Non-Western Anarchisms and Postcolonialism

Maia Ramnath

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Abstract

This chapter offers a very brief overview of non-Western anarchisms (while criticising that very terminology), touching upon historical and contemporary manifestations of anti-authoritarian movements in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East, closing with a consideration of two comprehensive liberation projects in progress in Chiapas and Rojava. In analysing manifestations of anarchism and related formations across various contexts, it's necessary to map power relations and relevant forms of oppression, exploitation and hierarchy as they manifest in each specific context, and their corresponding histories of resistance and alternative-making, drawing on cultural repertories which practitioners may or may not choose explicitly to identify as connected to the modern genealogy of anarchist tradition. Although each example is unique, one important factor shared by most non-Western anarchisms is a history of colonisation, foreign occupation or intervention. This adds an additional layer of complexity to the analysis of power and resistance, requiring a systemic awareness of where a given society is located in relation to global structures of capital and empire, dispossession and extractive industry, as these intersect or collude with locally rooted forms of domination, hierarchy and authority. Looking beyond "the West" for radical alternatives, this exploration alights on a note of hope.

Non-Western? Anarchism? Postcolonialism?

Every term in this title is questionable. Each is self-negated by the very logic within which it assigns me to write about it.

Firstly, Non-Western

The very use of the binary terms 'West' and 'Non-West' (the notorious 'Rest', in reference to a dizzying multiplicity of complex cultures and histories) is the quintessence of colonial thinking. This West (or North) marks less a spatial cartography than a political category, a historical legacy, a cultural/racial taxonomy. Equating it to literal cartographic coordinates has precisely as much meaning as the papal meridians drawn in 1493 and 1529, awarding one half of the globe to Spanish conquest and the other to Portuguese. Thus 'The West' carries the discursive baggage of the cluster of dominant paradigms that have underwritten imperial expansion for half a millennium.

As an oppositional force to those paradigms, was anarchism ever truly Western? Russia and the Mediterranean rim have been central to the classical (and therefore the unmarked 'Western') anarchist tradition, yet these places were only ambivalently part of the industrial and technological core of the 'West'. And given the centrality of such early pillars of the American anarchist canon as African-Mexican-indigenous Lucy Parsons and the Oaxacan Zapotec-mestizo Ricardo Flores Magón, for example, 'Western' anarchism may never actually have been so purely Western after all.

The story of 'Western' anarchism is intrinsically global, woven of the passages of labour migrants and exiles; transnational shipping as vector for syndicalism; diasporas linking host countries and home countries in intellectual networks; and cosmopolitan cities as nodes of multi-ethnic interchange of tactics and ideas.[1] Structures of empire provide another important framework of globality—including that of anarchism—by enabling us to link together places remote from each other but yoked to the same colonial metropole.[2]

Does non-Western anarchism then mean the anarchism of the colonised? The anarchism of the global South, the Third World, the Tricontinental, the indigenous and African diasporic communities of the Americas' 'third worlds within'? This isn't quite right either, unless we choose to define (for example) Japan as Western, and Ireland not. Perhaps non-Western only means decentring Europe (including

[1] C. *Bantman* and B. Altena (Eds), *Reassessing the Transnational Turn* (Oakland: PM Press, 2017).

[2] See Laursen in this volume.

its settler offshoots), diversifying our awareness of anarchism, with or without explicit attention to colonialism.

Secondly, Anarchism

But what is it we're looking at, exactly, in these expanded non-European vistas? It is not enough to restore visibility to the 'non-Western' participation within the familiar models of first, second and third wave anarchism (the well-trodden 'classical' 1880s–1930s, the 1960s–1970s New Left and the turn of the millennium resurgence).[3]

A further step beyond greater inclusivity within familiar paradigms is to consider that anarchism throughout the world may actually not be limited to these familiar paradigms. Yet that question applies to the unmarked or Western anarchism as well. Does anarchism encompass anti-authoritarianism overall, anti-authoritarian communism, libertarian socialism? How are we situating revolutionary syndicalism? Individualism? Insurrectionism? Revolutionary romanticism? Some who assign anarchism a fixed and narrow definition have felt the need to posit 'post-anarchism' or post-structuralist anarchism as an alternative, whereas others who define it more capaciously, as an evolving discourse comprising a spectrum of thought and praxis addressing key dialectical questions, perhaps don't feel it's so restrictive as to require going outside it to find those alternatives.

If its particular organisational lineages and intellectual genealogies are located specifically in the context of the European Enlightenment, is it a thesis or antithesis to that context? Part of the secular (anti-clerical if not atheistic) Enlightenment, alongside other branches of socialism, liberalism and radical democracy—or congruent with the lumpen 'primitive' revolutionary impulse that preceded it, and persisted in an ongoing counterpoint? Or does it hint at a synthesis? This double helix is our bridge between questions of anarchism and questions of postcolonialism.

Finally, Postcolonialism

Postcolonial history, chronologically speaking, in a specific country often refers to the period after the formal transfer of power from a colonial to a national government. But to my mind, the term postcolonial refers to a time after not the elimination but the onset of coloniality. A postcolonial world then is one indelibly marked by the ongoing processes and effects of colonisation.

Postcolonial theory refers to a body of academic thought situated since the 1980s as a counter-hegemonic intervention in certain disciplines and areas of knowledge production such as cultural theory, literary and linguistic analysis, historiography, sociology/anthropology, and epistemology. As such it also addressed the real experiences and structural positioning of scholars and students who bore identities marginalised in relation to the academy.

This body of critical scholarship draws upon, overlaps with and comments upon but is distinct from a history of actual anti- and decolonial movements, thought and praxis. And despite its significant challenges to academic institutional contexts, postcolonial theory is also quite recuperable within them. Academic discourse in isolation can coexist with the political, military and economic mechanisms of coloniality (such as the entrenchment of settler regimes, neoliberal capitalist world-systems, dispossession/extraction/exploitation of resources, and disenfranchisement of racialised communities).

Although the cultural, epistemological, pedagogical and psychological dimensions of colonisation are indeed connected to its material processes in complex ways (given that force alone can only accomplish so much; sustained control requires legitimating certain narratives while subjugating others), linguistic and philosophical deconstruction is not cognate to an activist critical theory of race, gender or intersectionality. If we take intellectual work and knowledge production outside the academy, though, shifting from abstraction to experience, concepts are much clarified.

[3] This periodisation from J. Adams, *Non-Western Anarchisms: Rethinking the Global Context* (Johannesburg: Zabalaza Books, 2002).

A language of postcolonial anarchism emerged from the same context that has produced several waves of mobilising since the 1990s among North American self-identified anarchist people of colour, who challenged anarchist milieux to acknowledge the implicit racism of countercultural spaces that remained predominantly white, insensitive to the experiences of racialised and colonised communities and therefore out of touch with their priorities. Anarchist people of colour foregrounded anti-imperialism, and linked anti-racism to a larger anticolonial analysis, rebuking white Western anarchist assumptions that anticolonial liberation struggle was nationalist and therefore ideologically incorrect for anarchists to support.[4]

At the same time, anarchists who identified with communities of colour (including Indigenous, African and other diasporas framed as part of a global anti-imperialist struggle), felt that an intervention in the other direction was equally important: namely to critique national liberation struggles by introducing anarchist principles and organisational models in place of state-based ends and authoritarian means.

As I've noted elsewhere, some strands of anarchism do have clear affinities with some elements of postcolonial theory.[5] However, although academic postcolonialism is assumed to be analogous with postmodernism and poststructuralism, this does not mean that the anarchism of the colonised matches up with that sort of postcolonialism; nor does it mean that non-Western anarchisms necessarily resemble post-anarchism. Rather, non-Western anarchist histories coexist within the same world-historical periodisation as the West and share many points of synchronous connection. They were subject to the same global-systemic processes (of industrialisation, technological acceleration, capital expansion, imperial warfare, and so forth) but with the key differential of *location* within an unevenly constructed system, and therefore a different experience of how oppression and exploitation manifest, and which agents of power are most salient at those coordinates. Location also determines when one can recognise the start and end points of a cycle of phenomena (the West often sees things last and loses sight of them first). The incorporation of such perspectives is crucial for generating postcolonial knowledge.

So I do not know how to speak of non-Western anarchism and postcolonialism. All I can do is offer a very brief sampling of a few specific manifestations of anti-authoritarian movements and tendencies outside of 'the West', especially as they pertain to anticolonial struggle and/or postcoloniality. Perhaps in doing so, even more usefully, I can propose a rubric of analysis for further collaborative illumination of such things.[6]

The Terrain, and the Tools

If you look at any place with anarchist eyes, what do you see? To analyse anarchism anywhere in the world, its priorities and practices, it's necessary to map power and counter-power.

Firstly, the Terrain

What are the structures and relations of power, hierarchy, oppression and exploitation, which are most operative at any given location? What specific forms do they take? What patterns of coercion and control are present and who is responsible for them? Where is this place situated within global political and economic systems, which are tied to histories of empire?

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[4] See R. White, *Postcolonial Anarchism* (The Anarchist Library, Anticopyright 2004, theanarchistlibrary.org/library/roger-white-post-colonial-anarchism); APOC, *Our Culture Our Resistance* (www.libcom.org/forums/organise/anarchist-people-of-color-book) (Accessed 30 November 2017).

[5] M. Ramnath, 'In dialogue: anarchism and postcolonialism', in C. Levy and S. Newman (Eds), *The Anarchist Imagination* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018); 'Decolonisation', in R. Kinna and U. Gordon (Eds), *Handbook of Radical Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

[6] [I am planning to set up an interactive online feature to collaboratively build this research].

In most non-Western contexts, by definition, colonialism will cast a long shadow. It mediated their incorporation into global capitalism (cementing a dependent and peripheral position) and their encounter with the modern state with its disciplines, punishments and carceral and surveillance regimes. Furthermore, in many colonial situations, the external forces also collude opportunistically with local reactionary elements. This is why any anarchistic movements against colonial regimes require also an overhaul of internal oppressions alongside the elimination of external ones.

Secondly, the Tools to Navigate the Terrain

What repertories of emancipatory practice are available? What stored memories and movement histories can be drawn upon? What cultural materials, heroes, narratives and legends influence both resistance tactics and radical aspirations? What intellectual/philosophical traditions inform the contents of the utopian imagination? (Whether apocryphal or verifiably documented, inspiration can be a powerful resource for subsequent action.)

Where culture is a tool of resistance (or cultural nationalism), rooted authenticity is at a premium. However authenticity need not mean normativity, as policed by conservative elites, or deployed by chauvinistic reactionaries. Anticolonial struggle is simultaneously a struggle for the direction and cultural identity of the decolonising society and, therefore, for which (dominant or subjugated) strands of its own traditions to embrace or reject, emphasise or downplay. Chances are the relevant imaginaries/aspirations may be submerged or heterodox within their own contexts too, yet no less authentic or autochthonous for that. It seems reasonable to suppose that places with previous cultural materials to draw on that resonate with anarchistic principles are more likely to manifest those forms later. So, where European anarchists might conjure Diggers or Anabaptists as retroactively interpellated predecessors, Asian anarchists might look to Taoist sages or bhakti poet-mystics for traditions of radical egalitarianism, subversion of hierarchy and authority, practices of collective society, unmediated agency and horizontal cosmology.

So now, let us consider some far from exhaustive examples from the following highly imperfect subcategories of the vast Rest.

East Asian Anarchism and Postcolonialism

The story of East Asian anarchism usually begins with the 'glorious period' of the 1890s–1920s, during which Chinese, Japanese and Korean journalist-activists were avidly translating (and in some cases corresponding with) classical anarchists of the Western canon, such as Kropotkin, Bakunin, Goldman, Berkman, Malatesta and Reclus. Asian anarchists participated in dense nexuses of intellectual/political interchange in Tokyo and Paris.

These two respective clusters were associated with two different schools of thought which they developed within several influential journals, publishing their own writings as well as translations. Though not mutually exclusive, one emphasised progressive modernity, while the other looked to pre-industrial and pre-colonial agrarian collectivist practices with local philosophical roots. In Tokyo, anarchist feminist He Zhen and her husband Liu Shipei wrote and edited *Natural Justice*, looking to Taoist philosophy as a source of moral principle for anarchist revolution. In Paris, Li Shizeng and Wu Zhihui's *New Era* was dedicated above all to scientific progress and rationalism. These debates around modernity (Western?) and tradition (Asian?) anticipated by almost a century themes recognisable in internal (postmodernist?) and external (postcolonialist?) critiques of hegemonic Enlightenment values, categories and teleology.

Liu Shifu read both. Formerly a member of an anti-Manchu pro-assassination group similar to the Russian People's Will, he then became a peasant movement organiser. Under his watch, *The People's Voice* emerged as China's most influential organ of anarcho-communism, in whose pages there was no contradiction between embracing the latest science and embracing Buddhist and Taoist ideals. His

Society of Anarchist-Communist Comrades (est. 1914), succeeding the Society for Cocks Crowing in the Dark (est. 1912), focused on education toward creation of a new society, in which there would be common ownership and access to the means and fruits of production, land and wealth; free labour and association; and no class, laws, police, marriage or religion. He called this 'pure socialism'—in other words, an anarchist alternative to the state-building model of self-strengthening then being pursued in China to avoid the fate of India, the cautionary tale next door. This would also equip China for participation in a predicted world revolution, wherein, in Liu's words,

> The governments of Europe will be toppled one after another. In North and South America and in Asia, our party will join in and rise up. The speed of our success will be unimaginable. In China today nothing is more important than to catch up, devoting our utmost effort to propaganda in order to prevent the possibility that a day would come when that incident would occur in Europe but propaganda in the East would not be ripe; that would hold back the world's progress.[7]

In East Asia the dynamics of anticolonialism did not necessarily coincide with anti-Westernism. Japanese anarchists of this period who opposed their own government's colonialism, militarism and imperial conquest were accused of treason (and were more structurally comparable to French, Spanish or Israeli anti-authoritarians than to Algerian, Cuban or Palestinian ones). Korean, Chinese and Japanese anarchists all fought against Japanese imperialism, whether from within or from the receiving end.

Kotoku Shusui—editor of several newspapers and journals and an influence on the Chinese anarchists of the Tokyo circle—started as a Marxian socialist but announced himself as an anarchist in 1905 after being jailed for publishing subversive literature. Subsequently he felt much affinity with the IWW during the few years he spent in San Francisco. Advocating the tactics of direct action and general strike, he too invoked the philosophy of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu as a source code for anarchism, rooted in a 'general tendency to fulfill our freedom and happiness, because that tendency is natural in human society, to be realized with mutual aid and communal life, united by morality and charity, without government compulsion as it is now'.[8]

As in Chinese circles, the Japanese debate fell between anarcho-syndicalism and anarcho-communism, or 'pure anarchism' as Hatta Shuzo named it. The former was more industrial, scientific and modernist; the latter more agrarian and interested in seeking authentic culture. Again, note that the battle was less between 'foreign' and 'authentic' than about how to define what was authentic and which of its possible versions to foreground: not Confucianism with its emphasis on micro- to macro-structural order through obedience and duty within a scaffolding of hierarchical relationships, but Taoism with its emphasis on horizontality and fluidity.

Kotoku Shusui was executed in 1911 in connection with the High Treason Incident, along with his comrade and partner, the pioneering anarcha-feminist Kanno Sugako, and nine others, in connection with the High Treason Incident. This alleged plot by anarchists and socialists to assassinate the emperor was followed by a sweep of punitive arrests. Osugi Sakai and Noe Ito were the comparable anarchist power couple of the next generation: advocates of free love, early supporters but later critics of the Russian Revolution. Noe claimed that Japanese peasant society had been a 'functioning anarchist society based on mutual agreement and mutual aid': autonomous, self-organised, and participatory, sharing tasks of care and conflict resolution.[9] Both were murdered by police in 1923, targeted as part of a purge following the chaos of the Great Kanto Earthquake, in which the two main scapegoats, significantly, were anarchists and Koreans.

Amidst a global explosion of anticolonial mobilisation in the aftermath of the First World War, the All-Japan Libertarian Federation of Labour Unions (Zenkoku Jiren, est. 1926) included both anarcho-

[7] R. Graham (Ed), *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas, Vol. I* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005), 351.

[8] Ibid., 367.

[9] Ibid., 371.

syndicalist and anarcho-communist elements. Its tenets included class struggle for emancipation of workers and tenant farmers, direct and economic action over political participation and free decentralised industry-based federation. Consonant with the syndicalist slogan of no war but the class war, they 'oppose[d] imperialist invasion and advocate[d] the international solidarity of the workers'.[10] In 1931 its paper published a piece highly critical of the Japanese capitalist class and military, denouncing the invasion of China and Manchuria. 'We must cease military production, refuse military service and disobey the officers. Complete international unity of the anarchists would signal our victory, not only economically but in the war against war:

> Anarchist groups of all countries, unite!
>
> Abolish Imperialist War!'[11]

Hence their logical solidarity with Korean counterparts on the other side of the line of coloniality.

Much of what English speakers know of Korean anarchist history has come from anti-imperialist anarchist-pacifist scholar-activist Ha Ki-Rak. Although some say much of this is unverifiable apocrypha, nevertheless a popular attachment to mythologised memory says something real about what people value, aspire to and fight for.

Kim Jwa-Jin, the legendary 'Korean Makhno' (or should we be calling Makhno the 'Ukrainian Kim'?), was a hero of the Korean independence movement and the utopian Shinmin Autonomous Region, or Korean People's Association in Manchuria. It was formed in 1929 jointly by the Korean Anarchist Federation and Korean Anarcho-Communist Federation as a self-governing network of cooperatives, prefiguring anarchist principles while resisting Japanese occupation. Kim was murdered while defending one of the cooperatively run rice mills on which the community's survival depended. Shinmin fell shortly thereafter in 1931, squeezed between Japanese and Chinese forces.

The Declaration of Korean Revolution had stated, 'To sustain the Korean people's survival, we need to wipe out Robber Japan'. This could only be accomplished through a popular revolution: destroying the Japanese forces would require simultaneously eliminating 'the rule of a foreign race', 'a privileged class', a 'system of economic exploitation', 'social inequality', and 'servile cultural thoughts'.[12] Breaking through those layered structures of oppression would result in an 'authentic Korea' with freedom for the masses.

After the war, Ha helped found the League of Free Social Constructors in 1945 and later a new KAF in Seoul in 1972. While the earlier declaration linked the struggle against Japanese imperialism to 'internal lack of equality and freedom' wrought by local feudal and capitalist collaborators, the new one addressed the postwar trusteeship of new foreign powers, patronising local dictatorships. Could these be replaced by a free and equal society?

The 1980 Kwangju Uprising drew inspiration from both Shinmin and the Paris Commune (as did the Chinese students in Tiananmen Square 1989, alluding to it in their communiqués).[13] According to George Katsiaficas, the Kwangju revolutionaries had been studying and discussing the Commune, and through it, Kropotkin, viewed as the primary articulator of its logic as he expressed his faith in the people's capacity and tendency for spontaneous cooperation, self-organisation and prefiguration of a free society through the independent commune. Katsiaficas emphasises the language of participatory democracy, horizontal empowerment, bottom-up, anti-hierarchical social relations and decentralised coordination of movement organisation as well as of new social forms, the unleashing of contagious radical eros,[14] and the awakening and maturation of consciousness to be gained through the process

[10] Ibid., 376. In 1928 the Zenkoku tilted toward pure anarchism and the syndicalists broke off to form the much smaller Libertarian Federation Council of Labour Unions of Japan (Jikyo).

[11] Ibid, 389.

[12] Ibid., 374–375.

[13] G. Katsiaficas, *Asia's Unknown Uprisings, Vol. 1* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 361–388.

[14] This term, which George Katsiaficas develops throughout all his work, refers to 'the sudden, intuitive awakening of solidarity and massive opposition to the established system' visible in times of widespread revolutionary upsurge, exceeding rational

of insurrection. 'What people desire is not power, but freedom'—to 'put down structures of oppression and expand the spaces of freedom' in all its material and psychological dimensions.[15]

African Anarchism and Postcolonialism

In Africa too, the anarchist record tends to follow two tracks: one is dominated by revolutionary syndicalism and class struggle, with its two most well-documented sub-Saharan centres in Nigeria and South Africa, in whose liberation struggle anarchists formed a wing of the Social Democratic Federation (est. Cape Town, 1904) and the International Socialist League (est. Johannesburg, 1915) leading to the syndicalist Industrial Workers of Africa, Indian Workers Industrial Union and Industrial Socialists League (multi-racial formations which merged, split and remerged in new formations including the Communist Party of South Africa in 1921). An anarcho-syndicalist trade union federation in Portuguese Mozambique was allied to the Portuguese General Confederation of Labour (CGT), and in Guinea the Democratic Party of Guinea/Parti démocratique de Guinée (PDG) early on had close relations with the French CGT. In North Africa, syndicalism flourished in the early twentieth century along the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, in cosmopolitan port cities like Alexandria, Tunis and Beirut, borne by the vectors of Italian, Spanish and Greek seamen and labourers, migrants and exiles. This wave crested in the mid-1920s, but fell apart within a few years with much of the continent subject to fascist powers via imperialist incursions and intensifications (Courtesy of Salazar, Franco, Mussolini and Vichy France.)

Secondly, we might see an African counterpart to Hatta's 'pure anarchism' or Shifu's 'pure socialism' in the ideas developed under the language of African socialism. In their seminal text on African anarchism, Sam Mbah and I.E. Igariwey claim that 'anarchistic elements' were pervasive in traditional indigenous African societies in which the relatively egalitarian social organisation wasn't based in class or hierarchy but in gendered age groups. Power was not concentrated in authorities, although councils of elders were accorded respect in adjudication and decision-making for their wisdom and experience. Each community's economics were collective, its politics participatory and deliberative. To Mbah and Igariwey,

> What this means is that anarchism may not be so new in the African context. What is new is the concept of anarchism as a social movement or ideology. Anarchy as an abstraction may indeed be remote to Africans, but it is not at all unknown as a way of life. This is not fully appreciated because there is not as yet a systematic body of anarchist thought that is peculiarly African in origin.[16]

While acknowledging that those societies weren't perfect—some treated women poorly, and economically they were perhaps only feasible on a localised subsistence scale—Mbah and Igariwey claim that empire-states and social stratification began to emerge under the influence and distorting forces of colonial incursion. They make it clear that for the African continent, incorporation into the global capitalist system occurred through colonisation, which generated its racial regimes and internal class structures as well as its deleterious positioning in the global economy. Given this analysis, leftist revolutionary class struggle becomes inseparable from a colonial context; the trade union movement was 'a direct response to the colonial situation' of economic exploitation and developed even more strongly in settler areas where white supremacist social structures and the resultant racial tensions sharpened colonial contradictions.

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calculation and generating contagious energy from affect and desire. Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1997), 17n14.

[15] Graham, *Anarchism*.

[16] Mbah and I.E. Igariwey, *African Anarchism* (Tucson: See Sharp Press, 1997), 27–28.

After independence, some experiments were put into place to (re-)establish African socialism: in Nigeria, short-lived self-managing agricultural collectives were 'intended to recreate the traditional African communal way of living, complete with its features of equality and freedom'.[17] In Tanzania, Julius Nyerere's ujamaa villages were intended to be the seed units of a socialist future consistent with free and egalitarian African traditional values. Translated as 'familyhood', whether by blood or choice, the ujamaa concept called for 'economic and social communities where people live and work together for the good of all' through cooperative agriculture and self-chosen community government. However the new state regimes largely hijacked these potentially emancipatory ideals, by coercive top-down implementation (see for example Senghor, Nkrumah, Qaddafi, and not least, Nyerere).

Given the failures and disappointments of the postcolonial national liberation states (whose authoritarianism, corruption and complicity with neoliberalism/neocolonialism made them into obstacles rather than facilitators of self-determination for the various ethnicities of the continent) and Marxist state socialism (which had been so influential upon anticolonial liberation struggles from the 1920s to 1980s), many African countries would appear ripe for anarchism, which Mbah and Igariwey say more accurately reflects their cultural values in any case. They insist,

> Anarchists demand the liberation of all existing colonies and support struggles for national independence in Africa and around the world, as long as they express the will of the people in the nations concerned. However, anarchists also insist that the usefulness of 'self-determination' will be very limited as long as the state system and capitalism—including marxist state capitalism—are retained.[18]

A new wave of anarchist organisations emerged in the 1990s, including the Awareness League in Nigeria, whose anarchist turn reflected its sharp critique of the failed state socialism of the post-independence regimes, and the Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Front in South Africa, where anarchists now portrayed the post-apartheid ANC government as 'the main sub-imperialist power' acting as proxy for the residual interests of the British empire and now of the agents of neoliberalism through privatisation, evictions and debt.

Given that the other important component of African colonisation—besides settlement and foreign exploitation of land and natural and mineral resources—was the mass abduction of the population for the slave trade, the African diaspora has logically seen its own liberation as an intrinsic part of African decolonisation efforts. New Afrikan anarchism in the US situated itself within the black revolutionary anticolonial tradition, participating in the militant liberation struggles of the 1960s–1970s, but also—as in the post-independence African continent—born out of disillusionment with the failures of those movements.

Black Panther and Black Liberation Army veteran Kuwasi Balagoon has been identified as 'a new Afrikan freedom fighter'[19] and as 'an antiauthoritarian like Bakunin and Ricardo Flores Magón'.[20] The analysis he fleshed out in his court statements when on trial for the 1981 Brink's truck robbery laid out connections between capitalism, racism and imperialism. Identifying black people in the US as a third world community and an internal colony—the profitable exploitation of whose enslaved bodies and coerced labour were the basis for US imperial expansion[21]—while committing himself as a colonised person to militant liberation struggle (comparing the BLA to the IRA, PLO, FALN and ANC), he insisted upon the need for both anarchism and anti-imperialism:

> Of all ideologies, anarchy is the one that addresses liberty and equalitarian relations in a realistic and ultimate fashion. It is consistent with each individual having an opportunity

[17] Ibid., 47.

[18] Ibid., 106.

[19] D. Gilbert in *Kuwasi Balagoon: A Soldier's Story* (Montreal: Kersplebedeb Publishing, 2003), 9.

[20] J. Sakai in Ibid., 21.

[21] We should add here the other key component, namely the land seized from the prior inhabitants, which provided the land base for the plantation system's global commodity cash crops.

> to live a complete and total life ... This is because the goals of anarchy don't include replacing one ruling class with another ... This is key because this is what separates anarchist revolutionaries from Maoist, socialist and nationalist revolutionaries who from the outset do not embrace complete revolution. They cannot envision a truly free and equalitarian society and must to some extent embrace the socialisation process that makes exploitation and oppression possible and prevalent in the first place.[22]

Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, another Black Panther militant turned anarchist, systematically laid out his analysis of imperialism, capitalism and racism as the interlinked components of global oppression; his belief that anarchism combined with black revolution, among other anticolonial national liberation movements, was the best vehicle for counteracting that; and his dissatisfaction with white anarchists in their failure to come to terms with white supremacy, including what he saw as their ideologically purist dismissal of black and other third world nationalism.

His statement of belief sums it up:

> I believe in Black liberation, so I am a Black revolutionary...
>
> I believe in the destruction of the world Capitalist system, so I am an anti-imperialist...
>
> I believe in racial justice, so I am an anti-racist...
>
> I believe in social justice and economic equality, so I am a Libertarian Socialist ... I believe in workers [sic] control of society and industry, so I am an Anarcho-Syndicalist...
>
> I do not believe in government, and so I am Anarchist ... Anarchism means that we will have more democracy, social equality, and economic prosperity. I oppose all forms of oppression found in modern society: patriarchy, white supremacy, Capitalism, State Communism, religious dictates, gay discrimination, etc.[23]

We may infer from this his picture of a postcolonial anarchist society.

MENA Anarchism and Postcolonialism[24]

For the purposes of this overview, the formulation 'Middle East and North Africa' indicates a region of cultural and historical continuity through shared experiences of Ottoman, British and French control.

Postcolonial struggles in this region include simultaneously the direct primary resistance to a still extant settler colonialism pursuing a textbook agenda of land expropriations, ethnic cleansing to clear land, attempted cultural genocide, collective punishment, as in Palestine; and the resistance to dictatorships put in place and maintained as compradors or proxies by the US neo-empire, enforcing stringent internal security to guarantee the empire's economic and strategic interests, the profitability of free markets, and access to fossil fuel supplies, as in the regimes confronted by the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings.[25]

Non-Western anarchism sometimes manifests as a complex linking radicals among colonised populations and dissidents within the colonising society—such as, in this region, France/Algeria and Israel/Palestine. David Porter delves into the relationship of French anarchism to the Algerian anticolonial struggle as well as anarchistic formations within Algeria. Although most of the self-identified anarchists there from the late nineteenth century until independence were of European origin (French or Spanish exiles), he says, there were some native Algerian anarcho-syndicalists, who had spent time organising

[22] K. Balagoon in *Kuwasi Balagoon*, 75.

[23] L.K. Ervin, 'Anarchism and the black revolution', in Black Rose Anarchist Federation, *Black Anarchism: A Reader* (www.blackrosefed.org/black-anarchism-a-reader), 70–71 (Accessed 30 November 17).

[24] For the purposes of this overview, the formulation 'Middle East and North Africa' indicates a region of cultural and historical continuity through shared experiences of Ottoman, British and French control.

[25] See Galian in this volume.

and writing in Paris. Saïl Mohamed had been jailed during World War One for insubordination with the French Colonial Forces, then settled near Paris, joined the Union Anarchiste and Confédération Générale du Travail-Syndicaliste Révolutionnaire (CGT-SR), organising militant anarchist Algerians in France in a separate section; he eventually volunteered to fight with the Durruti Column in Spain.[26] Like Nyerere, Gandhi, Kim or Zapata in their own contexts, Saïl argued that rural Algerian (Berber) society, prior to Western incursion (or Western anarchist terminology), was already decentralised and autonomous, functioning by cooperative mutual aid principles. Liberation from French control must not lead to another hierarchical nationalist or religious regime, he insisted, like that of the marabouts whose clerical influence he considered to be a distortion of Algerian culture. Porter reports that when the Mouvement Libertaire Nord-African (MNLA) formed in 1950, its components included several anarchist groups in Algeria and Morocco with connections to the French Anarchist Federation newspaper *Le Libertaire*; it affiliated with the 'Libertarian Communist International' in 1954.[27]

After the liberation in 1962, there were attempts at *autogestion* or 'Algerian socialism' in the form of worker takeovers of farms, factories, land and services abandoned by colonial property owners. Assistance came from the Union Générale de Travailleurs Algériens (UGTA), whose members had studied cooperatives and worker-directed agricultural and industrial structures in China, Cuba, Yugoslavia and elsewhere. The UGTA journal called for collectivising previously European-owned land to use for *autogestion* farms. Still, these efforts at self-organisation were more 'spontaneous and pragmatic' than ideologically driven. During the Ben Bella regime, the 'scope and size of this radical decentralized socialist sector [was] unprecedented in a newly independent country', says Porter.[28] But after Boumedienne took over, the *autogestion* system was gradually broken down and consolidated into more state-controlled or privatised units.

Despite a lack of explicitly named anarchist formations in the post-independence period, some Algerians (at home and in France) did identify themselves as such; Porter claims to see a strong streak of consistent anarchistic sensibility in activism and writings viewing Berber cultural heritage as naturally anarchistic, whose local governing structures had 'centuries-deep roots in the mountainous communities of rural Kabylia, more autonomous by nature and fiercely suspicious of outside authorities than rural communities in the plains'.[29] Later insurrectionary moments like the Berber Spring (1980) and Black Spring (2001) based their challenges to the regime in a 'coordinated network of traditionalist-type local village and communal assemblies'. The *aarch* (assemblies) movement, a Berber cultural movement demanding greater regional autonomy from the national government, '[i]n its original 'horizontalist' structure and process ... had strong affinities with an anarchist model of social organization'.[30]

Similar observations have been made about some portions of the ongoing Palestinian struggle against colonial occupation, in which anti-authoritarian patterns and principles have been present even without a specific vocabulary and optics of anarchism as understood in the west. Echoing Ervin decades later, young Palestinian activists—who report that anarchistic thinking is amply present among individuals active in the struggle, though not in organised form as such—have cited the disconnect between Western anarchists' assumptions and the on-the-ground experience of a community struggling under acute colonial duress, including occasional Orientalist or Islamophobic blind spots.[31] The first Intifada (1987–1991) was characterised by horizontalist and bottom-up self-organisation, but the movement of popular struggle later felt derailed after the Oslo accords by the top-down power of the Palestinian Authority. The PA has since been critiqued as a virtual agent of the occupying forces (policing resistance

[26] D. Porter, *Eyes to the South: French Anarchists and Algeria* (Oakland: AK Press, 2011), 201.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 93.
[29] Ibid., 321. This seems consistent with James Scott's or Eric Hobsbawm's proverbial free/lawless mountain folk.
[30] Ibid., 322.
[31] J. Stephens (quoting Beesan Ramadan), 'Palestinian anarchists in conversation: recalibrating anarchism in a colonized country', *The Outpost* (February 2013). www.anarchiststudies.org/2013/07/19/palestinian-anarchists-in-conversation (Accessed 30 November 17).

while concentrating wealth and privileges amongst a small elite). Wherever there are critiques of not only the occupation but also the governing authorities; and not only of the governing authorities but of patriarchy and other entrenched social hierarchies; wherever there is the impulse to move beyond thinking nationalistically in the narrow or particularistic sense toward thinking as part of a broader transnational liberation ideal, there is anarchistic vision.[32] Much work remains to be done to spotlight, articulate and amplify these elements.[33]

Latin American Anarchism and Postcolonialism

As our attention roves over the great Non-West, certain patterns begin to emerge.

Recurring theme #1: in Latin America, as in Africa, formal independence from European empires fell almost immediately under the shadow of new forms of empire, in which the newly established states were often complicit. Whereas in Africa this came about in the late twentieth century, in Latin America the process began as early as the 1820s when Mexico and the Bolivarian countries won independence from the Spanish empire, only to face the US's assertion of hemispheric hegemony through the Monroe Doctrine, continuing through the seizure of half of Mexico's territory in 1848, Cuba and Puerto Rico in 1898, and on through a century of proxy-ruled banana republics, CIA-sponsored counter-insurgencies, neoliberal trade agreements, narco-wars and resource privatisations.

Recurring theme #2: anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary trade unionism traveled virally along the pathways of European migration and shipping, most significantly in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay.

Recurring theme #3: complementing the resultant urban industrial radicalism and its thriving intellectual and print culture was a rural revolutionary strain of left libertarianism, particularly acute where control of land, agriculture and mining were concerned, and which, given the ethnic make-up of the peasantry, drew strongly on indigenous traditions.[34]

Manuel González Prada was credited as one of the first urban anarchists of European origin to engage with Latin American indigeneity in 1904. In Peru, heterodox socialist José Carlos Mariátegui noted an alliance of urban trade unions, usually anarchist, with rural peasant rebels, usually indigenous, whose respective revolutionary tasks would be to face industrial capitalists and feudal landowners. In Mexico, an analogous dynamic unfortunately broke down when President Carranza co-opted the urban anarcho-syndicalists to organise Red Brigades against rural rebels such as Spanish/Nahua Magón-influenced guerrilla leader and land-reform champion Emiliano Zapata, in 1917.

In Bolivia, where the latest cycle of resistance to neocolonialism might be traced to the Cochabamba water wars in 2000, Raúl Zibechi sees an alternative to the existing socio-politico-economic system in the Altiplano, where Aymara communities are building decentralised, bottom-up non-state power using the *ayllu* (the traditional Andean kin-based social form) as the main organisational unit, wherein power is emergent from community rather than separated from or above it.

'If the state is the monopoly of physical coercion exercised by a body that separate from society (a civil and military bureaucracy)', said Zibechi, 'in the Aymara world this capacity is distributed and dispersed throughout the social body and ultimately subject to assemblies in the countryside and the

[32] Stephens, ibid. According to Ramadan, this broader space was opened up by contacts between Palestinians and Syrian, Lebanese and Egyptian anarchists, a phenomenon catalysed by the Arab Spring uprisings. See also M. Bamyeh, 'Anarchist, liberal and authoritarian enlightenments: notes on the Arab Spring'. *Jadaliyya* (30 July 2011).

[33] Independent activist/journalists J. Stephens and S. Campbell have each contributed to opening a portal by which western anarchists may glimpse and hear the voices of Palestinian anarchists, through work published on various websites including www.itsgoingdown.org and www.anarchiststudies.org (Accessed 30 November 2017).

[34] P. Marshall's tiny chapter on Latin America in the (in many ways admirable) compendium *Demanding the Impossible* (HarperCollins, 1992) suggests the opposite: that the indigenous empires (Aztec, Inca) were authoritarian and hierarchical while proposing a direct correlation between anarchist presence and degree of European immigration. He seems not to understand the diversity of indigenous social structures, or acknowledge the indigeneity of the peasantry, nor to recognise the distinction between urban syndicalism and rural anarchism.

city'.[35] The goal and aspiration is to build a 'self-organised pluricultural society starting out from the Andean community paradigm': an autonomous region beyond state, beyond capitalism.[36]

Conclusion: Stateless Sovereignties (A Postcolonial Aspiration)

From an anarchist perspective, nation-states are not equipped be the vehicles of either resistance or liberation. The acquisition of a state by a national liberation movement can never be postcolonial, since it will perpetuate coloniality.

Under colonial rule it is easy to recognise the state and all its avatars as hostile forces external to society, and industry and finance as obvious siphons of wealth away from local flourishing toward far-away concentration. But upon attaining independence from foreign rule, the 'postcolonial' state, with its affiliated economic and military elites, often simply takes over the structures, functions and behaviours of the colonial apparatus. An anarchist approach to anticolonial liberation must be as critical of nation-states' power and the local hierarchies they reward as it is to colonial regimes. The implementation of more radical imaginaries includes definitions of self-determination and sovereignty that do not entail state-building, and might involve drawing upon pre-colonial social forms and ethical systems as precedents. (The caveat here is that not all pre-colonial forms may be inherently liberatory either, simply by virtue of their provenance.)

But are stateless people stateless by choice and principle, or by deprivation of that option against their will, because they have been dispossessed, or displaced, or exiled, or had their homelands dissected by newly drawn borders? Many of the peoples who fought for independence from colonial rule in the twentieth century wound up with states. The not-yet-'enstated'—those who are still fighting, or stranded straddling state lines—perhaps have an opportunity to seek another form. Is it possible, in today's world, to establish and defend a sovereign territory without a state? Some are trying.

The Kurds have been seeking independence ever since the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire gave way to the British and French Mandatory system and thence to the postwar political map whose lines left them scattered between four countries. Rojava (or West Kurdistan) is a region within the borders of northern Syria comprising several autonomous cantons, according to an organisational model dubbed Democratic Confederalism by Abdullah Öcalan, a leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) originally established as a Marxist-Leninist national liberation party in 1978. While in prison in Turkey, Öcalan began studying the work of American anarchist theorist Murray Bookchin. Öcalan applied his interpretation of Bookchin's concepts of libertarian socialism, social ecology and municipalism as the basis for a decentralised social structure built upon autonomous municipalities, functioning through participatory democracy in local assemblies, and defended by people's militias. While another segment of the Kurdish population in northern Iraq does seek a more conventional route to statehood through a more conventional nationalism, oil-financed and strategically aligned with the interests of the main imperial forces in the region, Rojava's alternate model of Kurdish patriotism advocates ethnic diversity and religious pluralism, and foregrounds the ideals of jineology ('women's science'), committed to the principle that society cannot be free without eliminating patriarchy and misogyny; nor can it survive without establishing ecologically sustainable collective structures.[37]

As a ray of hope and inspiration, Rojava's Kobani canton has come to occupy a similar place in the worldwide anarchist imagination of the 2010s as perhaps Barcelona did in the 1930s. But do we see only what we want to see? Some observers caution against utopian wishful thinking, warning that the PKK is not immune to authoritarianism, leader worship or pressured conformity. Furthermore, its survival is

[35] Raul Zibechi, *Dispersing Power: Social Movements as Anti-State Forces* (Oakland: AK Press, 2010), 7.

[36] Ibid., 123.

[37] See as an introduction among many sources, Strangers in a Tangled Wilderness (Ed), *A Small Key Can Open a Large Door* (Strangers in a Tangled Wilderness, 2015).

precarious, surrounded by hostile forces in a volatile and hazardous political environment, entangled in messy situational webs of conflicting tactical alignments, and its future remains to be seen. But perhaps it may take heart from the fact that another example has lasted now for over 20 years.

The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) announced itself on the world stage in 1994, in direct response to the initiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement. The Mayan communities of the Lacandon jungle located themselves squarely in the context of opposition to neocolonialism in the form of neoliberal globalisation, namely, the hyper-expansion of global capitalism.

The Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon, issued in 1996 to announce a new phase of the struggle, framed the Mexican government as synonymous with criminality, and the federal forces as an army of occupation and new conquest of the indigenous communities; their 'struggle for democracy, liberty and justice is a struggle for national liberation' too.[38] Almost a decade later, the Sixth Declaration stated even more unequivocally (in the section 'How We See the World') that neoliberal global capitalism equals neo-imperial conquest, exploitation and plunder[39]; and (in the section 'How We See Mexico') that the state, serving global capital and not the people, is hence an agent of imperialism.

Foreshadowing our now standard hyper-connectivity of communication networks, they played a large role in calling forth a global network of grassroots resistance to neoliberalism. Zapatismo captured the imaginations of social movements around the world, and the hearts of many northern anarchists, though some did gripe that it wasn't proper anarchism. But nor was it proper nationalism: 'In the world we want everyone fits. In the world we want many worlds to fit. The Nation which we construct is one where all communities and languages fit'.[40] Henceforward, non-indigenous communities in effect were invited to participate in a nation-building project *on indigenous terms.*

Among the Zapatista autonomous municipalities, power flows upward from the base communities; according to the leadership model of 'leading by obeying', no major decision can be made from above without consultation and consent from throughout the confederation. Each community is organised through direct democracy in local assemblies, with cooperative economics. Here too, gender equality is prioritised in all formations.

In a surprising tactical turn, the Zapatistas have fielded a (female, indigenous) candidate for the 2018 Mexican presidential election, not for the purpose of taking over the state, but for the stated purpose of infiltrating the general consciousness and building the Indigenous Government Council as a presence mediating between the existing state and the alternate society they have nurtured. Beyond the establishment of a spatially separate territory, what happens if such a mode of society really does begin to reveal itself as a ubiquitous mesh, dispersing power throughout the shell of the old?

While it may or may not be accurate to call either Kurdish Democratic Confederalism or Zapatismo a non-Western postcolonial anarchism, each is an embattled base for the prefigurative praxis of true postcoloniality while striving toward radical self-transformation. In essence, the Rojava experiment is an effort to establish a form of anarchistic society independent of the surrounding state jurisdictions, and as such, a deferred decolonisation project, namely the liberation of a territory and people disenfranchised by maps of colonial palimpsest. The Chiapas experiment, similarly, is the effort to establish a form of anarchistic society independent of the surrounding state jurisdiction, within a liberated territory established as a bastion against neocolonialism.

Postcolonial anarchism is by definition embedded in a context shaped by the colonial encounter, and, since anarchism opposes all forms of domination, has therefore been involved in resisting it and embodying alternatives to it.

In many of the non-Western anarchist histories we've considered, two strands coexist: one that is more industrial, scientific and modernist; another that is more agrarian, land-based, holistic and arcadian. As the fundamental building blocks of struggle and futurity, the revolutionary syndicate and

[38] M. Leger and D. Tomas, *Zapantera Negra* (Brooklyn: Common Notions, 2017), 154–159.
[39] Ibid., 179.
[40] Ibid., 163.

the decentralised confederation of autonomous village collectives are equally widespread templates. We might also note the recurring co-presence of

- people and groups who self-identify with the genealogy of modern anarchist traditions, from syndicalist to insurrectionary, consequently challenging Western ownership of that tradition and
- people and groups who use different vocabularies rooted in a variety of philosophical traditions that demonstrate affinity with anarchism as defined above, consequently challenging anarchism's ownership of anarchistic praxis and thinking.

But we should not mistake this difference for one between stable categories of modernity and tradition or between progress and regression. Suppose we redefine 'postmodern' as the adjective locating a range of possible responses to conditions of modernity and 'postcolonial' a range of possible responses to conditions of coloniality (a historical component of modernity, as it has existed). This is at the crux of what postcolonialist discourse and its critics are addressing. It does not necessarily mean an attempt to recreate how things were prior to the initial colonial encounter, whether that means rewinding by five decades or five centuries; but rather for colonised peoples to be free to manifest modernity on their own terms, to revive tradition as evolving, not static, growing in accordance with desired values and aspirations; to resume movement upon an alternate route previously blocked off.

These non-Western anarchisms are all counter-modernities, proposing sophisticated and politically adept political and economic alternatives oriented toward a different set of values than the ones that have come to be associated with the dominant paradigms of modern Western colonialism. Indeed, many have argued that traditional forms of non-Western social organisation and economic relations (more free and egalitarian; less liable to bring about the destruction of the planet through war or ecological collapse) offer more just and sustainable models, which, if free to develop, would be capable of proceeding directly to a desired vision of anarcho-communism without passing through the universally set stages of a Hegelian or Whig teleology. Thus reclaiming these forms doesn't mean restoring lost purity, but restoring lost possibility: imagine a world where non-Western anarchisms and postcolonialism are the unmarked hegemonic reality.

Author's Postscript

It is crucial to emphasise that I am in no sense the rightful spokesperson for any non-Western anarchism or decolonial struggle—neither the ones mentioned here nor those I failed to mention. This piece is offered so as to hold space and open a threshold, nothing more. It is my hope to use it as a stepping stone for the collective generation of further knowledge about non-Western anarchisms through the self-directed participation of many more people (https://anarchiststudies.org/non-western-anarchisms-and-postcolonialism).

South Asian Anarchist Library

Maia Ramnath
Non-Western Anarchisms and Postcolonialism

The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism (edited by Carl Levy & Matthew S. Adams), chapter 38, pp. 677–695, DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-75620-2_38.

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