sup>45</sup> Bakunin, 2013 [1866], “Revolutionary Catechism,” 96.

<sup>46</sup> As does Robert Cutler in his introduction to Bakunin’s thought. Robert Cutler, 1985, “Introduction,” in *Mikhail Bakunin: From out of the Dustbin. Bakunin’s Basic Writings 1869–1871*, ed. Robert Cutler (Ann Arbor: Ardis), 27–28.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Graham, “Democracy and Anarchy,” Robert Graham’s Anarchism Weblog: <https://robertgraham.wordpress.com/2017/06/03/robert-graham-anarchy-and-democracy/>, accessed 2017-08-18.

<sup>48</sup> Mikhail Bakunin, 2005 [1872], “Letter to the Internationalists of the Romagna,” in *Colin Ward: The Anarchist Contribution. Book Chapter in Participatory Democracy: Prospects for Democratizing Democracy*, ed. Dimitrios Roussopoulos and George Benello (Montreal: Black rose books), 247–48.

Bakunin declares that the People's State can "signify only one thing: the destruction of the state."<sup>49</sup>

However, classical anarchism also cultivates, in parallel with an uncompromising critique of democracy, an understanding of democracy in terms of trajectory, as a step toward anarchy. We will later see how this notion grows in post-classical anarchism, though stemming from classical anarchist thought. Most notably, Proudhon explicitly advocates an anarchist project, through which "the principle of authority is forced to retire: it retires step by step, by a series of concessions, each one more insufficient than the other, of which the last, pure democracy, or direct government, ends in the impossible and the absurd."<sup>50</sup> When "we arrive at this last term, direct government," Proudhon continues, "there will be nothing for it but one of these two things, either to continue the development of government, or to proceed to the abolition of it."<sup>51</sup> This understanding of democracy as trajectory is furthered by Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman's inseparable companion.<sup>52</sup> The democratic state is for Berkman associated with majority rule, upheld by the principle of authority; it thus becomes a salient target for anarchist critique:

The essence of authority is invasion, the imposition of a superior will—generally superior only in point of physical force. The menace of man-made authority is not in its potential abuse. That may be guarded against. The fundamental evil of authority is its use. The more paternal its character or the more humanistic its symbols and mottoes, the greater its danger. ... The democratic authority of majority rule is the last pillar of tyranny. The last, but the strongest.<sup>53</sup>

For Berkman, democracy is not desirable; it is the very last stronghold of authority, yet an important step on the route toward anarchy. This idea resembles Bakunin's uncompromising rejection of "all legislation, all

<sup>49</sup> 2013 [1871], "The Program of the Alliance," 257. It should be noted here that radical-democratic theorist Miguel Abensour (2011 [1997], xxxii–xxxiii) clearly subscribes to the Bakunist logic, by arguing that "democracy can only exist inasmuch as it rises *against* the state"; yet Abensour extracts that political line of thought from Bakunin's very adversary: Karl Marx.

<sup>50</sup> Proudhon, 1969 [1851], 128.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>52</sup> For an informative, in-depth analysis of the intertwined biography of these prominent anarchist figures, see Avruch and Avruch, 2012.

<sup>53</sup> Alexander Berkman, "Apropos," *Mother Earth Bulletin* October 1917 (1917).

authority, and all privileged, licensed, official and legal powers over us, even though arising from universal suffrage.”<sup>54</sup> And on this note, when it comes to *representative* democracy, the anarchist tradition is in fact unanimously critical.

### *Against Representation*

The anarchist critique of representation, in government and other forms of rule, clearly resembles the proto-anarchist philosopher William Godwin,<sup>55</sup> typically considered by historians to be “the first to give a clear statement of anarchist principles,”<sup>56</sup> and therefore regarded as “the head of the tradition.”<sup>57</sup> Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, written at the very peak of the European Enlightenment in the late eighteenth century, rejects the idea “that a majority should overbear a minority.” “This evil, inseparable from political government,” Godwin argues, “is aggravated by representation, which removes the powers of making regulations one step further from the people whose lot it is to obey them.” Submission to casting votes for elected representatives reduces, Godwin concludes, the very vibrancy of politics; “debate and discussion are, in their own nature, highly conducive to intellectual improvement; but they lose this salutary character, the moment they are subjected to this unfortunate condition.”<sup>58</sup> Even though Godwin, as pointed out by George Woodcock, recognizes the “merits of democracy over other political systems,”<sup>59</sup> he sets a clear tone for the anarchist critique of representative government.

When anarchism is articulated as a political movement, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the critique of representative government—typically construed as democracy—becomes a keystone in anarchist thought. Charlotte Wilson argues that “political methods in a democracy

<sup>54</sup> Bakunin, 2013 [1871], “God and the State,” 231.

<sup>55</sup> Nettlau, 2000 [1932], 18–21.

<sup>56</sup> Marshall, 2008 [1992], 191.

<sup>57</sup> Woodcock, 1962, 60.

<sup>58</sup> William Godwin, 2017 [1793], “Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness,” in *Romantic Rationalist: A William Godwin Reader*, ed. Peter Marshall (Oakland: PM Press), 68, 70.

<sup>59</sup> George Woodcock, 2005 [1970], “Democracy, Heretical and Radical,” in *Participatory Democracy: Prospects for Democratizing Democracy*, ed. Dimitrios Roussopoulos and George Benello (Montreal: Black rose books), 19–20.



mean the art of obtaining command over the strength of numbers.”<sup>60</sup> This critique of representative government is particularly developed by the late Bakunin. “If there is a State,” Bakunin argues in “Statism and Anarchy,” “there must be domination of one class by another. ... The question arises, if the proletariat is to be the ruling class, over whom is it to rule?” In answer to his own polemical question, Bakunin declares that this ruling class will “no longer represent the people, but only themselves and their claims to rulership over the people.”<sup>61</sup> This critical forecast—that states not only maintain, but also produce, class structures—entails a thorough critique of universal suffrage, the election of governmental representatives, which Bakunin understood as a key pillar of democracy:

It was generally expected that once universal suffrage was established, the political liberty of the people would be assured. This turned out to be a great illusion. ... The whole system of representative government is an immense fraud resting on this fiction: that the executive and legislative bodies elected by universal suffrage of the people must or even can possibly represent the will of the people. ... Irrespective of their democratic sentiments or intentions, the rulers by virtue of their elevated position look down upon society as a sovereign regarding his subjects. ... Political power means domination. And where there is domination, there must be a substantial part of the population who remain subjected to the domination of their rulers: and subjects will naturally hate their rulers.<sup>62</sup>

Errico Malatesta, who often paid tribute to Bakunin’s thought, clearly picks up this notion of a new ruling class, stating that “government, parliamentary government included, is not merely powerless to resolve the social question and reconcile and satisfy everybody’s interests, but of itself represents a privileged class with ideas, passions and interest.”<sup>63</sup> Pyotr Kropotkin, a key figure in classical anarchism, similarly declares that “the State organization, having been the force to which the minorities resorted for establishing and organizing their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy these privileges.”<sup>64</sup> The anarchist critique

<sup>60</sup> Wilson, 2012 [1886], “Social Democracy and Anarchism,” 83–84.

<sup>61</sup> Bakunin, 2013 [1873], “Statism and Anarchy,” 330–31.

<sup>62</sup> 2013 [1870], “On Representative Government and Universal Suffrage,” 220–21.

<sup>63</sup> Malatesta, 2014 [1897], “The Socialists and the Elections: A Letter from E. Malatesta,” 210.

<sup>64</sup> Pyotr Kropotkin, 1912, *Modern Science and Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press), 68.

of political representation, understood as a central mechanism in the democratic state, is also pointedly rejected by Bakunin's friend and collaborator,<sup>65</sup> Carlo Cafiero:

No intermediaries, no representatives who always end up representing no one but themselves, no one to moderate equality, no more moderators of liberty, no new government, no new State, even should it style itself popular or democratic, revolutionary or provisional.<sup>66</sup>

In classical anarchism, then, critique of representation—and of representative democracy—intertwines with the question of universal suffrage, the right to vote. And this anarchist critique becomes notably furthered in the early 1900s, when anarchy-feminists express their critical views on supposed emancipatory outcomes of universal suffrage.

In line with Lucy Parsons's declaration that "of all the modern delusions, the ballot has certainly been the greatest,"<sup>67</sup> Chinese anarchist He Zhen argues that the "electoral system simply increases [women's] oppression by introducing a third ruling group: Elite Women. Even if oppression remains the same, the majority of women are still taken advantage of by the minority of women."<sup>68</sup> Here, in Zhen's nascent anarchy-feminism, a strand notably strong within Chinese anarchism at this time,<sup>69</sup> we recognize yet another layer in our search for an anarchist critique of democracy. It is telling that Malatesta, our most articulate critic of democracy, so clearly speaks out against what he calls the "majority rule," an arrangement that "implies a minority that must either rebel or submit to the will of others." Malatesta holds that the rule of the many is only marginally

<sup>65</sup> James Guillaume, 2013 [1907], "Michael Bakunin: A Biographical Sketch," in *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, ed. Sam Dolgoff (London: Routledge), 50–51.

<sup>66</sup> Carlo Cafiero, 2005 [1880], "Anarchy and Communism," in *No Gods No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism*, ed. Daniel Guérin (Edinburgh: AK Press), 294.

<sup>67</sup> Lucy Parsons, 2004 [1905], "The Ballot Humbug. A Delusion and a Snare; a Mere Veil Behind Which Politics Is Played," in *Lucy Parsons: Freedom, Equality & Solidarity: Writings & Speeches, 1878–1937*, ed. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr), 95.

<sup>68</sup> He Zhen, 2005 [1907], "Problems of Women's Liberation," in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas. Vol. 1, from Anarchy to Anarchism (300ce to 1939)*, ed. Robert Graham (Montreal: Black Rose Books), 340–41.

<sup>69</sup> Peter Zarrow, 1990, *Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press), 130, 49–55; "He Zhen and Anarcho-Feminism in China," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 47, no. 4 (1988): 808–11.

better than the rule of the few, contending that “those who really want ‘government of the people’ in the sense that each can assert his or her own will, ideas and needs, must ensure that no-one, majority or minority, can rule over others; in other words, they must abolish government, meaning any coercive organization, and replace it with the free organization of those with common interests and aims.”<sup>70</sup> On this note, the following pages convey the pressing anarchist critique of majority rule—and of the democratic state—through its advancement in the political writings of Emma Goldman.

### *Against Majority Rule*

In her fierce critique of majority rule, Emma Goldman activates not only a pioneering feminist analysis; she also siphons, as we will see, the individualist strand of anarchist thought. In fact, writing in the midst of first-wave feminism, with its notorious focus on women’s suffrage, Goldman actually rejects feminism as bourgeois, at best reformist; the feminists, Goldman contends, “foolishly believe that having a man’s job, or professions, makes them free.”<sup>71</sup> Commenting on Goldman’s intense quarrel with the feminists of her time, Vivian Gornick, in her poetic Goldman biography, simply declares that “Emma Goldman was not a feminist.”<sup>72</sup> Goldman’s rejection of first-wave feminism is quite characteristic of the emergent strand of *anarcha*-feminism; it characterizes the writings of Voltairine de Cleyre,<sup>73</sup> Italian anarchist Leda Rafanelli,<sup>74</sup> and the female revolutionaries of 1930s Spain.<sup>75</sup> Federica Montseny, a key theorist within this latter faction, polemically declares that “to propagate feminism is to

<sup>70</sup> Malatesta, 1995 [1924], “Democracy and Anarchy,” 78.

<sup>71</sup> Emma Goldman, 2011 [1919], “Letter to Stella Ballantine,” in *Emma Goldman: Political Thinking in the Streets*, ed. Kathy Ferguson (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers), 257.

<sup>72</sup> Gornick, 2011, 75.

<sup>73</sup> Voltairine De Cleyre, 2005 [1894], “The Political Equality of Woman,” in *Exquisite Rebel: The Essays of Voltairine De Cleyre: Feminist, Anarchist, Genius*, ed. Sharon Presley and Crispin Sartwell (New York: SUNY Press), 241–43.

<sup>74</sup> See Andrea Pakieser, 2014, *I Belong Only to Myself: The Life and Writings of Leda Rafanelli* (Edinburgh: AK Press), Chapter 4.

<sup>75</sup> See Martha Ackelsberg, 2005 [1991], *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women* (Oakland: AK Press), 115–20, 226–27.

foment masculinism; it is to create an immoral and absurd struggle between the sexes ... Feminism? Never! Humanism? Always!”<sup>76</sup>

It is in this critical vein of emergent anarcha-feminism that Goldman cultivates her articulate disbelief in democratic elections. “Our modern fetish is universal suffrage,” Goldman writes in her essay “Women Suffrage,” a fetish concealing “what people of intellect perceived fifty years ago: that suffrage is an evil, that it has only helped to enslave people, that it has but closed their eyes that they may not see how craftily they were made to submit.”<sup>77</sup> Goldman here resembles, possibly even referring to, Bakunin’s evaluation of suffrage as an illusory, viscous route to freedom. Yet Goldman also advances Bakunin’s analysis, cynically detesting the emancipatory potentials for female vote-casting:

I see neither physical, psychological, nor mental reasons why woman should not have the equal right to vote with man. But that cannot possibly blind me to the absurd notion that woman will accomplish that wherein man has failed. If she would not make things worse, she certainly could not make them better. [She] can give suffrage or the ballot no new quality, nor can she receive anything from it that will enhance her own quality. Her development, her freedom, her independence, must come from and through herself.<sup>78</sup>

In this anarcha-feminist spirit, Goldman disdains from essentialist notions of alleged female superiority, ideas about women being somehow better rulers than men. By that same token, Federica Montseny declares that “it is authority and domination that produce the evils in men in government and it will do the same to women. The answer to a better society is not female rulers, but a new society.”<sup>79</sup> This guiding idea for anarcha-feminist thinking is most pointedly summarized by Lucy Parsons: “the principle of rulership is in itself wrong; no man has any right to rule another.”<sup>80</sup>

<sup>76</sup>Federica Montseny, 1924, quoted in Shirley Fredricks, 1981, “Feminism: The Essential Ingredient in Federica Montseny’s Anarchist Theory,” in *European Women on the Left: Socialism, Feminism, and the Problems Faced by Political Women, 1880 to the Present*, ed. Jane Slaughter and Robert Kern (Westport: Greenwood Press), 133.

<sup>77</sup>Emma Goldman, 1998 [1911], “Woman Suffrage,” in *Red Emma Speaks*, ed. Alix Kates Schulman (Amherst: Humanity Books), 190, 92.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 192–93, 202.

<sup>79</sup>Quoted in Fredricks, 1981, 130.

<sup>80</sup>Parsons, 2004 [1905], 96–97.

So, precisely in the political context of popular demands for women's suffrage, feminist-leaning anarchists, especially Emma Goldman, take the opportunity to synthesize and propagate an anarchist contribution to feminist theory.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, in this same proliferation, Goldman also incorporates in her outspoken disbelief in suffrage as a means of emancipation an integrated recognition of anarchist individualism. The individualist strand of anarchist thought, subtly incorporated—and then advanced—in Goldman's political thinking, comprises, I believe, an essential component in the anarchist critique of democracy: the opposition to majority rule.

In "The Individual, Society and the State," Goldman declares that "more pernicious than the power of a dictator is that of a class; the most terrible—the tyranny of a majority." Goldman here argues that the basis for electoral democracy—majority rule—can only restrain power, including the individual's power to act according to her needs and desires. "Real freedom, true liberty," Goldman asserts, "is positive: it is freedom to something; it is the liberty to be, to do; in short, the liberty of actual and active opportunity [a liberty that] cannot be given: it cannot be conferred by any law or government. The need of it, the longing for it, is inherent in the individual."<sup>82</sup> Opposed to that liberty, as Goldman states in her essay "Majorities Versus Minorities," is "the majority, that compact, immobile, drowsy mass [which] will always be the annihilator of individuality, of free initiative, of originality."<sup>83</sup>

Goldman's critique of majority rule is notably influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche, a philosopher she openly acknowledged.<sup>84</sup> But Goldman's vigilance of electoral democracy also resembles yet another adversary to majority rule, the German philosopher Max Stirner.<sup>85</sup> Though his one book was first published in 1844, Stirner became known to English-speaking anarchists, Goldman among them, through Benjamin Tucker's translation, at the turn of the century, of *The Ego and Its Own*.<sup>86</sup> In this book, Stirner elaborates an

<sup>81</sup> For an ever-topical introduction to classical and contemporary anarcho-feminist texts, see Dark Star Collective, 2012, *Quiet Rumours: An Anarcho-Feminist Reader. Third Edition* (Edinburgh: AK Press).

<sup>82</sup> Goldman, 1998 [1940], "The Individual, Society and the State," 121.

<sup>83</sup> 1998 [1911], "Minorities Versus Majorities," 83, 85.

<sup>84</sup> See for instance 2011 [1931], *Living My Life: Two Volumes in One* (New York: Cosimo), 191–93.

<sup>85</sup> Falk, 2003, 10–11; Kathy Ferguson, 2011, "Why Anarchists Need Stirner," in *Max Stirner*, ed. Saul Newman (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), 172–73.

<sup>86</sup> See David Leopold, *ibid.*, "A Solitary Life," 36.

individualist-egoist analysis which came to articulate the anarchist aspect of individual autonomy, thus provoking the more communist-leaning branches of the anarchist tradition. Nevertheless, Stirner's "ontological anarchy," as Saul Newman calls it, has induced not only the Nietzschean tradition, but also post-structuralist notions of the subject as a non-essential, fluid entity.<sup>87</sup> Stirner's critique concerns how the individual is constrained by "societies and states." Stirner targets not only the established class, but "establishment itself, the state, not a particular state, not any such thing as the mere condition of the state at the time; it is not another state (such as a 'people's state') that men aim at, but their union, uniting, this ever-fluid uniting of everything standing."<sup>88</sup> This critique, then, concerns the societal search for consensus, which Stirner reads as a severe threat to individuality.

As observed by political scientist Kathy Ferguson, Goldman links Stirner's individualism, particularly his notion of oneness, with the Nietzschean critique of a morality, as outlined in Nietzsche's book *Beyond Good and Evil*.<sup>89</sup> Following this line of thought, Goldman attacks "the clumsy attempt of democracy to regulate the complexities of human character by means of external equality." Against these operations of democracy, Goldman draws on both Nietzsche and Stirner to suggest a vision "beyond good and evil" [that] points to the right to oneself, to one's personality."<sup>90</sup>

The individualist strand of anarchist thought, then, most notably fosters a critique of democracy. Historian George Woodcock observes that "no conception of anarchism is further from the truth than that which regards it as an extreme form of democracy. Democracy advocates the sovereignty of the people. Anarchism advocates the sovereignty of the person."<sup>91</sup> One example of this critical stance comes from Luigi Galleani, advocating Stirner's spirit of individualism, in the *The End of Anarchism*. Galleani here declares that "wherever possible, we must avoid, we must shun, we must reject compromise and renunciation. We must be ourselves, according to the strict character outlined by our faith and our convictions."<sup>92</sup> In a similar vein states Émile Armand (pseudonym of Ernest Lucien Juin),

<sup>87</sup> Saul Newman, *ibid.*, "Introduction: Re-Encountering Stirner's Ghosts," 1–10.

<sup>88</sup> Max Stirner, 1995 [1844], *The Ego and Its Own* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 198–99.

<sup>89</sup> Ferguson, 2011, 161–62.

<sup>90</sup> Goldman, 1998 [1915], "Jealousy: Causes and a Possible Cure," 215.

<sup>91</sup> Woodcock, 1962, 33.

<sup>92</sup> Luigi Galleani, 2005 [1907], "The End of Anarchism," excerpted in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas. Vol. 1, from Anarchy to Anarchism (300ce to 1939)*, ed. Robert Graham (Montreal: Black Rose Books), 122.

in his *Mini-Manual of the Anarchist Individualist*, that there “is no reconciliation possible between the anarchist and any form of society built upon authority, whether it be vested in an autocrat, an aristocracy or a democracy. No common ground between the anarchist and any setting governed by the decisions of a majority or the whims of an elite.”<sup>93</sup>

Returning again to Malatesta’s articulate critique of democracy, we find a similar siphoning of individualist approaches to majority rule. While embracing anarchist communism, yet acknowledging individual initiative, Malatesta often takes a position with “the individualist anarchist of the communist school.”<sup>94</sup> “We remain communist in our sentiment and aspiration,” the late Malatesta writes in his journal *Pensiero and Volontà*, “but we want to leave freedom of action to the experimentation of all ways of life that can be imagined and desired.”<sup>95</sup> For Malatesta, the bridging of individualism and communism is guided by the notion of liberty: “the greater the possibility of communism, the greater the possibility of individualism; in other words, the greatest solidarity to enjoy the greatest liberty.”<sup>96</sup> The aim of anarchy, Malatesta states, “is *solidarity*, and its method is *liberty*.”<sup>97</sup> For Malatesta, as for the good part of the anarchist tradition, the means become inseparable from the ends: “one can have the most widely varying ideals when it comes to the re-making of society, but the method will always be the one that determines the goal achieved, ... one does not go wherever one wishes, but wherever the path one is on may lead.”<sup>98</sup> Malatesta accordingly asserts that “whatever may be the practical results ..., the greatest value lies in the struggle itself.”<sup>99</sup>

Stemming from this firm accentuation on the anarchist method, inseparable from its political goal, Malatesta attacks all forms of majority rule, understood as the illegitimate coercion of individuals and minority groups. “Anarchists do not,” Malatesta declares, “recognize that the majority as such, even if it were possible to establish beyond all doubt what it wanted,

<sup>93</sup> Émile Armand, *ibid.* [1911], “Mini-Manual of the Anarchist Individualist,” 146.

<sup>94</sup> Errico Malatesta, 2016 [1897], “Individualism in Anarchism,” in *The Complete Works of Malatesta, Vol. 3. A Long and Patient Work: The Anarchist Socialism of L’agitazione, 1897–1898*, ed. Davide Turcato (Edinburgh: AK Press), 80.

<sup>95</sup> 2014 [1924], “Individualism and Anarchism,” 461.

<sup>96</sup> 1995 [1926], “Communism and Individualism (Comment on an Article by Max Nettlau),” 16.

<sup>97</sup> 2014 [1891], “Anarchy,” 143.

<sup>98</sup> 2014 [1889], “Our Plans: Union between Communists and Collectivists,” 99.

<sup>99</sup> 2014 [1899], “An Anarchist Programme,” 287.

has the right to impose itself on the dissident minorities by the use of force.”<sup>100</sup> It is these evaluations that lead Malatesta to explore the “fundamental disagreement” between democrats and anarchists, eventually leading him to disqualify democracy altogether.<sup>101</sup> The anarchists, according to Errico Malatesta,

do not wish to impose on others any hard and fast system, nor do we pretend, at least I do not, to possess the secret of a perfect social system. We wish that each social group be able, within the limits imposed by the liberty of others, to experiment on the mode of life which it believes to be the best.<sup>102</sup>

Here Malatesta resembles Bakunin’s famous declaration that “I am truly free only when all human beings, men and women, are equally free. The freedom of other men, far from negating or limiting my freedom, is, on the contrary, its necessary premise and confirmation.”<sup>103</sup> This line of thought is also notable in Kropotkin, who explicitly renounces “the idea of mutilating the individual in the name of any ideal whatsoever.”<sup>104</sup> Accordingly, Malatesta’s call for free association between individuals and groups—in place of democracy—clearly resembles his inclination to anarchist communism and the emergent strand of anarcho-syndicalism. In fact, although Malatesta overtly discards the militarist stand of the late Kropotkin, displayed by his sincere support for the Entente in World War I,<sup>105</sup> he is clearly inspired by Kropotkin’s communist vision on how people, after abolishing “property, government, and the state, ... will

<sup>100</sup> 1965 [1921], “Article Excerpt from *Umanità Nova*, October 6, 1921,” 73.

<sup>101</sup> 2016 [1897], “Collectivism, Communism, Socialist Democracy and Anarchism,” 237. It should be noted that Malatesta follows a most common understanding of democracy: “government of the people ruling through their freely elected representatives.” 1995 [1924], “Republic and Revolution,” 37.

<sup>102</sup> 2005 [1895], “Violence as a Social Factor,” in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas. Vol. 1, from Anarchy to Anarchism (300ce to 1939)*, ed. Robert Graham (Montreal: Black Rose Books), 163.

<sup>103</sup> Bakunin, 2013 [1871], “God and the State,” 237.

<sup>104</sup> Pyotr Kropotkin, 2002 [1890], “Anarchist Morality,” in *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, ed. Roger Baldwin (Mineola: Dover Publications), 106.

<sup>105</sup> Along with Malatesta, several influential anarchists, such as Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, Rudolf Rocker, and Gustav Landauer, were also explicitly critical of Kropotkin’s engagement in the War. See Paul Avrich, 1988, *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 69, 194.



form themselves freely according to the necessities dictated to them by life itself.”<sup>106</sup>

A similar linkage between individuality and communism is elaborated by Emma Goldman. In “Anarchism: What it Really Stands for,” Goldman portrays a “philosophy of the sovereignty of the individual.” Drawing on individualist thinker Oscar Wilde, Goldman asserts that individual freedom, the cultivation of “a perfect personality, ... is only possible in a state of society where man is free to choose the mode of work, the conditions of work, and the freedom to work. ... That being the ideal of Anarchism, its economic arrangements must consist of voluntary productive and distributive associations, gradually developing into free communism.”<sup>107</sup> In her widely read biography, *Living my Life*, Goldman rejects the idea that social organization “means the decay of individuality.” Conversely, Goldman continues, “the true function of organization is to aid the development and growth of personality.”<sup>108</sup> Again, we see how Goldman, like Malatesta, actively siphons the individualist strand of anarchist thought, in order to articulate a critique of majority rule, while simultaneously acknowledging an anarcho-communist sentiment.

Goldman accordingly opposes the urge, as she puts it in one of her last writings, to “cure the evils of democracy with more democracy.”<sup>109</sup> And for Malatesta, as illustrated in our opening quote from “Neither Democrats, nor Dictators: Anarchists,” the stark denunciation of majority rule, along with representation and authority, manifest what we must recognize as an *anarchist critique* of democracy. But anarchism also nurtures, as we will see, quite divergent approaches to democracy.

## ANARCHIST RECLAMATION

We have seen that classical anarchism produces a profound critique of democracy. By disqualifying *authority*, the very principle of governance, division between governors and governed becomes illegitimate. Classical anarchism further claims that democracy, sealed by universal suffrage, will

<sup>106</sup> Pyotr Kropotkin, 2005 [1881], “The Paris Commune,” in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas. Vol. 1, from Anarchy to Anarchism (300ce to 1939)*, ed. Robert Graham (Montreal: Black Rose Books), 107.

<sup>107</sup> Emma Goldman, 2012 [1911], “Anarchism: What It Really Stands For,” in *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years. Volume 3: Light and Shadows. 1910–1916*, ed. Candace Falk (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 285, 78.

<sup>108</sup> 2011 [1931], 402.

<sup>109</sup> 1998 [1940], “The Individual, Society and the State,” 110.

inevitably be managed through *representation*, by a small minority of elected governors, which in turn produces unnecessary, and undesirable, social hierarchies. Yet even if the majority—the people—were somehow to achieve state power, classical anarchist thinkers warn that minorities, and eventually individuality itself, would be severely threatened by such a *majority rule*. Nevertheless, in parallel with these adamant notions of democracy's incompatibility with anarchy, the anarchist tradition also nurtures ideas of democracy as trajectory, as a step toward anarchy. In post-classical anarchist thought, to which we will now turn, these ideas become particularly nurtured, even extended, into an *anarchist reclamation* of democracy.

To comprehend that reclamation, we should consider the very mark of our historical, or at least historiographical, shift between classical and post-classical anarchism: the rise and fall of the massive, anarchist movement in 1930s Spain. This historiography is indeed contentious; historian Paul Preston even argues that “the Spanish Civil War is being fought all over again on paper.”<sup>110</sup> Though not engaging with that complex set of history writing here, we shall acknowledge Preston's inference that “the Spanish Civil War was not one but many wars.”<sup>111</sup> And it is precisely in this conflictual, violent context that the anarchist movement produces one of modern history's largest experimentations with anarchy in action. Historians estimate that two-thirds of Spain's cultivated land became collectivized; some three million people were involved in autonomous, rural production collectives; workers controlled a considerable amount of urban factories; and a large part of the educational and welfare institutions were run by the anarchists.<sup>112</sup> Nonetheless, the anarchist movement eventually became caught up in the dilemma between joining state-oriented communist revolutionaries—which would put an end to the anarchists' autonomous collectives—or facing military defeat by General Francisco Franco.<sup>113</sup> The thorough attempts to build a large-scale, anarchist-inspired society, while constantly defending against military invasion, were, ultimately, suppressed by Francoist state power. The year of 1939, then, denotes the end of classical anarchism.

<sup>110</sup> Paul Preston, 2006, *The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution and Revenge* (London: Harper perennial), 14; Robert Alexander, 1999, *The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War: Vol. 1–2* (London: Janus), 1088–89.

<sup>111</sup> Paul Preston, 1993 [1984], “War of Words: The Spanish Civil War and the Historians,” in *Revolution and War in Spain 1931–1939*, ed. Paul Preston (London: Routledge), 10.

<sup>112</sup> See Alexander, 1999, 235–36, 490–91, 679–80.

<sup>113</sup> Preston, 2006, 246–48.

Now, with the ensuing context of World War II, and the unfolding bipolar geopolitics of the Cold War era, a most peculiar thing happens to democracy's genealogy in anarchist thought. While classical anarchism was concentrated on *criticizing* democracy, post-classical anarchism now begins to *reclaim* the concept. Democracy, carried out in its pure form, is even made equivalent to anarchy. The key aspiration for this radicalizing political project, as historian George Woodcock puts it, is that "orthodox democracy must give way to heretical democracy"; the dominant version of democracy hereby becomes distinguishable from what Woodcock calls "the notion of radical democracy."<sup>114</sup>

The urge to reclaim "the true principles of democracy" is pointedly formulated by Herbert Read in *Poetry and Anarchism*. "If we can make politics local," Read declares, "we can make them real. For this reason the universal vote should be restricted to the local unit of government, and this local government should control all the immediate interests of the citizen."<sup>115</sup> A related proposal for "libertarian municipalism" is most notably elaborated, as we will see, by Murray Bookchin. The reading of anarchism as a struggle for "true democracy" is also noticeable in, and this is quite telling for our genealogy, Gaston Laval's influential account of the "Collectives in the Spanish Revolution," in which "democracy extended into the whole of social life."<sup>116</sup> Most importantly, contrasted against that notion of democracy radicalized, as we will see, is the dominant version of democracy, decorated with various pejorative adjectives. The anarchist reclamation, conversely, comprises an idea of democracy as a step *toward anarchy*, and understandings of *direct democracy* as anarchy redressed.

### *Direct Democracy*

A quite resourceful proponent of our anarchist reclamation of democracy is the linguistic scholar, one of the most influential post-classical anarchist theorists, Noam Chomsky. Since the late 1970s, Chomsky has set out to distill meaning from the dominant form of "capitalist democ-

<sup>114</sup>Woodcock, 2005 [1970], "Democracy, Heretical and Radical," 24.

<sup>115</sup>Herbert Read, 1938, *Poetry and Anarchism* (New York: Books for Libraries Press), 92.

<sup>116</sup>Gaston Laval, 2005 [1971], "Collectives in the Spanish Revolution," in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas. Vol. 1, from Anarchy to Anarchism (300ce to 1939)*, ed. Robert Graham (Montreal: Black Rose Books), 478, 80.

racy,” in which “the pump handle will generally be operated by those who control the economy.”<sup>117</sup> This notion finds clear resemblance in the anarchist tradition which, we should not forget, stems from the critical evaluation of social conflicts produced by the capitalist economy. The classical anarchists, springing from, and often working in collaboration with, the broader socialist movement, shared the overall notion that capitalism unequally distributes power along the lines of property ownership. “Representative democracy,” declared Bakunin, “harmonizes marvelously with the capitalist economic system.”<sup>118</sup> In this vein, Alexander Berkman specifically located democracy in a political economy, relying on capitalist ownership of the means of production. Commenting on the nascent American engagement in World War I, supposedly to “make democracy safe,” Berkman declared “that a republic is not synonymous with democracy, and that America has never been a real democracy, but that it is the vilest plutocracy on the face of the globe.”<sup>119</sup>

Departing from this classical anarchist critique of the political economy, Chomsky argues that the “state capitalist democracy has a certain tension with regard to the locus of power: in principle, the people rule, but effective power resides largely in private hands, with large-scale effects throughout the social order.”<sup>120</sup> Echoing the political call of Mouffian radical democratic theory—though certainly not acknowledging that school—Chomsky sees potential here; corporate power could be dismantled by popular power since, as he so pointedly puts it, “democracy is a threat to any power system.”<sup>121</sup> What is needed, therefore, is *more* democracy:

More democracy is a value in itself. Democracy as a value doesn’t have to be defended any more than freedom has to be defended. It’s an essential feature of human nature that people should be free, should be able to participate,

<sup>117</sup>Noam Chomsky, 1982 [1978], “Intellectuals and the State,” in *Towards a New Cold War: Essays on the Current Crisis and How We Got There*, ed. Noam Chomsky (New York: Pantheon Books), 66.

<sup>118</sup>Bakunin, 2013 [1873], “Statism and Anarchy,” 336–37.

<sup>119</sup>Alexander Berkman, 2005 [1917], “To the Youth of America,” in *Life of an Anarchist: The Alexander Berkman Reader*, ed. Gene Fellner (New York: Seven Stories Press), 146.

<sup>120</sup>Noam Chomsky, 1991, *Deterring Democracy* (London: Verso), 375.

<sup>121</sup>“Democracy is a Threat to any Power System: Noam Chomsky Interviewed by John Nichols at Tucson Festival of Books”, Chomsky.info: <https://chomsky.info/03132017/>, accessed 2017-09-15.

and should be un-coerced. ... A really meaningful democracy ... would reflect my active, creative participation—not just me, but everyone, of course. That would be real democracy. We're very far from that.<sup>122</sup>

Chomsky's call for "a really meaningful democracy," juxtaposed with capitalist democracy, typifies the reclamation of democracy cultivated in post-classical anarchist thought. Yet this reclamation, which becomes notably vivid in the post-war period, is not an entirely new phenomenon in anarchist thought; nascent versions of direct democracy have been promoted before. As noted by anarchist historian Max Nettlau, a key figure in the Spanish faction of the anti-authoritarian International, José Lluas Pujols accentuates the necessity "to organize the administration ... without any directive council or any hierarchical offices [instead meeting] in general assembly once a week or more often, [which] prescribes a definite line of conduct for this commission or gives it an imperative mandate." Such an administrative organization, Lluas continues, "would be perfectly anarchist [and] does not mean an abdication of that collectivity's own liberty."<sup>123</sup>

Nonetheless, such an anarchist call for democracy, in terms of community-based self-governance, should not be read—especially given the polarization between democracy and communism, crucial distinguishers for international relations in the Cold War era—as some anarchist capitulation into representative democracy. In 1945, Paul Goodman, a pioneering post-classical anarchist, writes that "in small groups we must exercise direct political initiative in community problems of personal concern to ourselves (housing, community planning, education, etc.). The constructive decisions of intimate concern to us cannot be delegated to representative government and bureaucracy."<sup>124</sup> In an essay on the possibilities of worker's councils, Maurice Joyeux similarly alerts us to the "centralizing temptation, either in democratic form (majority rule) or in centralist form (elite rule or vanguard party rule) [that] will again loom as a threat. Centralization is the mechanism whereby new classes will be

<sup>122</sup> 1989, "Bill Moyers' Conversation with Noam Chomsky," in *A World of Ideas: Conversations with Thoughtful Men and Women About American Life Today and the Ideas Shaping Our Future*, ed. Bill Moyers (New York: Doubleday Books), 47, 53.

<sup>123</sup> Nettlau, 2000 [1932], 187–88.

<sup>124</sup> Paul Goodman, 2011 [1945], "What Must Be the Revolutionary Program?," in *The Paul Goodman Reader*, ed. Taylor Stoehr (Oakland: PM Press), 43.

formed and these in turn will devise privileges that need not necessarily be economic.”<sup>125</sup>

This type of democratic exploration, partly rooted in classical anarchism, becomes particularly manifest in the late twentieth century; the widespread experimentation with horizontal decision making within the Alterglobalization Movement, including the succeeding yet closely related Occupy Movement, has again boosted anarchist reclamation of democracy. The Alterglobalization Movement seemingly answers Murray Bookchin’s call from the mid-1980s to “democratize our republic and radicalize our democracy,”<sup>126</sup> what Amadeo Bertolo calls “libertarian democracy”: anarchistic, face-to-face, horizontal decision making that transcends the politics of representation.<sup>127</sup> This popular wave of democratic exploration enthuses David Graeber to announce the arrival of *The New Anarchists* at the end of the Cold War era.<sup>128</sup>

In the wake of the Alterglobalization Movement, the articulated anarchist-leaning version of democracy, in opposition to state capitalist democracy, typically invokes the adjective *direct*. In her influential essay “Democracy is Direct,” Cindy Milstein illustratively argues that democracy in fact is “completely at odds with both the state and capitalism,” hence anarchists need to begin “reclaiming the word democracy itself—not as a better version of representation but as a radical process to directly remake our world.”<sup>129</sup>

The notion of direct democracy has gained additional currency through the widespread publications of David Graeber. In *Direct Action*, Graeber argues that just as anarchists bypass the state by doing politics directly, so

<sup>125</sup> Maurice Joyeux, 2009 [1973], “Self-Management, Syndicalism and Factory Councils,” in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas. Vol. 2, the Emergence of the New Anarchism (1939–1977)*, ed. Robert Graham (Montreal: Black Rose Books), 247.

<sup>126</sup> Murray Bookchin, “The Greening of Politics: Toward a New Kind of Political Practice,” *Green perspectives: Newsletter of the Green Program Project* 1, no. January (1986): 5.

<sup>127</sup> Amadeo Bertolo, “Democracy and Beyond,” *Democracy & Nature* 5, no. 2 (1999).

<sup>128</sup> Graeber’s periodization here differs from Colin Ward’s, who associates the anarchist re-emergence with the counter-cultural movement of the late 1960s. David Graeber, “The New Anarchists,” *New left review* 13 (2002): 61–62, 69; 2013, *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement* (New York: Spiegel & Grau), 192; Colin Ward, 2005 [1970], “The Anarchist Contribution,” in *Participatory Democracy: Prospects for Democratizing Democracy*, ed. Dimitrios Roussopoulos and George Benello (Montreal: Black rose books), 255.

<sup>129</sup> Cindy Milstein, 2010 [2000], “Democracy Is Direct,” in *Anarchism and Its Aspirations*, ed. Cindy Milstein (Oakland: AK Press), 101, 07.

could democracy itself be reclaimed in the same, direct manner.<sup>130</sup> This idea emanates from Bookchin's core argument that "direct democracy is ultimately the most advanced form of direct action."<sup>131</sup> Bookchin here formulates a critique of representative decision making, what Uri Gordon locates as an introductory "association between anarchism and democracy,"<sup>132</sup> advocating a type of commune-based democracy "structured around direct, face-to-face, protoplasmic relationships, not around representative, anonymous, mechanical relationships."<sup>133</sup> Bookchin's *radical* notion of democracy stems from his reading of ancient Athens as a "working democracy in the literal sense of the term,"<sup>134</sup> though he eventually rephrases this approach as "libertarian municipalism,"<sup>135</sup> placing further emphasis on voting as a means of decision making, thus deliberately distancing himself from the classical anarchist critique of majority rule.<sup>136</sup>

But Graeber conversely refrains from Bookchin's inclination to equal democracy with majority rule. In his book *The Democracy Project*, built largely on participatory observation within the North American Occupy Movement,<sup>137</sup> Graeber explicitly juxtaposes decision making by the vote with a consensus process.<sup>138</sup> Seeing that classical anarchists "tended to accept that 'democracy' meant majority voting,"<sup>139</sup> Graeber proposes an anarchist reclamation—or, more literally, a *radicalization*—of democracy in terms of consensus, "the process of collective deliberation on the principle of full and equal participation."<sup>140</sup> If applied with care and rigor, Graeber contends, the consensus process seldom reaches the point

<sup>130</sup> David Graeber, 2009, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (Edinburgh: AK Press), 228–37.

<sup>131</sup> Murray Bookchin, 1982, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Plano Alto: Cheshire Books), 339.

<sup>132</sup> Uri Gordon, "Democracy: The Patriotic Temptation. Uri Gordon on the Difference between Anarchy and Democracy", CrimethInc.: <https://crimethinc.com/2016/05/26/democracy-the-patriotic-temptation>, accessed 2017-10-11.

<sup>133</sup> Bookchin, 1982, 336.

<sup>134</sup> 1986 [1971], *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, Second ed. (Montreal: Black Rose Books), 180, 77–85.

<sup>135</sup> "Thoughts on Libertarian Municipalism," *Left Green Perspectives* 41 (2000).

<sup>136</sup> 1995, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* (Edinburgh: AK Press), 16–19, 56–61.

<sup>137</sup> Graeber is himself a key figure in this movement, not least as the founder of the epic Occupy slogan "We are the 99%." See Graeber, 2013, 40–41.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 192–96, 210–32. Graeber does, it should be noted, clearly distinguish himself from what he reads as Bookchin's eventual embracement of majority rule (*ibid.*, 195.)

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

at which groups go to vote.<sup>141</sup> This elucidation of consensus, though puzzlingly similar to the Habermasian vocabulary, differs overtly from the concept of deliberative (state) democracy; for Graeber, the consensus process does not only mean participation in decision-making procedures, but also that “no one should be bound by a decision they detest.”<sup>142</sup> For Graeber, then, radicalized democracy signifies a direct, participatory, yet non-coercive political arrangement, meaning that “anarchism is not a negation of democracy [but instead] a matter of taking those core democratic principles to their logical conclusions.”<sup>143</sup> Noting that both democracy and anarchy historically have been used interchangeably, as pejorative ascriptions, Graeber accordingly advocates their tandem reclamation.<sup>144</sup> But although anarchist reclamation here translates into radicalization of democracy’s direct, libertarian latency, galvanized under the black flag, post-classical anarchism also develops an understanding of democracy, and especially its radicalization, as a step toward anarchy.

### *Toward Anarchy*

We have seen that anarchist reclamation of (direct) democracy is especially notable within North American factions of the late Alterglobalization Movement (milieus in which both Cindy Milstein and David Graeber are prominent anarchist figures). While Occupy assemblies are indeed recognized by anarchists as a flash of anarchy in action,<sup>145</sup> it should be noted that parallel anarchist theorization of direct democracy also develops aside from these phenomena. For instance, Argentinian psychoanalyst and anarchist Eduardo Colombo deliberately uses the adjective “direct” to distinguish between anarchist-styled democracy and the indirect, representative system associated with “capitalist-neoliberal democracy.”<sup>146</sup> Colombo further argues that, tactically, even majority rule could in fact be favorable to

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 224–25.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 169–70, 87.

<sup>145</sup> See for instance Andrew Flood, 2013 [2011], “Assemblies Are the Revolution,” in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas. Vol. 3, the New Anarchism (1974–2012)*, ed. Robert Graham (Montreal: Black Rose Books).

<sup>146</sup> Eduardo Colombo, 2006, *La voluntad del pueblo: Democracia y anarquía* (Buenos Aires: Tupac Ediciones), 92–93.



anarchists, given the consent of participating individuals.<sup>147</sup> Another example of that line of thought is Mark Mattern's recent book *Anarchism and Art*, in which anarchism is depicted as a "stronger and more radical form of participatory democracy."<sup>148</sup>

In parallel with understandings of anarchism as democracy radicalized, as opposed to the dominant form of capitalist democracy, we encounter an anarchist approach to democracy in terms of trajectory, a step toward anarchy. "The objective," as George Benello has it in his influential essay "We Are Caught in a Wasteland Culture," from 1967, "is a society which is fully democratized."<sup>149</sup> Benello furthers this line of thought in the anthology *Participatory Democracy*, co-edited with Dimitrios Roussopoulos (originally published in 1970). Roussopoulos and Benello here sketch a direct, participatory democracy, modified for large-scale, wage-labor societies. "Participatory democracy," they argue, "seeks to reintroduce the concept of democracy from the ground up, which means introducing democratic process into the major organizations of society, public and private."<sup>150</sup> Democratization thereby becomes a trajectory which is "anarchistic in its recognition that more than the democratization of the means of production and of industrial property is involved."<sup>151</sup> Sam Dolgoff, following that same line of thought, calls for apt contextual application of anarchist principles "to stimulate forces that propel society in a libertarian direction."<sup>152</sup>

This notion of democracy as trajectory—a step toward anarchy—has been notably strong among Third World anarchists, who have been politically active aside from the geopolitical divide of the Cold War era. For instance, Vinoba Bhave, a key ideological successor of Mohandas

<sup>147</sup> 2013 [2006], "On Voting," in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas. Vol. 3, the New Anarchism (1974–2012)*, ed. Robert Graham (Montreal: Black Rose Books), 50.

<sup>148</sup> Mark Mattern, 2016, *Anarchism and Art: Democracy in the Cracks and on the Margins* (Albany: SUNY Press), 18.

<sup>149</sup> George Benello, 1992 [1967], "We Are Caught in a Wasteland Culture," in *From the Ground Up: Essays on Grassroots and Workplace Democracy by George Benello*, ed. Len Krimerman, et al. (Montréal: Black Rose Books), 27.

<sup>150</sup> Dimitrios Roussopoulos and George Benello, 2005, "Preface & Introduction," in *Participatory Democracy: Prospects for Democratizing Democracy*, ed. Dimitrios Roussopoulos and George Benello (Montreal: Black rose books), 4, x-xi.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>152</sup> Sam Dolgoff, 2001 [1977], *The Relevance of Anarchism to Modern Society* (Tucson: Sharp Press), 13.

‘Mahatma’ Gandhi, in post-colonial India, argues that Sarvodaya, the political philosophy formulated by Gandhi,<sup>153</sup> “does not mean good government or majority rule, it means freedom from government, it means decentralization of power. ... Decisions should be taken, not by a majority, but by unanimous consent.” Bhava accordingly concludes that, in the wake of the retreating British state presence, “we should not allow ourselves to be governed at all, even by a good government.”<sup>154</sup> Another Third World anarchist thinker, surprisingly invisible in anarchist compilations,<sup>155</sup> is Luce Fabbri (daughter of Luigi Fabbri, Malatesta’s collaborator and biographer). In Fabbri’s approach to democracy, there is no contradiction between “on the one hand exposing its insufficiency, [and] on the other hand defending those spaces it keeps open.”<sup>156</sup> Instead of opposing democracy, or making it more radical, Fabbri suggests that anarchism encourages us to move beyond democracy. On the route toward anarchy, then, democracy becomes an important step:

Democracy and anarchy are not mutually contradictory but the one represents an advance upon the other. In fact, there is no diametrical opposition between the rights of the majority upon which democracy is built and the free consent that is characteristic of libertarian solutions; the difference is, instead, a difference of degree.<sup>157</sup>

<sup>153</sup>For a brief introduction to the anarchist sentiments of the Sarvodaya movement, see Ramnath, 2011, 188–203.

<sup>154</sup>Vinoba Bhava, 2005 [1952], “Sarvodaya: Freedom from Government,” in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas. Vol. 1, from Anarchy to Anarchism (300ce to 1939)*, ed. Robert Graham (Montreal: Black Rose Books), 183. It should be noted, however, that Jayaprakash Narayan, the most influential Gandhian theorist alongside Bhava, came to advocate what he called “democratic socialism,” a type of libertarian socialist state contrasted against the dominant state communism of China and the USSR. See Ramnath, 2011, 195–98.

<sup>155</sup>Robert Graham’s blog/archive being one, important, exception. See <https://robert-graham.wordpress.com/anarchy-democracy-bookchin-malatesta-fabbri/>, accessed 2017-06-16.

<sup>156</sup>Luce Fabbri, 1983 [1982], “Respuesta a la revista “A” ¿Defender La Democracia? – Aclamación de Luce Fabbri, en carta publicada en la revista N°98, de febrero 1982,” in *El anarquismo: Mas alla de la democracia*, ed. Luce Fabbri (Brasil: Editorial Reconstruir), 36. My translation.

<sup>157</sup>2012 [1983], “From Democracy to Anarchy,” Robert Graham’s Anarchism Weblog: <https://robertgraham.wordpress.com/anarchy-democracy-bookchin-malatesta-fabbri/>, accessed 2017-06-16.

Fabbri subsequently states that anarchists “should aim to socialize and federalize democracy and turn it into a direct, socialist democracy.” Here Fabbri tunes into the idea of anarchist reclamation, emphasizing the necessity “not to defend a democratic system but rather to defend the fundamental freedoms existing within it from the assaults of totalitarian forces.”<sup>158</sup> On a more pessimistic note, James Scott very similarly declares, in *Two Cheers for Anarchism*, that we “are stuck, alas, with Leviathan, though not at all for the reasons Hobbes had supposed, and the challenge is to tame it.”<sup>159</sup>

This type of demarcation—today’s form of democracy as unescapable yet incompatible with anarchy—is in fact paramount to the anarchist reclamation. Colin Ward puts it quite clearly in his call to “build networks instead of pyramids. Anarchism does not demand the changing of the labels on the layers, it doesn’t want different people on top, it wants us to clamber out from underneath. It advocates an extended network of individuals and groups, making their own decisions, controlling their own destiny.”<sup>160</sup> In a similar vein, political philosopher Robert Paul Wolff differentiates, in his *Defense of Anarchism*, between authority and autonomy. Wolff here contends that the “defining mark of the state is authority, the right to rule. The primary obligation of man is autonomy, the refusal to be ruled.”<sup>161</sup> Accordingly, the revolutionary content of anarchist thought, characteristically denouncing reformatory politics, fosters continuous disbelief in projects aiming to radicalize democracy. David Graeber illustratively states that democracy “can only be truly realized once the bureaucracies of coercion that hold existing structures of power together collapse or fade away.”<sup>162</sup>

This trajectory aspect, of the radical democratization approach, finds clear resonance in classical anarchist thought, especially in Malatesta’s notion of anarchism as a method—a process—rather than some utopian state of society. In his widely distributed pamphlet “Toward Anarchy,” written in 1899, Malatesta highlights that, for the anarchists, what matters “is not whether we accomplish Anarchy today, tomorrow, or within ten

<sup>158</sup> Luce Fabbri, 1983, quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> James Scott, 2012, *Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), xvi.

<sup>160</sup> Colin Ward, 1996 [1973], *Anarchy in Action* (London: Freedom press), 26.

<sup>161</sup> Robert Paul Wolff, 1998 [1970], *In Defense of Anarchism* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 18.

<sup>162</sup> Graeber, 2013, 302.

centuries, but that we walk toward anarchy today, tomorrow, and always.”<sup>163</sup> For Malatesta, then, the anarchist struggle is all about “seeking to reduce the power of the State and of privilege, and by demanding always greater freedom, greater justice.”<sup>164</sup> Malatesta’s approach, typically referred to as gradualism, ventures “that the complete triumph of anarchy will come by evolution, gradually, rather than by violent revolution.”<sup>165</sup> This means, for Malatesta, “that so long as government exists it should be as unoppressive as possible, the less it is a government the better.”<sup>166</sup> At the same time, we also recall how Malatesta formulates a most profound critique of democracy, a critique now reclaimed, and debated, in contemporary anarchist thought.

### RECLAIMED CRITIQUE

This last part of our anarchist journey portrays how a classical critique of democracy becomes revisited, reclaimed, in order once more to target the conflictual social divide between governors and governed. However, the anarchist reclamation of democracy, the notion that “anarchism would be nothing less than the most complete realization of democracy,”<sup>167</sup> as anarcho-syndicalists Lucien van der Walt and Michael Schmidt put it,<sup>168</sup> still lingers in contemporary anarchist thought. Yet voices are now also spelled out against democracy, revisiting the anarchist tradition in search of what we might call a *reclaimed critique of democracy*. A particularly articulate propagation of that reclaimed critique springs from the think tank CrimethInc. Ex-Workers Collective. “It is strange to use the word democracy,” CrimethInc. declares, “for the idea that the state

<sup>163</sup> Malatesta, 2014 [1899], “Toward Anarchy,” 300.

<sup>164</sup> 1965 [1925], “Article Excerpt from *Pensiero E Volontà*, May 16, 1925,” 23.

<sup>165</sup> 2014 [1930], “The Anarchists in the Present Time,” 504; See also Malatesta’s defense of gradualism in 2014 [1925], “Gradualism.”

<sup>166</sup> 1965 [1926], “Article Excerpt from *Pensiero E Volontà*, August 1, 1926,” 150.

<sup>167</sup> Lucien Van der Walt and Michael Schmidt, 2009, *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism & Syndicalism. Counter-Power Vol. I* (Edinburgh: AK Press), 70.

<sup>168</sup> It should be noted that Michael Schmidt has recently become affiliated with the radical-nationalist milieu. And this is not, we must remember, the first time influential anarchist thinkers have failed to translate anarchism into feminist and anti-racist stances; Proudhon (in)famously embraces both misogynous and anti-Semitic sentiments; Bakunin’s notion of Pan-Slavism contains distinct nationalist elements. For a critical discussion on this important theme, see Luther Blissett, 1997, *Anarchist Integralism: Aesthetics, Politics and the Après-Garde* (London: Sabotage Editions).

is inherently undesirable. The proper word for that idea is anarchism.”<sup>169</sup> In *From Democracy to Freedom*, CrimethInc. conversely argues that democracy, in whatever form, is incompatible with freedom. “Real freedom,” the argument goes, “is not a question of how participatory the process of answering questions is, but of the extent to which we can frame the questions ourselves—and whether we can stop others from imposing their answers on us.”<sup>170</sup> In the build-up of this argument, CrimethInc. distinguishes between government, “the exercise of authority,” and the self-determination that “means disposing of one’s potential on one’s own terms.” CrimethInc. accordingly argues that self-determination, in contrast to authority, fosters “cumulative autonomy on a mutuality reinforcing basis.”<sup>171</sup>

We here recognize that CrimethInc.’s critique of democracy clearly, and quite consciously, echoes classical anarchist thought, especially the polemical writings of Errico Malatesta. As we have seen, Malatesta’s argument crystalizes into the notion that “the government of the people turns out to be an impossibility, [since it] can at best be only the government of the majority.”<sup>172</sup> By this token arguments were raised in the rebellious heat of the late 1960s; in the Netherlands, for instance, the social movement known as the Provos clearly affiliated with anarchism, a tradition that, according to the Provos, “propagates the most direct rebellion against all authority, whether it be democratic or communist.”<sup>173</sup> Similar defiance has more recently been declared by Peter Gelderloos, emanating from the analysis that democracy is nothing but “a direct evolution of earlier elite institutions ... creating the illusion that the subjects are in fact equal members of society.”<sup>174</sup> Gelderloos develops this analysis in *Worshipping Power*, a study of early state formation, stemming from the anarchist notion that “all forms of government, from the most dictatorial to the most democratic, are fundamentally oppressive.” Gelderloos here con-

<sup>169</sup> CrimethInc. Ex-Workers Collective, 2017, *From Democracy to Freedom: The Difference between Government and Self-Determination* (Salem: CrimethInc. Far East), 42.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>172</sup> Malatesta, 1995 [1926], “Neither Democrats, nor Dictators: Anarchists,” 73–74.

<sup>173</sup> The Provos, 2009 [1965], “‘Provo’ Magazine Leaflet,” in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas. Vol. 2, the Emergence of the New Anarchism (1939–1977)*, ed. Robert Graham (Montreal: Black Rose Books), 283.

<sup>174</sup> Peter Gelderloos, “What Is Democracy?,” The Anarchist Library: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/peter-gelderloos-what-is-democracy>, accessed 2017-10-12.

cludes that the “problem is not corruption or lack of democracy or a particular party, but the very fact that we are governed.”<sup>175</sup> In the same vein, Uri Gordon pronounces a grave disbelief in redressing anarchism as democracy. “Anarchism,” he declares, “represents not the most radical form of democracy, but an altogether different paradigm of collective action.”<sup>176</sup> In an essay published on CrimethInc.’s website, Gordon further argues that “anarchist invocations of democracy are a relatively new and distinctly American phenomenon.” Gordon holds that linking anarchism to democracy is not only ideologically incoherent, but also strategically problematic since “it risks cementing the nationalist sentiments it seeks to undermine.”<sup>177</sup> And in this critical vein, as we will see, a reclaimed critique of democracy now includes the realm of non-human life, leading, eventually, to complete denunciation of the search for radical democracy, through vigorous articulation of what I call The Impossible Argument.

### *Democracy and Non-Human Life*

When the anarchist tradition is revisited, in the search for a critique of democracy, that reclaimed critique articulates not only classical anarchist denunciations of governance, it also rediscovers additional layers. Most notably, the reclamation of anarchist critique now encompasses, again echoing Bakunin, the unfolding notion that democracy produces and fortifies the ruling of one class, or group, or species, over another. One illustrative entry point here is Mick Smith’s *Against Ecological Sovereignty*, which portrays how our present political system “presumes human dominion and assumes that the natural world is already, before any decision is even made, fundamentally a human resource.”<sup>178</sup> Smith conversely introduces anarcho-primitivism, or simply primitivism, which suggests, “in place of the political paradigm of (human) citizenship, ... a constitutive ecological politics of subtle involvements and relations between more-

<sup>175</sup> 2016, *Worshipping Power: An Anarchist View of Early State Formation* (Oakland: AK Press), 1, 237.

<sup>176</sup> Uri Gordon, 2008, *Anarchy Alive!: An Anti-Authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* (London: Pluto press), 70.

<sup>177</sup> 2016, “Democracy: The Patriotic Temptation. Uri Gordon on the Difference between Anarchy and Democracy”, CrimethInc.: <https://crimethinc.com/2016/05/26/democracy-the-patriotic-temptation>, accessed 2017-10-11.

<sup>178</sup> Mick Smith, 2011, *Against Ecological Sovereignty: Ethics, Biopolitics, and Saving the Natural World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), xii.

than-just-human-beings.”<sup>179</sup> Primitivism, Smith argues, “rejects not only the commodification of nature but also the very idea of a specifically human form of labor that automatically stamps nature with a seal of proprietorship.”<sup>180</sup> Smith’s analysis acknowledges the writings of Henry David Thoreau who, in the essay “Walking,” written in the late 1850s, wished “to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with freedom and culture merely civil.”<sup>181</sup>

Smith’s analysis also draws on the anarcho-primitivism of John Zerzan, who asserts that the state is “a hypercomplex global setup [that cannot] function a day without many levels of government.”<sup>182</sup> Zerzan’s application of this layered analysis is a compact critique of civilization as a whole. “Expressions of power are at the essence of civilization,” Zerzan declares, only to add that civilization builds on the “core principle of patriarchal rule.”<sup>183</sup> Green anarchism, the broader strand of thought in which anarcho-primitivism is located, here unveils how the *demos*, even in its most radical understanding, does not encompass non-human life. Instead of embracing the logic of civilization, as Zerzan puts it, green anarchism evokes “face-to-face, non-domination of nature and each other.”<sup>184</sup> Due to “the repression of individual liberties and the curtailment of direct action in favor of deferred decision-making rejection,” Moxie Marlinspike and Windy Hart polemically declare, in primitivist Audio Anarchy Radio: “we are not echoing confused cries for more democracy, we are calling for its entire abolition.”<sup>185</sup> Hence, the starting point for green anarchism is, as Corin Bruce bluntly puts it, “that all hierarchy should be abolished, [including] the human subordination of other species of animals.”<sup>186</sup> Zerzan similarly declares that though “the domestication of animals and plants was once assumed as given, now its logic is brought into question.”<sup>187</sup>

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>181</sup> Henry David Thoreau, 2011 [1862], “Walking,” in *The Natural History Essays*, ed. Henry David Thoreau (Layton: Gibbs Smith), 93.

<sup>182</sup> John Zerzan, 2008, *Twilight of the Machines* (Los Angeles: Feral House), viii.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>185</sup> Moxie Marlinspike and Windy Hart, “An Anarchist Critique of Democracy: Audio Anarchy Radio Show on Democracy, 2005-01-11”, The Anarchist Library: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/moxie-marlinspike-and-windy-hart-audio-anarchy-radio-an-anarchist-critique-of-democracy>, accessed 2017-10-12.

<sup>186</sup> Corin Bruce, 2014, *Green Anarchism: Towards the Abolition of Hierarchy*, The Anarchist Library: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/corin-bruce-green-anarchism-towards-the-abolition-of-hierarchy>, accessed 2017-10-10.

<sup>187</sup> Zerzan, 2008, 62.

The critique of the human domestication of non-human life echoes throughout the anarchist tradition. A commonly referred to example is Élisée Reclus's pamphlet "On Vegetarianism." Based on personal encounters with the violent exploitation of non-human animals, Reclus advocates a future "in which we no longer risk seeing butcher shops full of carcasses next to silk and jewelry stores."<sup>188</sup> A quite similar approach, though less frequently recounted,<sup>189</sup> is adopted by Louise Michel, key organizer in the Paris Commune of 1871, later to become one of the most recognized figures within the anarchist movement.<sup>190</sup> In her memoirs, Michel charges the violent hierarchy between human and non-human animals as the ignition of her political life. "As far back as I can remember," Michel writes, "the origin of my revolt against the powerful was my horror at the tortures inflicted on animals."<sup>191</sup> Michel's political struggle is located at the intersection of social inequalities, targeting the social structure in which "men are masters, and women are intermediate beings, standing between man and beast."<sup>192</sup> Her chapter on women's rights, for instance, is closely interwoven with an urge for animal rights (as branded today) and for class struggle. For Michel, the principle of authority, fueling the domination of one group over another, requires resistance on multiple levels. "What an uproar when men find an unruly animal in the flock. I wonder what would happen if the lamb no longer wanted to be slaughtered,"<sup>193</sup> Michel asks, rhetorically, in her characteristic agitation for complete defiance, and struggle for the ungovernable.<sup>194</sup>

<sup>188</sup> Reclus, 2013 [1901], "On Vegetarianism," 161.

<sup>189</sup> One brief exception being Aragorn Eloff, 2015, "Do Anarchists Dream of Emancipated Sheep? Contemporary Anarchism, Animal Liberation and the Implications of New Philosophy," in *Anarchism and Animal Liberation: Essays on Complementary Elements of Total Liberation*, ed. Erika Cudworth, Richard White, and Anthony Nocella (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc.), 196–98.

<sup>190</sup> See Édith Thomas, 1980, *Louise Michel* (Montréal: Black rose books), 96–99, 395–97.

<sup>191</sup> Louise Michel, 1981 [1886], "Memoirs of Louise Michel," in *The Red Virgin: Memoirs of Louise Michel*, ed. Bullitt Lowry and Elizabeth Gunter (Alabama: University of Alabama Press), 24.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>194</sup> Voltairine de Cleyre seems to have shared a similar political approach. Emma Goldman reports that de Cleyre expressed "poignant agony at the sight of suffering whether of children or dumb [*sic*] animals (she was obsessed by love for the latter and would give shelter and nourishment to every stray cat and dog)." See Emma Goldman, 2005 [1932], "Voltairine De Cleyre," in *Exquisite Rebel: The Essays of Voltairine De Cleyre: Anarchist, Feminist, Genius*, ed. Sharon Presley and Crispin Sartwell (New York: State University of New York), 41–42.



Louise Michel's extensive attack on intersected forms of domination finds clear resemblance in contemporary green anarchism; Layla AbdelRahim, for example, accordingly invokes "wildness," the "character of untamed beings whose purpose for existence is not defined by a utilitarian value." For AbdelRahim, "wildness translates into anarchy," contrasted against the civilization that "keeps most human and other animals exploited, consumed and dispossessed."<sup>195</sup>

Hence, from the notion of intersectional resistance, nurtured by anarchist thought, stems the critique of *speciesism*: the logic through which governed species are violently exploited to produce milk and eggs, and how non-human animals are even killed, slaughtered, their bodies transformed into food commodities for their rulers. Bob Torres writes that anarchism "encourages us to see struggles as interconnected, and to act appropriately by building alliances and solidarity between them." Accordingly, Torres rejects "the consumption, enslavement, and subjugation of animals for human ends, ... as yet another oppressive aspect of the relations of capital and a needless form of domination."<sup>196</sup> Brian Dominick, reflecting on his widely distributed pamphlet "Animal Liberation and Social Revolution," similarly conceives "both human liberation and animal freedom [as] integral aspects of anti-oppression perspective."<sup>197</sup> Following this line of thought, the introductory essay in *Anarchism and Animal Liberation* postulates that the anarchist tradition, "with its explicit intent of challenging and ending all forms of domination, is seen to bring something of real value, hope and possibility."<sup>198</sup> Hence, the struggle against authority—the very backbone of anarchist ideas and actions—produces a variety of implementations in situated political

<sup>195</sup> Layla AbdelRahim, 2015, *Children's Literature, Domestication, and Social Foundation: Narratives of Civilization and Wilderness* (New York: Routledge), 3, 9.

<sup>196</sup> Bob Torres, 2007, *Making a Killing: The Political Economy of Animal Rights* (Edinburgh: AK Press), 126, 30.

<sup>197</sup> Brian Dominick, 2015, "Anarcho-Veganism Revisited: Twenty Years of "Veganarchy"," in *Anarchism and Animal Liberation: Essays on Complementary Elements of Total Liberation*, ed. Erika Cudworth, Richard White, and Anthony Nocella (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc.), 24.

<sup>198</sup> Erika Cudworth, Richard White, and Anthony Nocella, 2015, "Introduction: The Intersections of Critical Animal Studies and Anarchist Studies for Total Liberation," in *Anarchism and Animal Liberation: Essays on Complementary Elements of Total Liberation*, ed. Erika Cudworth, Richard White, and Anthony Nocella (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc.), 8.

contexts, not least the domestication of non-human life.<sup>199</sup> Anarchists hereby articulate the classical critique once more, in order to evaluate ongoing searches for radical democracy.

### *Anarchy and Radical Democracy*

We have seen how various strands of anarchist thought find reason to question the *anarchist reclamation*, what Dimitrios Roussopoulos advocates as “the democratization of democracy, the radicalization of democracy or participatory democracy.”<sup>200</sup> This *reclaimed critique* of democracy has, in turn, nurtured subsequent discussions on the relation between democracy and anarchy. A recent example is the debate between Wayne Price and Shawn Wilbur.<sup>201</sup> Here, Wilbur furthers the argument that these political systems are inevitably opposed: “anarchy describes the absence of rule, while democracy describes rule by ‘the people’.”<sup>202</sup> Price, on the other hand, argues that “anarchism is the most extreme, radical, form of democracy.”<sup>203</sup> Price’s argument is tactical; he discourages CrimethInc. and like-minded anarchists for dissociating anarchy from democracy, instead of convincing people that “anarchism is democracy without the state.”<sup>204</sup> This side of the argument builds not only on experiences from the Global North (like the Alterglobalization Movement and its Occupy successor), but also refers to ongoing experimental democratic advances in the Global South (like the democratic confederalism of Syrian

<sup>199</sup>The intersectional theme of critical animal studies has in turn redefined the boundaries of the revolutionary subject itself. For an explorative report on exemplified resistance from animals in captivity, see Jason Hribal, 2010, *Fear of the Animal Planet: The Hidden History of Animal Resistance* (Edinburgh: AK Press).

<sup>200</sup>Dimitrios Roussopoulos, 2005, “Introduction: The Participatory Tradition and the Ironies of History,” in *Participatory Democracy: Prospects for Democratizing Democracy*, ed. Dimitrios Roussopoulos and George Benello (Montreal: Black rose books), 261.

<sup>201</sup>This debate played out at the 2017 online symposium on Anarchy and Democracy, hosted by the Center for a Stateless Society, <https://c4ss.org/content/49206>, accessed 2017-08-18.

<sup>202</sup>Shawn Wilbur, “Anarchy and Democracy: Examining the Divide”, Center for a Stateless Society: <https://c4ss.org/content/49277>, accessed 2017-08-18.

<sup>203</sup>Wayne Price, “Democracy, Anarchism, & Freedom”, Center for a Stateless Society: <https://c4ss.org/content/49237>, accessed 2017-08-18.

<sup>204</sup>Ibid.

Kurdistan).<sup>205</sup> Anarchist critics of democracy dismiss such a positioning. “It is not the same thing,” Uri Gordon argues, “for stateless minorities in the Global South to use the language of democracy and national liberation as it is for citizens of advanced capitalist countries in which national independence is already an accomplished fact.”<sup>206</sup>

On a different note, contemporary anarchists have also found reason to doubt even the notion of direct, assembly-based, democracy. “Sabotage every representative authority,” The Invisible Committee calls out in their widespread essay collection *The Coming Insurrection*; “Spread the palaver. Abolish general assemblies.”<sup>207</sup> That sincere critique finds clear resonance in contemporary, as well as in classical, anarchist thought. “Even in most convivial communities,” Ruth Kinna points out, “individuals will organize themselves in ways that advantage some members over others. When it comes to decision-making, the more articulate, charismatic or knowledgeable are likely to dominate.”<sup>208</sup> In the same vein, CrimethInc. construes democracy as an obstacle to free initiative, for individuals as well as for minority groups, an analysis that openly challenges Graeber’s affirmative account of the democracy entailing the Occupy Movement. CrimethInc. reports how the consensus process here encouraged people into “treating it as a formal means of government—while anarchists who shared Graeber’s framework found themselves outside the consensus reality of their fellow Occupiers.”<sup>209</sup>

The contemporary anarchist critique of the direct, small-scale version of democracy clearly resembles, again, Errico Malatesta, particularly regarding his evaluation of the Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists. The Platform was initiated by several prominent anarchists, such as Nestor Makhno and Peter Arshinov, in 1926,<sup>210</sup> during the emerging context of the Bolshevik Soviet Union, in which the anar-

<sup>205</sup>For a contextualizing account of Abdullah Öcalan’s theory of democratic confederalism (forged with clear reference to Murray Bookchin), see Michael Knapp et al., 2016, *Revolution in Rojava: Democratic Autonomy and Women’s Liberation in Syrian Kurdistan* (London: Pluto Press), 36–46.

<sup>206</sup>Gordon, 2016.

<sup>207</sup>The Invisible Committee, 2007, “Get Going!,” in *The Coming Insurrection*, The Anarchist Library: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/comite-invisible-the-coming-insurrection>, accessed, 2017-10-10.

<sup>208</sup>Ruth Kinna, 2005, *Anarchism: A Beginner’s Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld), 115.

<sup>209</sup>CrimethInc. Ex-Workers Collective, 2017, 113, 34–46.

<sup>210</sup>See Nestor Makhno and “Delo Truda”, “The Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists”, *Nestormakhno.info*: [http://www.nestormakhno.info/english/new-platform/org\\_plat.htm](http://www.nestormakhno.info/english/new-platform/org_plat.htm), accessed 2017-10-03.

chist movement in general, and Makhno's militarized resistance in particular, was heavily repressed.<sup>211</sup> Many anarchists that participated in the February Revolution, in 1917, feared that the result of the Bolshevik-led October Revolution would threaten the workers' councils, the *soviets*. Gregory Maksimov, one of these critical anarchist voices, declared that the soviets "have been transformed from revolutionary organizations into organizations of stagnation, of the domination of the majority over the minority, and obstacles on the road towards the further development of progress and freedom."<sup>212</sup> In contrast to the Bolshevik version of democracy, Maksimov argued that "true democracy, developed to its logical extreme, can become a reality only under the conditions of a communal confederation. This democracy is Anarchy."<sup>213</sup>

As repression from the communist regime unfolded, Makhno and many other anarchists who took up arms against proletarian state power came to see an Organizational Platform as a necessity for effective resistance. Though various anarchists subscribed to this vision, many others, in particular Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, and, not least, Errico Malatesta, were openly critical towards the platformists.<sup>214</sup> In an open letter to Makhno, Malatesta does not spare his critique:

Your organization, or your managerial organs, may be composed of anarchists but they would only become nothing other than a government. Believing, in completely good faith, that they are necessary to the triumph of the revolution, they would, as a priority, make sure that they were well placed enough and strong enough to impose their will. They would therefore create armed corps for material defense and a bureaucracy for carrying out their commands and in the process they would paralyze the popular movement and kill the revolution.<sup>215</sup>

In an earlier published comment on the Organizational Platform, which "all comes down to a pure majority system, to pure parliamentarianism," Malatesta takes the opportunity to elaborate his critique of government as such. "It is well known that anarchists do not accept majority government

<sup>211</sup> See for instance Paul Avrich, 1973, "Introduction," in *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*, ed. Paul Avrich (London: Thames and Hudson), 23–28.

<sup>212</sup> Gregory Maksimov, *ibid.* [1917], "The Soviets of the Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies," 103.

<sup>213</sup> 2015 [1927], *The Program of Anarcho-Syndicalism* (Guillotina Press), 38.

<sup>214</sup> See Avrich and Avrich, 2012, 349–50.

<sup>215</sup> Malatesta, 1995 [1929], "Malatesta's Reply to Nestor Makhno," 110.

(democracy),” Malatesta asserts, “any more than they accept government by the few (*aristocracy, oligarchy*, or dictatorship by one class or party) nor that of one individual (*autocracy, monarchy*, or personal dictatorship). Thousands of times anarchists have criticized so-called majority government, which anyway in practice always leads to domination by a small minority.” An anarchist organization, Malatesta concludes, must ensure that “individual members can express any opinion and use any tactic.”<sup>216</sup> On the same critical note, a key participant in the Makhnovist movement, Voline (Vsevolod Mikhailovich Eikhenbaum), eventually came to the conclusion that, in order to keep a revolution alive, “it is necessary that this existence, the existing society itself, become impossible; that it be ruined from the top to bottom—its economy, its politics, its manners, customs, and prejudices.”<sup>217</sup> And so, at this point, we begin to grasp the very *anagnorisis* of our Impossible Argument.

### *The Impossible Argument*

Acknowledging the reclaimed critique of democracy, with its close linkage to classical anarchist thought, we encounter something of an anarchist twist to The Impossible Argument. We recall how Malatesta accentuates this very “fundamental principle of anarchism—namely, that no-one should have the desire or the means to oppress others and force others to work for them.”<sup>218</sup> Malatesta accordingly states that

*Anarchy* is a form of living together in society; a society in which people live as brothers and sisters without being able to oppress or exploit others ... *Anarchism* is the method of reaching anarchy, through freedom, without government—that is, without those authoritarian institutions that impose their will on others by force, even if it happens to be in a good cause.<sup>219</sup>

Malatesta is, of course, well aware that “so many honest opponents believe Anarchy a thing impossible.”<sup>220</sup> Yet it is true, Malatesta declares,

<sup>216</sup> 2014 [1927], “A Project of Anarchist Organization,” 488, 90.

<sup>217</sup> Voline, 1974 [1947], “Book 2, Part 1, Chapter 2: Causes and Consequences of the Bolshevik Conception,” in *The Unknown Revolution*, ed. Voline (Detroit: Black & Red), 198.

<sup>218</sup> Malatesta, 1995 [1926], “Communism and Individualism (Comment on an Article by Max Nettlau),” 14.

<sup>219</sup> 1995 [1925], “Note on Hz’s Article, ‘Science and Anarchy,’” 52.

<sup>220</sup> 2014 [1899], “Toward Anarchy,” 299.

that anarchism is “always fighting to make possible what today seems impossible.”<sup>221</sup> As implied by the title of Peter Marshall’s history of anarchist thought and action, *Demanding the Impossible*,<sup>222</sup> the anarchist struggle aims for no less. Yet anarchists demand nothing from those entitled to govern, but from themselves. In this vein, Jacques Rancière, too, infers that even for anarchist predecessors in 1830s France, “the question was not to demand the impossible, but to realize it themselves.”<sup>223</sup> Anarchism, in this respect, becomes a political struggle to challenge and extend the boundaries of political possibility.

But The Impossible Argument also means to impede and disable—to make impossible—all forms of rule; and that is its *anagnorisis*. “Anarchy is our only safe polity,” Paul Goodman pessimistically declares; “people are not to be trusted, so prevent the concentration of power.”<sup>224</sup> CrimethInc. Ex-Workers’ Collective, endeavoring to reclaim the anarchist critique of democracy, likewise invokes this Impossible Argument:

If we wish to maximize autonomy for everyone rather than simply seeking it for ourselves, we have to create a social context in which no one is able to accumulate institutional power over anyone else. We have to create *anarchy*. ... It is not a matter of governing in a completely participatory manner, but of making it impossible to impose any form of rule.<sup>225</sup>

In the very same vein, The Impossible Argument, as formulated by Errico Malatesta, contends that, above all, “it must be made impossible for some to impose themselves on, and sponge off, the vast majority by material force.”<sup>226</sup> Malatesta argues that “we want not just to improve the institutions that now exist, but to destroy them utterly, abolish all and every form of power by man over man and all parasitism, of whatever kind, on human labor.”<sup>227</sup> In order to reach the political moment in which “no one may exploit anybody else’s labor,”<sup>228</sup> and “no one could impose his wishes

<sup>221</sup> 2014 [1930], “Against the Constituent Assembly as against the Dictatorship,” 509.

<sup>222</sup> Marshall, 2008 [1992].

<sup>223</sup> Jacques Rancière, 2012, *Proletarian Nights: The Workers’ Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Verso), ix.

<sup>224</sup> Goodman, 2011 [1972], “Freedom and Autonomy,” 31–32.

<sup>225</sup> CrimethInc. Ex-Workers Collective, 2017, 70, 42.

<sup>226</sup> Malatesta, 1995 [1924], “Democracy and Anarchy,” 79.

<sup>227</sup> 1995 [1924], “Anarchism and Reforms,” 80.

<sup>228</sup> 2016 [1897], “Anarchism and Socialism: The Parliamentary Socialists’ Refrain,” 252.

on others by force,”<sup>229</sup> Malatesta states that anarchism is all about “seeking to destroy every trace of privilege,”<sup>230</sup> but then also to “remain opposed to any embryonic government,”<sup>231</sup> “the re-establishment of the police and the armed forces.”<sup>232</sup> Malatesta declares polemically:

This is our mission: demolishing, or contributing to demolish any political power whatsoever, with all the series of repressive forces that support it; preventing, or trying to prevent new governments and new repressive forces from arising.<sup>233</sup>

The Impossible Argument, then, aims not only to end exploitation and authority for good, but also to encumber those very social tendencies. This notion resembles Bakunin’s call to “destroy all government and make government impossible everywhere.”<sup>234</sup> It should however be noted that Malatesta opposes Bakunin’s infamous attempt to impede governmental regrowth through a secret, underground organization of exclusively dedicated revolutionaries.<sup>235</sup> Instead, Malatesta urges that to abolish the state, the *gendarme*, “for good, and not see him reappear under another name and in different guise, we have to know how to live without him—that is, without violence, without oppression, without injustice, without privilege.”<sup>236</sup>

This is, I believe, a keystone of The Impossible Argument: the construction that tandems destruction, the idea that revolution is two-sided. The anarchist revolution, in Malatesta’s political thinking, “is the creation of new living institutions, new groupings, new social relationships; it is the destruction of privileges and monopolies.”<sup>237</sup> Advancing on Bakunin’s renowned declaration that “the desire for destruction is also a creative

<sup>229</sup> 1965 [1922], “Article Excerpt from *Umanità Nova*, October 7, 1922,” 171.

<sup>230</sup> 1965 [1921], “Article Excerpt from *Umanità Nova*, September 6, 1921,” 165.

<sup>231</sup> 1995 [1925], “Note on Hz’s Article, ‘Science and Anarchy,’” 38.

<sup>232</sup> 2014 [1899], “An Anarchist Programme,” 292.

<sup>233</sup> 2014 [1922], “Revolution in Practice,” 421.

<sup>234</sup> Quoted in Sam Dolgoff, 2013 [1973], “Introduction,” in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, ed. Sam Dolgoff (London: Routledge), 10.

<sup>235</sup> Bakunin, 2013 [1869], “The Program of the International Brotherhood,” 148–55. For a critical evaluation of this particular strand in Bakunin’s thought, see Marshall, 2008 [1992], 271–77.

<sup>236</sup> Malatesta, 2014 [1926], “Let’s Demolish – and Then?,” 478.

<sup>237</sup> 1965 [1924], “Article excerpt from *Pensiero e Volantà*, June 15, 1924,” 153.

desire,”<sup>238</sup> Malatesta declares that “we must not destroy anything that satisfies human need however badly—until we have something better to put in its place.”<sup>239</sup> If not, Malatesta warns, “we shall leave such matters to the ‘leaders’ and we shall have a new government.”<sup>240</sup> This dual notion of anarchist resistance signifies, for Malatesta, “a kind of vicious circle. To transform society men must be changed, to transform men, society must be changed.”<sup>241</sup>

In fact, this tandem characteristic of anarchist resistance—that of destruction and construction—echoes throughout the anarchist tradition. Kropotkin, for one, points out that “it is not enough to destroy. We must also know how to build.”<sup>242</sup> Inspired by Kropotkin’s writings, the influential pamphlet “Declaration of the Korean Revolution,” authored by Shin Chaeho,<sup>243</sup> similarly declares that “we destroy in order not just to destroy but to construct. If we do not know how to construct, that means we do not know how to destroy ... destruction and construction are inseparable, not two but one.”<sup>244</sup> The urge to destroy, to “smash all forms of domination,” as Carol Ehrlich came to put it in the late 1970s, “is not just a slogan, it is the hardest task of all. It means that we have to see through the spectacle, destroy the stage sets, know that there are other ways of doing things.”<sup>245</sup> This very notion, today labeled as constructive resistance or prefigurative politics, is actually key for the anarchist tradition, though it was generally strong in the early twentieth century, and particularly crystallized in the writings of Gustav Landauer:

<sup>238</sup> I here use the movement-circulating quote, from James Guillaume’s well-known biography on Bakunin, though Sam Dolgoff’s direct translation reads “the passion for destruction is a constructive passion, too!” See Guillaume, 2013 [1907], 24; Mikhail Bakunin, *ibid.* [1842], “The Reaction in Germany,” 75.

<sup>239</sup> Malatesta, 2014 [1925], “Gradualism,” 473.

<sup>240</sup> 2014 [1926], “Let’s Demolish – and then?,” 479.

<sup>241</sup> 2014 [1899], “An Anarchist Programme,” 284.

<sup>242</sup> Pyotr Kropotkin, 2002 [1896], “Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Ideal,” in *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*, ed. Roger Baldwin (Mineola: Dover publications), 136.

<sup>243</sup> See Dongyoun Hwang, 2017, *Anarchism in Korea: Independence, Transnationalism, and the Question of National Development, 1919–1984* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 23, 95.

<sup>244</sup> Shin Chaeho, 2005 [1923], “Declaration of the Korean Revolution,” in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas. Vol. 1, from Anarchy to Anarchism (300ce to 1939)*, ed. Robert Graham (Montreal: Black Rose Books), 374–76.

<sup>245</sup> Carol Ehrlich, 1996 [1977], “Socialism, Anarchism and Feminism,” in *Reinventing Anarchy, Again*, ed. Howard Ehrlich (London: AK Press), 185.



The state is a social relationship; a certain way of people relating to one another. It can be destroyed by creating new social relationships; i.e., by people relating to one another differently. The absolute monarch said: I am the state. We, who we have imprisoned ourselves in the absolute state, must realize the truth: *we* are the state! And we will be the state as long as we are nothing different; as long as we have not yet created the institutions necessary for a true community.<sup>246</sup>

This excerpt illustrates how Landauer, as sociologist Richard Day argues, construes the state—and capitalism—not primarily as structures, but as sets of relations.<sup>247</sup> Destruction, then, becomes inseparable from the process of creation. As noted by Alexandre Christoyannopoulos and Matthew Adams, this constructive notion is particularly elaborated by spiritual and religious branches of the anarchist tradition, factions that strive toward “a rejection of the state, call for an economy of mutual aid, present a denunciation of oppressive authorities that often includes religious institutions.”<sup>248</sup> The constructive conception is also found in Bart de Ligt’s famous anarcho-pacifist aphorism “the greater the violence, the weaker the revolution”; revolution here denotes “social construction,” the process of “creating an entirely new collective order in every branch of production and distribution.”<sup>249</sup> This spiritually coded, radical pacifism draws, in turn, on the politico-theological thinking of Lev Tolstoy.<sup>250</sup> Following the anarchist assumption that “there could not be worse

<sup>246</sup> Gustav Landauer, 2010 [1910], “Weak Statesmen, Weaker People!,” in *Revolution and Other Writings: A Political Reader*, ed. Gabriel Kuhn (Oakland: PM Press), 214.

<sup>247</sup> Richard Day, 2005, *Gramsci Is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (London: Pluto Press), 123–26.

<sup>248</sup> Alexandre Christoyannopoulos and Matthew Adams, 2017, “Anarchism and Religion: Mapping an Increasingly Fruitful Landscape,” in *Essays in Anarchism and Religion: Volume I*, ed. Alexandre Christoyannopoulos and Matthew Adams (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press), 1–2.

<sup>249</sup> Bart de Ligt, 1989 [1937], *The Conquest of Violence: An Essay on War and Revolution* (London: Pluto Press), 75, 167–68.

<sup>250</sup> It should be noted that, like Godwin, Stirner, Thoreau, and Gandhi, Tolstoy did not affiliate himself with the anarchist movement (which he associated with violence). Nevertheless, Tolstoy’s was indeed a prominent and influential voice against the notion of government, which has made him imperative for anarchist thought. Following Paul Eltzbacher’s list of key anarchist thinkers (1960 [1911]), Max Nettlau (2000 [1932], 250–54) locates Tolstoy alongside Bakunin and Kropotkin, just as Woodcock (1962, 398, 474) and Marshall (2008 [1992], 362–83) recognize Tolstoy’s profound contribution to the anarchist tradition.

violence than that of Authority,”<sup>251</sup> Tolstoy craves complete government abolition, calling for “neither congresses nor conferences, nor treaties, nor courts of arbitration, but the destruction of those instruments of violence which are called Governments, and from which humanity’s greatest evils flow.”<sup>252</sup> At the same time—and this is key for Tolstoyan anarcho-pacifism—government is resisted “not in setting up fresh violence, but in abolishing whatever renders governmental violence possible.”<sup>253</sup>

We here recognize the defining contours of The Impossible Argument; abolition of government is a permanent struggle, a continuous impeding of authority growing anew. Then again, The Impossible Argument, in its vivid articulation of various strands of anarchist thought, is not some monolithic approach to democracy. It is *one* approach, among others, nurtured within the anarchist tradition. Nonetheless, as we will see in the following, concluding chapter of this book, The Impossible Argument facilitates our critical examination of democratic conflict; it articulates the supposedly impossible—an anarchist critique of radical democracy.

<sup>251</sup> Lev Tolstoy, 1990 [1900], “On Anarchy,” in *Government Is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism*, ed. David Stephens (London: Phoenix Press), 68.

<sup>252</sup> 1990 [1900], “Patriotism and Government,” 86–87.

<sup>253</sup> 1990 [1900], “The Slavery of Our Times,” 145.



## The Impossible Argument to Radical Democracy

**Abstract** This concluding chapter puts in dialogue anarchism’s impossible wickerwork of critical and constructive ideas, and radical-democratic theorization of democratic conflict. By linking Husby’s governors–governed conflict to anarchism’s polygonal relationship between democracy and anarchy, this chapter offers to the school of radical democracy “The Impossible Argument”: a compound anarchist critique, an urge to make governmental rule impossible.

**Keywords** Radical democracy • Jacques Rancière • Anarchism • Conflict

We have seen that the anarchist tradition, though internally heterogeneous and historically discontinuous, nurtures a profound critique against each and every form of governmental embodiment. From classical anarchism stems a critique of authority, representation, and majority rule. Post-classical anarchist thought, however, disparately construes radicalized, direct democracy as synonymous with, or as a step toward, anarchy. These divergent strands of anarchist thought are both siphoned by anarchists today, dynamically activated in relation to the political issues at hand. We will now link that compound anarchist critique—that impossible argument—to the scholarly field of radical democratic theory. And the nodal point in this linkage is our case study of democratic conflict—between

governors and governed—played out in Husby, the socially vigorous city district of Stockholm, politically condemned by the democratic state of Sweden.

The Husby community, we recall from Chap. 2, demonstrates a dynamic and most vibrant political activity: people are engaged in a variety of groups and organizations, aiming to advance local society. With the terminology of Jacques Rancière, the radical democratic theorist who conceptualizes precisely these societal processes, we recognize how *democratic life* deeply infuses the Husby community. That democratic life subsequently produces, following the Rancièrian analysis, a conflict with the *democratic state*. Over the past decades, interviewed Husby residents recount, numerous attempts have been made to influence local decision making. The state and municipal governors—in Rancière’s scheme contrasted against the governed residents—have continuously ignored, disqualified, or repressed the democratic life in Husby. This dismissive response conveys what Rancière calls the *hatred of democracy*; democratic life beyond the state is not only excessive, but also a direct threat to the defining contours of the democratic state: the division between the governors and the governed.

In May 2013, that conflictual relation became markedly discernible, in the streets of Husby. After the violent embodiment of the armed state—the police—had been attacked, it answered with one of the most forceful police interventions in Swedish history. The people of Husby soon took to the streets to prevent further violent confrontations. When people were hurt—by police batons, dog bites, and infantilizing racist insults—a temporary legitimization was established; collective experiences set a local-historical context for talking about attacking the police, and the state, in defensive terms. The so-called Husby Riots became an intensification of an experienced historical antagonism: the conflictual relation between governors and governed. In the Rancièrian scheme, this conflict is located at the very heart of democracy. And quite tellingly, the Swedish state responded to the Husby events, not by acknowledging and empowering its democratic life, but by intensifying repressive measures and supplying the police with additional resources.<sup>1</sup> In Rancièrian terms, the conflict

<sup>1</sup>For instance, the police have been allowed to increase camera surveillance and use sound detectors in Husby in order to prevent further outbursts of what they label “social unrest.” See Länsstyrelsen i Stockholm, 2017-11-10, *Tillstånd till kameraövervakning. Beteckning 2112-24812-2017*; Kammarätten i Stockholm, 2016-06-09, *Dom gällande kameraövervakning vid Tenstaplän och Tenstagången i Stockholm. Mål 7392-15*.

between democratic life and democratic state thus continues, in Husby, Stockholm, Sweden, and all across the nation-states that define our political realities today.

Radical democratic theory, as elaborated by Jacques Rancière, here offers an important perspective; we are given critical tools to detect the (im)possibilities of forging democracy into a non-hierarchical project. Our Rancièrian analysis of the Husby case reveals how beyond-state-politics undermines the governors–governed divide, manifesting, in this exact sense, a threat to democracy itself. Interviewed Husby residents portray how they are deprived of self-determination, one interviewee expressing this in a pointedly cynical way: “That is our beautiful democracy.” Such a descriptive, indicative critique of democracy is indeed valuable for anyone that craves radical social change. We have seen this indicative critique echoing throughout the anarchist tradition, eventually finding its way to the Copenhagen Summit, where our confined demonstration march sarcastically chanted “This is what democracy looks like!”

Radical democratic theory thereby resembles an anarchist critique of democracy. But aside from unmasking the very boundaries of democracy, radical-democratic scholars also, and this quite explicitly, defend democracy’s pluralistic, direct, and participatory dimensions; the political incarnation becomes a call for *more* democracy, of a radicalization of what we already have. And such a call typically translates into an inversion of the governors–governed relationship; radicalization means acknowledging the very root of democracy, namely, the people’s rule (*dēmokratía*). It is precisely here, I believe, that we may further our radical-democratic analysis, by exploring the variety of approaches to democracy, offered by the sundry history of anarchist thought.

We recall from Chap. 3 that the anarchist tradition is notably heterogeneous, holding divergent ideas of democracy as a rebranding of, a step toward, or a threat to, anarchy. Nonetheless, the anarchist tradition is inherently skeptical toward power grabbing *within* democratic states, whatever the political intensions. This political line clearly resembles Rancière’s radical-democratic theorization, exploring the very drive to escape government, to withdraw from domination, to be ungovernable.<sup>2</sup> Yet in radical democratic theory, this anarchist critique is usually seen as an obstacle to political advances. Chantal Mouffé, attacking what she calls “exodus theo-

<sup>2</sup> See Jacques Rancière, 2012, *Proletarian Nights: The Workers’ Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Verso), iv.

rists”, polemically asks how we can pretend “that it is possible to make a revolution without taking power.”<sup>3</sup> In place of social movement “exodus,” Mouffe advocates a “profound transformation, not a desertion, of existing institutions.”<sup>4</sup>

While anarchistic, beyond-state politics—from the Mouffian view on radical democracy—becomes a most impossible argument, radical-democratic theorization also carries alternative political imperatives. To flesh out this line of thought, we have turned to the precise ideological tradition that advocates, not left-populist urges for state power, but further exploration into the indefinite realm of the impossible, an open-ended journey toward a free world of many worlds, so far from, yet so very near, the world as we know it today.

Yet a critique of democracy is indeed quite impossible to articulate within a democratic discourse, the political reality in which the anarchist tradition produces plural responses. Anarchist thought typically refrains from demand-making politics and indirect government action, instead acquiring direct action and political self-determination. This political starting point, when applied in dissimilar local contexts, allows boundless possibilities for social organization. Direct decision making here finds, through anarchist thought, resonance with the participatory dimension of democracy. This particular strand of thought—the anarchist reclamation of democracy—clearly escapes pejorative accusations of being outlandishly against decent societies (understood in terms of democracy). By redressing anarchism as *radical* democracy, it becomes possible to formulate a critique of seemingly misguided yet dominant forms of democracy.

Furthermore, the radical-democratic notion of allowing dissensus, in contrast to the deliberative democratic model aimed at consensus-seeking, is indeed reflected in anarchist thought. Simon Springer even suggests that “an anarchic model of radical democracy, where agonism replaces antagonism, is precisely the realization of non-violent politics.”<sup>5</sup> CrimethInc. similarly suggests, though from a different position, that councils and assemblies are not miniature bodies of government, but “spaces of encounter,” dynamic fora that allow “for differences to arise, conflicts to play out,

<sup>3</sup> Chantal Mouffe, 2013, *Agonistics: Thinking of the World Politically* (London: Verso), 118.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv, 10.

<sup>5</sup> “Public Space as Emancipation: Meditations on Anarchism, Radical Democracy, Neoliberalism and Violence,” *Antipode* 43, no. 2 (2011): 551.

and transformations to occur as different social constellations converge and diverge.”<sup>6</sup> By recognizing the pluralist and participatory dimensions of democracy, understood in spatial rather than political terms, anarchism clearly aligns with open-ended explorations into radical democracy. On this note, anarchist thought also produces an understanding of democracy as a step, however tiny, toward anarchy. This position, resembling critical evaluations of democracy’s limitations, yet acknowledging its subversive dimensions, thus makes it possible to formulate a critique of democracy, that is, democracy as we know it today.

At the same time, anarchist thought also deliberately concedes to accusations of being anti-democratic. Classical anarchism opposes democracy for its reliance on *authority*, a principle of domination establishing an undesirable and unnecessary social hierarchy—the division between governors and governed. Classical anarchist thought, now revisited by contemporary anarchists, also warns that whenever democracy extends the defining boundaries of the *demos*, other groups will inevitably be excluded. The anarchist critique of *representative* democracy is advanced by the anarcho-feminist disbelief in the emancipatory potential of women’s suffrage and an individualist critique of *majority rule*. And the revisited, *reclaimed critique* extends this notion: it attacks democratic exclusion of non-human life, and embraces struggles of ungovernable minorities and individuals.

We here find an anarchist critique of democracy to resonate with Rancière’s notion of endemic conflict between democratic life and democratic state. Then again, for Rancière, democracy also means political inversion; it asserts “the power of the people, which is not the power of the population or of the majority, but the power of anyone at all.”<sup>7</sup> Though subversive and threatening to those temporarily in power, this people’s rule does not challenge the deeper political setting. Miguel Abensour’s radical-democratic theorization goes further: it armors an insurgent democracy with “the possibility of annihilating the division between governors and governed, or of reducing it to almost nothing.”<sup>8</sup> We recall how this exact social divide is being addressed, when the classical anarchist

<sup>6</sup> CrimethInc. Ex-Workers Collective, 2017, *From Democracy to Freedom: The Difference between Government and Self-Determination* (Salem: CrimethInc. Far East), 72, 75.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Rancière, 2006, *Hatred of Democracy*, trans. Steve Corcoran (London: Verso), 49.

<sup>8</sup> Miguel Abensour, 2011 [1997], *Democracy against the State: Marx and the Machiavellian Moment*, trans. Max Blechman (Cambridge: Polity), 96, xxx–xli.

critique of democracy is reclaimed, in opposition to the strand of anarchist thought that construes anarchy in terms of radical democracy.

Returning to Husby, where residents repeatedly find themselves excluded from democratic, decision-making procedures, the immediate political response is naturally to extend the *demos*, by also including those located at the margins of society. Radicalizing democracy would mean deepened and more locally rooted political influence. An anarchist critique of democracy, however, goes deeper: it attacks the motor of democratic conflict, the antagonism between government and those it tries to govern; it demands no less than making governmental rule impossible.

The Impossible Argument thereby disqualifies the very political prerequisites of democracy, the struggle over which group will rule over the other. Anarchism, with its various strands of thought, has a completely different motif of political struggle; the ambition is not only to avoid—but to abolish—the principle of authority. And that *destruction* of authority entails, in the anarchist tradition, an explorative *construction* of anarchy. In order to prevent—to make impossible—any embodiment of authority, anarchy must be practiced in the here and now. Surely, endeavors to organize society-beyond-the-state will, most certainly, as sorely experienced in Husby, become a threat to those that attempt to govern; anarchism attacks the authority that legitimizes governance.

The anarchist call to abolish state power, along with intersected social institutions of hierarchic dominion, thereby combines a persistent struggle *against authority*, the practice of ruling, with a continuous struggle *for anarchy*, the social order in which ruling becomes impossible. It is my belief that The Impossible Argument, in this compound sense, may facilitate future advances into the (im)possibilities of radical democracy.



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