

# THE NEW FORMULATION

AN ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN REVIEW OF BOOKS



February 2003

Volume 2, Number 1

Volume Two, Issue One  
February 2003

Editor: Chuck Morse

Copy Editors: Matt Hoffmann, Erin Royster, Matt Stoner, Shanti Salas, with help from Paul Glavin and Nur Yavuz

Cover Illustration: "Viñeta para Invitación" by Leopoldo Méndez, 1944.

**The New Formulation**

2620 Second Avenue, #4B

San Diego, CA

92103 - U.S.A.

E-mail: [cwmorse@newyorknet.net](mailto:cwmorse@newyorknet.net)

On the Internet: <http://flag.blackened.net/nf/index.htm>

Biannual Subscriptions: \$7 in the United States and \$10 elsewhere. Please make checks payable to *Charles Morse*.

© 2003 The New Formulation

**Statement to Contributors:**

Contributions are encouraged. This journal is restricted to comparative book reviews. Reviews must examine the failings and virtues of books for a contemporary anarchist theory and politics. Anarchism is understood here as a doctrine seeking the abolition of capitalism, the nation-state, and hierarchy generally, and the creation of a cooperative economy, a decentralized confederation of communes or municipalities, and a culture of liberation. The deadline for the next issue is July 1, 2003.

Each review must treat at least two books and one must have been published in the previous two years. In some cases, reviews of works in other media (such as film) will be accepted.

Reviews of two books should be between 2,500 to 3,000 words and reviews of three should be 3,500 to 4,000 words.

## Contents

<b>Program</b>	1
<b>The State in Hyper-Drive: the Post-September 11<sup>th</sup> U.S.</b> by Paul Glavin	2
Review of <i>Silencing Political Dissent: How Post-September 11<sup>th</sup> Anti-Terrorism Measures Threaten our Civil Liberties</i> by Nancy Chang, <i>The Terrorism Trap: September 11<sup>th</sup> and Beyond</i> by Michael Parenti, and <i>Terrorism and War</i> by Howard Zinn	
<b>Chasing the Tornado</b> by Uri Gordon	13
Review of <i>The Trajectory of Change</i> by Michael Albert, <i>Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising</i> by Starhawk, and <i>Change the World Without Taking Power</i> by John Holloway	
<b>The Writer as Freedom Fighter, The Freedom Fighter as Writer</b> by Ramor Ryan	23
Review of <i>True Crimes: Rodolfo Walsh - The Life and Times of a Radical Intellectual</i> by Michael McCaughan and <i>Our Word is Our Weapon: The Collected Writings of Subcomandante Marcos</i> by Juana Ponce de Leon (editor)	
<b>Towards an Anti-Authoritarian Critique of Marriage</b> by Priscilla Yamin	33
Review of <i>Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation</i> by Nancy Cott, <i>The Wedding Complex: Forms of Belonging in Modern American Culture</i> by Elizabeth Freeman, and <i>Unmarried to Each Other: The Essential Guide to Living Together as an Unmarried Couple</i> by Dorian Solot and Marshall Miller	
<b>An Anarchist Terror</b> by Rebecca DeWitt	42
Review of <i>Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies</i> by Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton (editors) and <i>Slow Food: Collected Thoughts on Taste, Tradition and the Honest Pleasures of Food</i> by Carlo Petrini with Ben Watson and Slow Food Editore (editors)	
<b>Towards a Vibrant &amp; Broad African-Based Anarchism</b> by Ashanti Alston	49
Review of <i>Post-Colonial African Theory and Practice: Wole Soyinka's Anarchism</i> by Joseph Walunywa and <i>African Anarchism: The History of a Movement</i> by Sam Mbah and I.E. Igariwey	
<b>Latin American Anarchism</b> by Chuck Morse	58
Review of <i>Cronica Anarquista de la Subversion Olvidada</i> by Oscar Ortiz and <i>Contribución a una Historia del Anarquismo en América Latina</i> by Luis Vitale, <i>Anarquismo y Anarcosindicalismo en América Latina</i> by Alfredo Gómez, and <i>Anarquistas en América Latina</i> by David Viñas	
<b>Anarchism and the Argentine Labor Movement: Two New Studies</b> by Fernando López	67
Review of <i>Anarquistas: Cultura y Política Libertaria en Buenos Aires 1890-1910</i> by Juan Suriano and <i>La Estrategia de la Clase Obrera 1936</i> by Nicolás Iñigo Carrera,	
<b>(Interview) Resistencia Libertaria: Anarchist Opposition to the Last Argentine Dictatorship</b> by Chuck Morse	75
<b>Notes About Contributors</b>	89
<b>Publications Received</b>	90

## Program

Welcome to *The New Formulation: An Anti-Authoritarian Review of Books*. This biannual journal contains comparative book reviews examining the value of recent publications to the development of a contemporary anarchist theory and politics.

The purpose of this journal is to help clarify the distinctness of an anarchist approach to social affairs, to provide a forum for the integration of new works and insights into the anarchist project, and to give authors struggling to redefine the tradition a setting in which to share their research and reflections.

Although the anarchist movement is currently enjoying a renewed influence on social movements and political life generally, there is a compelling need to clarify the principles, goals, and strategies that constitute the anarchist perspective. This is a precondition of the movement's ability to become genuinely revolutionary and we hope this journal, and other sympathetic projects, can help facilitate this clarification.

Contributions are welcome. All book reviews must examine the failings and virtues of books for a contemporary anarchist theory and politics. Anarchism is understood here as a doctrine seeking the abolition of capitalism, the nation-state, and hierarchy generally, and the creation of a cooperative economy, a decentralized confederation of communes or municipalities, and a culture of liberation. The deadline for the next issue is July 1, 2003.

Each review must treat at least two books and one must have been published in the previous two years. In some cases, reviews of works in other media (such as film) will be accepted.

Subscriptions are \$7 in the United States and \$10 elsewhere. Please make checks payable to *Charles Morse*.

**The New Formulation**  
2620 Second Avenue, #4B  
San Diego, CA  
92103 - U.S.A.

Paul Glavin

## The State in Hyper-Drive: the Post-September 11<sup>th</sup> U.S.

*Silencing Political Dissent: How Post-September 11<sup>th</sup> Anti-Terrorism Measures Threaten our Civil Liberties*

By Nancy Chang

New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002

*The Terrorism Trap: September 11<sup>th</sup> and Beyond*

By Michael Parenti

San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2002

*Terrorism and War*

By Howard Zinn (edited by Anthony Arnove)

New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002

*“The freedom of working people, the freedom of black people has always depended on the struggles of people themselves against the government. So, if we look at it historically, we certainly cannot depend on governments to maintain our liberties. We have to depend on our own organized efforts.”*

*-Howard Zinn, Terrorism and War*

For those of us living in the United States the world has changed drastically since the tragic events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, as it has for millions living in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. The Bush Administration has used the events of that day to grossly expand the power of the state to intervene in the lives of people both overseas and here at home.<sup>1</sup> There is now public discussion of initiating a level of surveillance against the U.S. population, using “War is Peace”-type rhetoric, previously confined to dystopian novels such as *1984*. U.S. citizens are being held virtually incommunicado as “enemy combatants,” denied all constitutional rights.<sup>2</sup> Some six hundred other “enemy combatants” are being held at

---

1. The list of foreign military interventions since September 11<sup>th</sup> is extensive. It includes not only Afghanistan, but also Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The U.S. military has also returned to the Philippines with 660 Special Forces troops meant to train the Philippine Army ostensibly to fight Abu Sayyaf, a guerrilla force of some one hundred to two hundred fighters. The U.S. military and the CIA have returned to the Horn of Africa, with some eight hundred Special Forces and over 1,500 troops, who are conducting exercises in the impoverished nation of Djibouti. It is from here that the CIA launched its Predator Drone equipped with a Hellfire missile that killed five people in a car in Yemen, including a supposed member of Al Qaeda and a U.S. citizen. Also, the U.S. military is conducting exercises in Kuwait, a country which has turned over one quarter of its territory to the U.S. military, closing it off to its own citizens.

Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, outside of international rules established to govern the treatment of Prisoners of War. And finally, up to two thousand people (the government will not say exactly how many) have been rounded up and indefinitely detained.

Prior to the attacks, the movement against capitalist globalization and the anarchist-wing of this new movement were in ascendancy. The anarchist movement had been enjoying a revival of activity and visibility not experienced in the United States since the 1920s. The events of September 11<sup>th</sup> put the brakes on both the growing anti-globalization movement in the United States and, with it, the anarchist movement. We need to regroup and think through what has changed and what remains the same. We need to figure out the “post-September 11<sup>th</sup> world” so we can begin again to move toward our goals. These three books, in varying ways, help in this process.

Nancy Chang’s book, *Silencing Political Dissent*, is a detailed analysis of recent legislation, such as the USA PATRIOT Act, the detention of up to two thousand immigrants without charges, and various Draconian executive orders and policy changes. She also analyzes other instances when the U.S. government has taken repressive measures in history. Parenti’s book, *The Terrorism Trap*, steps back from the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> to look at the historical and political-economic context in which they took place, including a chapter on Afghanistan’s recent history. Howard Zinn’s book, *Terrorism and War*, is based on a series of interviews conducted by Anthony Arnove, a member of the International Socialist Organization (ISO). Despite his affiliation with this authoritarian organization, Arnove asks well-informed, interesting questions which help to create a well-rounded presentation by Zinn. Of the three, Zinn has the best politics, being a libertarian socialist or anarchist, Chang is a liberal who defends the Constitution and the highest ideals of the United States, and Parenti is an Old Left Marxist.

### **The Assault on Civil Liberties**

Nancy Chang works as a senior litigation attorney for the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), which is basically a left-wing American Civil Liberties Union. Her work there focuses on protecting the First Amendment rights of political activists and the constitutional rights of immigrants, as well as fighting against racial profiling.

A large part of Chang’s book examines the ideological nature of the USA PATRIOT Act. This legislation (hastily drafted and spanning 342 pages) was passed overwhelmingly by Congress just over a month after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, in the near hysterical climate of the time. Chang summarizes her critique succinctly: “First, the Act places our First Amendment rights to freedom of speech and political association in jeopardy by creating a

2. I refer here to Jose Padilla and Yaser Esam Hamdi.
3. Nancy Chang, *Silencing Political Dissent: How Post-September 11<sup>th</sup> Anti-Terrorism Measures Threaten our Civil Liberties* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002), 44.

broad new crime of ‘domestic terrorism’ and denying entry to noncitizens on the basis of ideology. Second, the act reduces our already low expectations of privacy by granting the government enhanced surveillance powers. Third, the act erodes the due process rights of noncitizens by allowing the government to place them in mandatory detentions and deport them from the United States based on political activities that have been recast under the act as terrorist activities.”<sup>3</sup>

Just what constitutes “terrorism” and “terrorist activities” is defined broadly enough to allow the inclusion of just about anyone who might question unlimited state power or the right of the market to rule all social life.<sup>4</sup> The Act creates the crime of “domestic terrorism,” which applies to “acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws” if they “appear to be intended ... to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion.”<sup>5</sup>

The application of the term terrorist to people using extra-legal means to influence government—and corporate—policy has a precedent in the case of the Earth Liberation Front (ELF). The ELF uses illegal means such as arson to cause economic damage to those they see as profiting from damaging the ecosystem. They go out of their way to ensure no humans are endangered when they carry out their acts of economic sabotage, primarily aimed at multinational corporations, yet they are labeled terrorists by the government and corporations, eco-terrorists, to be precise.

Of course history is propelled by illegality. The world we live in today has been shaped by illegal actions, from the Boston Tea Party, to the sit-down strikes in Flint, Michigan in the 1930s, to the Civil Rights campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s. They all were illegal, and one could argue that some of those actions would fit the new definition of terrorism.

In the current climate, political repression will go hand in hand with racism and thus Muslims will be most vulnerable, but so will dissidents in general. As Chang points out, “the government will use this new crime to target Muslim nationals of Arab and South Asian countries, political activists, and dissident organizations for surveillance, infiltration, and prosecution.”<sup>6</sup>

- 
4. One need not qualify as a “terrorist” to warrant government investigation, even under the broad new definition. The government must now simply state that the proposed surveillance is part of an “ongoing criminal investigation” to be granted powers which previously required the showing of probable cause.
  5. Nancy Chang, *Silencing Political Dissent*, 44. (These acts must also occur primarily within the United States)
  6. *Ibid.*, 45.
  7. This number comes from David Cole as reported in his “Enemy Aliens,” *Stanford Law Review* 54 (2002): 951, 958; cited in Chang, *Silencing Political Dissent*, 69.
  8. Chang, *Silencing Political Dissent*, 67.

In fact, the targeting of Muslims began immediately after the attacks, with the detention of well over one thousand people, perhaps exceeding two thousand.<sup>7</sup> As Chang explains: “With little concern for the rule of law, the government has interrogated without suspicion, arrested without charge, and detained without justification numerous individuals who are not involved in terrorist activities but who match this religious and ethnic profile.”<sup>8</sup>

This is racial profiling with a vengeance. Chang documents several examples of how these two thousand people wound up behind bars: “a Moroccan youth was arrested and detained for four months as he sought to enroll in high school when a guidance counselor reported to the police that his tourist visa had expired. In another case, a man from Jordan was arrested and detained as he was seeking to renew his driver’s license. In a third case, an Egyptian man was arrested when a police officer he had flagged down to ask for directions asked to see his passport.”<sup>9</sup> All these folks and more ended up behind bars.

Traditionally, the constitutional protections enjoyed by American citizens have also applied to non-citizens. That is no longer the case, and the change has come about primarily through executive initiative. As Chang reports, “Freshly minted rules permit the INS to detain noncitizens indefinitely without charge, exclude the press and the public from immigration hearings of detainees of special interest, automatically override immigration judges’ decisions ordering the release of detainees on bond, withhold the names of detainees, and subject noncitizens and their representatives to protective orders barring them from disclosing what took place at their immigration hearings.”<sup>10</sup> Those held, some for well over a year, have been subjected to less than humane conditions while incarcerated: “Untold numbers of detainees with no links to terrorism or records of violence, charged with no more than minor immigration violations, have been placed in solitary confinement for months at a stretch. They have been housed in small windowless cells under bright lights that remain on twenty-four hours a day.”<sup>11</sup>

Chang’s book also does an excellent job documenting similar occurrences in U.S. history, going back to the Sedition Act of 1798, up through the Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) in the 1960s and 1970s, and the FBI’s campaign against Central American solidarity activists in the 1980s.

Of particular relevance to the current situation are the Palmer Raids during World War I. Then, like now, an immigrant community was targeted for political repression. At that time, a bomb went off at the home of Attorney General Palmer. The administration of Woodrow Wilson used this as a pretext to attack the radical immigrant community. The U.S. government “interrogated,

---

9. *Ibid.*, 71.

10. *Ibid.*, 68.

11. *Ibid.*, 85.

12. *Ibid.*, 39.



arrested, and detained as many as ten thousand resident aliens who had been targeted based on their political ideology . . . and [this] resulted in the deportation of more than five hundred immigrants, not one of whom was proved to pose a threat to the United States.”<sup>12</sup> Those deported included anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman.

Another important historical precedent outlined by Chang is COINTELPRO, which the USA Patriot Act officially and openly returns us to.<sup>13</sup> Originally established by the FBI in 1956 to investigate the Communist Party, by the 1960s COINTELPRO widened its targets to include the movements of that era. Today we are treated to empty assurances that government surveillance is meant simply to protect Americans, but looking back a mere thirty years—or twenty in the case of the FBI’s attempt to disrupt and stop the movement against U.S. intervention in Central America—we can see what happens when the government increases its attention to those it perceives as a threat. As Chang points out: “In the case of the FBI’s investigation of the black nationalist movement, agents were instructed to ‘prevent groups and leaders from gaining “respectability” by discrediting them’ and prevent the rise of a ‘messiah’ such as Dr. King . . . ‘who could ‘unify and electrify’ the movement.”<sup>14</sup> In fact, from 1963 until his assassination in 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was “the target of a ferocious FBI smear campaign, the goal of which was to ‘neutralize’ him as an effective civil rights leader.”<sup>15</sup>

All of this and more came out when a group of citizens used direct action to uncover the government’s war against dissent. In 1971, the Citizens’ Committee to Investigate the FBI broke into the FBI Field Office in Media, Pennsylvania and turned over seized documents to the press. This led, some five years later, to the Church Committee Congressional Report which “condemned COINTELPRO for having accumulated, in a manner ‘indisputably degrading to a free society,’ massive intelligence information on lawful activity, including protest activity and domestic dissent, and on law-abiding citizens, for purposes ‘related only remotely or not at all to law enforcement and the prevention of violence.’”<sup>16</sup>

Despite the extensive and well-publicized findings of the Church Committee on government surveillance and dirty tricks aimed at its own citizens, the new guidelines proposed by the committee to set limits on the FBI were never enacted. Instead, the FBI itself established new guidelines, which were loosened by Attorney General Smith in 1983 and then replaced by even more permissive guidelines by Attorney General Ashcroft.

---

13. I say officially and openly because the government has never discontinued its surveillance, infiltration, and disruption of radical and dissident organizations. The only difference now is that it’s once again official policy and the results of surveillance can be used in courts.

14. *Ibid.*, 31.

15. *Ibid.*, 30.

16. *Ibid.*, 31.

17. *Ibid.*, 112.

According to Chang, these new guidelines have set “the stage . . . for a replay of the worst abuses of the FBI’s infamous COINTELPRO program.”<sup>17</sup>

Chang documents with depressing detail every change in the law and its interpretation that has occurred since September 11<sup>th</sup>, and the historical and political context within which these new developments take place, making this book well worth reading. Ultimately, however, she believes in the U.S. system and seems to think recent developments are an aberration, rather than the continuation of a long history of control and, when necessary, outright repression.

Throughout the book Chang expresses the opinion that those targeted by the government were “innocent” and not doing anything to deserve the harsh treatment they encountered. The implication is that the state is justified in violating some people’s rights, as long as they do something to deserve such treatment. Chang also seems to subscribe to a liberal belief in the inherent goodness of the U.S. State and its Constitution, which is simply being perverted by the Bush Administration. Despite her liberal naiveté about the history and intentions of the U.S. government, everyone interested in freedom and direct democracy should read Chang’s book.

### **The Political Economy of Imperialism**

Michael Parenti, on the other hand, is in no way naïve about the nature and functioning of the U.S. government. His book, *The Terrorism Trap*, is primarily a political-economic analysis with a strong anti-imperialist perspective. Its argument is crystallized by General Gray, commander of the U.S. Marines in 1990, who said, “The United States must have unimpeded access to established and developing economic markets throughout the world.”<sup>18</sup> Parenti expands and documents how this frank admission by a representative of the U.S. military plays out on the world stage.

Parenti does two things in his book. First, he looks at capitalist economic interests and how they dictate U.S. foreign and domestic policy. Second, he looks at the history of U.S. military intervention to show why the current “War on Terrorism” is unlikely to be any different. In this regard, Parenti’s book is very good. One example may suffice. In 1989, the United States invaded Panama, ostensibly to arrest someone previously on the CIA payroll—sound familiar?—by the name of Manuel Noriega. Once the U.S. military was in control, things in Panama changed: “Unemployment, already high because of the U.S. embargo, climbed to 35 percent as drastic layoffs were imposed on the public sector. U.S. occupation authorities eliminated pension rights and other work benefits, ended public sector subsidies, privatized public services, shut down publicly owned media, and jailed a

18. Cited in Richard Barnet, “The Uses of Force,” *New Yorker*, 29 April 29 1991, 90; also cited in Michael Parenti, *The Terrorism Trap: September 11<sup>th</sup> and Beyond* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2002), 89.

19. Parenti, *The Terrorism Trap*, 86.

number of Panamanian editors and reporters critical of the invasion. The U.S. military arrested labor union leaders and removed some 150 local labor leaders from their elected positions within their unions. Crime, poverty, drug trafficking, and homelessness increased dramatically.”<sup>19</sup> Through this and other examples, Parenti demonstrates clearly and convincingly that “far from being wedded to each other, as U.S. leaders and opinion makers would have us believe, capitalism and democracy are often on a fatal collision course.”<sup>20</sup>

On the one hand, Parenti’s book does not offer much that is new to radicals. For instance, it is the kind of introductory text which points out that while the United States comprises only five percent of the planet’s population it spends more on its military than all the powerful countries in the world combined. On the other hand, it is a decent introduction to the role the United States plays in the world for those in the dark. But his rhetoric may turn off many of those not already convinced, thus limiting his ability to reach a larger audience.

Unfortunately the book also has some serious content problems. For instance, Parenti defends the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and criticizes Noam Chomsky for opposing it.<sup>21</sup> Further, he claims Washington was opposed to the Soviet Union because of “the alternative class system they represented.”<sup>22</sup>

Granted, Parenti’s examination of the history of Afghanistan does away with the myth that the United States was simply responding to the Soviet invasion, by pointing out that the CIA was actively destabilizing Afghanistan before the Soviets invaded. But this in no way legitimates Soviet actions, as Parenti implicitly asserts. In his presentation of the Taliban, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union, it is not so much that he takes a third camp position, which criticizes both sides, but rather he criticizes the United States vis-à-vis these regimes, with the implicit message that they are good while the United States is bad. Parenti is far too apologetic towards regimes that, while outside of U.S. control, do not offer a viable social alternative.

### History, From the Bottom Up

One thing we do not have to worry about with Howard Zinn is his being soft on authoritarians, whether or not they are for or against U.S. foreign policy. Zinn’s take on history and the current crisis is refreshingly clear headed, rational, and optimistic. He is very anti-authoritarian in his outlook and extremely critical of the actions of the U.S. both before and after the attacks. His message is very simple: “If we want real security, we will have to change our posture in the world—to stop being an intervening military power and

---

20. Ibid., 89.

21. Ibid., 56.

22. Ibid., 83. This, plus Parenti’s referencing of authoritarian sources, such as *Workers’ World and Peoples’ Weekly World*, provide further indications of his political affinities.

23. Howard Zinn, *Terrorism and War* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002), 9.

to stop dominating the economies of other countries.”<sup>23</sup>

One of the impacts of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks was to give those of us living in the United States the type of experience usually reserved for those targeted by U.S. power, either directly or via proxies. As Zinn points out: “The horror of the terrorist attacks we experienced on September 11<sup>th</sup> is something that people in other parts of the world—Southeast Asia, Iraq, Yugoslavia—have experienced as a result of our bombings, of terrorism carried out by people we have backed and armed. Knowing this should have a sobering effect on any desire to continue with military solutions.”<sup>24</sup> Of course by now we know no such sobering up took place and any goodwill the U.S. enjoyed following the attacks has been hopelessly squandered by the Bush Administration.

Zinn is completely opposed to the attacks on Afghanistan: “We are terrorizing Afghanistan.”<sup>25</sup> He cites the estimate of Professor Marc Harold who, based on worldwide news reports, calculated more than 3,700 civilian deaths from U.S. bombings.<sup>26</sup> And this was in the first months of the U.S. attacks, prior to the attacks on hostile wedding parties and the like, which occurred in 2002. Zinn quickly dispenses with the notion that the attacks of 2001 were directed at the United States because terrorists oppose our freedom and democracy. He correctly points to the political dimensions of the conflict, namely United States’ policy in the Middle East. He points out that prior to 1990, bin Laden was a U.S. ally, a friend going back to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Only with the stationing of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia did bin Laden turn his attention to the United States. Up to that point he obviously had no problem with any supposed freedom and democracy in the United States.<sup>27</sup>

As for the U.S.’s War on Terrorism, Zinn makes two points. First, this “war” will not succeed because it is not possible to stop terrorism simply by bombing and invading countries. And, second, if you take this strategy at face value and judge its success based on the Bush Administration’s rationale, it has not been a success at all: “They say they are after bin Laden, and he becomes the focus; but they can’t find bin Laden. And then they say they want the Taliban leaders; yet now they can’t get the Taliban leaders. So, even from their own stated objectives—getting the Taliban’s leaders or al Qaeda or bin Laden—they have failed.”<sup>28</sup> Of course Zinn questions these objectives, asserting that even if they were fulfilled, the “war” would not be won. He further points out that the countries the United States chooses to bomb (Afghanistan and soon Iraq) are those countries in the region not

---

24. *Ibid.*, 10.

25. *Ibid.*, 11.

26. *Ibid.*, 11.

27. *Ibid.*, 13.

28. *Ibid.*, 27.

29. *Ibid.*, 28.

under U.S. control, unlike Saudi Arabia or Turkey for example, which are in effect “client states,” and therefore highly responsive to U.S. foreign policy. He also emphasizes that expanding the war to include Iraq “gives the government a perpetual war and a perpetual atmosphere of repression. And it generates perpetual profits for corporations. But it’s going to make the world a far more unstable and dangerous place.”<sup>29</sup>

Zinn addresses the ideological nature of the War on Terrorism, drawing parallels to the 1950s, McCarthyism, and the Cold War: “Terrorism has replaced Communism as the rationale for the militarization of the country, for military adventures abroad, and for the suppression of civil liberties at home. It serves the same purpose, serving to create hysteria.”<sup>30</sup> Zinn, ever the historian, brings up what happened during the Cold War against Communism, which led to “the deaths of millions of people in Southeast Asia and hundreds of thousands of people in Central America.” For example, “in 1954, the United States overthrew the government in Guatemala, which was not Communist but which was expropriating the United Fruit Company. In 1973, the government in Chile was overthrown in the name of fighting Communism. The government was not Communist, but it was not serving the interests of Anaconda Copper and ITT. We have to bring up this history and relate it to what is happening today.”<sup>31</sup>

In examining the historical record, Zinn responds to Bush’s assertion that “We are a peaceful nation” by noting that “since World War II, there has not been a more warlike nation in the world than the United States.”<sup>32</sup> This brings us to I.F. Stone, described by Zinn as “one of the great journalists of our time.” When speaking to journalism students he would say to them, “Among all the things I’m going to tell you today about being a journalist, all you have to remember is two words: governments lie.” Zinn believes it is “very important to know that. Otherwise we are victims of whatever the authorities say.”<sup>33</sup>

As the United States prepares for another war against Iraq, it is important to look at the last Gulf War. At that time, Pentagon briefers showed video footage of pinpoint strikes against Iraqi targets, although Zinn points out that, in fact, “pinpoint bombing is a fraud. They discovered after the Gulf War that 93 percent of the bombs turned out not to be so-called smart bombs and that the ‘smart’ bombs often missed their targets. Overall, 70 percent of our bombs missed their targets.”<sup>34</sup> Further is the myth of “collateral damage.” The United States dropped 88,500 tons of

30. *Ibid.*, 48.

31. *Ibid.*, 48-49. It should be noted here that the CIA-backed coup in Chile took place on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1973. In an ironic twist of fate one of the architects of that coup, Henry Kissinger, was appointed by Bush to investigate what happened on the other September 11<sup>th</sup>. After about a week on the job, Kissinger resigned, not wanting to divulge his consulting firm’s client list.

32. *Ibid.*, 52.

33. *Ibid.*, 63.

34. *Ibid.*, 82.

35. *Ibid.*, 82.

bombs on Iraq during a forty-three day period, “with the goal of, as the *Washington Post* put it, ‘disabling Iraqi society at large.’ According to the reporter Barton Gellman . . . ‘damage to civilian structures and interests, invariably described by briefers during the war as “collateral” and unintended, was sometimes neither.’”<sup>35</sup>

Another example comes from the bombing of Afghanistan, when the United States intentionally bombed a Red Cross complex three times, “but, according to the *New York Times*, ‘One of the American aircraft that had been ordered to hit the Red Cross supply warehouses missed its target and hit a residential neighborhood instead.’” Is this an example of collateral damage from intentional collateral damage? Of course, all this talk of pinpoint accuracy is intended to make the bombing of a largely defenseless people more palatable to the U.S. population. Zinn argues that if the majority of the American people “knew that we were killing large numbers of people, and displacing hundreds of thousands of people from their homes, they would not take such a benign view of the Afghan war.”<sup>36</sup>

Finally Zinn asks, “If the deaths of civilians are inevitable in bombing, as Donald Rumsfeld acknowledged, it is not an accident. The people prosecuting this war are committing murder. They are engaging in terrorism.”<sup>37</sup> Zinn calls for doing “away with the terrorism of fanatic sects and the terrorism of governments.”<sup>38</sup> Ultimately, Zinn shares a point of view with the classical anarchists who believed in the intrinsic goodness of people, which leads to his sense of optimism in these dark times: “I do feel hopeful in this time that seems to lack hope, and I suppose that is based on a fundamental belief in the fact that there is a moral good sense in the American people that comes to the fore when the blanket of propaganda begins to be lifted. I think there will be a reassessment, and people who have been calling the war immoral will be vindicated at some point.”<sup>39</sup> Only time will tell if Zinn’s optimism is warranted.

### **The Need for a Movement**

As depressing as the changes in U.S. law and the political climate are for anti-authoritarians, Christian Parenti (Michael’s son) points out that there is a difference between the letter of the law and its lived practice. His point is that the government can only get away with what the people allow it—there is a give and take between the state and the people, and a mobilized citizenry is the best defense against further encroachments.<sup>40</sup> Chang, Parenti, and Zinn all advocate citizen mobilization, although different kinds with different ends.

---

36. *Ibid.*, 84.

37. *Ibid.*, 88.

38. *Ibid.*, 64.

39. *Ibid.*, 120.

40. Comments made by Christian Parenti on 20 November 2001 at SEIU Hall in Portland, Oregon.

41. Chang, *Silencing Political Dissent*, 135.

For Chang, this takes the form of grassroots mobilization and education, which ultimately is aimed at pressing the judiciary and Congress to put checks on abuses of power exercised by the executive.<sup>41</sup> For Parenti, we need to “move away from liberal complaints about how bad things are and toward a radical analysis that explains *why* they are so.” Further, we need “a global anti-imperialist movement that can challenge the dominant paradigm with an alternative one.”<sup>42</sup> Zinn wants an oppositional movement: “We can engage in civil disobedience, in strikes and boycotts. We can all do what was done at other times in American history when it was necessary to build a national movement to say to the government, “No, you don’t speak for us. You’re not doing this for us. You aren’t doing this in our name.”<sup>43</sup>

If we needed a bottom-up, anti-statist, and anti-capitalist movement prior to September 11<sup>th</sup>, the need since then has only grown. As anti-authoritarians, we need to stand side by side with immigrant communities targeted by the government. We need to challenge the racist practices of the War on Terrorism which play out both at home and abroad. We also need to assert our right to affiliate, organize, and confront the state while not jeopardizing more vulnerable communities through more militant actions. We need to oppose the war on Iraq while using it as an opportunity to put forward a radical analysis of war and its causes, while connecting our analysis to efforts already underway to develop an understanding of capitalist globalization. Finally we should seek out allies in these dark times and argue against attempts by the government—and unfortunately many liberals—to make distinctions between “good protestors” and “bad protestors,” arguing for a movement which utilizes a diversity of tactics.

In addition to opposing the state, part of the agenda of this movement must be the change from an oil-based economy to one based on renewable, ecological energy sources. The need for oil not only demands Middle East military interventions, but it is also destroying the planet’s ecology by contributing to the Greenhouse Effect and air pollution. As Parenti points out, “Only a substantial effort to develop solar, tidal, and wind energies can make the country more self-sufficient. These alternative sources are readily available, infinitely renewable, [and] ecologically sound. . . . Indeed, if developed to any great extent, alternative sustainable energy sources could destroy the multi-billion dollar oil industry, which is why they remain relatively underdeveloped.”<sup>44</sup>

Oil is key to the capitalist economy. Those in power will do anything to maintain their control over its supply. These three books begin to tear away the façade of the War on Terrorism and reveal what it really is: a war to maintain U.S. global hegemony, increase control over Middle Eastern oil reserves, and guard against the rise of any internal movement which may threaten these objectives.

---

42. Parenti, *The Terrorism Trap*, 102.

43. Howard Zinn, *Terrorism and War*, 116.

44. Parenti, *The Terrorism Trap*, 13.

Uri Gordon

## Chasing the Tornado

*The Trajectory of Change*

By Michael Albert

Cambridge, MA: South End Press, May 2002

*Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising*

By Starhawk

Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, August 2002

*Change the World Without Taking Power*

By John Holloway

London: Pluto Press, March 2002

In the ever-ticklish relationship between practice and theory, a significant role has always existed for what we can call, for lack of a better name, “movement literature.” Locke’s *Two Treatises*, Burke’s *Reflections*, Paine’s response in *Rights of Man*, Marx and Engel’s *Manifesto*, Lenin’s *What Is To Be Done* and Debray’s *Critique of Arms*—these are only the most famous examples of works that were deeply rooted in their authors’ concrete political activity and which reflected and influenced ongoing processes of social transformation.<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, the current upsurge of anti-capitalist struggle is also accompanied by a great bulk of such literature, with the three books reviewed here being merely a selection from the most recent crop. Two of the authors, Michael Albert and Starhawk, are veteran American activists and the third, Holloway is an involved academic closely following the Zapatista rebellion.

These books all convey an ongoing process of self-assessment by today’s emancipatory networks. However, each one also displays a completely different variant of writing-as-activism. Michael Albert’s *The Trajectory of Change* adopts a very didactic approach, attempting to identify “problems” in an allegedly unitary “movement” and sort them out. Starhawk’s *Webs of Power*, on the other hand, combines very personal writing with theoretical reflections that are only gently presented as advice to activists. While Holloway’s *Change the World Without Taking Power* could just as well be written without a coexisting struggle to address—it is an entirely theoretical work in critical Marxism—it nevertheless captures (and will inevitably impact) the thinking of activists who read it. Each approach, as we shall shortly see, has telling results.

1. This phenomenon is by no means limited to progressive political movements—one might easily include *Mein Kampf* in this list.



A minor point to bear in mind is that all three books were essentially completed before the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center. While the authors still had the time to add some post-September 11<sup>th</sup> material, they were limited by the lack of clarity surrounding the full repercussions of these events and thus unable to take full account of the qualitatively different landscape of struggle we now face.<sup>2</sup> This might seem to be a significant limitation but only from a narrow point of view that would assess these books solely in terms of immediately relevant debates. With Holloway such an approach is pointless, and even some of the very concrete issues that Albert and Starhawk address remain timely despite changing circumstances.

### *The Trajectory of Change*

Michael Albert's collection is the most disappointing of the three. The articles—most published previously on ZNet and in *Z Magazine*—are all aimed at tackling alleged weaknesses of “the movement” in the United States: slowly expanding participation, defeatist attitudes, activist-ghetto mentalities, and an over-emphasis on confrontation rather than alternative-building. Albert doubtlessly has good intentions, and deserves appreciation for being prepared to face up to such problems (however exaggerated) and offer concrete suggestions (however flawed). But the main issue I take with this book is, to risk a cliché, the author's major attitude problem. Most striking at first is Albert's style, which I am sorry to find didactic and patronizing and which I suspect will alienate many activist readers. Take the following typical passage:

We need to design movement agendas that inspire widespread interest and provide means for widespread ongoing participation. We need movement focuses that are diverse and multiple, that are local, national and international, and that are continuous, not just annual or bi-annual events.

So which way forward for anti-globalization?

The anti-globalization movement needs to highlight what it is aiming for. We need to clarify our alternatives for international relations and also what we mean by a cooperative and just economy.<sup>3</sup>

You get the drift. While making generous use of the first person plural—“we need,” “we mean”—it is clear that Albert believes he is addressing an audience rather than collaborating with his equals. An audience, moreover, that seems to be composed in Albert's imagination of stereotypically young, dreddy, campus activists who may have

2. The extent of the systemic reconfiguration that the attacks would excuse, in terms of both power and ideology, was delineated for us only later. In this sense the historical marker can be identified not as September 11, 2001 but as January 29, 2002, with Bush's “Axis of Evil” speech.
3. Michael Albert, *The Trajectory of Change* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002), 21.

been very cute and doing a nice job of learning about the world, but now need someone to teach them what real activism is all about.

But the problem goes deeper than that. Throughout the book the reader will notice an underlying wish to steer “the movement,” streamline it, give it a push in the right direction. This betrays not authoritarianism (here Albert is beyond suspicion), but an almost brute insensitivity to the most basic logic of activism today. In a nutshell, Albert makes the crucial mistake of adopting a mechanic rather than organic understanding of anti-capitalist networks. This consists in the double error of assuming that there is *a* movement with clear boundaries and structures, and that it is possible to discursively act *upon* it rather than *with* it. As a result, most of what he says is completely out of tune with how activists think and operate, and with the values inherent in both. Who exactly is this ‘we’ that is going to ‘design movement agendas’? The quarrel here is not that Albert might be imagining steering committees and vanguards, but that in an organic struggle like this one, the very idea of “designing” agendas makes no sense. Today’s movement agendas aren’t “designed,” but rather *evolve* in the gradual fruition of a collective consciousness, formed by a million trial-and-error experiences. Albert should apply the logic of direct action to discourse as well as struggle. For example, in direct action, when we want something to happen or stop happening we do not appeal to anyone to do it, but rather make it happen ourselves and, likewise, if activists believe that struggle should go this way or another, they do not preach about it to others but rather mount actions or initiatives that display such a direction and hope that others are inspired and follow suit. This is precisely the way in which the Zapatistas, Reclaim the Streets and many others have so successfully made their impact on the evolution of resistance, often on a global scale, while at the same time living up to their ideals of decentralization and autonomy.

It seems that Albert never really got around to clicking with this basic dynamic. His efforts to re-invent the wheel are thus patently out of tune with what is going on in the activist world—even in the United States, to say nothing of movements in the global South. One example is his call for a unifying anti-globalization coalition, which he denominates the “Solidarity with Autonomy Movement.”<sup>4</sup> This would be some kind of umbrella organization that would stand for the sum total of everyone’s agenda and enable thorough coordination (of course with a representative board and a budget). This idea betrays either ignorance or (worse) a dismissal of the fact that activists in every continent already have what are probably the most innovative and efficient structures ever seen, all based on the network model: Peoples’ Global Action, the Direct Action Network, Indymedia, NoBorder and many named and nameless others. It is networks like these that have been behind every significant piece of anti-capitalist organizing and action, South and North, for the past decade—bringing together everything from millions-strong peasant movements to affinity

---

4. Ibid., 69-73.

groups of six. And such structures provide exactly the kind of “solidarity with autonomy” that Albert is after without needing a unified platform.

Why is Albert so out of touch? A clue may be found in the essay “My Generation,”<sup>5</sup> in which he expresses concern about veterans of the 1960s inability to bequeath their experiences to the young activists of today. And so he goes into a lecture on the need to avoid sectarian positions, asceticism, “lifestyle politics,” etc. So here is the key: at heart, Albert is a veteran moved by the hope that “this time around we can get it right.” He badly wants this cycle of struggle to be successful, to “win” (whatever that means), and so he understandably puts his persuasive force behind what he thinks is right.<sup>6</sup> However, having a different formative experience as an activist leaves Albert precisely in “his generation” and out of touch with the very different logic of today’s struggles. Albert’s political agenda also remains, to risk a proverbial anarchist accusation, that of a 1960s liberal. While he occasionally talks of questioning basic social structures, his short-term suggestions are in no way pregnant with such a project. In fact, for Albert “change is a combination of a sequence of reforms or limited victories that string together . . . until, ultimately, we win basic alterations.”<sup>7</sup> This is coupled with the almost colonial discourse of “bettering the lot of suffering constituencies,” and the limited notions of “raising the social costs” of elite actions, so that one can mount demands that they “agree to implement.”<sup>8</sup>

If this is objectionable, Albert’s response to the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> scenario is simply odd: he asserts that the attacks and ensuing war have changed nothing essential about the basic logic and conditions of dissent. So all he can recommend is business as usual, with the added anti-war agenda. There is no mention of the prospects for intense repression, nor of public paralysis and manufactured social fear. In fact, Albert even thinks that “despite flag waving patriotic media, way more people than before 9/11 are now seriously open to discussing world affairs and activism.”<sup>9</sup> A closer look at the author’s subsequent writing in *Z* might absolve such statements as stemming from a momentary lapse of perspective.

### *Webs of Power*

It is an impressive (and somewhat worrying) fact that Starhawk’s personal announcement e-list has more subscribers than those of the North American and European networks of Peoples’ Global Action put together. But then again she has always had an uncanny (magical?) way of putting her finger on the pulse of anti-capitalist struggle and saying something relevant (if seldom uncontroversial). Many readers will have thus already encountered the dispatches that form Part One of this book, covering the two-year period

---

5. *Ibid.*, 105-112.

6. *Ibid.*, 113.

7. *Ibid.*, 41.

8. *Ibid.*, vx and elsewhere.

9. *Ibid.*, xv.

from Seattle to the immediate aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>. These short pieces combine personal action reports with reflections on key debates related to each. Starhawk's very intimate insiders connection with the development of activism in the North, progressing as it (unfortunately?) did from one big mobilization to another, provides a very different reading experience to Albert's markedly self-distanced writing. Another contrast is between Starhawk's very personal and narrative writing in this section—by itself not without political significance—and Albert's didactic and patronizing style. Starhawk is telling her own stories and sharing her own thoughts and emotions, without pretending to have the entire picture or full answer.

One of the many interesting threads that runs through Starhawk's communications is the development of her position in the violence/nonviolence debate—for a time the most heated topic surrounding summit protests. Writing after the International Monetary Fund/World Bank blockades in Prague, she puts herself squarely on the principled nonviolence side of the dichotomy with statements such as, "this is a violent system [but] I don't believe it can be defeated by violence" and, "as soon as you pick up a rock . . . you've accepted the terms dictated by a system that is always telling us that force is the only solution."<sup>10</sup> But after the Quebec City FTAA protests the picture is different. In the article "Beyond Violence and Nonviolence"<sup>11</sup> she acknowledges the validity of arguments for "high confrontational" (no longer "violent") struggle, and maintains that couching the debate in the terms she herself earlier used is constricting, at a time when "we're moving onto unmapped territory, creating a politics that has not yet been defined." By Genoa, Starhawk is prepared to declare her sisterhood with the black bloc-ers, who represent "rage, impatience, militant fervor without which we devalue ourselves."<sup>12</sup> Hence she argues for flexibility, diversity of tactics, and above all solidarity and a collective assessment of the appropriate level of confrontation for each action. These conclusions—as close as activists have come to solving the dilemma—are reiterated on the basis of a very deep treatment in the essay "Many Roads to the Morning" in the second section of the book.

Other essays in the second part address diverse topics such as ecology, direct democracy and cultural appropriation. These discussions are recommended reading and it would be impossible to do justice to all of them. So I'll be nasty and comment only on what I find to be the weakest part of the book: the penultimate essay, "What We Want: Economy and Strategy for the End Times." Here, Starhawk unfortunately sacrifices the attack on capitalism's basic relations for the sake of portraying a non-existent unity of purpose in the "global justice movement" (whoever coined that term deserves a pie in the face). As a result, she slips into essentially reformist/regulative positions which resemble the NGO

10. Starhawk, *Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2002), 58-9.

11. *Ibid.*, 93-100.

12. *Ibid.*, 123.

agenda of the International Forum on Globalization. Most of the nine principles she cites as “common ground”<sup>13</sup> would have any attentive anarchist up in arms (and Starhawk says she is one<sup>14</sup>). Saying that “people who labor deserve to be paid enough to live with dignity” only makes sense if one assumes that there is someone paying them and one does not demand the abolition of wage labor. Asserting that there is a “sacred” realm that should not be commodified or touched by the market “however it is organized” is accepting that some things *can be commodified and that a market rampant enough to potentially encroach on these areas can be allowed to exist*. Talking about “businesses and enterprises” having to be “responsible and accountable” to “communities” is to capitulate to the most insidious capitalism-with-a-human-face jargon (“enterprises”?! for Goddess’ sake!). That “democratic enterprises” would “encourage input” from all levels and “favor” self-management and worker ownership is still a far cry from insisting on worker and community controlled production. And invoking, of all sources, Hawken, Lovins and Lovins’ *Natural Capitalism* to demonstrate the practicality of green technology is hardly entering into a worthy alliance. Here the devil is not, as Starhawk says, in the details but rather in the very fundamentals: it is simply false to present such controversial proposals as matters of agreement. Nor can she fall back on construing them as merely “minimal” demands while at the same time insisting they are “commonalities, deep principles and imperatives.” On any consistent anarchist reading such a program would only serve to rationalize, ameliorate, and thus delay the overthrow of a system that remains obscenely exploitative at its base.

But this is really the only major slip. Starhawk’s response to the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> scenario, for example, is much more encouraging. Far from dismissing it as Albert does (though unfortunately she does assume a similarly didactic style here), a very short time after the event she is already clear that the repercussions would be potentially shattering for radicals. Acknowledging that a major shift in our thinking is necessary in order to respond to war and social fear, she recommends several steps. Some of these reflect processes that have subsequently been happening (continued opposition, open organizing, exposure of the real aims of the war), but others are still only developing (new strategies and street tactics, and above all a new political language that can combine and go beyond existing forms of resistance).<sup>15</sup> If and when these come to fruition in the future, Starhawk will probably be there to help articulate them.

### *Change the World Without Taking Power*

John Holloway’s text is the deepest and most challenging one among those reviewed here.

---

13. Ibid., 239-241.

14. Ibid., 93.

15. The current Zapatista initiative around the Basque conflict is probably the most inspiring response to date (see <http://chiapas.indymedia.org>). For perspectives from Western Europe see a discussion paper circulated at the recent European conference of Peoples’ Global Action

One of the things that makes it so interesting is the author's attempt to simultaneously negotiate two agendas: rescuing Marxism for contemporary radical ("negative") politics and rescuing it from itself (i.e. from its hegemonization by authoritarian currents).

The Marxist tradition has produced a framework that has often limited and obstructed the force of negativity. This book is therefore not a Marxist book in the sense of taking Marxism as a defining framework of reference. The aim is rather to locate issues that are often described as Marxist in the problematic of negative thought, in the hope of giving body to negative thought and of sharpening the Marxist critique of capitalism.<sup>16</sup>

By reformulating the theoretical premises of Marxism to accommodate a globalized capitalist system and a decentralized anti-authoritarian resistance, Holloway is in effect attempting a thorough libertarian revision of Marxism—as a tool for socio-analysis and as an indicator for action. Some readers might at this point chuck the book across the room, muttering something about “narcissistic Marxist intellectuals trying to get out of the hole they dug themselves into.” But a more patient approach is in order here. Not every Marxist is automatically authoritarian or insincere, and activists today can actually find much of value in the libertarian elements of this tradition, particular in the young Marx and the Frankfurt School.

The bulk of material in the earlier chapters of this book is indeed drawn directly from this tradition.<sup>17</sup> Hence the articulation of capital accumulation in terms of the conversion of doing into done and of power-to into power-over (chapter 3); the centrality of the concept of fetishism (chapters 4 and 5); the critique of the “scientific” mainstream of twentieth century Marxism (chapter 7); and the emphasis throughout on the negative character of social struggle (embodied in Holloway's pet concept of “the Scream”). The clear drawback is that readers familiar with these ideas will find little new in the first 140 pages, with Holloway's occasional attempt to put this old (and excellent) wine into new skins sometimes verging on the comical.<sup>18</sup> But if we look at this part of the book as an

16. John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 8-9.

17. As a foray into this dazzlingly rich literature see Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1844 [1977]); Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1944 [1999]); Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1964 [1991]); Ernest Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* (3 vols.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1959[1986]). Holloway's use of material stemming directly from contemporary struggle is limited to a few citations from Subcomandante Marcos' communications. For a very good selection of these see Marcos, *Our Word is Our Weapon* (New York: Seven Stories, 2001).

18. One amusing aspect of Holloway's style is that he takes the multi-hyphen form, invented by translators as a way of dealing with German composite nouns, and makes it his own. This gives rise to nouns such as “can-ness, capacity-to-do,” “doing-in-the-service-of-the-expansion-of-capital,” or “I-and-we-ness.” Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power*, 28, 58, 105. Is such second-hand jargonizing really necessary when writing in English?

introductory text, then it does a good job of presenting these concepts clearly and accessibly. Importantly, these ways of conceptualizing social dynamics and struggle will resonate with contemporary activists, as will Holloway's clear rejection of both reform through the state and seizure of state power.

The book really becomes interesting, however, in its closing chapters. Here Holloway makes an honest attempt to tackle the question of the revolutionary subject—which now has to be posited afresh in view of the post-structuralist critique of definitional class categories. Accepting the post-structuralist premise that all acts of identification are oppressive, he takes a bold step further by constructing revolutionary subjectivity around the *refusal of identification*, the struggle against the social process of class identification and its material basis:

Class struggle, then, is the struggle to classify and against being classified . . . the unceasing daily antagonism (whether it be perceived or not) between alienation and disalienation, between definition and anti-definition, between fetishization and de-fetishization.

We do not struggle *as* working class, we struggle *against* being working class, against being classified. . . . Struggle arises not from the fact that we are working class but from the fact that we are-and-are-not working class, that we exist against-and-beyond being working class, that they try to order and command us but we do not want to be ordered and commanded, that they try to separate us from our product and our producing and our humanity and our selves and we do not want to be separated from all that.<sup>19</sup>

This fundamentally anti-fetishistic stance of the “critical-revolutionary subject” renders it indefinable, since its act of struggle consists precisely in escaping the oppressive categories imposed upon it. Here Holloway seems to be attempting a brave synthesis of post-structuralist and Marxist concepts, combining the former's critique of oppressive identity-construction with the latter's insistence in the tractability of domination to (in the last instance) material social relations. Some reworking is still needed here (Holloway's insistence on using the term “working class” is one problem—understandable but also resolvable—as is his retaining of the “us against them” logic which he earlier rejects), but this is overall a very powerful conception. It reflects discourses employed today in many struggles, gives an important place to ubiquitous, everyday-life forms of resistance (from *absenteeism* to culture-jamming) and—most importantly—points distinctly towards the dissolution of all power relations in society rather than their reconfiguration.

---

19. Ibid., 143-4.

The latter aspect can, of course, be easily defined as an anarchist position. But while Holloway hints at this connection when he defines anarchism as the set of approaches that fall outside the state-oriented, reform or revolution dichotomy—which his own project clearly does as well—he refrains from explicitly using this term to describe what he has to say, or from giving anarchism any further attention.<sup>20</sup> The objection might be raised that by doing this he is denying due credit to a 150-year tradition that has aimed precisely at “changing the world without taking power.” But there is a good reason for this: the label anarchist is not exempt from the struggle against identification. Holloway is deliberately avoiding this label and any other, as do indeed many contemporary activists, even if their visions and organizational models could be defined as anarchist by an observer. Maybe some self-defined anarchists will be offended by the lack of credit, but on further reflection they might understand and let that which does not matter slide.<sup>21</sup>

Holloway goes on to develop his notion of anti-identitarian struggle in the next two chapters, which are also highly original. First he provides a cogent critique of some elements in autonomist Marxism, including the first (as far as I know) critical Marxist engagement with Hardt and Negri’s important but highly problematic *Empire*.<sup>22</sup> He then ties his concepts to Marx’s analysis of crisis in *Capital*, in reference to the economic crises of the 90s and the crisis-managing role of today’s “bubble economy.”

Those who begin the book with the hope of receiving a blueprint, a how to “change the world without taking power,” are left with a question instead. Having initiated and explored his revision of Marxism for today’s struggles, Holloway is satisfied with opening up the possibility of revolution in the last chapter and leaving its meaning for today vague. He does, however, at least provide an indication:

Revolutionary politics (or better, anti-politics) is the explicit affirmation in all its infinite richness of that which is denied . . . not just the aim of creating a society based on the mutual recognition of human dignity and dignities, but the recognition now, as a guiding principle of organization and action, of the human dignity which already exists in the form of being denied, in the struggle against its own denial. . . . [This struggle] is inevitably both negative and positive, both scream and doing . . . [for example,] strikes that do not just withdraw labor but point to alternative ways of doing (by providing different kinds of transport, a different kind of health care); university protests that do not just close down the university but suggest a different experience of study; occupations of buildings that turn those buildings into social centers, centers for a different sort of political action; revolutionary struggles that

20. Ibid., 12.

21. Cf. David Graeber, “The New Anarchists,” *New Left Review* 13, January–February 2002, <http://www.newleftreview.net/NLR24704.shtml>

22. Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power*, 160–175.



do not just try to defeat the government but to transform the experience of social life.<sup>23</sup>

This is a conception which again will be familiar with many readers. A mature understanding seems to be shaping in this call-it-what-you-want movement of ours: the need to complement resistance to power with the investment in new non-hierarchical, non-commodified spaces of everyday living—social structures that can deepen and expand until they can replace current ones.<sup>24</sup> This is probably as close as we can come to a transformative strategy that remains coherent and immediately practicable under any conditions. In more than one way, Holloway has hit the nail on the head.

### Conclusion

This recent crop of movement literature reflects—with all its strengths and limitations—a collective process of assessment and reconfiguration that has been taking place in anti-capitalist networks in the North. The capacity for self-criticism and revision is perhaps one of the strongest attributes of the current wave of resistance, and it will hopefully carry us through this difficult stage. As I am writing, activists everywhere are struggling to cope with a changing landscape of struggle. For the past year, a process has been taking place which the books I am reviewing here simply could not reflect. Resistance is quite successfully being diffused, through social fear and the manufacturing of new enemies, as well as outright repression. Also gaining strength are processes which seek to co-opt the emancipatory energies created by social movements, and steer them into reformist strategies and vertical modes of organization. Both dynamics might result in the collapse (or, more likely, domestication) of the resistance. Or we could be encountering, very soon, some surprising and inspiring initiatives. Perhaps our second wind is closer than we think. Maybe it lies somewhere between a cool April night under the dignified sky of the Canary Islands and a hot June day on the sun-baked asphalt just outside Evian. . . .

---

23. *Ibid.*, 212-3.

24. In this context, see also Jared James, *Getting Free* (<http://omega.cc.umb.edu/~salzman/Strategy/GettingFree/Complete.html>) and B. A. Dominick, *An Introduction to Dual Power Strategy* (<http://www.rootmedia.org/~messmedia/dualpower/dpintro.htm>)

Ramor Ryan

## **The Writer as Freedom Fighter, The Freedom Fighter as Writer**

*True Crimes: Rodolfo Walsh - The Life and Times of a Radical Intellectual*

By Michael McCaughan

London: Latin American Bureau, 2002

*Our Word is Our Weapon: The Collected Writings of Subcomandante Marcos*

Edited by Juana Ponce de Leon

New York: Seven Stories, 2001

If our real desire is to destroy global capitalism, when is the time to propagate the word and when is the time to act? Is there a time when the word becomes mute and only actions speak? And when is the time that action should once more be subsumed under the word? Such questions of praxis underlie the lifework of the subjects of the two books reviewed here. Both Rodolfo Walsh and Subcomandante Marcos write and fight, the one with the 1970s Argentinean Montonero guerrillas, the other with the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). Interestingly, the former began as a writer and ended as a guerrilla fighter. The latter, Marcos, began as a guerrilla fighter and now, his rifle becoming rusty, continues ostensibly as a practitioner of the word.

### **Rodolfo Walsh - The Writer As Freedom Fighter**

Why would the life of an Argentinean leftist guerrilla of a 1970s armed struggle be of interest to anti-authoritarians or anarchists? In Argentina today, heady times filled with revolutionary passion, Walsh's name is one of the few from that era that still holds currency among the contemporary radicals. Unlike Che, he has not been reified into a popular icon, and unlike other well known radical intellectuals of the era, like Régis Debray, he never compromised politically or intellectually—for which he was shot down in the streets of Buenos Aires in 1977 by state assassins. In a time of total war against the popular movement, Walsh is remembered for his integrity—an unassuming, modest, behind-the-scenes player, but a pivotal figure in the secret revolutionary history of the era.

Michael McCaughan makes direct comparisons between Walsh and Subcomandante Marcos. Both pioneer the radical use of the word as a weapon, alongside their guns, to bring down dictators. The Zapatista slogan *Everything for everybody, nothing for ourselves*,

is equated with Walsh's notion of "living for others."<sup>1</sup> I would add a further comparison: Walsh as a revolutionary did not fight to seize power, but against the power embodied in the dictatorship. He fought and wrote inspired by notions of justice and political and economic freedom for the multitudes. Upon his death, he was fighting for freedom on two fronts; against the dictatorship and against the authoritarian Montonero leadership.

McCaughan's work is well-researched, erudite, and passionate. As well as presenting twenty-one of Walsh's seminal literary works (many translated into English for the first time), he has written a thorough biography of the man using diaries, writings, and interviews with family, friends, and comrades. This methodology works well, and we are presented with a very complete picture of the man—as writer, lover, father, journalist, organizer, and ranking officer and combatant with the guerrillas.

Walsh (b.1927) comes across as a man who has lived many lives. Already an accomplished and renowned literary figure in his native Argentina (his book *Operacion Massacre* (1957) was a continual best-seller and he was described by Eduardo Galeano as "the finest Argentinean narrator of his generation"<sup>2</sup>), he took off in 1959 to join in the Cuban Revolution. It was a time of endless revolutionary optimism. Another world seemed possible; the revolution was only a guerrilla struggle away. Walsh's activist life spanned this cycle, from the euphoria of the early 1960s to the ecstatic 1968 explosion, through the ensuing rollback, and terminating in the brutal repression of the 1970s.

His role in Cuba was to help develop an international, alternative news service to challenge the hegemony of the established news syndicates. A small group of young, inexperienced radical activists started up *Prensa Latina*, a media initiative that spread across Latin America, opening offices in a variety of countries. Volunteers worked day and night in cramped offices, using borrowed, donated, and stolen equipment. The chaos and energy described by McCaughan sounds like any present day Indymedia office.

Walsh watched with dismay as the Cuban state, securing control to combat the counter-revolution and the threat of U.S. intervention, clamped down on journalistic freedom. The original vibrancy and enthusiasm around the *Prensa Latina* project was stifled and by 1961 the agency was little more than a mouthpiece for the regime. Unwilling to work under such restrictive circumstances, and as his sign of protest, Walsh left *Prensa Latina* and Cuba, somewhat discouraged, but still a strong advocate of the Cuban Revolution in general.

And such was Rodolfo Walsh's militant stance throughout his life—he remained loyal and steadfast in his work and contribution to the dominant revolutionary forces of the day, but

1. Michael McCaughan, *True Crimes: Rodolfo Walsh - The Life and Times of a Radical Intellectual* (London, Latin American Bureau, 2002), 300.
2. Eduardo Galeano, cited in McCaughan, *True Crimes*, book jacket.

offered a critical voice against authoritarian tendencies and abuses of power in the organization.

And this position explains in some sense why, of all the revolutionary groups operating in Argentina, he choose to join the Peronist Montoneros. General Peron, while in power (1946-55), had exercised a particular form of populism that was influenced by Italian fascism but successfully presented itself as the defender of the working class. To understand the hysterical mass popularity of Peronism, it is important to realize that before Peron's "popular" dictatorship, Argentina functioned as a kind of feudal system—the majority condemned to a form of servitude and oblivion. Peron bestowed upon the masses a sense of self-dignity and a few crumbs from the country's rich banquet.

His reign ended when a tyrannical and paranoid Military Junta seized power in March 1976. This Junta, representing the upper classes, viewed Peron as a despot of the masses who would open the door to complete "anarchy." Opposition to the Military Junta formed itself into the broad-front "Peronist" resistance.

The Montoneros defined themselves during a violent split with the mainstream Peronist opposition in the early 1970s as a radical left-wing national liberation movement, influenced by the Cuban Revolution. However, the ideologically confused, vanguardist, and authoritarian guerrilla movement that emerged was not the answer to anything except getting everyone killed.

Here is not the place to undertake a full analysis of the Montoneros. Suffice it to say that they are about as close to anti-authoritarian or anarchist positions as the IRA in Ireland, the ANC in the anti-apartheid struggle, or the Sandinistas of pre-revolutionary Nicaragua. Nevertheless, like the three above mentioned groups, it would be folly to dismiss the Montoneros without taking into account that they represented the main revolutionary current in that particular moment in Argentine history. Indeed, the Montoneros were the largest guerrilla movement in Latin America and commanded the broadest popular support among the people who opposed the murderous dictatorship. Anarchists, lacking a mass popular base since Spain in the 1930s, have generally positioned themselves on the margins of the broad national liberation movements, offering conditional (and highly critical) support against the common enemy.

In a complicated and convoluted history that saw the triumphant return of Peron in 1973, his subsequent death a few months later, and a Military coup in 1976 that heralded a veritable genocide of the popular forces (thirty thousand killed or disappeared by the Military Junta), McCaughan struggles to keep the reader abreast of the situation.

Walsh's position as a militant in the Montonero movement was defined by the exigencies

of the situation. He wrote:

I have to say that I am a Marxist, but a poor Marxist because I don't read much. I don't have time for ideological formation. My political culture is empirical rather than abstract. I prefer to draw my inferences from daily life. I throw myself into life on the street, into reality, and then I join that information to an ideological basis which is fairly clear in my mind.<sup>3</sup>

The daily life faced by the Argentinean radical in these times was a simple matter of life and death, dictated by the extremist ideology of the Junta and the subsequent thirty thousand casualties, leaving little time or space for profound ideological formation.<sup>4</sup>

The government's total war on the people (a war replicated in Pinochet's Chile, in Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay, and needless to say fully supported by the CIA) left Walsh's position as a union organizer and journalist in the workers' paper *Semanario CGT* untenable. Most of his fellow trade unionists were jailed or disappeared. His subsequent post as a journalist with the left-wing *Noticias* daily newspaper also sunk into a grotesque farce as the offices got bombed, journalists were imprisoned, distribution agents disappeared, and eventually (mercifully?!) the newspaper was shut down by order of the courts.

All other roads closed, he went underground. He wrote: "Events are what matter these days, but rather than write about them we should be making them happen."<sup>5</sup>

The word had become anathema to him. This renowned writers' "defection" to the propaganda-by-deed tradition shocked Latin America. Here was a celebrated writer, in earlier days equated with Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Jorge Luis Borges, sacrificing the word for the gun. "These are different times . . ." he told a comrade, "and this is a time for a bigger undertaking. When you're trying to change important things, then you realize that a short story, a novel, aren't worth it and won't satisfy you. Beautiful bourgeois art! . . . But when you have people who give their lives and continue to give them, literature is no longer your loyal and sweet lover—it's a cheap whore. There are times when every spectator is a coward or a traitor."<sup>6</sup>

3. Rodolfo Walsh, cited in McCaughan, *True Crimes*, 200.

4. The regime's extremism was articulated well by General Jorge Rafael Videla, leader of the Military Junta, who stated that "A terrorist is not just someone with a bomb or a gun, but also someone who spreads ideas that are contrary to Western and Christian Civilization." (Videla, in A Report by the National Commission on Disappeared People [[http://www.nuncamas.org/english/library/nevagain/nevagain\\_233.htm](http://www.nuncamas.org/english/library/nevagain/nevagain_233.htm)])

5. Rodolfo Walsh, cited in McCaughan, *True Crimes*, 203.

6. *Ibid.*, 218.

These are strong words of a combatant, forced into a position of total resistance. And yet in reality Walsh never let go of the word. Even at the height of his active service with the guerrillas, he also organized ANCLA, Argentina's Clandestine News Agency. ANCLA attempted to monitor the avalanche of disappearances, murders and general mayhem generated by the Military Junta. As a kind of Amnesty International *Urgent Action* bulletin, it functioned well until most of the team was murdered.

As a Montonero Intelligence Officer, Walsh acted implacably with a soldier's ruthlessness. His network of revolutionary agents infiltrated the police and army. He was pivotal in an audacious 1976 guerrilla operation which involved placing a bomb in the police headquarters canteen, killing 42 guards. The military reprisals were predictably swift, beginning with the execution of 30 key prisoners that very evening and continuing afterwards with hundreds of assassinations and disappearances.

McCaughan suggests that the harsh reaction to this bombing, as well as the death of his daughter Vikki while on Montonero active service, caused Walsh to rethink his role and criticize the wisdom of tactics that invited such huge reprisals. Instead of high-impact spectacular attacks, he argued in favor of multiple small attacks, using whatever weapon at hand, whether it be the printing machine, popular culture, the pistol or the pipe bomb. Walsh assumed a heretical position within the guerrilla organization; he questioned the authority of the leadership and dared to formulate a new strategy.

The Montoneros were among the sole resistance movements still fighting by late 1976.<sup>7</sup> Reminiscent of British Generals ordering their troops over the trenches towards the German machine gun turrets, the Montonero leadership ordered the remaining militants to continue fighting. By 1979, the Montoneros were destroyed militarily, politically, and spiritually. Walsh was just one more fallen soldier in the slaughter on the Argentinean battle fields.

### **The Bridge from Walsh to Marcos**

Among the carnage that consumed Argentina from 1973 until his death in 1977, Walsh's legacy was not his guerrilla endeavors but his continued use of the word as a weapon against the military dictatorship. As he wrote: "The typewriter is a weapon. . . . It can be a fan or a pistol. . . . With a typewriter and a piece of paper you can move people in unbelievable ways."<sup>8</sup>

In his final year Walsh was openly critical of the strategy of the Montonero leadership. While the Montoneros still had major popular support, that support was hemorrhaging. The public grew war-weary as the Montoneros pursued their suicidal armed struggle to defeat

7. See the interview with Fernando Lopez in this issue for information on anarchist resistance to the dictatorship.

8. Rodolfo Walsh, cited in McCaughan, *True Crimes*, 177.

the regime. Walsh recognized this fatal separation between the organization and the support base and argued for class war in place of all-out military confrontation.

We must be more self-critical and realistic. Of course there is a class struggle, there always has been, and always will be, but one of the big successes of the government has been to wage war on us, not on the people as a whole. And this is largely due to our own mistakes, we isolate ourselves with ideology and our lack of political proposals for the ordinary people.<sup>9</sup>

Whether out of inspiration or despair it is unclear, but he returned to his original craft—that of a writer. After seven long years focusing solely on popular and armed struggle, the muse returned with vengeance and in his final days he wrote, among other works, a seminal prose essay which directly challenged the military government. The title of the piece was *Open Letter from a Writer to the Military Junta* and it skillfully attacked the dictatorship with an arsenal of reason, facts and moral certitude. It would be his most lasting contribution to the struggle and his most effective act of resistance. This was not a work of propaganda sanctioned by the Montoneros, but his own individual contribution as a writer. On the eve of his death, he comes around full circle—from writer to militant to guerrilla fighter and back again, finally, to writer.

The first anniversary of the latest Military Junta has been marked by many official documents and speeches evaluating the government's activities over the past year; what you call successes are failures, the failures you recognize are crimes and the disasters you have committed are omitted altogether. . . .<sup>10</sup>

He outlines the true crimes of the regime—the murders, disappearances, and tortures which elevate the level of human rights abuses to the barbaric, as well as the economic devastation wreaked by their clientalist policies upon the population. His stated aim was to “bear witness in difficult times”<sup>11</sup> but instead he succeeds in delivering his most effective blow against the regime. And his tactical deployment of literature to bring down dictators did not go unnoticed.

*Fast-forward, fifteen years.* A clandestine guerrilla sits meditating over a prose essay which directly challenges the Mexican dictatorship. No doubt his *companeros* thought it strange, that the commander spent so much time writing, when there was so much to prepare for the planned insurrection. Marcos' 1992 essay, *A Storm and a Prophecy - Chiapas: the Southeast in Two Winds*, appears like a bridge between the failure of past revolutionary projects, and a new formulation of struggle. The word, alongside the pistol and popular

9. Rodolfo Walsh, cited in *ibid.*, 260.

10. *Ibid.*, 284.

11. *Ibid.*, 214.

power, would take central place in Mexico's revolutionary struggle.

### **Subcomandante Marcos - The Freedom Fighter As Writer**

As Walsh fell, gunned down by the regime's assassins in 1977, Mexico was undergoing its own little slaughter as the state eliminated the threat of subversive groups with a similar vigor. Still, considering the repressive political climate overseen by the PRI dictatorship (the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party, in power uninterrupted since the 1920s), the path of armed resistance continued to be attractive to elements of the politicized youth. A student named Rafael Guillen in Tampico heard the calling. By 1979, he was integrated as "Capitan" in the ranks of a doomed guerrilla outfit, grandiosely called the National Liberation Forces (FLN). An old-school Marxist group, they subscribed to the vanguardist idea of igniting a popular uprising through armed struggle.

As the guerrilla militants were killed off one by one, the survivors formulated a new tactical direction, Maoist in inspiration. They would uproot themselves from their familiar urban surroundings, and sink themselves into the ranks of the rural poor, agitating for armed revolution. This strategic path led Rafael Guillen and a few of his mates to Chiapas, to the indigenous communities, the poorest of all Mexican poor. And crucially, a proud people despite their eternal dispossession, with a long history of rebellion.

And so began a story that we are all now familiar with: the young Marxist guerrilla agitator was reborn in the mountains of the southeast as Subcomandante Marcos.

But you wouldn't know any of this basic history from the book *Our Word Is Our Weapon*. Instead the editor chooses to go along with the myth that Marcos was "born" on January 1st, 1994. The 101 communiqués printed here are accompanied by an Introduction and two essays from distinguished writers.<sup>12</sup> One might have expected, in the first complete English language edition of the collected writings of Subcomandante Marcos, some kind of contextual introduction about the man himself. In this sense, Michael McCaughan's work in uncovering the background and contextual life and times of Walsh the writer proves so useful. Regrettably, there is nothing here in the Introduction or accompanying essays that reveal anything new about Marcos or his writing.

So even the most basic questions are not considered—like why does this masked guerrilla, carrying his submachine gun, spend all his time *writing*? The editor Ponce de Leon allows Marcos' writings to stand alone. And this, in one sense, is fine—Ponce de Leon's work of gathering the body of the work, translating and footnoting, is a huge contribution in itself—but I cannot help thinking it is a great opportunity lost.

12. The collection is framed by an odd essay by Jose Saramago, equating the indigenous of Chiapas with Persians; a history of the struggle in general by Ana Carrigan; and a Zapatista timeline by Tom Hansen—none of which deals with Marcos directly.



So, if you are interested in a critique of Marcos or his writing, forget it with this collection. The editor's introduction, "Traveling Back for Tomorrow," is premised in the usual fawning adoration, contributing to the Marcos myth and legend—one that urgently needs to be debunked before his myth becomes his own, and the Zapatistas', undoing. We need to see Marcos as a real man, foibles and all—an extraordinary figure, a great military strategist, a brilliant writer, but a human, filled with the usual inconsistencies and desperate failings.

Despite these editorial shortcomings, what we do have in this anthology is enough to make any activist tingle with joy. Marcos' writing is beautiful and expansive enough to fit every revolutionary tradition. His great ruse is to make each tradition think of him as representing them—the indigenous say he is one of them, the guerrillas claim him as one of their own, the intellectuals include him in their pantheon, Mexican nationalists see him as a great Mexican hero, NGOs see him as their advocate, Marxists see him as one of their sect, anarchists claim him as part of their tradition, even the base church sees him as a representative of their preferential option of the poor. This potentially complex multiple personality disorder is of course symbolized by the ever-present mask. Would the real Subcomandante Marcos please stand up?!

In this collection we find Marcos the military tactician, the politician, the (anti-) statesman, the storyteller, the wise old sage, the wit, the clown, the poet, the philosopher—it just doesn't stop. He can engage a five year old child as much as the President of the Republic, as much as the great literary minds of the age, as much as the peasant farmer. Is he superhuman?!

Here's the good news. A good proportion of his writing, as demonstrated in this anthology, is dirge. He is refreshingly flawed, and human. Here in this anthology you can read some real fucking gibberish.

And here's the better news, the good stuff—which I would say constitutes about half of this anthology—is singularly brilliant, scathing, witty, fantastic: the most inspired radical writings of the end of the twentieth century.

The anthology is appropriately called *The Word is Our Weapon*. Strange guerrillas they are, with their complete lack of appetite to engage in armed struggle.<sup>13</sup> Not since the first week of 1994 have the Zapatistas engaged the enemy militarily and this is their strength

---

13. Zapatistas in the Northern Zone periodically engage in armed confrontations with Paramilitaries. In San Juan de Libertad in June 1998 Zapatistas unsuccessfully tried to repel a military invasion (although they did down a helicopter). The ensuing execution of militia members on active service is erroneously described as "civilian" deaths in Tom Hansens' scrappy timeline, despite their inclusion in Marcos' recall of fallen Zapatistas (Marcos, *Our Word is Our Weapon: The Collected Writings of Subcomandante Marcos*, ed. Juana Ponce de Leon [New York: Seven Stories, 2001], 201).

(but may also be their undoing). Learning from the hopeless carnage of the Dirty War against the popular forces in the 1970s, Marcos steers the EZLN away from military confrontation with the Mexican Army and towards political confrontation with the state.

Marcos is an attentive student of revolutionary history. "The flower of the word will not die," he declares in one of the most poetic and powerful works, *The 4th Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* (January 1996), "Our words, our song and our cry, is so that the most dead will no longer die. We fight that they may live. We sing so they might live. The word lives. . . . The word becomes a soldier so as not to die in oblivion. . . ."<sup>14</sup>

One could imagine Walsh turning over in his undisclosed grave, with pleasure. Marcos and the Zapatistas represent all the dead freedom fighters' phoenix rising. Marcos takes the essential elements of the guerrilla fighter—armed resistance and the will of the people, and, like Walsh argued, expands the arsenal. He explains: "We use the weapon of resistance . . . the arm of the word, the weapon of our culture, the weapon of music, the weapon of dance. . . ."<sup>15</sup>

Ultimately Marcos articulates the great historical paradox of the guerrilla fighters—"we became soldiers so that one day soldiers would no longer be necessary."<sup>16</sup> A philosophical tenet that perhaps was overlooked by legions of dead freedom fighters who, like the Montoneros, fought, not wisely, but too well.

Power flows from the barrel of a gun, says Mao, but what if the guerrilla fighters do not fight for power, but for the deconstruction of power? Autonomy seems a wholly different project, demanding a completely new formulation of tactics and strategy.

The Zapatistas back the word with mass mobilizations, popular plebiscites, road show caravans, popular expressions of support and, most significantly, building concrete autonomous municipalities.

### **The Freedom Fighter as . . . Freedom Fighter**

But what does a reading of these two books together do to contribute towards developing an anti-authoritarian perspective? First of all, since many of our milieu think the sun shines out of Marcos' ass, or his pen, it is useful to understand that he came, ideologically and practically, from the Latin American armed, authoritarian Left. McCaughan's *True Crimes* plots some crucial years and struggles of the tumultuous times of the armed authoritarian Left, a cycle that began with the Cuban revolution and ended with the electoral defeat of

14. Marcos, "The 4th Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle," in *Our Word is Our Weapon: The Collected Writings of Subcomandante Marcos*, ed. Juana Ponce de Leon (New York: Seven Stories, 2001), 86.

15. Marcos, "Why We Use the Weapon Of Resistance," in *Our Word is Our Weapon: The Collected Writings of Subcomandante Marcos*, ed. Juana Ponce de Leon (New York: Seven Stories, 2001), 161.

16. *Ibid.*

the Sandinistas in 1990. (Marcos also spent time in Nicaragua in the 1980s.) Rebels of conscience like Walsh who fought not for power but for justice, realized, albeit too late, the follies of authoritarian organization. Marcos' political acumen lies in subsuming the authority of the authoritarian guerrilla EZLN to the horizontal organization of the indigenous clandestine assembly.

So clearly it is important to know our history well and the background of the movements we covet (or not). Our beloved Zapatistas might not fit into an anti-authoritarian paradigm, as much as we might wish, and revolutionaries (like Walsh) from armed movements like the Montoneros are not necessarily macho authoritarians.

Secondly, I think a reading of these two books together can help us think tactically and strategically. Both Walsh and Marcos are intellectual tacticians who respond to the political situation they are confronting. Obviously neither are constrained by moral dilemmas over the use of physical force, but they are not warlords either. Walsh recognized the catastrophic consequences of all out military confrontation with the enemy and Marcos learned this lesson well. After a week of battle, the Zapatistas changed strategic direction and pursued a political offensive deploying the word as their weapon. But power has been trying to lure them for years into the constitutional political spectrum. The Zapatistas plainly understand that their arms, or the threat of arms, is their crucial negotiating tool. The word is a weapon deployed in the shadow of the gun.

Most of all we learn from these books the necessity to take the word and employ it in the service of revolutionary struggle. Writing theses or books is okay. Journalism and video-making is fine. Teaching and social work is useful. Raising awareness and funds for international solidarity is important. But from Walsh and Marcos we learn we must have the courage to go the whole way, to write and fight, to back our fine intellectual endeavors with concrete organizing and action. Destroy the ivory towers and get down in the streets and fields of revolutionary struggle where real change is possible.

The word as a weapon is not enough. Intellectual activity unconnected with grassroots struggle is moot. Conversely, from Walsh's story, it is clear that ultra-militancy is a fool's game. Before his premature death, Walsh was navigating a critical territory away from the authoritarian Left towards a new formulation. This path was crossed a decade later by Marcos, from the FLN to the EZLN.

The EZLN is a new paradigm, a renewal of revolutionary struggle. The path unfolds before us. Walking we learn.

Priscilla Yamin

## Towards an Anti-Authoritarian Critique of Marriage

*Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*

By Nancy Cott

Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2000

*The Wedding Complex: Forms of Belonging in Modern American Culture*

By Elizabeth Freeman

Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002

*Unmarried to Each Other: The Essential Guide to Living Together as an Unmarried Couple*

By Dorian Solot and Marshall Miller

New York: Marlowe & Company, 2002

The 2000 United States Census showed a dramatic 72 percent increase since 1990 in the number of unmarried couples, heterosexual and same-sex, living together.<sup>1</sup> A conservative marriage movement already active for some time, organizing in churches, communities, and at the level of state and national policy, has been emboldened by this data. With the full support of the Bush administration, conservative activists are advocating for pro-marriage policies; most notably marriage programs in welfare reform, but also the creation of the government Office of Marriage Initiatives. Thirty years ago, criticisms of marriage, raised by the feminist movement, were much more common. Today, the response of most feminists, progressives and liberals to a large degree has not been to oppose Bush on the issue of marriage, but rather to say that this institution is important for helping families, overcoming poverty, providing stability for children, and sustaining society.

Anarchists have always consistently opposed the institution of marriage, recognizing its role in the maintenance of capitalism and the nation-state, as well as its constraining effect on the possible range of loving relationships. Of course Emma Goldman is a case in point, who wrote in 1911: "The popular notion of love and marriage is that they are synonymous. . . . Like most popular notions this also rests not on actual facts, but on superstition."<sup>2</sup> However, while Goldman rightly pointed out the distinction between the intimate feelings

1. There are roughly eleven million people living with an unmarried partner in the United States. Nearly ten million of them are living with an unmarried different-sex partner and 1.2 million living with a same-sex partner. 11 percent of unmarried partners are same-sex couples. For more information see Alternatives to Marriage Project website at <http://www.unmarried.org>
2. Emma Goldman, "Love and Marriage," in *Anarchism and Other Essays* second revised edition (New York and London: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1911), 233.

of love and the institutional power of the state, she, like other anarchists of her time did not fully articulate the degree to which the state manages relations of class, race, gender and citizenship through marriage. In light of both the right-wing attempt to coerce people to marry and the growing numbers of people actually seeking an alternative, an anti-authoritarian critique of the institution and proposal of alternatives is more important than ever.<sup>3</sup>

One step in that direction is understanding the significant role of marriage in American history, politics and culture, and viewing marriage policy as at the center of the constitution and maintenance of the nation-state. Marriage has a complicated political position in the United States, both marking and blurring the line between private and public life. The right to marry is recognized by law as “one of the basic civil rights of man.”<sup>4</sup> At the same time, it is considered “an institution, in the maintenance of which in its purity the public is deeply interested, for it is the foundation of the family and of society without which there would neither be civilization nor progress.”<sup>5</sup> As a right and obligation, marriage laws help shape and link personal, economic and political aspects of life. In the United States, marital status defines both an individual’s household and sexual relationship, while shaping his or her civil status. Signifying a private relationship of familial intimacy, marriage law anchors private property by establishing familial inheritance rules. It is also a public, state-managed institution. Through property-holding, citizenship, immigration and tax policy, government and legal claims determine the obligations and privileges of marriage.

The following books illustrate and analyze this tension between the rights and obligations of marriage and the more public and political role of the institution in the United States. In different ways, these books show how marriage is more than the ultimate commitment between two people, but is in fact a policy of family with ideological roots that cannot be separated from the political and cultural moments in which they exist. The first book, *Public Vows* by Nancy Cott, shows how marriage has changed over time; the second, *The Wedding Complex* by Elizabeth Freeman, discusses the different meanings and potential meanings of it in culture; and the third, *Unmarried to Each Other* by Dorian Solot and Marshall Miller, illustrates how to live alternatively, outside marriage. Each challenges the seemingly natural relationship between love, sex, kinship, social status, morality and inheritance that marriage represents. They reveal how marriage is intimately tied up with state policies, rights, and culture in ways that not only reproduce hierarchical relations but reinforces state power. The following books also afford an opportunity to think through the

- 
3. The books in this review and the issues raised draw only from the United States context. However, similar issues may be present in other countries as well.
  4. Quote from the 1967 Supreme Court case *Loving v. Virginia* which determined all anti-interracial marriage laws unconstitutional.
  5. Quote from the 1888 Supreme Court case *Maynard v. Hill* which asserted firmly that marriage is a social relation subject to the State’s police power.

difficulties in constructing an anti-authoritarian view of marriage.

### **An Historical Perspective of Marriage and the Nation**

In *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*, Nancy Cott explores the relationship between the public and private roles of marriage and argues that “the institution of marriage and the modern state have been mutually constitutive.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, the project of the book is to show the links between marriage and family policy and the creation of the American state. She provocatively suggests that without one you cannot have the other. Beginning with the founding of the American Republic, Cott parallels changes in the institution of marriage to the development of the nation-state. Drawing from legal cases, policy and popular rhetoric, she shows how a Christian common law model of consensual, lifelong monogamy was enforced as not only the legitimate form of family structure but as crucial to the maintenance and viability of the state. She suggests that for citizens, marriage has been as much a public vow to the nation-state as it has been a personal choice. Cott’s extensive, informative, and very readable history of the changing nature of marriage laws and customs reveals marriage as more of a political creation than a moral choice.

In a chapter called “An Archaeology of American Monogamy,” Cott unpacks monogamy as a political ideology in the United States. Since the revolutionary era, the legitimacy of the American state has been based on “marital metaphors” and it was widely believed that legal monogamy benefited the social order by harnessing sexual desires and by supplying predictable care for the young and dependent.<sup>7</sup> Marriage in American revolutionary rhetoric reflected emergent themes in Enlightenment political theory more generally. For instance, Montesquieu’s work helped initiate the association between polygamy and despotism and by contrast monogamy came to stand for a government of consent, moderation and political liberty. These thematic equivalencies resonated throughout the political culture of the United States during the subsequent century. Cott writes that “from the perspective of the American Republic, stark contrasts between monogamy and polygamy not only illustrated the superiority of Christian morality over the “heathen” Orient ... but also staked a political claim.”<sup>8</sup> She argues that a belief in monogamy as a political ideal and defining characteristic of the American state was as deeply lodged in American political thought as notions of popular sovereignty, consent or the necessity of a government of laws.

Cott argues that marriage policy underlies national belonging and the cohesion of the body politic both because it enforces monogamy and shapes rights to citizenship. She outlines

6. Nancy Cott, “Giving Character to our Whole Civil Polity: Marriage and the Public Order in the late Nineteenth Century,” in *US History as Women’s History*, edited Kerber, Kessler-Harris, Sklar, Kish (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

7. Nancy Cott, *Public Vows* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), 10, 16.

8. *Ibid.*, 22.

how marriage has also been bound up with civil rights and in the past has been “instrumental in articulating and structuring distinctions grouped under the name of ‘race.’”<sup>9</sup> She illustrates this in two ways. On one level, marital nonconformists were deemed racially different and inferior to the American, white majority. These racial groups were Indians, freed slaves, Asians, and polygamous Mormons, which Cott describes as metaphorically nonwhite.<sup>10</sup> On another level, historically racialized groups have never had the same marriage rights as others. For example, slaves did not have the right to marry until they were freed and interracial unions were illegal until 1967. Moreover, because marriage defined inheritance rules, money was not only passed down through white families but also kept in them. By incriminating some marriages and encouraging others, marital regulations have drawn lines through the citizenry and defined what kinds of sexual relations and families will be legitimate. Through marriage, the state and its policymakers have defined the state against racial others.

Cott also argues that because marriage is a public institution, its policies actually define a “gender order.” Expanding the critique of marriage beyond its private effects on women, she stresses that marriage defines a public status and thereby *institutionalizes* an unequal relationship between men and women. In other words, viewing marriage as public reveals how the state has sanctioned hierarchical gender relations. For instance, the state has constructed gender roles by linking a woman’s right to citizenship to her marital status. Until the 1930s, if an American woman married a foreign born man, she automatically lost her American citizenship; whereas, if an American man married a foreign-born woman, she automatically became American (unless she was considered racially ineligible).

Cott’s book outlines how marriage laws shape the body politic in terms of biological reproduction and economic power. Marriage policy in the United States has shown a national commitment to exclusive and faithful monogamy, preferably intra-racial and heterosexual unions. From an anti-authoritarian perspective, this book illustrates the coercive side of marriage in U.S. history and its role in producing state power.

As Cott points out, marriage policy is still coercive today even if some of the legal foundations of hierarchical relations based on gender and race in marriage are not as prevalent. Unequal relations and rights are still very much alive in marriage policy with the prohibition of same-sex marriages. On this Cott quotes Congressman James M. Talent of Missouri who said the following in support of the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act, which defined marriage as heterosexual against same-sex marriage: “it is an act of hubris to

---

9. *Ibid.*, 4.

10. *Ibid.* Cott explains that during the late 1800s in the United States the notion of civilization was considered a racial trait (*Ibid.*, 117). The association of whiteness with monogamy, America and political liberty meant that polygamy was equated with nonwhites and despotism, anti-American values. Even though their skin color was white, Mormons were considered nonwhite because they practiced polygamy.

believe that marriage can be infinitely malleable, that is can be pushed and pulled around like silly-putty without destroying its essential stability and what it means to our society, and if marriage goes, then the family goes, and if the family goes, we have none of the decency of ordered liberty which Americans have been brought up to enjoy and to appreciate.”<sup>11</sup> This statement could have been made one hundred years ago. Highlighting a hypocrisy in marriage rhetoric, she points out that legislators jealously guard their power over marriage while denying that marriage has been state-conferred since the 1840s and that they—not God or nature—define it. She writes, “they have tried it both ways with marriage in political discourse—picturing it as a rock of needed stability amidst eddies of change, while also acting to define and redefine marital definitions.”<sup>12</sup>

With *Public Vows*, Cott gives an important political and institutional history of marriage, revealing the very public and ideological nature of the institution. In so doing, she challenges the conventional understanding of marriage as a free, individual choice that is only about love, commitment, and privacy. Cott’s powerful work allows us to understand the historical context of the current conservative push for marriage and state-funded marriage programs and reveal them for what they are: economically coercive, politically motivated policies that are part of a long complicated history that has used marriage to define the nation, and the rights and obligations of citizens. At the same time, she does not discuss any alternatives to marriage, claiming that “history and tradition cement the hold of marriage in individual desires and social ideals.”<sup>13</sup> Cott ends with a tension—even though marriage has changed dramatically and most of the trappings of the past are no longer, it has become the only site of privacy legally available to citizens and by denying access to this privacy to certain couples, it remains a privileged institution, deeply connected to the state and nation. Cott does not ultimately follow through with the implication of her own critique. Rather than exploring the potential of abolishing an institution that she has shown to be hierarchical, exclusionary, and maintained for political purposes, or consider what it would mean politically and socially not to have marriage, she instead supports expanding the right of marriage and legalizing same-sex unions. In an interview, she admits that same-sex unions are conservative because they will not upset the essential structure of marriage but perhaps she sees no alternative.<sup>14</sup>

What could replace marriage that might be fairer, less restrictive, and not controlled by the state? Is there a way to imagine organizing our private relationships other than marriage? Elizabeth Freeman, in her work, addresses another site within which marriage operates, the cultural and psychological realm. She attempts to move beyond the critique and imagine alternative forms of attachment and belonging that expand outside the couple in marriage.

11. *Ibid.*, 219.

12. *Ibid.*, 219.

13. *Ibid.*, 225.

14. Infinite Mind radio program on NPR, November 22, 2002, <http://lcmmedia.com/mind245.htm>



### Weddings in American Culture and Literature

In her book, *The Wedding Complex: Forms of Belonging in Modern American Culture*, Elizabeth Freeman looks at the history of American weddings and their depictions in literature and popular culture. Rather than understanding weddings as the grand finale leading to the happy ending of marriage in the story of love in America, she sees weddings as an opening for conceiving alternative forms of belonging and attachment. Weddings are usually understood as acts of social and psychic closure that mystify heterosexuality, making it seem natural and magical, but as Freeman points out, a wedding is ultimately a very common, everyday event. Weddings, she suggests, do not represent longing for marriage but for public forms of pageantry and celebration. De-linking the wedding from the idea of legal marriage, she argues that weddings are performances, fantasies, and rituals that provide openings for imagining and even enacting different kinds of attachments and intimacies other than monogamous, heterosexual marriage.

Weddings and marriages are predominant literary tropes in American texts and films. Freeman writes, “The use of a wedding to figure the incarnation of a polis has a long history in cultural representations of America.”<sup>15</sup> In the texts and films she examines—works by Carson McCullers, William Faulkner, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and the films *The Graduate* and *Deer Hunter* among others—the ceremony itself is portrayed as a “portal” to national belonging. The voluntary submission of the bride to the groom and of the couple to domestic laws reflects and reinforces the contractual and consensual aspects of U.S. citizenship. Here, she asserts, “the state authorizes itself by sanctioning a particular kind of love.”<sup>16</sup>

In this way, the state financially rewards those who limit their social obligation and sexual relationships and allow the state to forsake the burden of caring for dependents. Freeman points out that in the contemporary United States, more than an issue of determining the role of men and women, marriage law privileges the dyadic couple over other forms of belonging, attachment, intimacy, and connection. The issue is that the couple automatically packages incommensurate elements such as material resources, sexual practices, social recognition and institutional benefits. The state maintains the social order by fixing the routes by which names, property and cultural recognition travel.<sup>17</sup> Seeing how marriage functions in culture and society is important for articulating an anti-authoritarian approach to marriage.

At the same time, Freeman shows how there is a fundamental instability at the heart of the American weddings. She asks to what degree does the ritual of wedding reinforce marriages, the nation-state, and notions of belonging or open them up and destabilize them?

15. Elizabeth Freeman, *The Wedding Complex* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 39.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, VIII, IX.

In this book you not only get an idea of the repressive and state-centered ideologies around marriage, but are also offered ways rethink it. In the chapter, "Love among the Ruins," Freeman gives an informative and rich history of the wedding ceremony. She explains that the wedding offers contrasting visions of the social, one restrictive and one expansive. In the wedding the couple is the focus while at the same time also displayed alongside them are the very things that compete with the primacy of the couple, such as ties with extended kin, social and religious movements, and friends.<sup>18</sup> The wedding, she sums up, "can seem to transform static and biological notions of being into dynamic, cultural notions of doing, extending the parameters of belonging—so that even when these parameters seem limited by race and sexuality, they can be operated against their most oppressive results. The wedding preserves exactly what it claims to renounce."<sup>19</sup>

Instead of viewing the wedding ceremony as reinforcing the synthesis of patriarchal, Christian, governmental, and capitalist aims in marriage, she is interested in the discontinuities between these domains. She focuses "on the dissonance within the nuptial ceremony . . . and on the question of whether and how these discontinuities might be worked against marriage and toward a recalibration of social life as we know it."<sup>20</sup> She argues that weddings allow an opening, and tap into fantasies not reducible to a wish for couplehood. For example, in her chapter called "The We of Me: *The Member of the Wedding's* Novel Alliances," she analyzes Carson McCuller's 1946 novel. It takes place during World War II and is about a twelve year-old tomboy named Frankie who, longing for connection, suddenly becomes obsessed with her brother's wedding. Freeman explains that most view the novel as a coming of age story in which Frankie leaves her childhood behind for illusions of femininity, marriage and a proper adult life. Freeman takes a different tact and argues that Frankie's focus on the wedding is not about a desire for a wedding but more to be a part of the wedding, a member as it were, and that weddings do not always signify marriage. Freeman's argument is more complex than I can reproduce here, but in short, she suggests that Frankie is in love not with someone else or even the couple, but the with the pageantry and celebration of the wedding itself.

Through her analysis of literary texts and film she argues that rather than closure, weddings create social and narrative chaos. She also suggests that weddings do cultural work at an interesting angle, what she describes as "slantwise" to marriage law.<sup>21</sup> That is, according to Freeman, weddings have the potential to demystify marriage law, and break apart its power to maintain structures that do not seem immediately connected to it, such as the nation-state and racial taxonomies. The wedding plays a dual role against marital supremacy, she claims. It allows a window into the work of marriage law as well as makes visible other

---

18. *Ibid.*, 11.

19. *Ibid.*, 44.

20. *Ibid.*, 9.

21. *Ibid.*, XIV.

kinds of important but publicly undervalued and nonlegal social attachments such as gay couples, nonparental ties between adults and children, and friendships, to name a few. She argues that these other social possibilities are also points of resistance, creating the possibility of a different social order.

A complicated book with many different themes running through it, *The Wedding Complex* at times overreaches itself but it is also interesting and insightful. Freeman's work creatively illustrates how deeply entrenched notions of marriage are in American society, defining our conceptions of national and personal attachment solely through a monogamous, dyadic couple. However, while she opens up the notion of weddings and imagines alternative forms of belonging, she does not explain or address how destabilizing cultural narratives will actually have practical, political effects. Different from Cott, Freeman does not support legalizing same-sex unions because they still would privilege the couple as the primary form of attachment. She suggests that to truly reconceive the social order would be to open up the family structure. The difference between Cott and Freeman on the issue of same-sex marriage may result from Cott's focus on policy and Freeman's on culture. However, together they show the difficulty in actually achieving alternatives to marriage and how to link those to a political project.

### **What are the Alternatives?**

In their book, *Unmarried to Each Other*, Dorian Solot and Marshall Miller try to tackle that social and political project on some level. They do so not only by offering practical advice on how to live life outside of the institution of marriage, but also by beginning to imagine and construct an identity of unmarried people comprised of unmarried heterosexuals, single people, gays, lesbians and people in polyamorous relationships. The book is based primarily on interviews with over a hundred unmarried people varying in age, region and racial classification. It offers information ranging from what to call your unmarried partner, how to set up contracts in lieu of the marriage contract, and how to have and raise children out of wedlock.

A very different kind of book than Cott's or Freeman's, *Unmarried to Each Other* does not claim to offer any analysis of marriage. However, it demonstrates that the current rules of marriage do not fit existing, heterogeneous practices. More of a how-to book, Solot and Miller explore and explain the political, cultural and personal issues in being unmarried. In the chapter, "Why aren't you married?" Solot and Miller discuss the myriad reasons why many people do not get married even if they could. They cover the ideological weight associated with becoming a wife or husband and why many, on that basis, have said no to the institution.<sup>22</sup> They point out that the marriage contract is the only contract most people sign without having had any opportunity to read or modify its terms (even though everyone

---

22. Dorian Solot and Marshall Miller, *Unmarried to Each Other* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 2002), 41.

knows that it triggers a slew of state and federal laws that effect the couple).<sup>23</sup>

In a chapter called "When Others Disagrees: Surviving Pressure and Discrimination," Solot and Marshall discuss the different kinds of communities and viewpoints that discriminate against unmarried people, whether they are heterosexual or homosexual. At the same time, they make clear that there are differences between heterosexual and homosexual discrimination at the unmarried level, stating that homophobia is more of a problem than marital status discrimination. And of course they admit that most of the time, unmarried life is "smooth sailing." However, marital status discrimination is still a reality. In many ways, family members are the biggest culprits, but so are adoption agencies, bank and loan companies, car rental companies, and data collectors.<sup>24</sup> A chapter on the history of cohabitation is also interesting and offers a useful broader view of unmarried relationships. In looking into the history of the United States and other countries, they claim that relationships outside marriage were and still are very common.<sup>25</sup> This book fills a gap by explaining the way living unmarried effects people on an individual level.

By giving information not only on how to manage and negotiate an unmarried life but also on the historical and legal background of domestic partnership policy, this book is an enormous contribution. One could argue that Solot and Miller could have been more self-consciously political in their orientation, but at the same time, by not taking this approach, they present unmarried relationships as normal, even commonplace. It is the first step towards carving out a social space for nonmarital relationships. They leave it to others to imagine and argue for an unmarried identity and link this to struggles for equality and freedom from discrimination.

These books by Cott, Freeman, and Solot and Miller, in different ways, illustrate the cultural and political work marriage has done, and still does, by shoring up state power and limiting personal and collective choices. They offer material that not only enriches the early opposition to marriage by anarchists like Emma Goldman, but also develops and expands it with a level of theoretical and practical sophistication. Through an understanding of marriage as controlling cultural traditions, bounding sexual relationships, limiting legitimate reproduction, restricting economic inheritance and defining the nation, it seems possible to imagine a political identity of unmarrieds on its own terms and suggests that marriage is a legitimate site for constructing an anti-authoritarian politics.

---

23. *Ibid.*, 50.

24. *Ibid.*, 86.

25. *Ibid.*, 241-42.

Rebecca DeWitt

## **Anarchist *Terrior***

*Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*

Edited by Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton

New York: Routledge, 2002

*Slow Food: Collected Thoughts on Taste, Tradition, and the Honest Pleasures of Food*

Edited by Carlo Petrini with Ben Watson and Slow Food Editore

White River Junction, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2001

Anarchism and contemporary academic theory ignore each other. On opposite ends of the theoretical spectrum, one tends toward universal ideas and the other towards isolated phenomena. Introducing academic theoretical advances to anarchism is both an affront and a necessity. Anarchism, let me introduce you to Food Studies. Go on, try it, you might like it! Kropotkin's response to Malthusian sentiments in *Mutual Aid*, Food Not Bombs as anarchism in action, and mobilizations against biotechnology and other profiteering methods of production are the primary ways in which anarchism utilizes food. While anarchists debate the nature of nature, serve vegan food to the homeless, and protest Monsanto's<sup>1</sup> conquest of the so-called Third World, is it worth expanding anarchism's utilitarian use of food? Why this even matters is discernable in the new trend known as Food Studies. Two recent books, *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies* and *Slow Food: Collected Thoughts on Taste, Tradition, and the Honest Pleasures of Food* attest to the new political nature of food and expand upon an international dialogue.

These days it is no longer enough to hand out free food, declare oneself a vegetarian, or shop at your local coop to make a statement about food. The emerging academic field of Food Studies invokes eco-gastronomic movements, analyzes rifts between "foodies" and "fatties,"<sup>2</sup> and elevates slow food over fast food to look at the means of production, transportation, cultural identity, nation building or dismantling, class warfare, and imperialism. To simply demand control over the means of production and access to food, central to anarchist thought, appears to be the equivalent of theoretical vulgarity. If anarchism wishes to take advantage of the increasingly rich fields of Food Studies, it will need to avoid such simplistic reductions while also retaining strong anarchist convictions.

- 
1. Perhaps a frivolous footnote but I am disturbed by the fact that my Microsoft spell checker contained the correct spelling of Monsanto. Food for thought. . . .
  2. "Foodies" generally mean "slow food" gourmets; "Fatties" generally means fast food consumers.

Writing about food and politics brings to mind the French wine term, *terroir*. Although it is strictly defined as a group of lands from a certain region, belonging to a specific vineyard, and sharing the same type of soil and weather conditions, which all give wine its specific personality, the concept of *terroir* often also embodies the earth as a whole, its cumulative use over the years, the culture and morals of the vintner and the soul of the country, if not just the region.<sup>3</sup> An understanding of food as a sort of *terroir* makes it easier to grasp Food Studies' conscious attempt to explore food as more than consumable items; and anarchist theory would do well to explore this *terroir*. While we need to also keep in mind that we *need* food, which means the capitalist system will profit from food at all costs, such an oversimplification of the political impact of food eventually leaves anarchism out in the cold.

The largely academic field of Food Studies has packed a variety of meanings into a simple four-letter word: food. For example, Food Studies contends that market forces have penetrated social relationships on the level of everyday life.<sup>4</sup> Food is a “symbolic marker of membership (or non-membership) in practically any sort of social grouping. ... As with language, on many occasions people define themselves with food; at the same time, food consistently defines and redefines them.”<sup>5</sup>

*Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies* looks mostly at how people first define themselves by food and then are redefined by the mechanisms of consumer society, often without their conscious consent. The fourteen essays included cover such topics as how the French learned to eat canned goods, food and nationalism in the origins of so-called Belizean food, the donut and the Canadian national identity, the methodical popularization of the avocado, social tensions surrounding independent grocery stores, and the politics of scarcity in urban Soviet Russia.

Editor Warren Belasco hopes that the collected essays will help reposition food as a “primary focus” of social inquiry (instead of merely being a “useful tool”).<sup>6</sup> Rather than relating food solely to gender issues, he goes further to find fault with the classic Western dualism that prizes mind over body and the “idealized bourgeois division between the female sphere of consumption and the male sphere of production.”<sup>7</sup> By understanding food as more than a simple consumer item and using it as a way to approach larger issues, Food Studies urges us beyond our individual consumption—be it female or male—to look at

3. Kolleen M. Guy, “Rituals of Pleasure in the Land of Treasures: Wine Consumption and the making of French Identity in the Late Nineteenth Century,” in *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, ed. Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton (New York: Routledge, 2002), 34.
4. Sidney Mintz, “Food and Eating: Some Persisting Questions,” in *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, ed. Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton (New York: Routledge, 2002), 25.
5. *Ibid.*, 26.
6. Warren Belasco, “Food Matters: Perspectives on an Emerging Field,” in *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, ed. Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton (New York: Routledge, 2002), 6.

things such as “the interaction between globalization and the invention of national cuisine.”<sup>8</sup> Eating with a consciousness just got juicier.

Nothing could be simpler than the donut, or so one would think. “If we believe that the dynamic of mass culture is to degrade production on the one hand, and to reduce social experiences to consumption on the other, then the donut takes on considerable analytical power.”<sup>9</sup> National identity, populist imagery of citizens, and anonymous meeting grounds for disconnected communities, can all be attributed to the rise of donuts in Canada. I was alarmed to read the following: “In donut capitals we are in danger of inventing a kind of industrial Folk for postindustrial times, replacing outport peasants and their songs with unpretentious blue-collar folk and their donuts.”<sup>10</sup> However odd the concern for Canadian donuts, the author is right. This is how McDonalds has taken over the world. American and apparently Canadian citizens, as they lose their traditional livelihoods and cultural identities, are filled up with substandard foods that sell nostalgia, a folklore, and an imagined community. If we lived in a world that prioritized intellectualism, anarchists could ditch the black flag for a donut flag and everybody would understand.

The donut example leads us to a series of practical and theoretical questions about the relationship between food and society. In her essay “Untangling Alliances: Social Tensions Surrounding Independent Grocery Stores and the Rise of Mass Retailing,” author Tracey Deutsch argues that “Chain stores succeeded not only because of low prices but also because of their ability to defuse the tense and often time-consuming negotiations between grocers and customers. Chains promised, in particular, to remake the gender norms and gender relations which had placed such pressure on grocers and their customers. In this early moment of mass retailing, social politics mattered as much as economic rationality.”<sup>11</sup> In effect, the richness of *terroir* was leveled to normalize gender and even race relations, at least when it came to shopping. Many people saw chain stores as a way to strengthen their communities, release women from the tyranny of the nosy shopkeeper, and make choices about their social relationships and desire for autonomy.

From canned food for the French to Gerber’s baby food, people make conscious choices in buying and eating food, but the choices were never theirs in the first place. As my French grandmother would say, “Quel horreur!” Each time I go to visit her, she tells me about the

7. Ibid., 7.

8. Ibid., 12.

9. Steve Penfold, “Eddie Shack was no Tim Horton: Donuts and the Folklore of Mass Culture in Canada,” in *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, ed. Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton (New York: Routledge, 2002), 63.

10. Ibid., 59.

11. Tracey Deutsch, “Untangling Alliances: Social Tensions Surrounding Independent Grocery Stores and the Rise of Mass Retailing,” in *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, ed. Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton (New York: Routledge, 2002), 157.

latest supermarket and subsequent degradation in the quality of food. In fact, the French government has established standards for an authentic French baguette and they cost a little bit more. Quality of life becomes nostalgia and passes out of the realm of need to those who can afford it. Manufacturers of highly processed food say they are catering to what the consumer wants, but choices are clearly restricted by financial means and essentially class-based from the bottom up.

The eerie role food plays in nation building is an especially intriguing concern of Food Studies. Belizean food, author Richard Wilk argues, doesn't really exist, and not only because Belizean society represents a melting pot far more diverse and interwoven than the great USA. "One version of national food was developed in America by Belizeans for Americans; another was developed partly by Americans in Belize, for Belizeans; but a third version of Belizean food is the one that attracts the most attention: the version developed by Belizean and foreign entrepreneurs to feed foreign tourists with a taste for something authentically Belizean."<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey Charles' essay, "Searching for Gold in Guacamole," in *Food Nations*, attempts to further explain food's role in nation building. What is clear is that food is different from run of the mill commodities: "both in the depth of meanings ascribed to it and in the complexity of the system that produces it. Some of the more centrally consumed foodstuffs, such as sugar, even helped to create the system of political institutions, economic forces, and cultural constraints that govern us to this day."<sup>13</sup> In a way, an intuitive understanding of such things has led anarchists to be against many forms of food which they see as supporting an oppressive economic system. Yet, over the years, eliminating sugar, milk, and meat from our diets has spawned a new consumer marked rather than the revolution.

The Slow Food movement was founded in 1989 by Carlo Petrini in reaction to the opening of a McDonald's at the Spanish Steps in Rome. At first, Slow Food was a "gastronomic organization dedicated to rediscovering and protecting the right to the pleasures of the table, and to using our tastebuds as our guides to seek out the highest achievements in taste."<sup>14</sup> But now Slow Food enthusiasts, numbering more than 65,000 with four international offices, see themselves as an "eco-gastronomic" *movement*. Slow Food becomes more about the scarcity of good food, as it relates to where it comes from and who produces it, and how mass substandard production, i.e., bad food, can be stopped. Now, instead of bad vegetarian food, anarchist theory must contend with good food for the

12. Richard R. Wilk, "Food and Nationalism: The Origins of 'Belizean Food'," in *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, ed. Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton (New York: Routledge, 2002), 63.
13. Jeffrey Charles, "Searching for Gold in Guacamole: California Growers Market the Avocado, 1910-1994," in *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, ed. Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton (New York: Routledge, 2002), 84.
14. Patrick Martin, Introduction to *Slow Food: Collected Thoughts on Taste, Tradition, and the Honest Pleasures of Food*, ed. Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton (Chelsea Green Publishing Company: White River Junction, Vermont, 2001), XIV.



masses, which, in turn, legitimately supports small family owned businesses in their quest to survive in the global market.

Gourmets are up in arms in the eighty-plus essays covering topics such as tradition, consumerism, what it means when food is good for you, street food, the post-industrial pint, the value of time, the morality of food, transportation methods, Frankenfoods, exotic animals, and leftovers. It's not anarchism, but the philosophy does go beyond using your wallet to effect change. It is also potentially anti-capitalist, even though some of its biggest proponents are government officials, if only because people are really trying to think about fundamental changes in society. For example, Herman Scheer, President of the Agriculture Commission of the Assembly of the Council of Europe, concludes his essay, "Region is Reason," with the following series of demands: "Let us reflect upon the meaning of the term 'protection.' Protecting culture, the environment, and human values is no longer enough. We need to change something in the structure of the economy, introducing new definitions and objectives. First and foremost, we should develop direct patterns of distribution, abolish export subsidies, and use that money to support regional markets and counter patents on biogenetics. The agricultural sector must get actively involved in opposing the decrease in energy prices and the thoughtless consumption that this encourages. Individual countries should create banks in which the diversity of species can be preserved. Clean, renewable energy obtained locally from agricultural produce needs to be developed because it can considerably reduce current costs. And we must fight for the abolition of all the government directives that determine the size of apples, pumpkins and so on, since these rules only help large distributors and hinder the process of regionalization in agriculture."<sup>15</sup> Food for thought.

The question of cultural differences must be brought up. Is there some significance in the fact that during the historic Seattle WTO protest French officials were the only representatives to leave the WTO assembly and join Jose Bove in blockading the McDonalds to hand out banned Roquefort cheese? In the United States, pleasure is doled out on a merit basis and food is more a product of our industrial pride rather than our palette. No American politician ever says we have the right to eat good food. Processed cheese is a staple of food banks. Good food is for those who can afford it. My French family truly feels sorry for me and all Americans for a variety of reasons, including our president, overall lack of culture, and absence of taste, but national chauvinism is obviously no more an answer than national cuisine. Is the right to good food something which anarchists could be proud to advocate and what the hell does that mean?

For Slow Food, taste is a starting point, and an easy one at that. Eventually, an

15. Herman Scheer, "Region is Reason" in *Slow Food: Collected Thoughts on Taste, Tradition, and the Honest Pleasures of Food*, ed. Carlo Petrini, Ben Watson, and Slow Food Editore (Chelsea Green Publishing Company: White River Junction, Vermont, 2001), 10.

unsuspecting gourmet will find themselves caught between who is at war with their environment and who isn't. The United States appears to be perpetually at war with our environment and regularly deploys food as a weapon. Vandana Shiva, in her essay, "Genetic Freedom," points to a contributing mindset: "Cultures that regard nature as life have always considered the divine presence in nature and seen any expression of its diversity as an expression of its divinity. A mechanistic culture, on the other hand, divorces god from creation, thus making the deity a sort of super-engineer, a watchmaker."<sup>16</sup>

So, we are back to *terroir*, which Slow Food holds dearly and preserves as well as explores. The problem is what to do as *terroir* disappears. Another essay in the Slow Food collection connects this uncertainty to what may become the last frontier of this food fight. In "Transgenesis," Arnaud Apoteker asks: "Will the food of tomorrow maintain a bond with the soil, the land, and the farmer who 'plows the field and scatters,' or will it simply be the product of the genetics lab, irrespective of where it is produced? Will it be a gift of nature, warts and all, or will it be an insipid, rigorously codified industrial product?"<sup>17</sup>

For their part, Slow Food Arcigola (the main organizational branch of Slow Food) has established the Ark (i.e., like Noah's Ark) as a means by which to preserve, promote, and directly distribute hand-made, artisanal, slow foods. For example, in the United States, they financially support Native Americans in Minnesota harvesting wild rice in the traditional manner using sticks and canoes, Delaware Bay fisherman, and growers of heirloom apples from Oregon. It is not the one, right thing, but we should value this type of contribution as a way to avoid conformity on all levels.

Where in *terroir* do food and anarchism actually meet? Most political theory, even anarchism, holds pleasure, including that gained from food, at a distance. In our "democracy," ordinary citizens have no right to enjoy themselves unless they can pay for it. It is no wonder that today's anarchists scorn the idea of good food, much less aspirations for fine cuisine. But, as a longtime anarchist friend pointed out, it is bourgeois to not think about food. Furthermore, the anarchist comrades did eat well, she said, without compromising their politics. For the Fourth of July, during the depression, in Northern Pennsylvania coal mining country, her family and friends expropriated food that had been donated to the local police. Since was more than enough to go around, it is unclear whether the police missed the food or not. What is clear is that no one collected food to donate to the anarchists, mostly Italian anarchist immigrants, and other coal miners, who died almost

16. Vandana Shiva, "Genetic Freedom," in *Slow Food: Collected Thoughts on Taste, Tradition, and the Honest Pleasures of Food*, ed. Carlo Petrini, Ben Watson, Slow Food Editore (Chelsea Green Publishing Company: White River Junction, Vermont, 2001). 175.

17. "Transgenesis" by Arnaud Apoteker in *Slow Food: Collected Thoughts on Taste, Tradition, and the Honest Pleasures of Food*, ed. Carlo Petrini, Ben Watson, Slow Food Editore (Chelsea Green Publishing Company: White River Junction, Vermont, 2001) 175.

daily in the mines. Eating well in a truly anarchist sense! Anarchists used to hold international picnics where the food was looked forward to just as much as the conversation. Due in part to the strong ethnic foundations of anarchism and subsequent disappearance of these groups within U.S. anarchism, the idea of “good food” remains elusive and difficult to translate politically. But there was a quality of life verging on an anarchist *terroir* in its view of the earth and its bounty.

Food Studies and Slow Food are helpful, as are most things. *Food Nations* is very well written, enlightening and more engaging than most social criticism. The Slow Food movement attacks the windmills armed with recipes and is making a dent with its efforts to preserve and promote traditional food production. When examined, the relationship between globalization and national cuisine or the concept of good food, are interesting at best. Both books help regain a little *terroir* but the damage done is overwhelming. It is also not enough to call for food for everyone, advocate for or against technology, or to individually attempt to assert total control over our food source. Anarchist political theory bears the burden of elevating the discussion as well as deepening its own understanding of food related issues.

A new quality of life means everything and nothing, so make the connections between donuts and the degradation of society, champion slow food appreciation and production, oppose imperialistic means of production, be anti-capitalist in your food choices, learn to cook, but don't forget what we are after. We know that coops, vegetarianism, feeding the hungry, and opposing biotechnology (all staples of anarchism) are components that, when separated from a broader perspective, can lead to a narrowly pragmatic or quasi-religious approach to food, neither of which is particularly desirable. We also know that the academic apolitical focus on minutia has barred anarchism from its ranks and insights. Food Studies will not end the standoff but it could, like a good dinner party, enrich the conversation, if only because a certain quality of life appears to be a common goal.

Instead of ending with a boring call to think more about food, remember Marcuse's New Sensibility: “The advent of a free society would be characterized by the fact that the growth of well being turns into an essentially new quality of life. ... The new direction, the new institutions and relationships of production must express the ascent of needs and satisfactions very different from and even antagonistic to those prevalent in the exploitive society. ... Freedom would become the environment of an organism which is no longer capable of adapting to the competitive performance required for well being under domination, no longer capable of tolerating the aggressiveness, brutality, and ugliness of the established way of life.”<sup>18</sup> More food for thought.

---

18. Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 4.

Ashanti Alston

## **Towards a Vibrant & Broad African-Based Anarchism**

*Post-Colonial African Theory and Practice: Wole Soyinka's Anarchism*

By Joseph Walunywa

Ph.D. Dissertation, Syracuse University, 1997

*African Anarchism: The History of a Movement*

By Sam Mbah and I.E. Igariwey

Tucson, Arizona: See Sharp Press, 1997

I am always on the search for cutting edge, challenging thinking within anarchism and other fields of revolutionary theory: the search for how to get beyond 'stuck.' As a Black anarchist I have looked for writings specifically related to the problems and challenges that I face, and that my people face here in the United States, and that can help us organize for self-determination and destroy the very basis upon which all oppressive systems operate. Of the activist "isms," anarchism, at least in theory, promotes the kind of openness and risk-taking that actually encourages the constant regeneration necessary to meet new revolutionary challenges. The price to pay, often, is getting "uncomfortable," being "jarred," even in terms of what one understood as the anti-authoritarian or anarchist canon.

The two works reviewed here, *Post-Colonial African Theory and Practice: Wole Soyinka's Anarchism* and *African Anarchism: The History of a Movement*, come from authors trapped in vicious post-colonial hells. They have "stretched their necks" to see and understand differently in order to just "breathe" and fight back. The stretching and openness to new information, new insights, is what keeps anarchism and other radical perspectives fresh and evolving to meet our planetary needs.

### **Wole Soyinka's Anarchism**

*Post-Colonial African Theory and Practice* by Joseph Walunywa, a Kenyan student who wrote in requirement for a degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English at Syracuse University in New York, was a rare find. Black and African writers on the subject of anarchism are rare, seemingly.

Wole Soyinka, the first African to win the Nobel Peace Prize (for Literature, 1986), is a controversial figure. He was brought up as a relatively privileged Nigerian of Yoruba culture, raised partially Christian and given a Western education. Though indebted to Western literary figures such as Nietzsche, Bertolt Brecht and G. Wilson Knight, he was also influenced by Franz Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah, Amilcar Cabral, Julius Nyerere, and

was familiar with the writings of anarchist thinkers such as Pierre Proudhon, Tolstoy, Gandhi, Albert Camus and Ignazio Silone.<sup>1</sup> But his philosophical roots are deeply embedded in African and more specifically Yoruba mythology and culture. It was his grandfather, with whom he developed a special relationship, that gave him his groundings in Yoruba mythology.<sup>2</sup> It is in this Yoruban and Western reinterpretation of African myth that Walunywa finds the not-so-hidden anarchism.

Soyinka's dramatic works include *Dance of the Forests*, *Death and the King's Horseman*, *Madmen and Specialists*; his poetry, *Idanre and Other Poems*; *Autobiography*, *Ake: the Years of Childhood*; a novel, *The Interpreters*; literary and cultural criticism, *Myth, Literature and the African World*; and political criticism, *The Open Sore of a Continent*.

His ability to play with both Greek and Yoruban drama and tragic themes has made his work unique. His analysis of the post-colonial absurdities of Nigerian and African power dynamics and his call for an "organic revolution" that derives its authenticity from Yoruban mythology has also made his productions controversial. For example, in 1960 the twenty-six year old Soyinka returned to Nigeria from England as the country achieved its nominal independence from England. His new play, *Dance of the Forest*, whose opening was timed to coincide with official celebrations, immediately placed him at odds with the newly installed leaders as well as with many of his fellow intellectuals. The play's theme focused on Africa's, and by extension Nigeria's, "recurrent cycle of stupidities," i.e. the chronic dishonesty and abuse of power that colonialism had bred in generations of indigenous political leaders and functionaries. Like Fanon and Nkrumah, he had dared to highlight class contradictions and other pitfalls of nationalism and neo-colonialism. He has maintained his criticism and vision for over forty years as an artist and a citizen-rebel.

By recounting the representation and play with Yoruba myth and ritual drama that runs through Soyinka's work, Walunywa seeks to demonstrate recurrent anarchist themes. Exciting. Can tragic or ritual drama in "endogenous" (Walunywa's term) society provide means for anarchic regeneration, recuperation, and a praxis of the "creative-destructive principle" in contemporary life? Does this have parallels in post-industrial Western societies, especially one like the United States, that has "captive nations within" (my words) that are "endogenous," including Black, Mexicano and Native American nations?

Walunywa presents a definition of anarchism, through Soyinka, that is based in African

- 
1. Ignazio Silone (1900-78) was an Italian socialist and anti-fascist journalist and novelist. He authored *Bread and Wine* (1962) and defined himself as a "socialist without a party, Christian without a church."
  2. Information on Soyinka's influences come mainly from Florence Stratton, "Wole Soyinka's Social Vision," *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol. 22, Number 3 (Fall 1988): 534. Stratton, interestingly, also associates anarchism with Soyinka's works. Also, see: Joseph Wilson, "Soyinka and Philosophic Traditions: European and African," (<http://www.emory.edu/ENGLISH/Bahri/Soyinka.html>)

reality and, surprisingly, on ritual or tragic drama. I would call his work, "An Anarchism Defined Through The Ritual Drama of Endogenous Society." His 313 page dissertation presented quite a challenge: generally familiar with Africa's best known literary writer and playwright, I was less familiar with the specific literary and artistic usage of terms such as drama, ritual, tragedy, primordial, chthonic, archetype, abyss, Promethean, Apollo, Dionysus, etc., and the Yoruban mythology that infuses all of Soyinka's work.

Key to understanding Walunywa's expose is his definition of anarchism: "As used in this study, the term anarchism refers to a specific form of anarchism that I believe Soyinka has introduced in African intellectual discourse. . . . Anarchism is defined as the desire on the part of the individual concerned to deconstruct the social, economic and political institutions which reflect the values of 'modern civilization' as conceptualized through the prevailing ideologies in order to pave the way for the recuperation of 'primordial culture' as conceptualized through the 'cosmologies' of 'endogenous societies.'"<sup>3</sup> It is "the consistent resistance—the desire to break free of—all forces, irrespective of whether they originate from 'the Left' or from 'the Right,' that seek to confine either the individual or the community within any established social, economic, or political constitutional barricade."<sup>4</sup>

By "endogenous societies"<sup>5</sup> one should think "*indigenous*" with Walunywa's focus on the role of mythological or symbolic systems within these societies. He is referring to the specific mythological or symbolic practices that existed before the imposition of European colonialist modernity around the world and that are part of cultures that continue to resist by holding on to their mythical ritual archetypes. They are endogenous reenactments of the unity, contradiction and struggle of existence; ritual archetypal reenactments found the world over that highlight and "myth poeticize" such dramatic themes as death and rebirth, disintegration and recuperation, destruction and creation, suffering and compassion, fragmentation and re-assemblage, and fallibility and remediation. These traditions contain built-in mechanisms for constant resistance, revision, recuperation and revolution.<sup>6</sup>

Walunywa states: "the primary function upon which endogenous society is developed—the ritual archetype—is believed to be 'revolutionary' in terms of the freedom it affords the individual and the community because it is thought to provide the medium through which the individual and the community in question maintain an intimate relationship with primordial culture and its liberating forces (and consequently exist in a diametrical opposition with modern culture and its alienating forces) without completely relinquishing their respective sense of selfhood and community."<sup>7</sup> Walunywa makes it clear that the

3. Joseph Walunywa, "Post-Colonial African Theory and Practice: Wole Soyinka's Anarchism" (Ph.D. Diss., Syracuse University, 1997), 21.

4. Ibid., 75.

5. Ibid., 3, 23.

6. Ibid., 116.

anarchist lessons, the tools, are actually in the ritual dramas themselves. He argues that Soyinka brings their anarchic, communal character to center stage through his art and literary productions, and also in the fields of politics and post-colonial revolution. Let us follow the story, as culled from the works of Walunywa, Soyinka, Clyde W. Ford, and Jane Wilkinson:

In the beginning there was only one godhead, known as Orisa-nla, a beingless being, a dimensionless point, an infinite container, including itself. This uncreated creator had a slave known as Atooda or Atunda. As Orisa-nla was working in a hillside garden, Atunda rebelled, rolling a massive boulder down the hill, smashing Orisa-nla into many fragments. So, the story goes, these fragments became the Yoruba gods and goddesses known as "orishas" with their number varying from 201 to 1,001 or more.<sup>8</sup>

Of these many orishas, a handful represent key figures in the pantheon and wisdom tradition of the Yoruba. Soyinka keys in on, draws from, and gives his own unique interpretation to the main careers of the gods Obatala, Shango and Ogun.<sup>9</sup> Of the three, it is Ogun with whom he found a personal affinity as a youngster and whom, according to Walunywa, he develops as the archetypal anarchist.<sup>10</sup> The story continues:

Originally both divinity and humanity were contained in the godhead, Orisa-nla, and there was no earth as we know it. To make a long story short, Obatala, the symbol of the power to shape life, made human beings from clay and called on the supreme orisha, Olorun, to breath life into them. It was done. Later, there was a crisis and a problematic separation between the orishas and humanity emerged. In the West, after "The Fall" it is the task of humanity to find its way to The One & Only God. In Yoruba, as in many other endogenous cultures, it is the orishas, the gods and goddesses, who journey to the earthly realm, for in their divine state they were incomplete and needed to re-embrace humanity to make them whole. It was Ogun who forged the sacred path for the return of divinity to humanity.<sup>11</sup>

With this we are being asked to accept the validity of a non-Western perspective and way of making sense of life. This may prove difficult for Marxists, anarcho-communists, and syndicalists who have learned to see the world only through the lens of science, reason and

7. Ibid., 22.

8. Compiled from the following and compared for consistency: Clyde W. Ford, *The Hero With An African Face* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), 146; Jane Wilkinson, *Orpheus in Africa: Fragmentation and Renewal in Four African Writers/Between Orpheus and Ogun* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1990), 179-181; and Walunywa, "Post-Colonial African Theory and Practice," 92-115.

9. Walunywa, "Post-Colonial African Theory and Practice," 93-99.

10. Ibid., 104.

11. From Ford, *The Hero With An African Face*, 146; Jane Wilkinson, *Orpheus in Africa*, 179-181; and Walunywa, "Post-Colonial African Theory and Practice," 92-115.

objectivity, with “the worker” as the epicenter of change. But, as Paul Feyerabend argues in *Against Method*, “there is no idea, however ancient and absurd, that is not capable of improving our knowledge.”<sup>12</sup> He also states that the indigenous thinker often shows greater insight into the nature of knowledge than those who deal exclusively with Western science. “It is . . . necessary, to reexamine our attitude towards myth, religion, magic, witchcraft and towards all those ideas which rationalists would like to see forever removed from the surface of the earth (without so much as having looked at them—a typical taboo reaction).”<sup>13</sup>

By paying homage to the gods within the context provided by the ritual, the individual, working on behalf of the community, consistently *lets go* of and recuperates his or her sense of self-constitution. If one wishes to get out of the post-colonial crisis, the ritual says, first, “Yes, automatically, you have the right to rebel,” and second, “you must now prepare and transit through an unavoidable hell to acquire the powers, insights, skills, and unities necessary for you and the community to move to the ‘Liberation Hilltop.’” This letting go or relinquishing of the self into the abyss, chthonic realm, or the chaos implies being *torn asunder* from all those alienating forces and ideological influences, individually and collectively internalized, that has kept one stuck in a restricted state. It is in this way that the ritual of transition provides a kind of built-in mechanism for making a transition from a confining, compartmentalizing, oppressive existence to more liberatory and free realities.

For Soyinka, the transition itself is a principle and Ogun is what could be called the principal “transit conductor.” The activity of *going through something* is a fact of life and not always, and maybe even rarely, a pleasant journey. But through it, through the abyss, the chthonic realm or chaos, there are the elemental forces upon which one can draw to bring about re-assembly, recuperation and creativity.

Walunywa points to Soyinka’s use of Ogun as the tragic hero whose job it is to make this transition happen. It is Ogun’s story that is most instructive here. (“Ogun is the embodiment of challenge, the Promethean instinct in man, constantly at the service of society for its full self-realization.”<sup>14</sup>)

The principle of destruction and creativity set in motion by Atunda’s boulder is repeated anew in the activity of Ogun.<sup>15</sup> Soyinka places him at the center of Yoruba metaphysics. He becomes the essence of creativity itself. He is the individualist anarchist, the iron worker, the reluctant leader, or Nietzsche’s Superman, expressing the indomitable will to power (according to

12. Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchist Theory of Knowledge* ([http://pnae.com/phil/main\\_phil/fey/against.htm](http://pnae.com/phil/main_phil/fey/against.htm)). See also, Arun Bala, *Feyerabend and Scientific Method*, (<http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/phibalas/dialogue2001.Scientific%20Method/Feyerabend>)

13. Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchist Theory of Knowledge*, Ibid.

14. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (New York: Cambridge University, 1976), 30.



Soyinka) *in the service of the community*. He is the only god willing to make the transition through the abyss, through the chaos, to prepare the way for the others in their quest to reunify with humanity. In making the transition, he is also willing to be *torn asunder*, so that in re-assembly he might help bring about communal change. It is evident in Walunywa's commentary that Soyinka has recreated the character of Ogun in such a way that he can be most useful in the context of Africa's contemporary post-colonial, neo-liberal wreckage. This Ogunian anarchism is the theme that constantly expresses itself throughout Soyinka's art, life, and revolutionary vision.

### **African Anarchism: The History of a Movement**

1997 was a celebratory year due to the publication of the first major work on anarchism from a specifically African perspective. Authors Sam Mbah and I.E. Igariwey are both members of the Nigerian Awareness League, an anarcho-syndicalist organization at the time numbering up to one thousand members. There are only a handful of reviews of the book and, sadly, I have yet to find a review in any black nationalist publication.

Though few people may associate anarchism with Africa, many black nationalist folk will associate with its close "cousins"—communalism and African socialism. Although anarchism still carries capitalist-constructed distortions, and leftist, Marxist dishonesty, it is both bold and dangerous for Africans to declare themselves anarcho-syndicalist and argue that anarchism has a legitimate place among liberation theories on the continent. And one must ask: *Why?* Thus far nothing has been able to resolve Africa's post-colonial, neoliberal crisis: neither liberal democracy, Marxism, capitalism, modernity, nor nationalism.

In an 1999 interview Mbah explained the spirit in which he and Igariwey outlined anarchism's relationship to Africa: "Although anarchism is not complete without the Western European contributions, we believe there are elements of African traditional societies that can be of assistance in elaborating anarchist ideas. One of these is the self-help, mutual aid, or cooperative tradition that is prevalent in African society."<sup>16</sup>

In the first two chapters they give a very general perusal of a European-based anarchist theory and history, and also a history of anarcho-syndicalism on the African continent. For me, the book begins with the third Chapter, "Anarchist Precedents in Africa," which identifies and expounds upon "anarchic elements"<sup>17</sup> in pre-colonial *stateless* societies and explores how these elements manifest themselves today. Case studies focus on such communities as the Igbo, the Tallensi, and the Niger Delta peoples (notably, the hierarchical Yoruba are not chosen). "Anarchy as an abstraction may indeed be remote to Africans, but it is

15. F. Odun Balogun, "Soyinka and the Literary Aesthetic of African Socialism," *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol. 22 Number 3, (Fall 1988): 521.

16. Chuck Morse, "African Anarchism: An Interview with Sam Mbah," *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory*, Spring 1999, 9.

not at all unknown as a way of life.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, Mbah and Igariwey are saying: “here are the ‘anarchic elements,’<sup>19</sup> “here are indigenous roots.” In their last chapter, “Anarchism’s Future in Africa,” the authors return to these roots to advance a revolutionary perspective for liberation from the post-colonial, neo-liberal devastation of the African continent: “Given these problems, a return to the ‘anarchic elements’ in African communalism is virtually inevitable.”<sup>20</sup> There is hope grounded in concrete historical (and present-day) examples of stateless, government-less, police-less societies.

Mbah and Igariwey do not paint a romantic, rosy picture of these “tribes without rulers.” Communalism was *not* an anarchist utopia. But mechanisms were in place to work out social problems through a participatory, broadly inclusive form of democracy that we call consensus. This is startling information for those of us accustomed to seeing life as structured upon rich and poor, government and led, police and policed citizenry, White and nigger.

With religion or spirituality, Mbah and Igariwey do point out its significance in traditional life and the cohesive role it played: “Religion, in this sense, was primarily a theoretical interpretation of the world, and an attempt to apply this interpretation to the prediction and control of worldly events. . . . The idea that ‘spiritual forces’ translated into a notion of gods, an earth spirit or a powerful guardian spirit that was personal to individual members of the community. . . . In short, the gods are not only theoretical entities, they are people.”<sup>21</sup>

Whereas Soyinka would see this aspect of indigenous religion as dynamic, in “Obstacles to the Development of Anarchism in Africa (Religious and Cultural Factors),” the authors state: “like all religions, African religions also had conservative/reactionary aspects.”<sup>22</sup> They connect religion with despair and say that religion, especially imported Western religion, feeds on despair. Although this may simply reflect the authors’ uncritical embrace of a European-based anarcho-syndicalist, anti-metaphysical perspective, one also learns that religion or spirituality is not static. There are ritual aspects, specifically in indigenous societies, that have built-in mechanisms for challenging the status quo and making change.

In reexamining the development of African socialism, the authors encourage us not to close the books on Nkrumah’s positive socialism, Senghor’s existential and “negritude” socialism, Nasser’s democratic socialism, or Nyerere’s Ujamaa (familyhood) socialism. Although all these varieties of African socialism were state-initiated and failures, Mbah and Igariwey believe that a

17. Sam Mbah and I. E. Igariwey, *African Anarchism: The History of a Movement* ([http://www.circlearpha.com/library/african\\_anarchism/precedents.html](http://www.circlearpha.com/library/african_anarchism/precedents.html)).

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., ([http://www.circlearpha.com/library/african\\_anarchism/future.html](http://www.circlearpha.com/library/african_anarchism/future.html)).

21. Ibid., ([http://www.circlearpha.com/library/african\\_anarchism/precedents.html](http://www.circlearpha.com/library/african_anarchism/precedents.html)).

22. Ibid., (<http://www.illegalvoices.org/apoc/books/aa/ch6.html>)

very “genuine and credible attempt” was made in Tanzania under Julius Nyerere. Nyerere’s thought is seen as an organized, systematic perspective on socialism that is “indisputably anarchistic in its logic and content.”<sup>23</sup> His attempt to implement socialism through the concept of Ujamaa was novel. It was based on the community and the traditional family group, but took into account “modern methods and the twentieth century needs of man.”<sup>24</sup> It called for village democracy and was not to be established through coercion, but rather persuasion and consensus. The authors contend that the intervention of bureaucracy and state corruption caused Ujamaa to fail, but insist that this does not detract from Nyerere’s argument. A small commentary is devoted to Muammar Gadhafi’s “Third Universal Theory” and his concept of *jamarrhiriyah*.<sup>25</sup> Though it is another experiment in socialism initiated by the state (and like so many others, the state emerged from a liberation movement), it is theoretically bold and deserves more attention, along with the revolutionary socialist works of Nyerere, Sekou Toure, Augustino Neto, Samora Machel, Amilcar Cabral, Kwame Nkrumah and Patrice Lumumba.

In “Anarchism and the National Question in Africa” the authors again, I feel, rely too strongly on a European experience, which ties nationalism to capitalism, national and ethnic chauvinism, and the construction of a state. This perspective does not articulate the full creativity of nationalism and national liberation movements.

Mbah and Igariwey subsume nationalism, culture, and the spirituality of subject peoples under *the* class struggle, specifically under the workers and peasants’ struggle. But real folks are also Ibo, Yoruba, Ogoni, women, youth, university teachers, traders, construction workers, etc. Nationalist movements have strong identity components that are not grounded in abstract political economic categories. Fresh thinking is needed and can be drawn from analyses of nationalism and liberation movements found in feminist, postmodernist, and cultural studies. There is already a small, but growing body of work on non-state or anti-state nationalisms being developed by anarchists and anti-authoritarians.

## Conclusion

In developing a broad and vibrant African-based anarchism, these two works can provide insights that anarchists and revolutionaries in general are missing. Together they offer a combination of culture and class analyses that take in the whole of peoples’ lives: their ritual everyday lives and their class-based, post-colonial lives. Walunywa’s analysis of Soyinka

23. They write: “It is ultimately in the seminal thoughts of Julius Nyerere that we glean an organized, systematic body of doctrine on socialism that is indisputably anarchistic in its logic and content.” (Ibid., [http://www.circlealpha.com/library/african\\_anarchism/precedents.html](http://www.circlealpha.com/library/african_anarchism/precedents.html))
24. They write: “Their community would be the traditional family group, or any other group of people living according to Ujamaa principles, large enough to take account of modern methods and the twentieth century needs of man.” Ibid.
25. For further commentary, see Thomas Martin, “Society Its Own Supervisor: Qathafi’s Democratic Theory,” *Social Anarchism*, No. 15 (1990): 42. Martin defines *jamahiriya* as the “state of the masses” or “people-dom.”

gives us insight into the significance of everyday Yoruban resistance, whereas Mbah and Igariwey give us a strong class analysis of the African crisis and suggest an anarchistic perspective that could free the continent.

But it is worth noting that Walunywa does not mention the criticism Soyinka has received for being elitist and sexist in his works. For example, Ngugi wa Thiong'o has criticized his works for downplaying the power of the masses while overemphasizing the tragic hero's ability to bring about change.<sup>26</sup> Also, his women characters are, more often than not, stereotypical *femmes fatales* and Soyinka focuses on the three male gods, when there is just as much revolutionary potential in the goddesses Osun, Oya, and Yemoja. The decision is his, as was the decision of Ibo writer Flora Nwapa, for example, to focus on *Ogbuide*, the Lake Goddess (aka "Mammywata"), or Ama Ata Aidoo, Ousmane Sembene and Ngugi wa Thiong'o to give women more diverse revolutionary roles in their literary works, and thus encourage more possibilities for female and male readers. *African Anarchism*, though strong on class analysis, could also benefit from a stronger feminist analysis as well as insights from works such as by Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, Filomina Chioma Steady, and Florence Stratton that dig deeper into African everyday life. Complemented with various postmodernist analyses which challenge old positions on nationalism (Wahneema Lubiano, Benedict Anderson, Rajani K. Kanth, Manuel Castells, Partha Chatterjee), cultural revolution (bell hooks, semiotician Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka), and classical anarchism (Todd May, Saul Newman), Mbah and Igariwey's work could be the foundation of greater critical analysis.

Walunywa has done a most valuable thing by bringing culture to the fore. His education in post-structuralism, as noted in his preface, indicates an ability to bring other perspectives into his work. For me, Walunywa's interest in Soyinka's anarchism may well be his own (he states: "Soyinka's own concept of anarchism is the only truly revolutionary method available to mankind today"<sup>27</sup>). If so, it may be Walunywa, more than Soyinka, who is our first acknowledged African anarchist philosopher to join the ranks of other thinkers—such as Gail Stenstad, Saul Newman, Todd May, Lorenzo Erving, Colin Ward, and Rolando Perez—who are pushing anarchist thinking toward new, urgent horizons.<sup>28</sup> Together, *Post-Colonial African Theory and Practice: Wole Soyinka's Anarchism* and *African Anarchism* have taken on added importance for me while researching and writing this review. Their hints, insights, focuses should be taken up by grassroots black revolutionaries and others who go through the existential suffering of being "stuck" in time and ineffective as movements.

26. See Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "Wole Soyinka, T.M. Aluko and the Satiric Voice," in *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1983). See also Mumia Abu-Jamal, "Soyinka's Africa," *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 31, No. 1: 37.

27. Joseph Walunywa, *Post-Colonial African Theory and Practice*, 124.

28. I do want to admit the heavy male and western bias of my own resources, especially in not being able to refer to any women of color anarchist theoreticians or philosophers for this review. Self-criticism is here.

Chuck Morse

## Latin American Anarchism

*Cronica Anarquista de la Subversion Olvidada* by Oscar Ortiz and *Contribución a una Historia del Anarquismo en América Latina* by Luis Vitale  
Santiago, Chile: Ediciones Espiritu Libertario, 2002

*Anarquismo y Anarcosindicalismo en América Latina*  
By Alfredo Gómez  
Paris: Ruedo ibérico, 1980

*Anarquistas en América Latina*  
By David Viñas  
Mexico City: Editorial Katun, 1983

There are important reasons for anarchists in English-speaking parts of North America to study the history of Latin American anarchism.

One reason is political. We need to form principled, collaborative relationships with our Latin American comrades to fight global capitalism globally and, to do so, we obviously need be able to identify our real comrades among the countless groups in the region that make claims upon our solidarity. Should we “defend the Cuban Revolution” or toast Lula’s social democratic victory in Brazil? Should we adopt the Zapatista ski-mask as our emblem or devoutly align ourselves with small anarchist groups? A genuine confrontation with these questions requires a deep appreciation of the history of Latin American opposition and certainly the anarchist movement has played a significant role in this history.

Another reason is more theoretical: it is necessary to develop a vision of a worldwide anarchist movement that takes into account the very different conditions that exist in “underdeveloped” parts of the world (such as Latin America) as opposed to Europe or the United States. It is necessary to understand how these conditions affect the form and content of anarchist activity. For example, clearly Belgian and Bolivian anarchist movements will have different characteristics, but exactly what type of differences and why? Certainly a good way to begin exploring these questions is by looking at the actual experience of anarchist movements in Asia, Africa, or, in the case of this review, Latin America.

Finally, the Latino identity is central to economic and cultural contradictions in the United States. Of course it is a positive source of community, tradition, and sense of self for

millions of Latinos within U.S. borders and it is also used as a negative signifier to justify exploitation and racism. The constantly changing meaning of the Latino identity is highly dependent upon ideas about the history of Latin America and radicals can encourage the most expansive, utopian elements of this identity by making sure that liberatory historical experiences in the Americas are not forgotten.

Unfortunately those who try to research the Latin American anarchist tradition will immediately discover that the historical literature on the movement is remarkably poor. There are no books on the topic in English or Portuguese and only five in Spanish, of which one is an anthology and another is a very brief overview.<sup>1</sup> The paucity of studies does not reflect the significance or dynamism of the movement but rather that social democrats and Marxists, who have produced the richest literature on social movements in the Americas, are hostile to the anarchist tradition and have attempted to erase or diminish its presence in this historical record.<sup>2</sup> Both groups need to construct the revolutionary Left as fundamentally statist to justify their social projects: the Marxists to defend their authoritarian regimes and the social democrats to present their free-market policies as the *only* socially conscious alternative to Marxist authoritarianism. Of course the existence of the anarchist tradition—a revolutionary, anti-authoritarian alternative—complicates their assertions.

Thus contemporary anarchists are obliged to undertake a major reconstructive effort to restore anarchism to its proper place in the history of the Americas and the three books reviewed here are among the best on the subject. Their authors defiantly and unanimously assert that the anarchist movement was a vital actor in early twentieth century social history. Louis Vitale, in a sentiment echoed by the other authors, observes that “anarcho-syndicalism was the dominant current in the Latin American workers’ movement during the first two decades of the twentieth century.”<sup>3</sup> They also all assert that anarchists were leaders in the creation of early labor unions, cultivated a strong working class militancy, and achieved many concrete gains for the working class. Indeed, between the revolutionary unions, schools, daily newspapers, and other projects, these authors paint a picture of a profoundly dynamic anarchist movement, especially in Argentina, Chile, Brazil, and Uruguay.

1. In addition to those reviewed here, the other two books on the subject are: *El Anarquismo en America Latina*, ed Angel J. Cappelletti and Carlos M. Rama (Caracas, Venezuela: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1990) and Angel Capelletti, *Hechos y Figuras del Anarquismo Hispanoamericano* (Madrid: Ediciones Madre Tierra, 1990).
2. For a good example of the social democratic omission of anarchism, see Jorge G. Castañeda, *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left After the Cold War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994). Castañeda, Mexico’s former Foreign Relations Secretary, excludes anarchism entirely from his sweeping study of the Latin America Left. The Marxist hostility to anarchism is noted in nearly every study of anarchism in Latin America.
3. Luis Vitale, *Contribución a una Historia del Anarquismo en América Latina* (Santiago, Chile: Ediciones Espiritu Libertario, 2002), 155. All translations are mine.

### **Anarchism and the Labor Movement**

Alfredo Gómez's *Anarquismo y Anarcosindicalismo en América Latina (Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism in Latin America)* treats anarchism in Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico. Gómez focuses on anarchists' role within the revolutionary labor movement and attempts to draw conclusions about the classical anarchist project based on the comparative study of the anarchist movement in these countries. Gómez, who is an anarchist, wants to both document the history of the movement and defend it in theoretical terms.

For Gómez, anarchism or anarcho-syndicalism (he does not distinguish between the two) is linked fundamentally to the labor movement. He regards anarchism as a theoretical expression of workers' capacity to organize themselves and potentially run society without the interference of capitalists or statists. In other words, anarchism allows workers to become conscious of their power as workers, defend their immediate interests, and fight to revolutionize society as a whole.

In each country he treats, Gómez charts the emergence of a combative working class and the influence of anarchist groups on this class. His study of Colombian anarchism, which makes up nearly half of the book, is a welcome contribution given that Colombia has received scant attention in existing studies of Latin American anarchism. Here he documents major strikes, such as the anarchist led banana workers' strike of 1928, and also the activities of anarchist groups such as Bogotá's Grupo Sindicalista "Antorcha Libertaria," the Via Libre group, and others.<sup>4</sup> However, his emphasis lays upon the working class and its capacity to fight directly for its own interests rather than specifically anarchist activities per se. This is partially because the anarchist movement was less developed in Colombia than in other countries, but also because Gómez regards a direct action based workers' movement and anarchism as essentially two sides of the same phenomenon (practice and theory, respectively). In Brazil, Gómez shows us how anarchists led a massive and nearly revolutionary wave of strikes from 1917 to 1920. In Argentina, which had one of the most mature anarchist movements in the Americas (and the world), Gómez focuses on the relationship between the anarchist Federación Obrera Regional de Argentina and working class struggles. In Mexico, Gómez examines the anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón's intervention in the 1910 Mexican Revolution and also treats the Mexico City based *Casa del Obrero Mundial* (House of the World Worker), which was a center of anarchist organizing and labor radicalism.

### **The Democratic Dimension of Anarchism**

The double book released by Chile's Ediciones Espiritu Libertario contains *Cronica Anarquista de la Subversion Olvidada (Anarchist Chronicle of Forgotten Subversion)* by

4. The banana strike was immortalized in Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998).

Oscar Ortiz and Luis Vitale's *Contribución a una Historia del Anarquismo en América Latina* (*Contribution to a History of Anarchism in Latin America*). These books document the history of anarchism in Latin America but have a special focus on the movement in Chile.

Vitale is a renowned Trotskyist author of Chilean citizenship who participated in the anarchist movement in his native Argentina as a young man. He states in the prologue that his book is an attempt to repay a debt he incurred to the anarchists, who presumably introduced him to revolutionary politics, and who gave him the élan necessary to survive the nine concentration camps in which he was interned during Pinochet's dictatorship.<sup>5</sup> His short (47 pages) and overwhelmingly laudatory work is divided into four sections. The first treats the origins or pre-history of anarchism in Latin America (i.e., utopian socialism) and the second discusses the influence of anarchism on the workers and students' movements and culture of Latin American between 1900 and 1930. This section, which is the longest part of the book, contains brief commentary (sometimes no more than three or four paragraphs) on anarchism in Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Peru, Mexico, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Costa Rica, and Colombia. The final section analyzes the history of the anarchist movement in Chile from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 1960s.

Although Vitale also places anarchism squarely within the labor movement, his focus is slightly different: he understands anarchism less as an expression of class interests and more as a utopian movement that seeks to reconstruct society along radically democratic, communitarian lines. Accordingly, he locates anarchism at both the beginning and end of industrial capitalism. He sees it as an articulation of the communitarian elements present in capitalism's early artisanal phase, when small workshops and many pre-capitalist practices were the norm, as well as the utopian sensibilities that emerged with the decline of industrial capitalism around the period of the New Left (expressed by thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse). In this sense, Vitale's concern lay on the anarchist movement's capacity to advance democratic sentiments against capitalism as opposed to its role within the development of class contradictions in the capitalism system.

Vitale shows how anarchists not only fought for the immediate interests of the working class but also created a broad culture of resistance that challenged the fundamentals of the social order with a deeply democratic politics. For example, in addition to their contributions to the labor movement, Vitale emphasizes anarchist support for women's liberation. He writes that "not only were [the anarchists] the most consequent fighters for the equal rights of women in the workplace, but dared to frankly pose [the issue of] free love, questioning the patriarchal servitude of marriage, advocating the egalitarian relation

---

5. Luis Vital, *Contribución a una Historia del Anarquismo en América Latina*, 148.



among the sexes in all aspects of the daily life.”<sup>6</sup> He highlights the important role played by anarchist women in the movement and specifically mentions anarcho-feminist activities (such as the first anarcho-feminist periodical in the world, *La Voz de La Mujer*, which was published in Buenos Aires from 1898 to 1899). Vitale also notes that anarchists were leaders in anti-militarist campaigns, the first to oppose compulsory military service, and among the first on the Left to collaborate with militant neighborhood organizations. In the realm of culture, Vitale emphasizes anarchist’s literary contributions, as well as struggles to democratize the university. He not only notes leading anarchist thinkers such Manuel Gonzalez Prada of Peru (who was one of the first on the Left to take up the “indigenous question”) and Mexico’s Ricardo Flores Magón but also lesser known writers who radicalized the broader cultural environment of their countries, such as Alejandro Escobar y Carvallo, the author of the first essays in sociological history in Chile, Argentina’s tango lyricist Enrique Santos Discépolo, and others. As for university struggles, Vitale notes that the movement for university reform was led by anarchists in Chile and in Argentina and that anarchists were also leaders of the first (1918) process of university reform in Latin America. As a whole, he paints an image of a movement engaged in the broadest possible opposition to the status quo and one that struggled to democratize all aspects of social life, from the economic to the cultural realms, from the private to the political arenas.

### **Anarchism as Radical Culture**

Oscar Ortiz’s *Cronica Anarquista de la Subversion Olvidada*, which makes up the greatest part of Ediciones Espiritu Libertario’s double book, is a collection of seventeen short, historical essays chronicling various important events and personages in the history of Chilean anarchism from the beginning of the twentieth century to the 1970s. Ortiz combines a narrative flare with an academic rigor, and thus his essays are both a pleasure to read and rich in a scholarly sense (although the book is an anthology of his essays and, hence, not particularly systematic).

David Viñas’s *Anarquistas en América Latina* is also an anthology of sorts. It consists of short excerpts from texts written by and about anarchists during the period of anarchism’s heyday and contains no sustained analysis except for a 30 page introductory essay. The excerpts, which are organized by country, cover Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Brazil, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina. Although Viñas provides some editorial comments, there is no attempt to offer a history of the movement or additional resources for interested researchers. The book is really a montage of quotes and seems more like the preparation for a book than a finished book per se.

Although Ortiz and Viñas do not advance strong theories of anarchism, claims about the nature of anarchism are present nonetheless. They also locate anarchism within the labor

6. Ibid., 157.

movement, but they are concerned primarily with its cultural elements, particularly its ability to provide the cornerstone of a productive counter-culture around which revolutionaries and dissents could gather.

Ortiz's study of key moments in the history of Chilean anarchism allows him to illustrate a revolutionary counter-culture made up of militant workers and idealistic bourgeoisie who were unified by a common anarchist axiom and the vicious persecution visited upon them by the ruling class as a result. Ortiz focuses on anarchists who transformed Chilean culture in various ways and, more often than not, anarchists who transformed the culture not through their explicitly anarchist activities but through activities that were somehow linked to their political convictions. For example, he devotes a chapter to the working class anarcho-Tolstoyian painter, Benito Rebolledo. Rebolledo, a committed anarchist who was immersed in the working class culture of the time, transformed Chilean painting by bringing poor people into his art. This accomplishment was of course innately connected to his anarchism, and he was celebrated and loved by the poor for his contributions. Likewise, Ortiz has a chapter treating Juan Gandulfo, who was both a militant anarchist and pioneer of socialized medical care in Chile. Gandulfo's medical contributions were also directly wedded to his anarchist commitment to improving the health of the working class. Ortiz's approach allows one to see anarchism as a broader social project: one that was not only embedded in working class struggle but also one that had the capacity to transform multiple areas of life.

Viñas's clearest statements about anarchism are present in his introductory essay. Here he describes anarchism primarily as a romantic protest against modernity waged by men and women who refused to accept the brutality of contemporary life. He refers to the "anarchist drama" that unfolded upon the stage that he describes as the social Darwinist city of the early twentieth century. Viñas's work offers a less consistent picture of the nature of anarchism—given that his book is really just a compilation of quotes—but one can surmise that the very form of the book indicates his conviction that anarchism is an essentially fragmentary project that rallied against the status quo.

### **The Decline of Anarchism in Latin America**

All of these authors agree that anarchism disappeared as a mass movement in Latin America around 1930 and all agree that vicious state repression was a significant cause of its decline. For example, Gómez notes that the Argentine government declared a state of siege against the workers' movement for the first time in 1902 and another four times in the following eight years, with a total duration of 18 months.<sup>7</sup> Also, citing Abad de Santillán, Gómez notes that the Argentine anarchist movement suffered around 500 deaths and accumulated more than a half million years of prison sentences in three decades of

7. Alfredo Gómez, *Anarquismo y Anarcosindicalismo en América Latina* (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1980), 152.

activity.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, Ortiz details brutal tortures and imprisonment suffered by Chilean anarchists. And Viñas reproduces letters that Flores Magón wrote while in prison in the United States, as a victim of repression directed by both American and Mexican authorities. Clearly, the anarchist movement was a threat.

But why did the anarchist movement fail to overcome the vicious state repression and regain its footing as a mass movement.<sup>9</sup> What was it about anarchism that prevented it, as a project, from adapting to the new challenges and flourishing?

These authors' different emphases allow them to highlight different internal problems that precipitated the decline of the anarchist movement. Of the four authors considered here, Gómez offers the most sustained critique of anarchism and devotes an entire chapter to "Reflections on the Decline of Anarcho-Syndicalism" (as an anarchist, he expects the most of the doctrine and, accordingly, is the most critical). Gómez argues that the anarcho-syndicalist project was essentially unable to articulate a coherent alternative to the social order it confronted. He sites "rationalist messianism" as one problem, wherein the anarchist faith in progress doomed anarchists to overestimate the potentials to educate humanity into a rational society and also discouraged them from acting in solidarity with other oppositional groups whom they deemed immersed in "metaphysics" (such as Zapata's army in Mexico, which anarchists disparaged for their Christianity). He also sites the tendency of anarchist organizations to become ends in themselves (as opposed to the means for creating a revolution) and thus to ossify into stilted and basically conservative bureaucracies. For example, Gómez points to the tendency towards bureaucratic dogmatism in Argentina's Federación Obrera Regional de Argentina. He cites the 1907 attempt to institute the doctrine of anarcho-communism as the basis for unified action with other unions, the ideological purges of 1924 (in which organizational support was withdrawn from those not considered properly anarcho-communist), and a gradual decline in organizational democracy (reflected in the diminishing frequency of congresses and a general language of organizational control). Gómez believes that these events indicate the growth of a regressive, dogmatic sentiment within the organization. He also shows how the tendency toward bureaucracy in anarchist unions dovetailed with the rigidly, para-statist organizations advanced by the Marxist-Leninists, both of which drew workers away from self-organization and a commitment to direct action.

Viñas and Ortiz offer less material about the decline of the movement. However, Viñas intersperses his book with citations from Marxists-Leninists who argue that anarchists failed to develop a coherent approach to the issue of political power. Presumably this is his view. Ortiz gives the impression that the militant working class counter-culture developed

8. This figure comes from Diego Abad de Santillán, *La FORA: Ideología y Trayectoria* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Proyección, 1971), 23; cited in Gomez, *Anarquismo y Anarcosindicalismo*, 155.

9. South Africa's ANC is an example of a movement that was able to withstand terrible repression.

by the anarchists was simply unable to contend with changing cultural and economic circumstances and thus faded into history (becoming “the good old days”).

Vitale is the least critical of anarchists and, by detailing the history of the movement up to the 1960s, implies that it may not have declined as radically as is normally supposed. But of course he does note a decline, and advances two reasons to explain this. First, he asserts that anarchists were unable to respond to changing economic circumstances in which old quasi-artisanal structures were superseded by the concentration of workers in enormous factories and, second, he argues that the emergence of populist governments inclined to negotiate with workers undermined the appeal of anarchist’s strident, oppositional stance.

Of the four authors, Gómez offers the most cogent critique of the anarchist movement in Latin America, whereas Vitale and Ortiz offer the most compelling arguments for the continuity of anarchism.

### **Critical Points**

These books all present different aspects of the rich history of Latin American anarchism, whether as a tendency in the labor movement, a force for democratization, or a counter-culture. They belie the political motives at work in the exclusion of anarchism from the historical record. As in Asia, Europe, and the US, the Latin American anarchist movement was a mass revolutionary movement that mounted a radical challenge to the existing order. Its significance can only be ignored at the cost of fabricating history.

But these works also have significant limitations when evaluated as potential resources for contemporary anarchists.

First, these books share a limited focus which makes it difficult to analyze the course of the anarchist movement in the context of the broader history of Latin American opposition. There is the implicit assumption that economic contradictions are at the center of history and hence an excessive focus on the labor movement to the exclusion of other forms of radicalism. This is expressed most clearly in Gómez’s book, but it is evident in the other works as well (which always prioritize the labor movement, even if they construct anarchism in different ways). Thus, the authors hardly relate the anarchist movement to the other forms of resistance that took place during anarchism’s heyday. For example, the authors fail to connect the anarchist movement to communitarian movements among indigenous people in any significant way (Gómez touches upon this in his commentary on the relationship between the Mexican anarchists and the original Zapatistas, but does not develop the point). Likewise, Vitale notes the link between anarchists and the feminist movement but, again, the point remains undeveloped.

Second, they are also limited when evaluated as possible resources for understanding the development of anarchism in “underdeveloped” parts of the world. For example, none of the authors make a comparison between the Latin American anarchist movement and anarchist movements in Europe or the US. And, furthermore, these books imply that the anarchist movement was not particularly conditioned by circumstances of underdevelopment. Gómez’s book, for example, was initially conceived as a study of anarchism in Colombia alone, but he expanded the work to include Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico precisely because he believes the anarchist movement followed a similar trajectory in these countries, despite their very different economic and political conditions.

In addition, there is a striking absence of a truly Latin American perspective. Indeed, while all of the books treat anarchism in Latin America (except for Ortiz’s, which focuses exclusively on Chile), it would be more accurate to say that they analyze anarchism in *several Latin American countries*, rather than Latin American anarchism per se. Although differences between individual countries make a country-by-country analysis important, it is unfortunate that the authors fail to situate anarchism within broader social and political trends in Latin America as a whole.

And there is also no attempt to explore the relationship between anarchism and the Latino identity. Is there a distinctly Latino anarchism? It is tempting to argue that there is not, given the pivotal role played by European immigrants in the Latin American anarchist movement and the early labor movement generally. For example, Gómez mentions that five and a half million European workers arrived in Argentina in the half century prior to 1924 (whereas the country’s total population was 6 million in 1890).<sup>10</sup> Among these immigrants was Diego Abad de Santillán, a Spanish born anarchist who became a leading participant in the Argentine anarchist movement and later returned to Spain to become a major figure among anarchists in the Spanish Civil War. Was he a Latin American anarchist or a European anarchist in Latin America? The possible meaning of a distinctly Latin anarchism remains unexplored.

These books all make important contributions to fleshing out a history that has been suppressed and must be reclaimed if the anarchist movement is to flourish once again in the Americas and in relation to the Americas. Their failings indicate the relatively low level of scholarship on the movement, although their strengths suggest points of departure for more thorough and critical studies that must come in the future.

---

10. Gómez, *Anarquismo y Anarcosindicalismo en América Latina*, 146.

Fernando López

## **Anarchism and the Argentine Labor Movement: Two New Studies**

*Anarquistas: Cultura y Política libertaria en Buenos Aires, 1890-1910*  
By Juan Suriano  
Buenos Aires: Manantial, 2001

*La Estrategia de la Clase Obrera 1936*  
By Nicolás Iñigo Carrera  
Buenos Aires: Pimsa-La Rosa Blindada, 2000.

Few new works on the history of the Argentine anarchist movement have appeared in the last decade, despite the fact that this movement was one of the most significant in the world (together with those in Spain, Italy, and North America). One can only mention the work of Jorge Etchenique<sup>1</sup> and some re-editions of the already classic works of Osvaldo Bayer. This is why Juan Suriano's book produced a sense of excitement prior to its appearance: it was presented as the definitive work about the period (in which the author is a renowned academic specialist). Nicolás Iñigo Carrera is also a renowned academic researcher, although his specialty is not anarchism but rather the Argentine workers' movement, in whose history anarchism occupies a significant place. Both authors offer a distinct—and problematic—approach to the relationship between anarchism and the Argentine labor movement.

Suriano's investigation into the anarchist movement from 1890 to 1910 is both arduous and complex. It is complex because it is not limited to the relationship between the workers' movement and anarchism, like the well-known texts of Bilsky, Oved, Abad de Santillán, Solomonoff, Zaragoza Ruvira and others,<sup>2</sup> but also focuses on analyzing anarchism's "cultural apparatus": its specifically anarchist propaganda, its rationalist schools, its local associations, libraries and cultural centers, theater, the characteristics of its press, its

- 
1. Jorge Etchenique, *Pampa Libre: Anarquistas en la Pampa Argentina* (Buenos Aires, Amerindia y Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2000).
  2. Edgardo Bilsky, *La FORA y el Movimiento Obrero: 1900-1910* (Buenos Aires, CEAL, 1985); Oved, *Iaácvov, El Anarquismo y el Movimiento Obrero en la Argentina* (México, DF: Siglo XXI, 1978); Diago Abad de Santillán, *La FORA: Ideología y Trayectoria del Movimiento Revolucionario en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Nervio, 1933); Jorge Solomonoff, *Ideologías del Movimiento Obrero y Conflicto Social* (Buenos Aires, Tupac, 1988); Gonzalo Zaragoza Ruvira, *Anarquismo Argentino: 1876-1902* (Madrid, Ediciones de la Torre, 1996).

enormous publishing endeavors, the organizational methods used in the formation of affinity groups, and the conditions and particularities of its ideological discourse.

The introductory chapter, which describes the specific conditions of anarchist propaganda at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, shapes the core chapters that examine the diverse aspects of the anarchist "intervention": "the anarchist interpellation" is an analysis of the structure of the anarchist movement's public discourse; "Pamphlets, Books, Conferences, Militants and Propagandists" studies its publishing efforts and cultural penetration in popular environments; "Free Time, Parties, Theater" explores the use of popular recreation as a tool for constructing a sense of identity and awareness; "The Anarchist Press" offers a more detailed examination of anarchist journalistic initiatives, particularly those of the of *La Protesta* newspaper; "Anarchism's Educational Practices" explores attempts at extending rationalist education, "The State, Law, Homeland and Anarchism's Political Practices" is a more than complex discussion of the anarchist movement's concrete practice and ideological assumptions. The book concludes with a chapter with a title that contains a whole definition in itself "Anarchist Rites and Symbols."

These dimensions of the movement are hardly glimpsed in earlier works, although one should stress that some young authors in the academic environment have been studying the anarchist movement's distinct discourse, its worldview, and something of the daily life of its militants, and also that some methods of propaganda circulation and the production of anarchist discourse were already examined in works by Golluscio de Montoya y Barrancos.<sup>3</sup>

But the work is also arduous because it implies the meticulous consultation of a profuse number of pamphlets and the reading of an enormous quantity of publications. Indeed, Suriano points out the poverty of Argentine archives and expresses gratitude for the opportunity he had to consult Amsterdam's Institute of Social History.

In this enormous quantity of documentation Suriano believes he finds the key to how the tactics and strategies of this movement were elaborated, without ignoring the relation with the workers' movement, but keeping it outside of his specific focus. He explores the specificity of the anarchist interpellation, the peculiarities of its ideological discourse, and

---

3. Eva Golluscio de Montoya, *Círculos Anarquistas y Circuitos Culturales en la Argentina de 1900* "Caravelle, Number 46, (1986). See also Jean Andreu y Maurice Fraysse, *Anarkos: Literaturas Libertarias de América del Sur 1900* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, Buenos Aires, 1990). Dora Barrancos, *Anarquismo, Educación y Costumbres en la Argentina de Principios de Siglo* (Buenos Aires: Contrapunto, 1990); "Anarquismo y sexualidad," in *Mundo Urbano y Cultura Popular*, ed. Diego Armus (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1990); *La Escena Iluminada: Ciencias para Trabajadores, 1890/1930* (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra), 1996.

the definition of “sender” and “recipient” within its discourse. He presents a rich image of its most distinguished militants in the chosen period, and of its itinerant orators, lecturers, propagandists, and even its rituals and symbolic systems, in order to conclude with the thesis he advanced in the introduction: that the anarchist movement experienced an inexorable decline in the face of reformist and integrative practices generated by the state to confront the conflicts produced by the anarchist movement. Suriano argues that these mechanisms of statist integration were set into motion in the first decade of the century and sent the anarchist movement into a permanent decline.

One objection to his work has to do with the divide between the workers’ movement and the anarchist movement. How should one describe the abundant trade union periodicals in the Resistance Societies, whose discourse is so clearly libertarian, in contrast to that of specifically anarchist publications? How to separate, and in what manner, anarchist culture from the workers’ culture? Does there exist a genuine workers’ culture that is not “ideological” or defined by the Left, the Right, or religious? This is especially problematic when one takes in account that the FORA<sup>4</sup>—which anarchists led without opposition until 1915— defined its activity as the struggle for “anarcho-communism” in its declaration of principles.

A second objection has to do with the pertinence of the temporal divide. Suriano affirms that from 1910 anarchism fell into an inevitable decline as a consequence of the advance of an oligarchic reformism, an advance that definitively ended the absence of the state in the social (and one that would have made possible the extension of the anarchist movement had it been maintained).<sup>5</sup> Although leaving to one side the leading participation of anarchists in the social struggles that would be denominated the “tragic week” of 1919, their leadership in the Patagonian strikes, and the intense social conflicts that took place until the 1930 military coup of Uriburu, it is certain that Suriano never offers an exposition of this decline which he presents as a fact.<sup>6</sup> Wouldn't it be necessary to explain this decline before elaborating the hypothesis that it explains?

- 
4. The FORA was the largest labor federation in Argentina during the first two decades of the twentieth century.
  5. Oligarchic reformism refers here to projects of political and social inclusion, such as mandatory, free, and universal educational and the cooptation of middle class sectors through electoral practices. These activities were carried out to expand the hegemony and legitimacy of state.
  6. The Patagonian strikes were led by anarchists in the 1921 and 1922 in southern Argentina. This insurrectional movement is described by Osvaldo Bayer in his four volume work *La Patagonia Rebelde* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1995). “The tragic week” refers to an insurrectional movement that developed in Buenos Aires in January 1919. A popular movement overcame police forces—who lost control of the streets—and raided police stations and armories. Bourgeois order could only be reestablished after the army intervened and carried out a fierce slaughter. The true number of victims remains unknown to this day.



The appearance of oligarchic reformism could be an indirect proof, but he does not present an exposition of the oligarchic intervention either. The blunt affirmation advanced by Suriano in his initial hypothesis is striking, when the same person, in earlier works, plays down this intervention of the oligarchic state, limiting it to the level of the good intentions of a reduced group of reformers, whose efforts “resulted in an apathetic and disinterested response of the hegemonic political sectors.”<sup>7</sup> This position coincides with that of other studies, such as those of Falcon<sup>8</sup> and Zimmermann.<sup>9</sup>

And with respect to the electoral opening of 1912: what was the magnitude of proletarian participation in the elections staged by the oligarchic regime or its Radical continuator?<sup>10</sup> No one has worked on this question seriously. And, apart from praises that establishment academics would direct to the oligarchic reformism after the return of democracy in 1984 (as the founder of a democratic, “citizens” tradition), I suspect that workers’ participation was infinitesimal until the years of Peronism. In fact, one can say that the oligarchic state and its Radical continuator only dealt with the workers movement by means of repression, and in this sense their legislative initiatives were exhaustive.

It is impossible to understand the temporal limit advanced by Suriano except as a subterfuge used to elude the complexities that anarchism will assume when the workers’ movement begins to transform itself after the First World War. Fortunately some texts have appeared in recent years—such as those of Etchenique<sup>11</sup> e Iñigo Carrera<sup>12</sup>—that shed light on this question (this has hardly explored in academic works, with the sole exception of

- 
7. Juan Suriano, “El Estado Argentino Frente a los trabajadores urbanos: política social y represión 1880-1916,” *Anuario*, Number 14 (1989-90).
  8. Ricardo Falcón, “Izquierdas, Régimen Político, Cuestión Étnica y Cuestión Social en Argentina: 1890-1912,” *Anuario*, Number 12 (1986/7).
  9. Zimmermann, *Los Liberales Reformistas* (Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1995).
  10. In Argentina the term radicalism or radical refers to the Radical Civic Union Party, which holds a political identity diametrically opposed to a progressive or left perspective.  
The electoral opening of 1912 refers to the moment when the vote became universal, obligatory, and secret. This change in electoral practices enabled the election of the Radical party. Traditional historiography emphasizes this as a key moment in the expansion of citizenship and the incorporation of previously excluded classes.
  11. Etchenique, *Pampa Libre*, 2000.
  12. Nicolás Iñigo Carrera, *La Estrategia de la Clase Obrera 1936* (Buenos Aires, La Rosa Blindada-PIMSA, 2000).
  13. Osvaldo Bayer, *La Patagonia Rebelde* (4 Volumes) (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1995); Also, *Los Anarquistas Expropiadores* (Buenos Aires, Legasa, 1986), y *Severino Di Giovanni: El idealista de la Violencia* (Buenos Aires, Planeta, 1999). These themes were explored in Jornadas de Historia de la Izquierda (Conference on the History of Left) that took place at Centro de Documentación e Investigación de la Cultura de Izquierdas in Buenos Aires at the end of 2000, during which there was a roundtable on the anarchist movement in the 1920s and 1930s. Various papers were presented that at least managed to put in parentheses Suriano’s blunt assertion that the anarchist movement basically disappeared after 1910. This talks will soon be available in digital format.

Bayer's writings.<sup>13)</sup>

In *Strategy of the Working Class*, Nicolás Iñigo Carrera is rightly amazed that the mass movement that produced the construction workers strike of 1935-36 is not present in academic studies. One could advance hundreds of conspiracy theories about the existence of this "forgotten history" and perhaps the explanation would not be more than negligence, carelessness, and a bureaucratic conception of the historians' job that falsely repeats old dogmas for fear of innovating or contradicting established opinions. This is the only way it possible to comprehend the fact that events such as those narrated by Carrera are absent in the analyses made by historians like Hugo del Campo or Matsushita.<sup>14</sup> But, worse still, no professional historian will question this significant exclusion during the last twenty years. Carrera argues that the omission of this history is intentional and reflects the fact that the contemporary focus on "ethnic or cultural movements" discourages the study of the working class as a central actor in the evolution of Argentine society.

Carrera's point is very pertinent. To found a citizens' tradition in a country such as Argentina, governed since its foundation by exclusionary oligarchies and devastated by ferocious military dictatorships, it is necessary to hide the true and only resistance that fought the all-embracing domination of those dictatorships for more than one hundred years: the workers' movement. This movement has been led by anarchists, socialists, communists, syndicalists or Peronists, and is invariably hostile to the Radical demoliberalism.

Carrera systematically studies the genesis and formation of the Argentine working class in order to explore the structure and composition of Argentine society in the mid 1930s, particularly the actions of the Argentine working class during the general strike of January 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, 1936, which was declared in solidarity with the already-striking construction workers. This strike had insurrectional characteristics in the view of the contemporary observers. Carrera mentions the theory of "cycles" with which our historiography classifies this history: there is one insurrectional and anti-statist cycle until 1910, and this would open a second cycle of citizens' integration, and end with the "Cordobazo" in 1969.<sup>15</sup> The first objection Carrera advances is that insurrectionalism covers all the cycles, with peaks in the "tragic week" of 1919, the solidarity strike of 1936, and the Cordobazo. And of course he

14. Hugo del Campo *Sindicalismo y Peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Clasico, 1983). Hiroshi Matsushita, *Movimiento Obrero Argentino 1930-1945* (Buenos Aires, Hyspamérica, 1986). Both authors focus exclusively on this period of the labor movement and their works are considered authoritative on the subject.

15. The Cordobazo refers to an insurrectional movement that unfolded in Córdoba in between May 29<sup>th</sup> and May 31<sup>st</sup> of 1969 against the military dictatorship of 1966-1973. The conflicts expanded from industrial centers in Córdoba to Corrientes, Mendoza, Tucumán, Rosario, and Corrientes. It became a movement of such national significance that it caused the fall of General Onganía and the beginning of the retreat of the regime.

does not mention—because the book appeared earlier—the social explosions of December, 2001 that resulted in the resignation of president De la Ruá. Although surely working class participation in the events of 2001 was more diffuse than in previous explosions, all these episodes are worthy of the title *insurreccional*.

Carrera also rejects any description of the dominant economic structure as proto-capitalist in the first decades of the century. He highlights its entirely capitalist character and rejects the classification of the proletariat of the epoch as artisanal. He also argues that there is always an articulation of an economic struggle as well as a political struggle, thus discrediting the thesis that anarchist “anti-politicism” was apolitical. He also picks up on the emergence of a large middle class that, in a certain way, helped stimulate a political opening (embodied in the Radical Party’s assumption of power). But likewise he emphasizes that the repression of the workers’ movement was invariably the Radical policy, with bloody landmarks like the repression of January 1919, the executions in Patagonia, the repression in La Forestal in Santa Fe, Ingenio Las Palmas in Jujuy, and in Chaco. Thus Carrera shows how the Radical governments of the time “incorporated” the working class socially or institutionally.

Carrera clarifies the social and economic context from which the 1936 strike would emerge. He reviews the expansion of industry from the 1920s and also the growing democratization of political sphere, although in reality these processes will only really unfold in the second half of the 1940s. In the meantime there is the “Infamous Decade:” the repression, the executions, the first *desaparecidos*, the systematic practice of torture, until the state of siege in 1932. The growth of industrial activity also had an important expression in urban life, where mounted concrete industrial techniques were diffused with the rationalist architecture. Workers’ neighborhoods grew in previously uninhabited zones of the capital and these neighborhoods would later be the primary sites of sabotage and confrontation with the police and state during the January strike.

Carrera searches to identify the participants in the strike (those involved in the arson of trains, public buses that had not joined to the strike, municipal garbage trucks, etc). He wants to see the social sectors involved and notes the leading role of youth, who were the most affected by the unemployment crisis that had existed since 1930. He documents the various acts of corruption and injustices of the Justo government: the assassination of the anarchist maritime leader Antonio Morán, the trial of the prisoners of Bragado, the assassination of the socialist José Guevara, and the government support of the English-owned *Corporación de Transportes*. An anti-monopoly and anti-imperialist sentiment rapidly spread throughout the working class and other social sectors. Solidarity with the construction workers’ strike reached a national level and was expressed in civil disobedience, attacks against symbols of the state and concretized by armed confrontations

with the police forces, with victims on both sides.

In the middle of the general solidarity strike with the construction workers an internal conflict in the workers' movement came to a head. Syndicalists, communists, and socialists—who were pushing for the growth of industrial unionism—were aligned on one side. And, on the other side, were members of FORA, who wanted to conserve craft unions, direct action as the only tactic, and direct discussion with the employer, and did not recognize the state's growing intervention in employer/worker relations. Regrettably the FORA decided to reject the strike and thus suicidally isolated itself from the workers' movement. In general, the majority of its members left the group for specifically anarchist groups, such as Comité Regional de Relaciones Anarquistas (Regional Committee of Anarchist Relations) first and then its heir, the Federación Anarco-Comunista Argentina (Argentine Anarcho-Communist Federation) and also the Grupo Spartacus (Spartacus Group).

In the conclusion, where Carrera searches zealously to discover the strategy of the working class, he finds that three alternatives are expressed by its politicized sectors. One is the FORA's alternative, which is a guild-oriented, pre-industrial unionism. The second alternative he finds "tries to overcome the form of existing organization, claim the struggle of the whole of the working class and direct action without disdaining the use of the instruments of the institutional system."<sup>16</sup> And the third alternative proposes that workers are directly integrated into the existing social order as "citizens."<sup>16</sup> If the construction workers and their long conflict appear set on the right road in this third option, the general movement of solidarity that shaped the general strike of January 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> seem nevertheless to find its bearings in the second alternative. The general strike brought to light the limits of simply fighting for wage increases and raised the conflict to the larger political plane.

But the general strike of January 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> indicates another strategy that would not prevail, that of an alliance between the working class and the Peronists in the mid 1940s. For Carrera, the working class becomes present in the political scene with the general strike of 1936 and creates the conditions by which the organized workers' movement is a conduit for class alliances and ultimately agrees to extend capitalism by integrating itself into the institutional framework of the state.

In other words, the struggle that aims to transcend capitalism actually improves it. And it is this tendency that obliges the most lucid members of the ruling class to give ground to the workers in order not to lose everything. For Carrera, the 1936 strike demonstrates a historical tendency of the Argentine proletariat to repeat insurrectional actions that contain,

---

16. Carrera, *La Estrategia de la Clase Obrera 1936*, 282.

embryonically, the improvement of the existing system. This tendency is hidden in traditional historical accounts, which only perceive a tendency toward democratization and social integration. Democratization and integration—we would add—are not irreversible processes, as demonstrated by the social disintegration and marginalization that has occurred in Argentina over the last twenty years.

The last two decades have seen the surge of an impressive body of historical literature about the birth of “citizenship,” the existence of early electoral campaigns, and “democratic” practices. This body of historical literature selects as its subject a diffuse conglomeration of social groups—because of the evident aversion to speaking about classes. Its advocates argue that its approach is a more “scientific” and “serious” than that which takes the working class as the object of its study and searches for the elements that transform it into a historical subject. But in spite of its presumed scientific discourse, the work of this intellectual claue is nothing more than an ideology, and a politics, specifically one that geared toward founding a “historical tradition” in the early 1980s for this novel “democracy without adjectives.”

We were speculating in the beginning of this essay about the origin of this “forgotten history” and now it is possible to see that the neglect of this history is not an innocent act. It is clear that two ways of doing history have been presented here, neither of which is or can ever be innocent or naïve. This is because historical research—in its questions, selection of sources, and many other ways—demonstrates a choice in the face of the world, and thus necessarily takes a position. If we were to use the metaphor of the barricade that Michel Onfray applies so successfully to illustrate the social conflicts of today, it would be very clear on which side of the barricade stands one or the other investigator.

Translated from Spanish by Chuck Morse and Shanti Salas.

Chuck Morse

## **Resistencia Libertaria: Anarchist Opposition to the Last Argentine Dictatorship**

A broad and popular resistance confronted the military dictatorships that strangled Latin America in the 1970s. Activists from diverse political tendencies fought back, in both organized and spontaneous ways, and their efforts doubtlessly saved many lives and hastened the collapse of these brutal regimes.

Although some of their contributions have been celebrated in books, articles, and films, important aspects of the resistance have never been studied. In particular, anarchist opposition to the dictatorships—which existed in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay—has been almost entirely omitted from the historical record.

The following interview offers a corrective to that omission. It tells the story of *Resistencia Libertaria*, a clandestine anarchist organization founded shortly before the Argentine military seized power in 1976.

*Resistencia Libertaria* (RL) was active in the student, labor, and neighborhood movements and also had a military wing with which it defended and financed its activities. At its peak, it had between 100 and 130 members and a much broader network of sympathizers. The organization was crushed in 1978 and 80 percent of its members perished in the dictatorship's concentration camps and torture chambers.

The RL sustained the long tradition of Argentine anarchism and also transformed it in the face of the new conditions confronting activists in the 1970s. The experiences of the RL—which have been essentially undocumented in Spanish or English until now—mark an important chapter in the history of resistance to the last Argentine dictatorship and post-World War II anarchism generally.

Although the *New Formulation* is normally restricted to book reviews, it is hoped that readers will welcome this small departure from our normal editorial policy.

This interview was conducted in Spanish by phone on October 13, 2002 with Fernando López, one of RL's few surviving members. Please see the "About Contributors" section for more information on López.

~ Chuck Morse

***Please tell me about the origins of the RL. How was it formed?***

The RL was founded by comrades from the city of La Plata at the end of the 1960s. The founding nuclei constituted a community around a cooperative carpentry shop (which still exists to this day) and developed militant projects among university students and later in the workers' movement (specifically in the shipyard workers' and judicial workers' unions).

A key event occurred when members of this group started collaborating with the newspaper, *La Protesta*, and a very heavy, acute discussion took place between them and the old people that were there.<sup>1</sup> The discussion had to do with the appearance of the first groups of armed action, such as the Tupamaros and the Ejercito Revolucionario del Pueblo (Revolutionary Army of the People). The young people tended to support the actions carried out by these groups and thus conflicted with the older people, who opposed these actions, because they rejected some of the Marxist positions of these groups. The younger group was expelled from *La Protesta* due to these differences around 1971. This cut their relationship with the older anarchist movement and rendered them independent from it.

Later, in 1973, an anarchist conference was held in the city of Cordoba, in which militants of groups from Cordoba, Buenos Aires, Mendoza, Salta, and Montevideo [Uruguay] participated. Myself and another comrade attended this conference as delegates from a group called Acción Directa. It was here that comrades from La Plata, Cordoba, and Acción Directa from Buenos Aires constituted Resistencia Anticapitalista Libertaria (Libertarian Anti-Capitalist Resistance) as a national organization.

A year or year and a half later, the name Resistencia Anticapitalista Libertaria was dropped simply for Resistencia Libertaria (this just happened naturally, there was not a discussion about changing the name). I joined the organization in 1974.

***How was the RL structured?***

The RL was an absolutely clandestine organization and it was organized in a cellular form by fronts of work.<sup>2</sup> The fronts of work were the workers' front, the student front, and the neighborhood front. The RL also had a military apparatus that was, in reality, a mechanism for financing the organization—working in a moment of almost absolute clandestinity is very onerous and costly—and for protecting militant workers, etc., because things such as kidnappings and rightist actions against left-wing workers' groups were common during this era. It was necessary to organize self-defense in some cases.

1. *La Protesta* is anarchist newspaper that has published from 1897 to the present. During its heyday it was an essential part of the Argentine labor movement and an important resource for the anarchist movement in Latin America.
2. The RL was always clandestine, although its work in mass fronts was not clandestine until the coup d'etat of 1976.

The organization's democracy obviously did not function through assemblies, but votes and elections were carried out within the organization's cellular form. Each cell had a delegate and this delegate connected to higher levels of the organization, successively, until arriving at a relation of a national or regional character. So, decisions reached the national level in the same way as they reached the cell. That is, decisions went up and down in the same manner [within the organization]. But of course it was more awkward than this, because it was not possible to get everyone together to talk.

***How many members did the RL have?***

The RL had important nuclei in La Plata and the areas surrounding La Plata, such as Berisso, Ensenada, Villa Elisa, in some of the cities between Buenos Aires and La Plata, and in Buenos Aires. And also in Cordoba and some of the cities close to Cordoba, such as the city of Ferreyra, which was an industrial sector, a zone of auto factories that had Renault and Fiat plants. It is difficult to estimate the exact number of RL members, given its clandestine, cellular structure, but I estimate that in 1975, in its moment of greatest development, the RL had between 100 and 120 or 130 members.

The RL was conceived of as a cadre party, not a mass party, and thus people that had relations with the RL could have a lower level of political formation and commitment than a RL cadre, and participate in groups that the RL controlled to some degree, such as base groups in the neighborhoods, factories, and the universities. Thus, when one thinks about this question, it is necessary to imagine a larger acting group than the 120 or 130.

***Explain to me what you mean by the word cadre.***

A cadre is a militant that, because of his or her [political] formation is capable of generating politics by his or herself once inserted in a place of determined work, without maintaining an organic, permanent link with the organization (which is not possible because of repression). That is to say, although this comrade, due to the situation of clandestinity, is isolated from the organization, he or she is capable of generating politics in the framework and necessities of the organization. He or she is capable of generating politics in any circumstance. A cadre is a political cadre, a military-political cadre. In other words, a cadre is a militant capable of working in neighborhood or a factory, that knows how to assemble a Molotov cocktail or a bomb of any type, that knows how to handle a weapon, etc.

And this is the difference with a mass party: a cadre party only incorporates militants that have agreed totally with the organization before joining. In a mass party it makes sense that it is authoritarian, because there are distinct levels of engagement inside the organization, from the lowest militants up the leaders. In the RL, the level of the militants was equal for everyone and any militant could exercise any function in any moment. Thus, for this to be



possible, the militant to be incorporated into the organization has to have a level of development or formation like the others that are already in the organization. I believe that the model is taken in some way from Bakunin's Alliance of Social Democracy, the party that he constructed during the First International.<sup>3</sup>

*Tell me about the members of the RL in 1975. What sort of economic background did they have? What were their ages? Who were some of the more significant members?*

I believe that the majority of RL militants and those of the new anarchism that emerged in the 1970s—there was an enormous quantity of small groups of young anarchists—had more petty-bourgeois origins than working class origins.

While their origins may have been petty-bourgeoisie, many slowly entered the workers' movement, where they developed their entire political and social lives. This reflects conceptions of the epoch, not only within anarchism but also in the Left generally, in which it was argued that the student movement needed to be proletarianized.

As for the age of the members, although there were comrades that exceeded forty or fifty, the majority were between nineteen and twenty-five years old, including the core that was between twenty-three and twenty-four.

The Tellos, who were three brothers (now disappeared) from La Plata, were important comrades. They were labor leaders at the ship factory in Berisso and Ensenada. Also, later, there was Rafael (I can't remember his full name—of course we all had pseudonyms) who was the Secretary General of a rubber union in Cordoba. He was a very important personality in the organization in the sense that he was a leader of the masses, not only an important RL militant. (This comrade also did not have working class origins. He had been formed as an anarchist in the Architecture Department in the National University of Cordoba. I believe he survived and is exiled in Spain.) But, in general, the RL didn't have very important public leaders, as it was absolutely clandestine.

*In what fronts did you work in 1976?*

I worked in the workers movement specifically. In 1974 I began to work in the Plumber's Union, which had an anarchist tradition and also older anarchist members. We developed some projects there. Later, in 1975, I began to work in a very large textile factory, the Alpargatas, when the RL began to prioritize political work in the biggest factories and strongest industrial unions.

*What exactly did you do there?*

Our participation was focused on rank and file workers, on the formation of classist groups.

---

3. López here refers to Bakunin's International Alliance of Social Democracy.

We participated in the national labor movement, organizing unions, internal commissions of classists and revolutionaries in distinct factories in the whole country, and the Coordinators of Unions in Struggle.<sup>4</sup> We did a lot of work in this between 1974 and 1976. And in 1976, under full military repression, we even went so far as to occupy the Alpargatas factory in Florencio Varela for two weeks, during which we were surrounded by the army.

***Tell me about this occupation.***

It wasn't an occupation in the sense that we were going to construct a workers' council that would run the factory. In principle, the occupation involved closing the factory and obliging the management to negotiate with the workers over labor conditions, salaries, etc. The conflict was over a series of demands of an economic character.

Cadres of the RL in these factories focused on the organization of these rank and file groups: the education of comrades, the incorporation of militants of these groups into the RL, the coordination of activities with groups in other factories, and the attempt to construct links between unions.

***Was it known that you were anarchists?***

No. As a party of cadres, the RL almost never produced party or ideological propaganda. The political propaganda was union propaganda or classist propaganda.

What happened is that particular members of these rank and file groups that the RL controlled were being formed politically and, in the long run, were incorporated in the RL as cadres. It was there where they began to have access to specifically anarchist texts.

***In addition to the workers' front, did you also work in the other fronts?***

I didn't work in the neighborhood front. I integrated myself into the student front, but I began to work into the workers' front almost immediately after joining the RL.

And of course militants of all the fronts participated at times in operations that were not specific to their front: in operations of armed propaganda; in lightning or blitzkrieg acts where streets were barricaded, automobiles overturned; actions with flyers; small explosives, and *miguelitos*, etc.<sup>5</sup> Cadres and militants of distinct fronts participated at times in these operations.

***Tell me what happened in 1976.***

- 
4. Coordinators of Unions in Struggle was an organization formed when public labor activity became impossible due to the repression. It was made up of independent labor activists and revolutionary left organizations, including the RL. It coordinated the activities of militants in the factories and other areas.
  5. Miguelitos are four-pronged spikes used to disrupt traffic.

Although the strong repression had begun earlier, in 1976 it was more indiscriminate and genocidal in character. We had the first important loss in 1976, in which five or six comrades were disappeared in Cordoba. They had the Rubber Union there, which was lost due to their disappearance. It was necessary to reconstruct the work fronts, move comrades to other places, etc. This was a permanent problem, and one that demanded a great quantity of money.

But it was in 1978 when they almost annihilated us as an organization. During three nights, in a systematic, linked way, they disappeared our comrades in La Plata, Buenos Aires, and in cities between La Plata and Buenos Aires. And there the organization stayed absolutely ruptured. Many of us reappeared, but more than half of the [members of the] organization never appeared again. We lost the greater part of the organization.

*What happened to the disappeared comrades?*

We assume that they were executed. This was the usual practice in this epoch. Of those of us that were disappeared, the military decided, I don't know for what reason, that some would survive and they were abandoned in various places. The others, with diverse grades of organizational responsibility, were executed. And all the disappeared were tortured, whether or not they were ultimately executed.

*In what year were you disappeared?*

In June 1978, in the middle of the World Cup that happened in Argentina. I was kidnapped during the night from an apartment I was living in with my *compañera* and three year-old son in La Boca.<sup>6</sup> They came around three in the morning, beating on the door. I got up to open the door, thinking that it could be my brother, who sometimes arrived at my house late.

It was a "*patota*"—this was the name for this type of paramilitary group.<sup>7</sup> There was six or seven individuals with many arms, machine guns, rifles, etc. I was subdued, tied up, and blindfolded. They brought me down from the apartment and put me into a van, in which I noted that there were others in the same condition.

They took us to what we later learned was a police barracks in the province of Buenos Aires and immediately brought us into a torture chamber to obtain information. The torture was the usual: electric shocks, blows, sticks, cudgels, chains. The usual. I prefer not to speak of the subject.

*How long were you in the police station?*

6. La Boca is a neighborhood in Buenos Aires known for its artistic and cultural qualities.

7. The word *Patota* is typically used in Argentina and Paraguay to describe a gang of youths that bother people on street.

I was there for two months. Other comrades were there for six months and nevertheless reappeared. This is the case of one of the comrades, but the majority that did not reappear after two months never appeared again.

***What happened to you after these two months?***

They abandoned me in a neighborhood in the outskirts of Buenos Aires, together with ten other people. They put our backs against a wall, as if they were going to execute us, and then left.

***Where did you go?***

I went to Uruguay, because I had a lot family there, with the idea, more than anything, of leaving my *compañera* and son in Montevideo and returning to Buenos Aires. However, as it turns out, I stayed in Uruguay until I returned to Argentina in 1984. There was still government surveillance in Uruguay, but it was low-key. They did not bother me directly.

***Tell me about the RL's activities between 1976 and 1978, the final two years of the organization.***

Of course the activity had a much less public character. We had more activity focused on meetings, discussion, the elaboration of documents and materials, discussions and the creation of relations with other groups.

Relations were so confused, so difficult and complicated by the repression. For example, if you lost contact with a comrade it could take months before you regained this contact. And imagine the enormous quantity of security: measures were being implemented one upon the other.

But, in any case, we worked fundamentally to conserve the groups that we had in the workers' front as well as in neighborhood and student fronts.

***What did you do in the neighborhood and student fronts?***

The neighborhood front attended, above all, to the poorest neighborhoods. The activities of the neighborhood groups had to do with demands for water, sewage, the construction of housing, parks, etc., (the various distinct demands of poor neighborhoods). In the student front we worked on the traditional student demands around study programs, classroom materials, and grades: the usual issues of the time.

***Tell me about the military front.***

Of course it was the smallest nucleus of the organization. It was not necessarily made up of the oldest, most proven comrades of the organization—there wasn't a rule in this respect—but naturally the most proven and oldest comrades ended up in this front because these

comrades had been exposed to the police and were going to be stopped. In other words, their names had fallen into the hands of repression and thus they could not work in more conspicuous projects.

***How did you know that these comrades were exposed?***

For example, the comrades that came from the ship factory were denounced and persecuted because they were notorious militants in the unions. When the repression really began in 1976, it was necessary to transfer these comrades from Berisso and Ensenada and insert them in less conspicuous projects, with greater coverage, in the northern zone of Buenos Aires, in San Fernando, in Tigre, etc.

***And these comrades ultimately joined the military front?***

Yes, more than anything they worked in the military front and, at times, carried out actions with other organizations, to acquire money or other things that were needed, such as arms, printing machinery, and autos.

***Tell me about some of your actions.***

As is typical of these types of groups worldwide, they had to do with kidnappings in order to charge ransoms from businessmen. At times there were actions against the police, where a police vehicle was burned or a police station was shot at. That is, actions of diverse types.

***What was the relationship between the RL and other Left groups?***

There was only one anarchist group of the level or importance of the RL, which was the LAC, the Línea Anarco-Comunista (Anarchist-Communist Line), from here in Buenos Aires. But it began to lose momentum as an organization before 1976 and a great part of the LAC joined the RL around the middle of 1976.

We also got along particularly well with groups of classist character. There was the Organización Comunista Poder Obrero (Communist Workers' Power Organization), which was a New Left organization and a classist group. Although they were Leninists, even classical Leninists, we had an important enough level of agreement with them.

***Tell me about the agreements.***

The agreements were functional: the coordination of efforts in the labor movement, the organization of Coordinators (fundamentally in the workers' front).<sup>8</sup> At times relations were also established on the level of military defense, in operations we conducted with them. They had a military apparatus called the *Brigadas Rojas* (Red Brigades), which was much more developed than ours.

---

8. See footnote 3 for an explanation of Coordinators of Unions in Struggle.

***In what sense were your activities different than those of other revolutionary Left groups during the dictatorship?***

I do not know if they were *that* different. They were distinguished by our political attitudes. We were inclined to workers' self-organization, towards generating autonomous structures of the workers' movement and less towards capturing activities in the work fronts as a party. In other words, we tried to organize groups in the mass fronts, not groups of our organization. Of course our militants were inserted in these groups, but not with a party-like character.

The organization had this Bakuninist conception of revolutionary militants that had shaped Bakunin's Alliance of Social Democracy. That is, they are militants that act and coordinate in order to organize the popular masses, but they do not have a directive plan for the popular masses. To say it another way, our work is the construction of power, not seizing power.

***Were there conflicts between the RL and other groups of the revolutionary Left?***

In a situation of absolute clandestinity, it reaches to a point at which it is very difficult to establish relations of any type with other organizations and thus you do not see the obligation to fight with them. In this sense we did not have big conflicts with other political organizations.

Perhaps we had them at the student level, when the militancy was less clandestine, but during the period of total clandestinity we not did feel compelled to conflict with militants of other organizations because we did not have shared efforts.

***What were your relations with the international Left?***

We had relations with the people from Uruguay, particularly the Organización Popular Revolucionaria 33 (Popular Revolutionary Organization 33). This group had anarchist origins and a form of organization very similar to ours. It was an older organization, with greater insertion in popular struggles and also more powerful. It still exists these days but has changed significantly. It emerged from the FAU (Uruguayan Anarchist Federation) and, in the 1970s, was evolving into a libertarian Marxist organization. We had lots of connections with these people in the 1970s, when they were much closer to the FAU.

And there is one other relation, about which I am the least appropriate to comment—I don't know if there are still comrades alive who know about this relation—but around 1976 I heard talk about a relation with a Palestinian group. This contact is almost mythic and I knew very little about this, but I know that some comrades had been trained in the Middle East with Palestinian anarchists. I don't know how important this relationship was or if it was sporadic and disappeared immediately. In my epoch of militancy in the organization I

don't remember talk of this relationship as something habitual, but I know that something had existed. In any case, those who participated in this relation are now dead, disappeared.

***Did you have other relationships with the international anarchist community?***

No.

***Tell me about the RL's ideas.***

The RL ideas were a conglomeration. Originally they were fundamentally Bakuninist but later we incorporated the classical ideas of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism, of Cornelissen<sup>9</sup> and also the anarcho-syndicalism of Rudolf Rocker.

In Argentina there are internal divisions or different currents of anarchism. There is a more communalist anarchism and a more syndicalist, classist anarchism (which was very important here in the 1920s). In a way, the RL rescued this classist tradition of Argentine anarchism.

***What did you read?***

Apart from the classics of anarchism, which we logically read as an anarchist organization, we also habitually read books by Franz Fanon, such as *The Wretched of the Earth*, *The Sociology of Revolution*, Mao's texts about the prolonged war, Marcuse, and others.

***Was there an influence of Spaniard Abraham Guillen?<sup>10</sup>***

No, and there was not an influence of the Spanish [anarchist] guerrillas either. Yes, we had news or someone knew something, but everything that had to do with the Spanish Civil War and Spanish resistance after the establishment of Franco was very distant for us.

***What debates and conflicts did you have in the RL?***

In general, the discussions revolved around works of concrete insertion, around the politics of alliances, that is, with whom we should have an alliance and what character this alliance should have.

For example, there was an internal discussion about the alliance with the Organización Comunista Poder Obrero. Or also, in 1976, during the military dictatorship, the Monteneros<sup>11</sup> launched the CGT<sup>12</sup> in Resistance. That is to say, they tried to link the unions

9. Cornelissen was an important Dutch anarcho-syndicalist.

10. Abraham Guillen (1913-1993) was a prolific anarchist activist and theoretician, veteran of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), and a lifelong member of the Spanish CNT who went into exile in South America in the late 1940s. His most well-known and influential work is *Strategy of the Urban Guerrilla*. See Donald C. Hodges, *Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla* (New York: William Morrow, 1973).

11. See review by Ramor Ryan in this issue for a fuller discussion of the Monteneros.

12. The Confederación General del Trabajo was the national labor federation.

to a non-official, parallel CGT, and this produced a discussion in our organization concerning whether this was coherent, if the correct thing was not to strengthen the labor federation that existed and which the workers recognized as theirs. That is to say, the workers continued seeing the CGT as their organization, so constructing a parallel organization could be useless or even dangerous. This discussion continued until 1978.

Debates within the RL took place through *minutas*, which were written resumes of a discussion. They were passed to a cell, to a sphere of coordination, from this sphere of coordination to another sphere of coordination. This is how the *minutas* circulated (and what permitted the discussions to take place in a framework of total clandestinity).

***What publications did the RL produce?***

The RL did not produce a party publication or party propaganda. The RL published periodicals in each work front, in each place of concrete insertion. For example, the RL participated in *Coordinadoras de Gremios en Lucha* (Coordinators of Unions in Struggle) in the southern zone of the province of Buenos Aires, and produced a periodical called *Organización Obrera* (Workers' Organization). When the members of the RL were inserted in the construction union they produced a publication called *Resistencia Obrera* (Workers' Resistance). The comrades in the graphic workers' union also had a publication (although I don't remember its name). A publication was produced in each place of work where we had an important development and where there was some possibility of an internal press, but the publications were of the fronts of work, not the organization. This has to do with the RL's character as a cadre party, not a mass party.

***What was the relationship between the RL and the older anarchists?***

The relation was very weak. The older anarchists continued to be centered in two or three groups that, while existing, had very little political relevance and were very isolated. And, curiously, these young anarchist groups weren't born inside the old anarchist institutions. They developed outside, not inside the anarchist tradition. They were coming to anarchism from other political currents.

***Did the older anarchists help you?***

I believe that there was a very sharp generational break in the 1970s among those of us who were twenty then and those who were sixty and seventy years old. The generational split was very sharp, much sharper than today, where there are shared cultural references among distinct generations. There really wasn't any type of cultural reference between the generations then and thus it was very difficult to establish more or less normal relations.

***In retrospect, what do you think were the RL's most notable errors and successes?***

It's so difficult. We never managed to make a self-critique. We have never gotten together



after the debacle, after such a blow, after so much catastrophe.

But, seen from a distance, I believe that the successes have to do with all of our experiences in attempting to elaborate an efficient anarchist organization in conditions of total clandestinity. I think these are valid organizational successes and they are worth considering. How to conserve internal democracy, the internal political discussion, in an organization of some importance (in terms of the number of members) in the context of violent repression: I believe that our struggles with these questions, as a specifically anarchist organization, were successes. Referring to theoretical successes or political successes, I believe the organization was just able to recuperate a classist tradition of Argentine anarchism that had been lost.

[As for errors], after the repression really began, I believe that the military front started to have a weight inside the organization that it would not have had in other circumstances. This is perhaps one of the most terrible errors.

I also believe, seen from a distance, that the organization should have [better] guarded its militant workers and those inserted in mass struggles. It should have reduced their activity in some places in order to maintain and protect its inserted militants, in the worker's front, in the student's front, in the neighborhood front. I think that was an error, a grave error.

But all this has to do with the sensation of expectation experienced by all the Left organizations in Argentina. Of course the massacre was shared, it wasn't for us alone.

*Why was it an error that the military front had such weight within the organization?*

In a situation of total clandestinity an organization is obliged to have a very large level of finance to survive and continue acting and protecting its militants. The militants are not able to finance themselves, so you need to have an apparatus that is permanently occupied with generating these resources. Thus, the apparatus begins to have a preponderance, a greater level of significance, than it was originally supposed to have.

For us, the military front was not like it was for other Left parties in Argentina, as the embryo of an army or anything along these lines. In our strategy of prolonged, popular war, we foresaw the creation of a popular army, but we understood that this army would be constructed in the factories and neighborhoods, which of course we would support, but it wouldn't be a party organism. We had a different conception in this respect [than other Left groups].

*In your opinion, what are the RL's most important lessons for anarchists today?*

I believe that the fundamental lesson has to do with the negation of the isolation and

sectarianism [within anarchism]. I think that if there was something absolutely coherent about the RL during all its years of existence, it has to do with this, the negation of sectarianism, isolation from the masses, from the workers, from the discussions of the common people. I think this is the most redeemable feature of the RL. The RL broke with this, along with other anarchist groups that were close to the RL (there were many other anarchist groups in the period, many of which ended up being incorporated into the RL).

All these groups emerged as a reaction against the isolation that anarchism had at the beginning of the 1960s. This isolation had to do with the phenomena of Peronism in Argentina. After the repression of the 1930s and the 1940s, anarchism was withdrawing and enclosing itself and it had this posture when the 1960s arrived. And all these [new] groups, which were constituted primarily by youths, were a reaction against this withdrawn, enclosed anarchism. So, I believe that the most redeemable of the RL is precisely its negation of sectarianism, its attempt to engage the people, their discussions, and contribute to their struggles.

*What are the best books about resistance to the dictatorship in Argentina?*

There really are not good books about resistance to the dictatorship, and this is an interesting issue. One sees that the Spanish have spent thirty years writing about Franco's dictatorship, and the distinct forms of resistance [against it] and the whole struggle of the Civil War before the rise of Franco. Why is it that here, in Argentina, where the dictatorship was such a great trauma, that coherent books have not been written about the resistance to the dictatorship?

The explanation has a lot to do with the influence of the dominant culture and how the agenda of the historical studies in Argentina have been formulated. This agenda has been governed by reformist sectors that insisted upon the theory of the two devils, in which the dictatorship was described as a fight between a devil of the Right and a devil of the Left, with the people as spectators.

Those who manage the agenda of historical studies in Argentina have tried to silence the subject of workers' resistance to the dictatorship, because, in the framework of the theory of the devils, the people that disappeared were disappeared by chance or accident, not because they were inserted in a struggle against the dictatorship.

This has to do with the regime's need to legitimize its actions since the rise of Alfonsín in 1983.<sup>13</sup> That is to say, to legitimize the government that returned to the liberal forms of democracy of forty or fifty years ago, they tried to assert that Argentina had experienced a war between crazies of the Left and crazies of the Right and that the majority of the people

13. Raúl Alfonsín was elected in October 1983, during the first presidential election held since the military coup.

were accidental victims, merely in the middle.

In this sense those who manage the agenda of historical studies in the university disregard the study of workers' resistance. For example, although it is unknown by the majority of the people, 60 percent of the disappeared were factory workers. And, likewise, the Radicals insisted strongly in their attempt to demonstrate that there were not thirty thousand disappeared but ten or twelve thousand.<sup>14</sup>

And no one has done a study of how many people were disappeared and later reappeared. In other words, how many people passed through the dictatorship's concentration camps. What we can find there is that probably a good bit more than one hundred thousand people must have passed through these concentration camps.

That is to say, studies of working class resistance to the dictatorship, which was important, studies of the quantity of people that passed through the dictatorship's concentration camps, would break this scheme and the legitimacy of these liberal governments in Argentina. Because this government proposes that they came to recuperate a democracy in Argentina killed by the conflict between some extremists of the Left and some extremists of the Right. This is what gives legitimacy to the Radical government.

To study workers' resistance to the dictatorship, the fact that the majority of the disappeared were factory workers, not militants of armed organizations, would show that the resistance to the dictatorship was a popular resistance. And that what this popular resistance asked for was not the return of democracy in the style of Radicalism, but rather a socialist revolution.

**Note:** Despite the weakness of present works on resistance to the dictatorship, I asked López to mention some of the best books that are available. He mentioned the following titles:

Anguita, Eduardo and Martín Caparrós. *La Voluntad: Una Historia de la Militancia Revolucionaria en la Argentina*, Vol. 1-3. Buenos Aires, Norma, 1998.

Bousquet, Jean-Pierre. *Las Locas de la Plaza de Mayo*. Buenos Aires: El Cid Editor, 1983.

Gillespie, Richard. *Soldiers of Peron: Argentina's Montoneros*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982

Mattini, Luis. *Hombres y Mujeres del PRT-ERP: la Pasión Militante*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Contrapunto, 1990.

Translation by Chuck Morse

14. López refers here to the Radical Civic Union Party. This is the party of Raúl Alfonsín as well as that of Argentina's disgraced former president, Fernando de la Ruá.

---

## Notes About Contributors

**Ashanti Alston** is a former member of the Black Panther Party and former prisoner-of-war (Black Liberation Army). He is presently a member of Estación Libre/People of Color Zapatista Support Group, a board member of the Institute for Anarchist Studies, the Northeast U.S. Coordinator for Critical Resistance, participant in the Anarchist/Anti-Authoritarian People of Color Study Group, and grandfather.

**Rebecca DeWitt** is a former Director of the Institute for Anarchist Studies and now a board member. She works actively on local arts and community issues and was recently the Acting Director for the Contemporary Artists Center in North Adams, Massachusetts. She also holds a day job at a local land trust.

**Paul Glavin** has been part of the Free Society Journal Collective, the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation, efforts to free Mumia Abu-Jamal, and numerous collectives and organizing projects over the years. He currently works with the Institute for Anarchist Studies and enjoys life in the Pacific Northwest.

**Uri Gordon** is an Israeli activist currently based in Oxford, UK. He has been working with the local anti-war group (<http://osstw.lautre.net>), on strengthening ties between Israeli and European radicals through the Peoples' Global Action Network (<http://www.agp.org>), and promoting the European Social Consulta Project (<http://www.consultaeuropea.org>). In his spare time he is developing an anarchist theory of democracy for his doctoral thesis.

**Fernando López** is a longtime anarchist and presently lives in Buenos Aires with his daughter. He is an active member of the Centro de Documentación e Investigación de la Cultura de Izquierdas, a radical archive specializing in the history of the Left.

**Chuck Morse** founded the Institute for Anarchist Studies, teaches at the Institute for Social Ecology, and lives in Mexico City.

**Ramor Ryan** is an Irish anarchist writer living between Chiapas, Mexico and New York City. In Chiapas he works as a water technician serving Zapatista communities. He has written for a wide variety of radical newspapers, magazines, and books. His forthcoming book, *Globalization and its Discontents*, will be published later this year.

**Priscilla Yamin** is a Ph.D. candidate in political science at the New School for Social Research. She has been involved in various feminist and anarchist projects, and has recently joined the board of the Alternatives to Marriage Project.

## Publications Received:

### Books

- Joel Andreas, *Addicted to War: Why the U.S. Can't Kick the Militarism* (Oakland: AK Press/Dark Star, 2002, 65 pages)
- James Carr, *Bad: The Autobiography of James Carr* (Oakland: AK Press/Nabat, 2002, 238 pages)
- Dark Star, *Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader* (Oakland: AK Press/Dark Star, 2002, 120 pages)
- Dr. Ben Reitman, *Sister of the Road: The Autobiography of Boxcar Bertha* (Oakland: AK Press/Nabat, 2002, 205 pages)

### CDs

- Christian Parenti, *Taking Liberties: Prisons, Policing and Surveillance in an Age of Crisis* (Oakland: AK Press/Alternative Tentacles, 2002, 69 minutes).
- Noam Chomsky, *The New War on Terrorism: Fact and Fiction* (Oakland: AK Press/Alternative Tentacles, 2002, 54 minutes).
- Howard Zinn, *Artists in a Time of War* (Oakland: AK Press/Alternative Tentacles, 2002, 52 minutes).
- Various, *Mob Action Against the State: Collected Speeches from the Bay Area Anarchist Book Fair* (Oakland: AK Press/Alternative Tentacles, 2002, 140 minutes).

### Magazines

- *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* (Spring 2002): PO Box 2824, Champaign, IL, 61825, USA. Subscriptions \$15.
- *Bicel* (September 2002): Fundación de Estudios Libertarios "Anselmo Lorenzo", Paseo Alberto Palacios. Núm. 2. 28021 Madrid, Spain.
- *Discussion Bulletin* (September-October 2002): P.O. Box 1564, Grand Rapids, MI 49501, USA Subscriptions: U.S.: \$3 Individual; \$5 Library.
- *The Northeastern Anarchist: Magazine of the Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists* (Spring/Summer 2002): PO Box 230685, Boston, MA 02123, USA. Subscriptions: \$15
- *Onward: Anarchist News, Opinion, Theory, and Strategy of Today* (Fall 2002): PO Box 2671, Gainesville, FL 32602-2671, USA. Subscriptions: \$7.
- *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory: The Biannual Newsletter of the Institute for Anarchist Studies* (Fall 2002): IAS, P.O. Box 482, Amherst, MA, 01004, USA Subscriptions: \$5 Individuals, \$10 Institutions.
- *Razorcake* (Issue #10): PO Box 42129, Los Angeles, CA 90042. Subscriptions: \$15.
- *Slingshot Newspaper* (Winter 2002): 3124 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94705, USA Subscriptions: \$1

## **Additional Resources:**

### **Institute for Anarchist Studies**

P.O. Box 482

Amherst, MA

01004 - USA

Phone: 413-369-8037

E-mail: [ias@newyorknet.net](mailto:ias@newyorknet.net)

Website: <http://flag.blackened.net/ias/Default.htm>

### **Institute for Social Ecology**

1118 Maple Hill Road

Plainfield, VT

05667 - USA

Telephone/Fax: 802-454-8493

E-mail: [info@social-ecology.org](mailto:info@social-ecology.org)

Website: <http://www.social-ecology.org/>

### **AK Press Distribution**

674-A 23rd Street

Oakland, CA

94612 - USA

Telephone: 510-208-1700

Fax: 510-208-1701

E-mail: [info@akpress.org](mailto:info@akpress.org)

Website: <http://www.akpress.org/>

### **Fundación de Estudios Libertarios**

“Anselmo Lorenzo”

Paseo de Alberto Palacios, 2

28021 Madrid, Spain

E-mail: [fal@cnt.es](mailto:fal@cnt.es)

<http://www.ecn.org/a.reus/cntreus/fal/index.html>

**Subscriptions:**

\$7 in the United States and \$10 elsewhere. Please  
make checks payable to *Charles Morse*.

**The New Formulation**  
2620 Second Avenue, #4B  
San Diego, CA  
92103 - USA

E-mail: [cwmorse@newyorknet.net](mailto:cwmorse@newyorknet.net)  
Website: <http://flag.blackened.net/nf/index.htm>

