

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

**Marcelo Lopes de Souza, Richard J. White and Simon Springer (eds)**, *Theories of Resistance: Anarchism, Geography, and the Spirit of Revolt*, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. ISBN: 9781783486663 (cloth); ISBN: 9781783486670 (paper); ISBN: 9781783486687 (ebook)

*Theories of Resistance* offers a refreshing collection of essays that reinvigorates anarchist theory in geography with utility for a range of scholars far beyond those who might label themselves “anarchists”. While anarchism has roots in geography (both Élisée Reclus and Piotr Kropotkin, prominent classical anarchist writers, were geographers), and has been highly influential in contemporary radical theory, explicit acknowledgement of anarchism’s legacy in critical geography remains largely elusive (Marcelo Lopes de Souza discusses this issue in detail in Chapter 6; cf. Clough and Blumberg 2012; Springer et al. 2012). In particular, anarchist theorists have been instrumental in developing thought around horizontality, self-management, and radical decentralization: ideas which have become commonplace in critical thought and practice, including much of contemporary Marxist theory. The book’s editors argue for the recognition of the important contributions of the anarchist lineage while also pointing out its shortcomings. They present these chapters in an effort to push anarchist thought further to make it relevant to the theoretical and practical challenges of our times. *Theories of Resistance* is Volume 2 in a trilogy entitled *Anarchism, Geography, and the Spirit of Revolt*, which includes a volume on pedagogy and another on the contemporary practices of left-libertarian socio-spatial experiments (see Springer et al. 2016; White et al. 2016).

The book is not explicitly organized to address particular themes, but the chapters revolve around a few theoretical nodes I will address in turn. First, a number of the chapters complicate

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notions of *power and governance*, which have historically been simplistically understood in anarchist thought. While classical anarchism conceptualized anarchist practices as “outside” of governing power, where self-empowered individuals have ultimate freedom, Nathan Eisenstadt (Chapter 2) develops a way of seeing anarchism as a relational form of governance itself. He demonstrates that there is no such thing as a sovereign subject; individual freedom entails a responsibility and (always imperfect) self-discipline to maintain fairly even power relationships with others. In one of the most thoughtful moments of this volume, Eisenstadt asserts that “unless we understand anarchist practices of freedom as governmental, then we will be unable to think and practice more emancipatory modes of governing” (p.33). Along the same lines, Gerónimo Barrera de la Torre and Anthony Ince (Chapter 3) warn that many non-state relationships are created in the image of the state, stressing the importance of research that explores a diversity of organizational forms. Seeing these emancipatory projects as relational governing practices means that anarchism is actually *not* the manifestation of ultimate individual autonomy, but the collective cultivation of new political desires and subjectivities (as Eisenstadt makes very clear). In this vein, Nick Garside (Chapter 10) advocates for attention to informal political realms and “feral” citizens, political agents who disrupt conventions of citizenship and society by their participation in political discourse.

Next, many of the book’s contributors are also actively engaged in *decolonizing anarchism* and applying anarchist theory to decolonization efforts. The authors recognize anarchism’s spotted history, where activist practices have been labeled “anarchist” when they do not self-identify that way (this tendency is particularly offensive when indigenous cultures and resistances are appropriated by anarchists, as noted in Chapters 3, 8 and 9). Rather than seeing anarchism as the central reference point for all antiauthoritarian practices, this book’s

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contributors understand it as “just one manifestation of a large family of egalitarian and emancipatory principles and projects” (as articulated in Chapter 3, p.59). As Vanessa Sloan Morgan (Chapter 8) urges, anarchists need to be respectfully engaged with indigenous movements, and Adam Gary Lewis (Chapter 9) argues that anarchists should more explicitly critique settler colonialism in order to engage in co-resistance and co-existence with indigenous communities; otherwise, anarchists risk aiming for a future that comes “at the expense of others who were resisting long before us” (p.207-208). While these critiques are hard-hitting, they only begin to identify the road forward, which Lewis notes will be messy and always imperfect. Two additional themes of this book, explored below, contribute to this effort of decolonizing anarchist theory by developing and complicating notions of space and the state.

Several essays in this volume work to *spatialize anarchist theory* by proposing new ways of understanding land, space, and territory in resistive practices. According to Eisenstadt, “anarchists are concerned with the taking and re-making of space and territory” (p.33), but as Nick Clare and Victoria Habermehl (Chapter 5) point out, anarchism allows and necessitates a radically different conceptualization of the use and occupation of space than the “police” (the Rancierian social order) does. While territorialization by the police is based on the exclusive ownership and occupation of space, Clare and Habermehl speculate that a more radical use of space involves sharing it for multiple purposes, uses, and groups through time. My sense is that in the context of colonization (where the colonizers have no intention of leaving), this pluralistic understanding of space may prove an important notion. As Morgan (Chapter 8) shows, the seizure and transformation of land into territory are “integral to the settler colonial identity” (p.181), so the decolonization of anarchist thought requires a rethinking of the anarchist relationship to place (this idea is discussed at length by Lewis in Chapter 9). The book’s

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contributors propose multiple ways of conceptualizing place and space in anarchist theory, and the diversity of their ideas corresponds to the diversity of practices and lineages in left-libertarian thought. The vast range of spatial practices in anarchism is most apparent in Chapter 7, where Benjamin Pauli compares and brings together two vastly different understandings of anarchic relationships to place (through Murray Bookchin and Hakim Bey), exploring the theoretical implications of permanent and temporary occupations of land. These discussions are particularly relevant in the contemporary, diverse landscape of activist practices, where Temporary Autonomous Zones, Burning Man, and the Zapatistas all practice very different strategies regarding the use of space.

Finally, the book's contributors do important work in developing analyses of the *state*. As noted by Barrera de la Torre and Ince (Chapter 3), geographers often, even if inadvertently, reproduce notions of a permanent state and myths regarding the necessity of the state. Surprisingly, Lewis (Chapter 9) points out that even colonial theory involves "little analysis of the state itself," which might leave this theory "open to an unacknowledged continuation of the state" (p.220). I see this problem as one of the areas in which anarchist thought, because of its inherent critique of the state, can make some of the greatest contributions to a diversity of theoretical lineages. As Erin Araujo (Chapter 4) shows, many services are assumed to be only the domain of the state, like health care, education, and security, when, in actuality, we are constantly engaged in informal governance practices that only need to be made visible. Here she proposes a process of diversifying the state, pulling from the diverse economies work of Gibson-Graham and colleagues to "see" the multiple forms of governance and service provision already occurring in and outside of the formal state. Her analysis is limited, however, because the examples she uses are mainly drawn from the Zapatistas. While the Zapatistas have made

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incredible progress in the development of non-state services like education and healthcare, more recognition of everyday governance is needed to drive Araujo's point home.

This is where I see potential new frontiers forming in anarchist theory. A number of the book's contributors highlight the importance of everyday and often-informal modes of governance, uses of space, and encounters, but still return to explicitly anarchist practices for illustrative examples. In other words, this volume showed me that anarchist thought can be applied to practices that are not explicitly anarchist, and provided theoretical frameworks for doing so, but it stopped short of actually demonstrating its broad applicability. Scholars (like myself) studying alternative economies and everyday encounters often disregard anarchism because our empirical objects are not self-identified as anarchist, and may not be explicitly antagonistic toward the state. But *Theories of Resistance* illustrates that anarchism is still applicable and relevant: it can help develop a rich understanding of governance practices, aid in decolonization efforts, explicate the implications of different spatial strategies, and provide a framework for a deconstructive analyses of the state. Crucially, it can be applied to non-anarchist practices without appropriating them *as* anarchist. Like other theoretical traditions, anarchism is dynamic, multiple, and malleable, and this volume's editors and contributors successfully demonstrate its pertinence by honoring anarchism's historical legacy without being constrained by it. I hope their work encourages a diversity of geographers to engage more deeply with anarchism, as they have inspired me to do.

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