



**Federico Ferretti, Gerónimo Barrera de la Torre, Anthony Ince and Francisco Toro (eds),** *Historical Geographies of Anarchism: Early Critical Geographers and Present-Day Scientific Challenges*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2018. ISBN: 9781138234246 (cloth); ISBN: 9781315307558 (ebook)

This interdisciplinary anthology is the product of a widespread revival of anarchist perspectives in geography, history, and related fields over the last two decades. Particularly noteworthy is the international makeup of its dozen contributors, who hail from throughout North and South America and Europe. Collectively, their work illustrates the richness of these scholarly perspectives, as well as some of their limitations.

The first section on “Spaces of the History of Anarchism” consists of essays by four historians who utilize geographic analyses—in particular, network analysis and urban studies—to connect “anarchism and its history to its places and circulations” (p. 2). Andrew Hoyt and Davide Turcato build upon the growing historical literature on Italian-speaking anarchists to explore the hidden networks through which Italian-language newspapers were sustained and circulated throughout the United States and Europe, and the role that these publications played “as social media platforms” (p.25) and in sustaining Italian anarchism “as a single movement that stretched across the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean” (p.61). This transnational and network-based approach is complimented by Carl Levy’s study of the central role that urban centers played as nodes in historical anarchist movements, from the Paris Commune to Red Barcelona. Unsurprisingly, he emphasizes the importance of port cities, including those, like Buenos Aires, located in the “Global South”. The transnational connections that anarchists forged between these cities, Levy argues, “presents us with an alternative modernity, and alternative globalization, during the era of High Imperialism” (p.15). The final chapter in this section, Julian Brigstocke’s analysis of humor and violence in late 19<sup>th</sup> century French anarchism, is something of an outlier in this collection; although nominally focused on anarchist attempts to create “a

utopian space of creativity, hedonism, moral experimentation, and joyful humor” within the working-class neighborhood of Montmartre, Brigstocke’s discussion is largely about methods and discourse rather than geography.

The following section moves from geographical approaches to history, to the history of anarchist geographers. Its three essays focus largely on the figures of Pëtr Kropotkin and Élisée Reclus, whose pioneering approaches to “social geography” have recently been rediscovered by a new generation of radical geographers. Francisco Toro highlights the overlap between the ideas of Reclus, who challenged imperialism, modern ideas of “progress”, and “anthropocentric” views, and those of the “degrowth” movement that emerged in Europe beginning in the late 1960s. Federico Ferretti, whose own scholarship has been crucial to the rehabilitation of Reclus, explores how early anarchist geographers understood nationality in a cosmopolitan sense, separate from and even in opposition to states—a theme also present in Turcato’s chapter. Pascale Siegrist’s contribution strikes a more critical note, and takes aim at the work of Simon Springer, the most well-known American anarchist geographer (who also contributes a brief and somewhat esoteric forward to this volume). Siegrist points out that, despite its many similarities to the earlier ideas of Reclus and Kropotkin, contemporary radical geography emerged independently from their work and is instead rooted in Marxism, via scholars like David Harvey. She also argues, somewhat unconvincingly, that early anarchist geographers considered their political writings and geographical work to be unrelated endeavors. But Siegrist is on firmer ground when she observes that although anarchists “anticipated” later developments in geography (p.145), they had no direct influence on those developments, and their similarities were discovered only after the fact. This insight is inadvertently supported by Toro’s chapter, which shows no actual connection between Reclus and the degrowth movement, but rather argues that many of the “basic precepts of what degrowth philosophy *should be*” were “immanent in some of Reclus’ essays”, and his ideas “*should be* a reference for contemporary thinkers of degrowth” (p.89, 108, emphasis added). Here, as elsewhere, the relationship between early anarchist geography and

present-day radical geography is largely one of connections and influences that *could* and perhaps *should* exist, but that do not as of yet.

This disconnect is on full display in the third and final portion of *Historical Geographies of Anarchism*, focused on contemporary anarchist applications of geography. Following a brief overview and appreciation of the work of anarchist Colin Ward (1924-2010) by David Crouch, four anarchist geographers explore contemporary social movements and new frontiers in geographical theory. What is most striking about these chapters, however, is their complete lack of reference to, or use of, earlier anarchist geographers—including Kropotkin, Reclus, or Ward. Instead, these contributors cite the likes of philosopher Gilles Deleuze and draw inspiration from contemporary archaeology and Indigenous perspectives to analyze urban insurrections in Brazil, “post-statist geographies”, and non-Western geographies. As Anthony Ince and Gerónimo Barrera de la Torre (both coeditors of the volume) admit in their coauthored chapter: “Rather than utilizing the established anarchist canon, we have drawn primarily from a diverse range of radical, critical and decolonial thinkers” (p.191). The following essay by Barrera de la Torre and Narciso Barrera-Bassols, “On ‘Other’ Geographies and Anarchisms”, similarly abandons existing anarchist writings in pursuit of “other ontologies” (p.203) of radical geographical understandings. (On a minor historical note, they also incorrectly describe celebrated American anarchist Voltairine de Cleyre as “a Canadian” [p.198].)

Taken as a whole, *Historical Geographies of Anarchism* represents some of the most cutting-edge scholarship on its topic, of vital interest to historians and geographers alike. At the same time, it exemplifies the incomplete and unfinished nature of the editors’ quest to reunite historical and contemporary anarchist approaches to geography. Like Siegrist, I find many of the contributors’ “reluctance to deal with the obvious divergences between geographies separated by a century a bit disappointing” (p.146). If the recovery of the ideas of Kropotkin, Reclus, and other “classical” anarchists is to be of any consequence, geographers must move beyond simply acknowledging them as anticipating or prefiguring later developments, and instead develop



methods for their practical application and build upon their theoretical foundations. This anthology, therefore, is perhaps best understood as a promising beginning rather than a culmination.

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