Michael Schmidt
South Asian Anarchism
Paths to Praxis
July 17, 2012

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Meditations on Maia Ramnath's *Decolonizing Anarchism: an Antiauthoritarian History of India's Liberation Struggle* (AK Press, USA, 2012) and her *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (California World History Library, USA, 2011) – by Michael Schmidt, founder member of the Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Front (ZACF) of South Africa, co-author with Lucien van der Walt of *Black Flame: the Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism, Counter-power* Vol.1 (AK Press, USA, 2009), and author of *Cartographie de l'anarchisme révolutionnaire* (Lux Éditeur, Canada, 2012). This piece was kindly edited by van der Walt.

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Contents

opposition within the system of states, with no larger horizon of revolutionary rupture, will not remove the basic causes of oppression, and will not be perpetually tolerated either. Ramnath admits that a multi-fronted approach is necessary: "There can be no post-colonial anarchism in one country! No doctrine of peaceful co-existence, but continuous world revolution!" Thus, the project of counter-power: attempting to build tomorrow within the shell of today, to actively dismantle statist borders by means of social reconstruction, to defeat of the system, and to move beyond fond dreams to a genuine anarchist anti-imperialist liberation of society.

Conclusion

Both of Ramnath's books are brave, groundbreaking and vital contributions to the liberation literature of an entire subcontinent. My criticism of some points should not occlude this. Decolonizing Anarchism is written from the perspectives and sensibilities of an activist, while Haj to Utopia from those of a social historian. In some respects, the latter, being the more academic work, is the more detailed and solidly argued, whereas the prior relies to some extent on statements of synthesis reflecting reductions of long internal and external debates, of Ramnath's personal journey of discovery. They are packed with so many new vistas on the unknown South Asian aspects of anarchist anti-colonialism that they demand repeated readings, which never fail to delight. They should be read in tandem, as together they retrieve a lost set of libertarian socialist (and anarchist) tools once used within a vastly complex culture, and by this process relegitimise and sharpen the potential today for such anti-authoritarian approaches as multiple blades directed at the Gordian knot of ethnic identity, post-colonial capitalism and neo-imperialism, within South Asia and globally.

What the Institute for Anarchist Studies' Maia Ramnath has achieved with these two books whose angles of approach differ yet which form companion volumes in that they intersect on the little-known anarchist movement of South Asia, is a breathtaking, sorely-needed re-envisioning of anarchism's forgotten organisational strength in the colonial world which points to its great potential to pragmatically combat imperialism today.

Anarchism's Anti-imperialism Enabled its Global Reach

To paint the backdrop to Ramnath's work, we need to break with conventional anarchist histories. Lucien van der Walt and Steven Hirsch's Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Post-Colonial World (2010) states: "The First International provided the womb in which the anarchist movement emerged, but the formal meetings of the International, its press, and its debates were located within the body of a dynamic global working class and peasant network. Anarchism had an organised presence in Argentina, Cuba, Egypt and Mexico from the 1870s, followed by Ireland, South Africa and Ukraine in the 1880s. The first anarchist-led, syndicalist, unions outside of Spain (the Spanish Regional Workers' Federation, 1870) and the USA (the Central Labor Union, 1884) were Mexico's General Congress of Mexican Workers (1876) and Cuba's Workers' Circle (1887). These were the immediate ancestors of the better known syndicalist unions that emerged globally from the 1890s onwards. To put it another way, anarchism was not a West European doctrine that diffused outwards, perfectly formed, to a passive 'periphery.' Rather, the movement emerged simultaneously and transnationally, created by interlinked activists on [four] continents – a pattern of inter-connection, exchange and sharing, rooted in 'informal internationalism,' which would persist into the 1940s and

beyond." They concluded that to "speak of discrete 'Northern' and 'Southern' anarchist and syndicalist movements'" as is common in contemporary anarchist discourse, "would be misleading and inaccurate."

It cannot be overemphasised how for the first 50 years of its existence as a proletarian mass movement since its origin in the First International, the anarchist movement often entrenched itself far more deeply in the colonies of the imperialist powers and in those parts of the world still shackled by post-colonial regimes than in its better-known Western heartlands like France or Spain. Until Lenin, Marxism had almost nothing to offer on the national question in the colonies, and until Mao, who had been an anarchist in his youth, neither did Marxism have anything to offer the peasantry in such regions – regions that Marx and Engels, speaking as de facto German supremacists from the high tower of German capitalism, dismissed in their Communist Manifesto (1848) as the "barbarian and semi-barbarian countries." Instead, Marxism stressed the virtues of capitalism (and even imperialism) as an onerous, yet necessary stepping stone to socialism. Engels summed up their devastating position in an article entitled Democratic Pan-Slavism in their Neue Rheinische Zeitung of 14 February 1849: the United States' annexation of Texas in 1845 and invasion of Mexico in 1846 in which Mexico lost 40% of its territory were applauded as they had been "waged wholly and solely in the interest of civilisation," as "splendid California has been taken away from the lazy Mexicans, who could not do anything with it" by "the energetic Yankees" who would "for the first time really open the Pacific Ocean to civilisation…" So, "the 'independence' of a few Spanish Californians and Texans may suffer because of it, in some places 'justice' and other moral principles may be violated; but what does that matter to such facts of world-historic significance?" By this racial argument of the "iron reality" of inherent national virility giving

Anarchist revolutionary counter-power has historically achieved territorial control over large areas through the primacy of its egalitarian socio-economic project – not by the international system of states respecting its juridical status. The tragic failure of the Spanish Revolution lay precisely in the attempt to use the state system to protect the revolution: allying with Republicans against Franco's forces, the anarchists found the Republican state would no more tolerate a decentralised and non-hierarchical socio-economic project than would Franco; the revolution and its territory were destroyed by the Republic before Franco marched into Barcelona. The "fuzzy" border areas which concern Ramnath for their indeterminacy were precisely the kind of regions in which the Makhnovist and Manchurian anarchist zones of 7-million and 2-million people respectively were able to establish their constructive social revolutions, which in turn underwrote the territorial control that the RPAU army and HCH militia were able to defend for several years.

Today's borderlands no longer offer effective protection from the modern state's over-the-horizon intelligence/munitions reach (let alone that of capital's "private military companies"). Yet is it not precisely the autonomous municipalities of the Zapatistas rather than its armed forces, the EZLN, per se that have allowed them to secure some territorial control and to force the Mexican and US states to take Zapatista claims seriously? This is not the weak liberal concept of "speaking truth to power," but rather it is a demonstration of pragmatic, egalitarian-revolutionary counter-power. Yes, both insurgent Makhnovia and Shinmin were later defeated by Red Army and Japanese Imperial Army imperialist invasions, but this simply shows that the "international community" will not tolerate real challenges – they can only be forced to respect them by force. And that requires counter-power to be established territorially by an armed social revolution. Perpetual "small a"

Ramnath notes in Decolonizing Anarchism how the centralist Indian and Pakistani states, having emerged from colonialism, continue to emulate it with regard to their own minorities. In her view, these states' behaviour towards regionalist, decentralist aspirations is "colonialism plain and simple, complete with the illegal occupation of territory" such as disputed Kashmir, the two states steamrolling over of many Kashmiris' own clear desire for autonomy. It remains to be seen what the central South African state – which largely takes command-economy India as its model – would do if ever its own ethnic minorities with their own small-scale republican traditions such as the Boers or Griquas demanded more autonomy by extraparliamentary means, though "democratic" SA's illegal invasion of Lesotho under Nelson Mandela in 1998 to crush a pro-democratic mutiny gives a foretaste of the type of neo-colonial response we can expect.

What is to be put in place of the centralised state in regions where colonialism imposed borders that do not match the demographics of the resident peoples? Ramnath shows how anti-colonial movements ended up in statist dead-ends, yet she herself argues for the construction of a Palestinian state, whose borders would be respected by the international system of states, as a means to secure space within which a decentralised and non-hierarchical socio-economic project may be possible; not to do so risks reconquest or dissolution, she says. But surely such a Palestinian state would itself conquer its own population, and surely we already see the proof of this in embryo with the Palestinian Authority? And the extrajudicial actions of imperialist states against insurgent zones, such as the USA in Iraq, or of sub-imperialist states such as SA in Lesotho, shows, to paraphrase August Spies, the restraints of international law on the powerful to be as cobwebs.

rise to laudable capitalist overmastery, Engels said the failure of the Slavic nations during the 1848 Pan-European Revolt to throw off their Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Russian yokes, demonstrated not only their ethnic unfitness for independence, but that they were in fact "counter-revolutionary" nations deserving of "the most determined use of terror" to suppress them.

It reads chillingly like a foreshadowing of the Nazis' racial nationalist arguments for the use of terror against the Slavs during their East European conquest. Engels' abysmal article had been written in response to Mikhail Bakunin's Appeal to the Slavs by a Russian Patriot in which he – at that stage not yet an anarchist – had by stark contrast argued that the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary camps were divided not by nationality or stage of capitalist development, but by class. In 1848, revolutionary class consciousness had expressed itself as a "cry of sympathy and love for all the oppressed nationalities". Urging the Slavic popular classes to "extend your had to the German people, but not to the… petit bourgeois Germans who rejoice at each misfortune that befalls the Slavs," Bakunin concluded that there were "two grand questions spontaneously posed in the first days of the [1848] spring… the social emancipation of the masses and the liberation of the oppressed nations."

By 1873, when Bakunin, now unashamedly anarchist, threw down the gauntlet to imperialism, writing that "Two-thirds of humanity, 800 million Asiatics, asleep in their servitude, will necessarily awaken and begin to move," the newly-minted anarchist movement was engaging directly and repeatedly with the challenges of imperialism, colonialism, national liberation movements, and post-colonial regimes. So it was that staunchly anti-imperialist anarchism and its emergent revolutionary unionist strategy, syndicalism – and not

pro-imperialist Marxism – that rose to often hegemonic dominance of the union centres of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay in the early 1900s, almost every significant economy and population concentration in post-colonial Latin America. In six of these countries, anarchists mounted attempts at revolution; in Cuba and Mexico, they played a key role in the successful overthrow of reactionary regimes; while in Mexico and Nicaragua they deeply influenced significant experiments in large-scale revolutionary agrarian social construction.

The anarchist movement also established smaller syndicalist unions in colonial and semi-colonial territories as diverse as Algeria, Bulgaria, China, Ecuador, Egypt, Korea, Malaya (Malaysia), New Zealand, North and South Rhodesia (Zambia and Zimbabwe, respectively), the Philippines, Poland, Puerto Rico, South Africa, South-West Africa (Namibia), and Venezuela – and built crucial radical networks in the colonial and post-colonial world: East Africa, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, Central America, the Caribbean, South-East Asia, and Ramnath's chosen terrain, the South Asian sub-continent. In recent years, there have been several attempts to take on the huge task of researching and reintroducing anarchists, syndicalists and a broader activist public to this neglected anti-authoritarian counter-imperialist tradition: Lucien van der Walt's and my two-volume Counter-power project is one global overview; the book edited by van der Walt and Hirsch is another; and there are important new regional studies such as Ilham Khuri-Makdisi's, Levantine Trajectories: the Formulation and Dissemination of Radical Ideas in and between Beirut, Cairo and Alexandria 1860–1914 (2003), and Benedict Anderson's study of the Philippines, Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-colonial Imagination (2005).

advises us to "look to your own house; work at and from your own sites of resistance." For Ramnath, her own house sits at the intersection of the power of the US metropole and of her exclusionary status as a person of minority Indian extraction. My own house sits at the intersection between the subaltern SA periphery and my declining power as a person of minority European extraction. Wrestling with the traditional authoritarianism of my own white African people is perhaps today of greater worth than my best-considered position on the Palestinian question, which Palestinian statists will find offensive – though they are ethically and consequentially linked.

Ramnath's view is that international solidarity work is crucial, linking struggles in imperialist and postcolonial countries, and that this cannot mean only supporting struggles if they are explicitly anarchist. I agree. Anarchists are fighting for a free world – not an anarchist world. My greatest personal revolutionary model, that of the Makhnovists, is of a politically pluralistic movement of the oppressed classes that operated along free communist lines. This was, however, a movement profoundly shaped by organisations of convinced anarchists – and showed the absolute necessity and value of homogenous anarchist organisations, inserted into mass movements, as crucial repositories of the lessons of a century and a half of anarchist class struggle. The Ukraine in which the Makhnovists operated had a long history of colonial subordination to Russia (an imperialism reinforced by the Bolsheviks), and a highly ethnically diverse population of Ukrainians, Russians, ethnic Germans, Jews, Cossacks, Tartars, Greeks and others – and the Makhnovists made a point of defending by force of arms ethnic pluralism (ethnic Germans were only dispossessed as landlords), publicly executing anti-Semitic pogromists.

(Struggle) Anarchist Communist Front (ZACF) has likewise based its approach on the strategies of the Brazilian Anarchist Co-ordination (CAB), which operates within a society with great similarities to ours, of multiracial "social insertion" of anarchist practice within multiracial popular classes.

In South Africa, one of the world's most deeply ethnically fragmented societies, this articulation is far from easy: any successful anarchist project here will have to convince masses of the black, coloured, indigenous and Indian popular classes, across lines of colour, but along lines of class (building layers of militants-of-colour by social insertion in grassroots struggles is the key ZACF strategy) so anarchists cannot ignore the fate of the 3,3-million white African workers and poor. The most obvious divide in South Africa today is the world's most extreme wealth-gap, slightly worse on the GINI scale than Brazil, with the post-apartheid state in many ways structurally indistinguishable from its apartheid predecessor. I feel my situation analogous to that of Ramnath when she travels to Palestine to work against the imperialism of her own USA, when travelling from the eroding privilege of multiracial lower middle-class Johannesburg to the shacklands of overwhelmingly black, excluded, underclass Soweto.

Ramnath speaks of her experiences, citing a Palestinian activist telling US activists on a visit to rather "go back home and end U.S. imperialism. Liberating ourselves is our job. Ending U.S. imperialism is yours." If as the saying goes the revolution begins in the sink, at home, perhaps I need to make a start within my own community – a notoriously reactionary one – and, if successful there, then widen my scope. It's a much harder option to do revolutionary work among people who have the social power of proximity to hold you to account, compared to the potential irresponsibility of rootless revolutionary tourism and summit-hopping. Ramnath

But so far, research into historical anarchism and syndicalism in South Asia (in Ramnath's pre-Partition terminology, India) has been lacking. In part this is because it was an immensely fragmented sub-continent, with three imperialist powers, Britain, France and Portugal, directly asserting dominance over a multiplicity of principalities and other indigenous power-structures, often integrated into the European empires through alliances and indirect rule, a patchwork not unlike Germany prior to Prussian expansion in the mid-19th Century: Ramnath calls India's pre-colonial structures "a range of overlapping, segmentary, sovereign units oriented towards different centers". This "beehive" polity was further fractured and complicated by religion, language, colour, and caste, so it is arguably difficult to scent the anarchist idea and its diffusions in such a potpourri.

Then again, van der Walt and my experience in researching Counter-power over 12 years has suggested that the lack of knowledge of the Indian anarchist movement is probably simply because (until Ramnath), no-one was looking for signs of its presence. While the history of Indian Marxism has been well documented, the anarchists have been ignored, or conflated with the very different Gandhians. For example, it was obvious to us that the strength of the French anarchist movement in the first half of the 20th Century definitely implied that there must have been an anarchist or syndicalist presence or impact on the French colonial port enclave of Pondicherry; and indeed Ramnath now confirms that Pondicherry was at least a base for anarchist-sympathetic Indian militants.

There were, of course, very real structural obstacles to the diffusion of anarchism and syndicalism in colonial South Asia. Much of India was pre-industrial, even semi-feudal; and while there was a large mass of landless labourers, capitalism had a limited impact. Despite the misrepresentation of anarchism

and syndicalism in mainstream Marxist writings as a refuge of the declining artisanal classes, and as a revolt against modernity, it was primarily in the world's industrial cities – Chicago, San Francisco, Buenos Aires, Valparaíso, São Paulo, Veracruz, Glasgow, Barcelona, Essen, Turin, Yekaterinoslav (Dnipropetrovs'k), St Petersburg, Cairo, Johannesburg, Shanghai, Canton (Guangzhou), Yokohama, Sydney and so forth – that the movement raised strongholds: the ports, slums, mines, plantations and factories were its fields of germination; and it was the shipping lanes and railways that were its vectors. Its agrarian experiments were also centred on regions where old agrarian orders were being shattered by imperialism, capitalism and the modern state, like Morelos and Pueblo in Mexico, Fukien in China, Shinmin in Manchuria, Aragon, Valencia and Andalusia in Spain, Patagonia in Argentina, and Zaporizhzhia in Ukraine. So in some respects, India's colonial fragmentation and level of development can be seen as similar to contemporary West Africa, where syndicalist unions only sprung up in the 1990s in Sierra Leone and Nigeria.

Yet India was also very much part of the modern world, its older systems being transformed by imperialism as well as the rising local bourgeoisie; the "jewel" of the British Empire, it was locked into late nineteenth century globalisation as a source of cheap labour (including a large Diaspora of indentured migrants), raw materials and mass markets; Indian sailors were integral to the British fleets and Indian workers and peasants were integral to British industry; Indian workers and intellectuals resident in the West were heavily involved in radical milieus and alliances. So I am fairly certain, given that syndicalism was propagated incessantly in the pre- and inter-war period by Indian revolutionaries, and given their links to the British working class, the leading edge of which in the pre-war period was syndicalist, that someone actively looking for de facto syn-

Hyun-Suk, who smuggled arms and explosives into the anarchist Shinmin zone in Manchuria in the late 1920s; and Truong Thi Sau, who apparently commanded a guerrilla section of the anarchist Nguyan An Ninh Secret Society in Cochinchina (Vietnam) in the mid-1920s, languish in the margins of history and have yet to be adequately studied. In India, it is perhaps significant that the lone early woman anarchist-influenced militant, Sister Nivedita (1867–1911), was born as Margaret Elizabeth Noble in Ireland. It still needs to be explained why it was only in recent years that libertarian socialist Indian thinkers such as the anti-imperialist writer Arundhati Roy (1961 —), a staunch supporter of Kashmiri autonomy – she has been called a "separatist anarchist" by her enemies – have come to the fore.

Revisiting Anarchist Anti-imperialist Praxis

Ramnath concludes Decolonizing Anarchism with a dialogue on the practical applications of these historical experiences: the key question arising from both volumes is the legitimisation of the anarchist project through effective locally-grounded strategy coupled to effective international solidarity. Her inspiration was partly derived from the questions raised by the now-defunct Anarchist People of Color (APOC) network in the USA, about how to deal with ethnic power differentials within movements, how to relate the lessons of grappling with ethnically-shaded internal neo-colonialism to international anti-imperialist solidarity. The majority-black Workers' Solidarity Federation (WSF) in South Africa, in which I was active, clashed with the ethnic separatist approach (later associated with APOC), because the WSF stressed multiracial class unity due to its view of the primacy of class as the spine of capital and the state which articulated all other oppressions such as racism and sexism. The WSF's successor, the Zabalaza

(FOL) leader Petronila Infantes (1922-) of Bolivia, libertarian pedagogue Maria Lacerda de Moura (1887–1944) in Brazil, Magónista junta member María Andrea Villarreal González (1881–1963) and fellow Mexican, the oft-jailed Vésper and El Desmonte editor and poet Juana Belém Gutiérrez de Mendoza (1875–1942), an indigenous Caxcan. In many Latin American countries, women's workplace strength was such that the anarchist/syndicalist unions had a Sección Feminina, such as the FOL's powerful Women Workers' Federation (FOF) – not as a gender ghetto, but because women workers tended to be concentrated in certain industries, especially textiles.

Is this absence of Indian women revolutionaries due to our lack of sources, or did the anti-colonial struggle and the related national question somehow limit women's participation? Many of the most prominent women anarchists and syndicalists outside of the West were in postcolonial or in imperialist countries. In colonial Latin America, the feminist syndicalist Louisa Capetillo (1880–1922) of Puerto Rico stands out. Most of the prominent East Asian anarchist women of which we know were located in imperialist Japan: the journalist Kanno Sugako (1881–1911) who was executed for her alleged role in a regicidal conspiracy; the anarchist-nihilist Kaneko Fumiko (1903–1926), who committed suicide in jail after plotting to assassinate the Emperor to protest against Japanese imperialism in Korea; the syndicalist Itō Noe (1895–1923) who was murdered by the police; and writer and poet Takamure Itsue (1894–1964).

There were, of course, outstanding Chinese anarchist women – notably He Zhen – but of them we know precious little, beyond some of their writings. Again, there are tantalising glimpses in colonial Asia: Wong So-ying, who committed suicide in jail aged about 26 after attempting to assassinate the British governor of Malaya (Malaysia) in 1925; the Lee sisters, Kyu-Suk and

dicalist unions in India's port cities would unearth something of interest.

Introducing Ramnath's Books

Briefly, Decolonizing Anarchism looks through what Ramnath calls "the stereoscopic lenses of anarchism and anticolonialism" for both explicitly anarchist as well as less explicitly libertarian socialist approaches, in the words and deeds of a wide range of local thinkers and activists, from the Bengali terrorists of the early 1900s, to the Gandhian decentralists of the mid-century Independence era, and to the non-partisan social movements of today. This is an important recovery of a tradition that rejected the statism of both the Indian National Congress, and of Communist traditions, and that raises important questions about the trajectory of Indian anti-imperialism.

Her Haj to Utopia explores the closest thing that colonial-era India had to an explicitly anarchist-influenced sub-continental and in fact international organisation, the Ghadar (Mutiny) Party. This took its name from the 1857 "Mutiny" against British rule, an uprising revered by Indian revolutionaries of all ideologies, as reflected in Ghadar's fused and phased mixture of syndicalism, Marxism, nationalism, radical republicanism, and pan-Islamicism. The two books intersect in the figure of Ghadar Party founder Lala Har Dayal (1884?- 1939), a globe-hopping, ascetic Bakuninist revolutionary and industrial syndicalist, secretary of the Oakland, California, branch of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and founder of the Bakunin Institute near that city. Har Dayal is of interest to van der Walt and I, in writing the South Asian section of Counter-power's narrative history volume Global Fire because he was explicitly anarchist and syndicalist and because he was a true internationalist, building a world-spanning liberation

movement that not only established roots in Hindustan and Punjab, but which linked radicals within the Indian Diaspora as far afield as Afghanistan, British East Africa (Uganda and Kenya), British Guiana (Guiana), Burma, Canada, China, Fiji, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaya (Malaysia), Mesopotamia (Iraq), Panama, the Philippines, Siam (Thailand), Singapore, South Africa, and the USA, with Ghadarites remaining active in (for example) colonial Kenya into the 1950s.

Oddly, Ramnath often uses the formulation "Western anarchism" – by which she says she means a Western conception of anarchism, rather than a geographic delimitation. Yet her own work underlines the point that anarchism/syndicalism was a universal and universalist movement, neither confined to nor centred on the West, a movement sprung transnationally and deeply rooted across the world. Of course, it adapted to local and regional situations – anarchism in the Peruvian indigenous movement was not identical to anarchism in the rural Vlassovden in Bulgaria, or amongst the Burakumin outcaste in Japan (this latter having implications for the Dalit outcaste of India) – but all of these shared core features and ideas. Anarchism in South Asia is a small but important link in the vast networks of anarchism across the colonial and postcolonial world. I feel Ramnath could have benefited from a deeper knowledge of the movement's historical trajectories across and implantation in colonial Asia, not least in China, Manchuria, Korea, Hong Kong, Formosa (Taiwan), Malaya (Malaysia), the Philippines, and the territories of Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina (together, Vietnam) – but then our Global Fire is not yet published.

Lucien van der Walt and my books have challenged the narrow, North Atlanticist bias of most anarchist historiography, and were written from such a perspective because we live in post-colonial Africa, and we needed to rediscover and re-establish

c) Contemporary: Shramik Mukti Dal

The third Indian anarchistic organisation that Ramthath considers in Decolonizing Anarchism is the "post-traditional communist" Shramik Mukti Dal, which rose in rural Maharashtra in 1980. She quotes founder Bharat Patankar saying that "revolution means… the beginning of a struggle to implement a new strategy regarding the relationship between men and women and between people of different castes and nationalities. It means alternative ways of organizing and managing the production processes, alternate concepts of agriculture, and of agriculture/industry/ecology, and of alternative healthcare." The Shramik Mukti Dal that emerges here is one that goes well beyond a backward-looking idealisation of tradition: its manifesto calls for a holistic and egalitarian revolution, assaulting through the transformation of daily life, "the established capitalist, casteist, patriarchal, social-economic structure," "destroying the power of the current state" and replacing it with an "organized network of decentralized and ecologically balanced agro-industrial centers" – with "a new ecologically balanced, prosperous, non-exploitative society" as its aim. A de facto anarchist position if ever there was.

Anarchist Women in the Colonial Context

Ramnath's work has highlighted for me – by its absence – the question of where were the leading women in these organisations, especially in light of Har Dayal's opposition to women's oppression, and the awe in which she says he held the likes of the Russian anarchist (later Marxist) Vera Zasulich? Latin America saw the rise of many towering female anarchist women, such as La Voz de la Mujer editor Juana Rouco Buela (1889–1969) of Argentina and her close associate, factory worker and Women's Anarchist Centre organiser Virginia Bolten (1870–1960), syndicalist Local Workers' Federation

are reduced as far as possible…"

In the Asian anti-imperialist context, the Manchurian Revolution precisely demonstrated the possibilities of Narayan's vision, but also the necessity of this entailing a revolutionary struggle, rather than mere moralistic appeals to exploitative landlords. This road was mapped out by Ghadar as well as in the vibrant minority stream of East Asian anarchism. In 1929, Korean anarchists in Manchuria, who were waging a fierce struggle against Japan's 1910 occupation of Korea, formed the Korean Anarchist Federation in Manchuria (KAF-M). The KAF-M and the Korean Anarchist Communist Federation (KACF) reached agreement with an anarchist-sympathetic general commanding part of the anti-imperialist Korean Independence Army to transform the Shinmin Prefecture, a huge mountainous valley which lies along the northern Korean border, into a regional libertarian socialist administrative structure known as the General League of Koreans (Hanjok Chongryong Haphoi) or HCH.

This self-managed anarchist territory was based on delegates from each Shinmin district, and organised around departments dealing with warfare, agriculture, education, finance, propaganda, youth, social health and general affairs. Delegates at all levels were ordinary workers and peasants who earned a minimal wage, had no special privileges, and were subject to decisions taken by the organs that mandated them, like the co-operatives. It was based on free peasant collectives, the abolition of landlordism and the state, and the large-scale coordination of mutual aid banks, an extensive primary and secondary schooling system, and a peasant militia supplemented by fighters trained at guerrilla camps. This vital example of an Asian anarchist revolution is grievously understudied, but ranks with Ukraine 1918–1921 and Spain 1936–1939 as one of the great explicitly anarchist/syndicalist revolutions.

the legitimacy of the anarchist/syndicalist praxis in our own region – where, for example, syndicalists built the what was probably the first union amongst Indian workers in British colonial Africa in Durban, South Africa, in 1917 on the IWW model, and where we work alongside Indian Diasporic militants today. It is hugely to Ramnath's credit that the implications of her work in restoring to us the contemporary relevance of South Asian libertarian socialism far exceed her own objectives. Despite her location in the imperialist USA, her motivations appear to be similar to our own: a rediscovery of her own people's place in anti-authoritarian history. And despite the fact that our approach favours what David Graeber calls "big-A anarchism" – the organised, explicitly anarchist movement of class struggle – and hers what he calls "small-a anarchism" – the broader range of libertarian and anarchist-influenced oppositional movements – our objectives coincide; taken together, her and our trajectories amount to a Haj, a political-intellectual pilgrimage, towards recovering a viable anarchist anti-imperialist praxis.

Reassessing Gandhi's "Libertarianism"

Just as she has introduced us to the details of the life of the ubiquitous figure of Mandayam Parthasarathi Tirumal "MPT" Acharya (1887–1954), a life-long anarchist, and, ironically, Lenin's delegate to the Ghadar-founded "Provisional Indian Government" in Kabul, so we hope to introduce her to ethnic Indian revolutionary syndicalists such as Bernard Lazarus Emanuel Sigamoney (1888–1963) of the IWW-styled Indian Workers' Industrial Union in Durban. In many respects, we have walked the same paths, for we too needed to assess the Bengali terrorists who interacted with British anarchists like Guy Aldred, to ascertain whether they were ever convinced by anarchism, beyond the simple and dangerous glamour of

"propaganda by the deed". We too have weighed up whether Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948) can be claimed – as in Peter Marshall's Demanding the Impossible: a History of Anarchism (2008), a magisterial work, yet flawed in its definitions – as "the outstanding libertarian in India earlier this century". This same argument has been made by the late Geoffrey Ostergaard, who called the Gandhians "gentle anarchists".

Ramnath writes of Gandhi that he "harboured a deep distaste for the institution of the state". This is unquestionable and it is important to recall that there was an anti-statist strand in Indian anti-colonialism. Yet anarchism is more than simply anti-statism: it is libertarian socialist, born of the modern working class. Gandhi's anti-statism was really a parochial agrarianism and Ramnath is correct to group him with the "romantic countermodernists"; it never translated into a real vision of national liberation without the state as its vehicle, and never had a real programmatic impact on the Congress movement. Ramnath is more convincing than Marshall in showing the libertarian socialist nature of Sarvodaya, the Gandhi-influenced self-rule movement of Jayaprakash "JP" Narayan (1902–1979).

Gandhian Sarvodaya falls outside of the anarchist current, but initially appears, like anarchism, to be part of the larger libertarian socialist stream within which one finds the likes of council communism. There are some parallels between Gandhi's vision of "a decentralized federation of autonomous village republics" and the anarchist vision of a world of worker and community councils. Yet this should not be overstated. Gandhi's rejection of Western capitalist modernity and industrialism has libertarian elements, but Ramnath perhaps goes too far to conclude that he had a clear "anti-capitalist social vision" that could create a new, emancipatory, world – a world in which modernity is recast as libertarian social-

"anarchist"!

Then, after Indian statehood in 1947, the CSP split from Congress to form a more mainstream Indian Socialist Party – and Narayan exited, turning his back on electoral politics entirely. For the next 30 years – before his return to party politics to rally the forces that defeated the 1975–1977 Indira Gandhi military dictatorship – Narayan worked at the grassroots level, together with fellow Sarvodayan anti-authoritarian Vinoba Bhave (1895 -1982), pushing Sarvodaya very close to anarchism in many regards. Ramnath quotes Narayan: "I am sure that it is one of the noblest goals of social endeavour to ensure that the powers and functions and spheres of the State are reduced as far as possible". Marshall traces the development of the post-Gandhi Sarvodaya movement from the 1949 formation of the All-India Association for the Service of All (Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh), an anti-partisan formation aiming at a decentralised economy and common ownership, to its peak in 1969 when the Sarvodaya movement managed to get 140,000 villages to declare themselves in favour of a "modified version of Gramdan" or communal ownership of villages, although in reality only a minority implemented this. Still, this push apparently "distributed over a million acres of Bhoodan [voluntary landowner-donated] land to half a million landless peasants".

For Narayan, "decentralization cannot be effected by handing down power from above", "to people whose capacity for self-rule has been thwarted, if not destroyed by the party system and concentration of power at the top". Instead, the "process must be started from the bottom" with a "programme of self-rule and self-management" and a "constructive, non-partisan approach". Ramnath quotes him saying of the state that "I am sure that it is one of the noblest goals of social endeavour to ensure that the powers and functions and spheres of the State

saying the party consisted of "simple peasants who became revolutionists and dared to raise the banner of revolt at a time when most of our national leaders could not think beyond 'Home Rule'."

b) Post-Independence: Sarvodaya

Beyond Ghadarite echoes within heterodox communism, did libertarian socialism implant itself within post-Independence India in any way? To answer this question, we have to turn to Sarvodaya as a movement. I must say that Ramnath makes a strong case that its key interpreter in his later years, JP Narayan, had moved from Marxism to a position far to the left of Gandhi, of de facto anarchism, by Independence. Narayan was a founder in 1934 of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP), then a left caucus within the Indian National Congress. Ramnath makes no mention of the inner dynamics of the CSP, which make for intriguing reading. According to Maria Misra's Vishnu's Crowded Temple: India since the Great Rebellion (2008), the CSP "included both socialists and [after 1936] communists – following the recent U-turn in Soviet policy encouraging communists to collaborate with nationalist parties. The goal of this group was the continuation and escalation of mass agitation, the boycott of constitutional reform and the inclusion of the trade unions and kisan sabhas [peasant associations] in Congress in order to strengthen the institutional representation of the radicals". According to Kunal Chattopadhyay in The World Social Forum: What it Could Mean for the Indian Left (2003), after the Communists were expelled from Congress in 1940 for advocating measures that would warm an anarchist heart (a general strike linked with an armed uprising), a growing "anarchist" influence led the CSP under Narayan's leadership into a more strongly anti-statist, anti-parliamentary orientation. A tantalising hint – although much depends on what Chattopadhyay means by

ism by the popular classes. By her own account, Gandhi's opposition to both British and Indian capital seems simply romantic, anti-modern and anti-industrial, a rejection of the blight on the Indian landscape of what William Blake called the "dark Satanic mills". Absent is a real vision of opposing the exploitative mode of production servicing a parasitic class, of seeing the problem with modern technology as lying not in the technology itself, but in its abuse by that class.

Gandhi's libertarianism leads easily into right wing romanticism. Ramnath admits this, and is unusually frank in noting that there are strands in the Indian anti-colonial matrix that can provide the seed-bed from which both leftist and rightist flowers may sprout. As she notes in Decolonizing Anarchism, "it is a slippery slope from the praise of a völkisch spirit to a mysticism of blood and soil, to chauvinism and fascism". Although her example of that French prophet of irrationalism and precipitate violent action, Georges Sorel, overinflates his influence on the syndicalist workers' movement (he was uninvolved and marginal), she is correct in saying that "certain [historical] situations create openings for both right and left responses, and, even more importantly, that the "rejection of certain (rational, industrial, or disciplinary) elements of modernity, became for Indian extremists and Russian populists a proudly self-essentializing rejection of Western elements", and constituted "a crucial evolutionary node, from which Right and Left branchings were possible."

This contradiction is at the very heart of the Gandhian Sarvodaya movement. On the one hand, it has a healthy distrust of the state. On the other, it retains archaic rights and privileges, traditional village hierarchies and paternalistic landlordism – in line with Gandhi's own "refusal to endorse the class war or repudiate the caste system". In practice, Ramnath warns that the traditional panchayat "village republic" system from which

Sarvodaya draws its legitimacy "is far from emancipatory… women who hold seats are frequently chosen more for their potential as puppets than as leaders." By contrast, anarchist agrarian revolutionaries like the Magónista Praxedis Guerrero fought and died to end the gendered class system, and to create genuinely free rural worlds, free of feudalism and patriarchy as well as capitalism – not to revert to feudalism over capitalism. Gandhi's embrace of caste, landlordism, and opposition to modern technologies that can end hunger and backbreaking labour, is diametrically opposed to anarchist egalitarianism.

Moreover, the mainstream of the anarchist tradition is rationalist, and thus opposed to the state-bulwarking mystification of most organised religion, whereas Gandhian Sarvodaya explicitly promoted Hinduism as part of its uncritical embrace of traditionalism. So what do we make of Gandhi himself? Speaking plainly, I do not like Gandhi because I am a militant anti-militarist who believes that pacifism enables militarism. I am very suspicious of Gandhi's central role in midwifing the Indian state. On balance, in his völkisch nationalist decentralism, I would argue for him to be seen as something of a forebearer of "national anarchism," that strange hybrid of recent years. Misdiagnosed by most anarchists as fascist, "national anarchism" fuses radical decentralism, anti-hegemonic anti-statism (and often anti-capitalism), with a strong self-determinist thrust that stresses cultural-ethnic homogeneity with a traditional past justifying a radical future; this is hardly "fascism" or a rebranding of "fascism," for what is fascism without the state, hierarchy and class, authoritarianism, and the führer-principle?

Turning to the Ghadar movement: besides unalloyed anarchist and syndicalist national liberation figures such as Nestor Makhno (1888–1934) of the Ukraine, Shin Chae'ho (1880–1936)

But the world does not always work as planned, of course, and sometimes anarchists, like the Bulgarians who fought for the liberation of Macedonia from Ottoman imperialism in 1903, were forced by living under imperialist circumstances into different routes – in this case, creating popular guerrilla formations first in order to wage anti-colonial war, only paying attention to industrial organisation in subsequent years. This is similar to the path taken by Ghadar, which focused on military and propaganda work, including the subversion of Indian colonial troops (Indian servicemen returning home from defending the British Empire were receptive to Ghadarite stresses on the contractions between their sacrifice and their conditions at home). This was clearly informed not only by the insurrectionary tendencies of the day (including strands of anarchism), but also the objective difficulties of open mass work against colonialism in a largely agrarian context.

With the formation of an independent Indian state in 1947 under the Congress party, supported by Gandhi, conditions changed again. Ghadar was, by this stage, still operational but increasingly intertwined with the Communist Party, which in turn, had a complex on-off relationship with the ruling Congress party – yet "Ghadar's influence," Ramnath writes, "continued to echo long after independence. The Kirti Party and later the Lal Communist Party espoused a heterodox socialism that resisted the diktats of CPI correctness and retained characteristically Ghadarite elements of romantic idealism." Veteran Ghadarites came to the fore again when the CPI Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML) split from the Party in the 1960s, and in 1969, a Communist Ghadar Party of India (CGPI) was founded among the Indian Diaspora in Britain and Canada with "anticapitalism and opposition to neocolonialism in India and antiracism and the struggle for immigrant rights in the West" as its key goals. The best epitaph of Ghadar appears to be that of Rattan Singh, quoted by Ramnath as

As an organisational model, she says that "Ghadar is often positioned as a transitional phase between two modes of revolutionary struggle, namely, the conspiratorial secret society model and the mass organizational model, which is also to say the voluntarist and structuralist theories of precipitating change." However, she writes, Ghadar was a distinctly different and "relatively stable mode" that involved a necessary articulation between the two other modes, between what we would call the specific organisation (of tendency) and the mass organisation (of class).

To expand: in most sub-revolutionary situations, specific anarchist organisations organised workers at the critical fulcrum of exploitation by creating syndicalist unions, unions to defend the working class but with revolutionary objectives. As these movements of counter-power developed, they went beyond the factory gates, to build revolutionary class fronts embracing (for example) rent strikes, neighbourhood assemblies, subsistence food-gardens, popular education, proletarian arts, and popular councils (soviets, we might say, although that term has been severely abused by awful regimes). As this grassroots counter-power and counter-culture became a significant threat to the ruling classes, armed formations (militia, guerrilla forces, or even subversive cells within the official army and navy) were often formed to defend the people's gains. And lastly, at this matured, the productive, distributive, deliberative, educational, cultural and defensive organs of counter-power would be linked into regional and national assemblies of mandated delegates. This enabled the co-ordination of a social revolution over a large territory, and the transformation of counter-power into the organised democratic control of society by the popular classes. This was the ideal route, aspired to by most anarchist movements; we can see elements of it in the Ghadar sensibility and aspirations too.

of Korea, Mikhail Gerdzhikov (1877–1947) of Bulgaria, and Leandré Valero (1923–2011) of Algeria, Ghadar can be located within a larger current of anti-colonial movements that were heavily influenced by anarchism, yet not entirely anarchist in that they were influenced by a mixture of beliefs current in their times. For example, Augusto Sandino (1895–1934) of Nicaragua, was influenced by a mélange of IWW-styled industrial syndicalism, ethnic nationalism, and mysticism. Phan Bội Châu (1867–1940) of Vietnam was influenced by anarchism, radical republicanism and, for temporary tactical reasons, was a supporter of the installation of a Vietnamese monarchy. Clements Kadalie (1896–1951) in South Africa drew on the IWW as well as liberalism and Garveyism to organise workers.

In Haj to Utopia, Ramnath notes that "Ghadar was the fruit of a very particular synthesis; of populations, of issues, of contextual frames, and of ideological elements. It is precisely the richness of this combination that enabled it to play the role of missing generation in the genealogy of Indian radicalism, and of medium of translation among co-existing movement discourses." Likewise, in South Africa, through figures like Thibedi William "TW" Thibedi (1888–1960) we can trace a vector of revolutionary syndicalism from the Industrial Workers of Africa, into the early Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), and into Kadalie's Industrial and Commercial Union which established an organisational presence in the British colonies as far afield as North Rhodesia (Zambia), that survived into the 1950s in South Rhodesia (Zimbabwe).

Three South Asian Anarchist-influenced Movements

What is of interest to van der Walt and I is not so much the ideas of individual Indian libertarian socialists – where these are legitimately identified – but rather whether those ideas motivated any mass movements; broadly because anarchism is only relevant if it escapes ivory towers and self-absorbed radical ghettoes and organises the popular classes, that is, the working class, poor and peasantry; and narrowly because it is important in engaging with ethnic Indian militants today to know of historic Indian anarchism and anarchist-influenced currents. So it is here that both the pre-war Ghadar and post-independence Sarvodaya movements need to be assessed in their own right as living social instruments that developed beyond their founders' ideas, and also – and this is important – to learn from both their successes and failures. Of Ghadar, Ramnath argues in Haj to Utopia that it was not only a party, but also "a movement, referring to an idea, a sensibility and a set of ideological commitments that took wing – or rather, took ship – exuberantly outrunning their originators' control." The same can also be said of Sarvodaya. So what are we to say about Ghadar and Sarvodaya as organisational tendencies, in terms of their practices which overspilled the original visions of Har Dayal and Gandhi?

a) Pre-Independence: Ghadar

For both movements, the question is inflected with shifts of emphasis over their decades of development, but in the case of Ghadar, its anarchist provenance is clearer and Ramnath argues that this was a very coherent movement: "though many observers and historians have tended to dismiss Ghadar's political orientation as an untheorized hodgepodge, I believe we can perceive within Ghadarite words and deeds an eclectic

and evolving, yet consistently radical program." She argues, for example, that Ghadar's "blending of political libertarianism and economic socialism, together with a persistent tendency toward romantic revolutionism, and within their specific context a marked antigovernment bent, is why one may argue that the Ghadar movement's alleged incoherence is actually quite legible through a logic of anarchism… not only did Ghadar join the impulses towards class struggle and civil rights with anticolonialism, it also managed to combine commitments to both liberty and equality. Initially drawing sustenance from both utopian socialism and libertarian thought, their critique of capitalism and of liberalism's racial double standard gained increasingly systematic articulation in the course of the [First World] war and the world political shifts in its aftermath."

Ghadar's "indictment of tyranny and oppression was on principle globally applicable, even while generated by a historically specific situation and inflected in culturally specific terms; moreover they increasingly envisaged a comprehensive social and economic restructuring for postcolonial India rather than a mere handing over of the existing governmental institutions." A "proper Ghadarite" was, she states, anti-colonial, passionately patriotic, internationalist, secularist, modernist, radically democratic, republican, anti-capitalist, militantly revolutionist, and "in temperament, audacious, dedicated, courageous unto death" – all virtues that can honestly be ascribed to all real revolutionary socialists, including the anarchists – but with Ghadar's aim being "a free Indian democratic-republican socialist federation, and an end to all forms of economic and imperial slavery anywhere in the world." Thus, despite its heterodox sources of inspiration, Ghadar, in its decentralist, egalitarian, free socialist, anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-imperialist, and universalist yet culturally-sensitive vision, closely approximated "big-A" anarchism.