

Without Borders: Reflections on Anarchism in Latin America

STEVEN HIRSCH
Washington University, St. Louis

The complex history of global anarchism is currently undergoing a thorough historical revision. Inspired by the worldwide resurgence of anarchist ideas, methods of struggle, and movements that accompanied the ascendance of neoliberalism and globalized capital, and the collapse of international communism in the 1990s, scholars have recently embarked on a re-examination of classical anarchism (1860s-1920s) from a transnational perspective. This new historiography of anarchism eschews the standard nation-state centered approach and its concomitant interpretation of nationally self-contained anarchist movements. Taking anarchism's principle of internationalism seriously, it focuses instead on supranational and multidirectional flows of ideas, discourses, resources, and activists, and formal and informal organizational and personal connections and interactions. In doing so, it offers a more nuanced historical narrative of anarchist networks, organization, ideological formation, solidarities, spaces, and temporalities. Much of this current literature, however, has been based primarily in a European territorial context.¹ Still, there is reason to be optimistic about a more comprehensive treatment of the history of anarchism. Renewed interest in anarchism's anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles has resulted in several important historical studies that encompass the Global South.² Nevertheless, considerable work remains to be done on the dissemination and reception of anarchism in the Global South during the first globalization (1880s-1920s), as Carl Levy recently stressed in an incisive literature review.³

The articles in this special issue significantly contribute to rethinking the history of anarchism in Latin America and the Global South. By utilizing a mul-

steven.hirsch@tufts.edu

tisite and multilevel geographic and spatial analysis, they clearly demonstrate that anarchist movements in Latin America, contrary to the traditional scholarly literature⁴, were neither unidirectional extensions of European movements nor nationally separate socio-political phenomena. Indeed, they convincingly argue that transnational anarchist networks shaped and underpinned national, regional, and local anarchist movements in Latin America. What emerges from these sophisticated treatments is a deeper understanding of the complexity, dynamism, and range of operations of Latin American anarchist movements in their struggles against industrial capitalism, centralizing nation-states, and imperialism.

Kirwin Shaffer's essay is a trenchant analysis of the development and interrelationship of anarchist movements in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Panama. By closely tracking the anarchist press, financial exchanges, and cross-border movements, he cogently demonstrates the existence of a trans-Caribbean anarchist network. Significantly, he explores the ways U.S. imperialism in its various guises galvanized and united anarchist opposition along transnational lines. Rising nationalism posed another challenge to anarchist internationalism. Here Shaffer shows that Caribbean anarchists contested, with some success, subaltern national identification.

Anton Rosenthal shifts our attention to the far-ranging geographic operations of the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.). Focusing primarily on its extensive web of chapters and press organs in North and South America, he provides fresh insights on the I.W.W.'s ability to forge local and transnational "spaces of resistance to capitalism." Although not strictly an anarchist organization, the I.W.W. closely collaborated with anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists in Mexico and Chile, and to a lesser extent in Uruguay, Peru, and Ecuador. In addition, it contributed to the spread of anarchist ideas, values, organization, and tactics in Latin America inasmuch as it promoted internationalism, worker dignity, working-class solidarity, direct action, and "decentralized revolutionary organization."

Geoffroy de Laforcade makes a compelling case for the importance of anarchist labor organization and its capacity for building transregional and transnational networks of solidarity. In Buenos Aires longshoremen and mariners organized anarchist resistance societies and local labor federations. Acting on anarchist ideas of federalism and "solidarity pacts," they established a vast network of solidarity that incorporated waterfront workers throughout the Rio de la Plata region and beyond. This meticulously researched study highlights the flexibility, transnational operations, and resilience of Argentine anarchist labor organization.

Together these essays underscore several key points. First, the anarchist press played a pivotal role in the construction of transnational anarchist networks.

Moreover, it was instrumental in promoting and coordinating transnational anarchist solidarity. Second, anarchist movements in Latin America were interconnected by the mobility of activists and working-class adherents in urban centers, along maritime lines, across borders, and within and between nations. Often this mobility was catalyzed by either capital flows and/or state repression. Third, each essay documents Latin American anarchism's simultaneous commitment to internationalism and concern for local and regional conditions. Fourth, any mapping of Latin American anarchism must factor in supra and subnational linkages and spatialities.

Finally, these essays are suggestive of new lines of inquiry. More scholarly attention must be given to how transnational anarchist values and meanings were articulated and reformulated at the micro-level so as to be assimilated by local actors and cultures. This will require careful scrutiny of particular anarchist discourses, symbols, and cultural practices. The influence of Latin American immigrants and exiles in the diffusion of anarchism is in need of further research. And lastly, the complex relationships between anarchist movements and their international rivals on the Left (socialists, communists) in Latin America merits more scholarly investigation.

NOTES

- 1 David Berry and Constance Bantman, eds., *New Perspectives on Anarchism, Labour and Syndicalism: The Individual, the National and the Transnational*, Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010; Ralph Darlington, "Syndicalism and the Influence of Anarchism in France, Italy, and Spain," *Anarchist Studies*, 17:2 (Autumn-Winter 2009), 29-55; Davide Turcato, "Italian Anarchism as a Transnational Movement, 1885-1915," *International Review of Social History*, 52 (2007), 407-444; Alexander Sedlmaier, "The Consuming Visions of Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Anarchists: Actualising Political Violence Transnationally," *European Review of History*, 14:3 (September 2007), 283-300; Carl Levy, "Anarchism, Internationalism and Nationalism in Europe, 1860-1939," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 50:3 (2004), 330-342.
- 2 Steven Hirsch and Lucien van der Walt, eds., *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870-1940: The Praxis of National Liberation, Internationalism, and Social Revolution*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2010; Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010; Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination*, London, UK: Verso, 2005.
- 3 Carl Levy, "Social Histories of Anarchism," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, 4:2 (2010), 18, 23-24.
- 4 Cf. Julio Godio, *Historia del movimiento obrero latinoamericano: Anarquistas y Socialistas, 1850-1918*, San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Nueva Sociedad, 1985; Luis Vitale,

Contribución a una historia del anarquismo en América Latina, Santiago: Instituto de Investigación de Movimientos Sociales, 1998; David Viñas, *Anarquistas en América Latina*, Buenos Aires: ParadisoEdiciones, 2004; Alfredo Gómez Muller, *Anarquismo y anarcosindicalismo en América Latina: Colombia, Brasil, Argentina, México*, Medellín: La Carreta Editores E.U., 2009.