

***Overcoming the Cosmopolitan/Communitarian Divide
through Anarchism: La Via Campesina and the Principles
of Anarchism***

Abstract

The cosmopolitan and communitarian dualism has long been a dividing line in the field of IR theory. On the one hand, cosmopolitan arguments are beset by charges of domination under an unswerving universalism that is said to be washed over human plurality and diversity. On the other hand, communitarianism is consumed under the contradiction of a parochialism that seeks to reduce community and ethics to the local sphere alone. This false dualism, a necessary corollary of the dominant discourse of the ‘anarchy problematique’ in IR theory, is an unwelcome distraction that corners the debate of human emancipation within definitional obscurity and the abstraction of an alleged perpetual antagonism between the universal and the local. In this article, it is argued that IR theory could circumvent this impasse by taking into account the key principles of anarchist philosophy; mutualism and global confederalism without executive power. In support of this argument, the paper explores the contemporary social movement La Via Campesina and suggests that it uniquely reflects certain anarchistic modes of social organization. Through such a form of organization the oppressed of the world can be united in their unique differences and joint desire for emancipation.

Keywords

Anarchism; Cosmopolitanism and Communitarianism; the anarchy problematique; confederalism; mutualism; La Via Campesina

Introduction

Many accepted definitions of the political philosophy of anarchism hold that it ‘stands for the free, unrestricted development of each individual; for the giving to each equal opportunity of controlling and developing his [or her] own particular life,’¹ or ‘to bring to full development all the powers, capacities and talents with which nature has endowed [the individual], and turn them to social account.’² While these place the individual at the forefront of anarchist thought, it would be a mistake to equate anarchism solely as an individualist doctrine premised on an ontological nominalism of the self – a mistake common to those who have confused anarchism with self-conceited egoism and rendered freedom as equivalent to *licence* and *caprice*.³ Rather than the isolated freedom and narcissism of this ‘lifestyle anarchism’ that *fits* rather than *resists* the alienated, commodified and egocentric form of capitalist society, anarchism’s conception of freedom shares etymological roots with

¹ WM. C. Owen, *Anarchism versus Socialism* (London: Freedom Press, 1922), ‘foreword.’

² Rudolph Rocker, *Anarchism: Its Aims and Purposes*, (Brunswick: Free Labour Publications, 1996), 17.

³ This anarcho-individualism of Tucker and Nozick or the anarcho-capitalism of Robert Paul Wolff and Ayn Rand, are anathema to the tradition of anarchism and must be clearly distinguished for they offer no alternative to private property or the free-market. These contradictions have their roots in the work of Stirner and, later Read, who overlooked the social element necessary for their disconnected individual freedom (or ‘egoism’) which thus contradicted their own radicalism. See Kropotkin’s scathing attack on Tucker’s American, laissez-faire anarchism in Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*, New Edition (London: Harper Perennial, 2007), and R.B. Fowler, ‘The Anarchist Tradition of Political Thought’, *The Western Political Quarterly*, 25(4) (1972), 745. See also Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, The State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974); Robert Paul Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1970); Ayn Rand, *Ayn Rand’s Q & A On Libertarianism*, (1971 Interview), <http://www.aynrand.org/> (accessed May 10, 2010); Herbert Read, *Anarchy and Order: Essays in Politics*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), 141-158.

the German *Freiheit* that intertwines freedom of the individual *in* society.⁴ Anarchism is above all concerned with the realm of the social from which genuine human freedom emanates. For anarchism, human-beings are not solitary but live socially, anterior to all law, institutions, and states, and it is within these social relations that is located the genuine content of human freedom – a freedom that is orderly without coercion.⁵

The Greek word (ἀναρχία), ‘ana’ (without) and ‘arche’ (rule), is typically misinterpreted within both IR theory and general parlance as *without order*, something the popular symbol of anarchist philosophy, the A in the O – ‘Anarchy is Order’ – was intended to redress. Proudhon’s deliberate writing of the word as ‘*an-archist*’ was to denote that it did not mean disorder but opposition to power.⁶ This diametrically opposed conception of anarchy shifts its popular association with chaotic disorder to a ground in which it becomes sensible to talk of an anarchic social sphere that is considered an orderly and just social ideal, not *despite* the fact that it has no rulership but *because* it has no rulership. For the anarchist, the volumes of law and legal instruments, the various forms of punishment and institutionalized forms of coercion, and the litany of policing and surveillance mechanisms are the outward signs of the *absence* of order – not its presence.⁷ Unfortunately however,

⁴ This is why anarchism is otherwise known as libertarian-socialism. Murray Bookchin, *What is Communality? The Democratic Dimension of Anarchism* (Brunswick: Free Labour Editions, 1996), 1, 5, 12 and Murray Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism* (Stirling: AK Press, 1995).

⁵ Peter Kropotkin, *Law and Authority* (Brunswick: Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation, 1998), 5.

⁶ Kropotkin notes how in the First International ‘anarchists’ were referred to as federalists or anti-statists and only later to the pejorative of ‘anarchist’. See D. Novak, ‘The Place of Anarchism in the History of Political Thought’, *The Review of Politics*, 20(3), (1958): 325 citing Peter Kropotkin, *Paroles d’un revolte*, Paris, 1885, 99.

⁷ Fowler makes a similar point. See Fowler, ‘The Anarchist Tradition of Political Thought’, 750.

under the dominant discourse of the ‘anarchy problematique’, the discipline of IR theory is thoroughly imbued with the notion that the non-presence of sovereign power necessarily equates to disorder.⁸ In this way it continues to subject anarchism to the grossest misunderstanding suffered by a major current of modern political thought.⁹

Ontologically however, there is nothing in the concept or the reality of anarchy that presupposes it as chaotic and disorderly. As Wendt has claimed, though intending different constructionist aims, anarchy is what *we* make of it.¹⁰ Such a view had been prefaced much earlier by Modelski, a neo-realist nonetheless, who suspected that ‘Anarchy *could* be in the eye of the beholder.’¹¹ While Modelski intended this as an argument against the existence of the English School’s notion of the *Anarchical Society*, it speaks to our argument here; that the meaning of anarchy as chaos is one propagated by dominant interests and the discursive practices they foster, but is not something ontologically present in the state of anarchy itself. For anarchism, a harmonious anarchy is just as possible as the disordered one presupposed by the Hobbesian imaginary. Yet rather than the normatively neutral content that constructivists like Wendt would give it, or the unquestioned status of the real background condition of the

⁸ For examples of this implicit assumption see Barry Buzan, Jones Charles, Richard Little, *The Logic of Anarchy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) and Joseph Grieco, ‘Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism’, *International Organization*, 42 (1988): 485-507.

⁹ Marshall S. Shatz, ‘Introduction’, to *The Essential Works of Anarchism*, (M.S. Shatz Ed.), (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), xi

¹⁰ Alexander Wendt, ‘Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics’, *International Organisation*, 46(2) (1992): 391-425.

¹¹ *My emphasis added.* George Modelski, ‘Long Cycles and the Strategy of U.S. International Economic Policy’, in *America in a Changing World Political Economy*, (W.P. Avery, D.P. Rapkin Eds.), (New York: Longman, 1982), 99.

international system that neo-realists like Modelski would present it, for the anarchist the ‘order in anarchy’ is imbued with a high level of ethical-life: *mutualism* as the ideal form of participatory and deliberative social engagement and the principle of *confederalism* to associate communities non-hierarchically and without centrism both globally and locally.

This paper makes three interrelated claims which are concerned with progressive global change through the united agency of the world’s oppressed peoples. Firstly, it is argued that anarchist philosophy may help circumvent the impasse reached in the debate between communitarianism and cosmopolitanism.¹² The false duality imposed by these two alleged binary opposites – one which is seen to defer to the local, the other to the universal, but both as reified absolutes. This has unnecessarily hindered theoretical advancement regarding the development of human community, confining thought within a perpetual antagonism of logical opposition in which there can be no conceptual movement. By taking up Richard Ashley’s method of the ‘Double Reading’ this erroneous dualism shall be exposed as an unfortunate by-product of the anarchy problematique, the orthodox or dominant discourse in IR theory.¹³ The content of the divide between communitarianism/cosmopolitanism will be contrasted with the epistemology of anarchism in which the local and global (or cosmopolitan) spheres are viewed as mutually related, wherein each is equally implicated in the other as co-equal facets of human community. The second part then details two key anarchist principles, derived not solely from classical anarchism but in reference to the more contemporary approaches of Rudolph Rocker and Murray Bookchin.

¹² See Barry Buzan, David Held, and Anthony McGrew, ‘Realism vs. Cosmopolitanism: a Debate’, *Review of International Studies*, 24(3) (1998): 387-398.

¹³ See Richard Ashley, ‘Untying the Sovereign State: A Double Reading of the Anarchy Problematique’, *Millennium*, 17(2) (1988): 227-262.

While these relate to the broad philosophical principles of anarchism regarding individual liberty and social cooperation without government or hierarchy,¹⁴ we will specifically focus and elaborate on the principles of mutualism and confederalism. The final part will then survey how La Via Campesina movement – at both local and international levels – uniquely reflects certain anarchist principles and modes of organization, albeit in unique or modified forms as appropriate to the changed socio-historical conditions in contemporary world politics. This should not be seen as an argument conflating La Via Campesina with anarchism; few of its members espouse anarchism and not all of its working are consistent with anarchism. However, our intention here is to explore areas of convergence in principle and action rather than in alleging some perfect accord.

Overcoming the Cosmopolitan v. Communitarian Divide: The Double Reading

It is no surprise that anarchism is becoming of increasing interest in the discipline of IR.¹⁵ Its unique insights into the understanding of anarchy and notions of human community are as compelling as they are unheard of in the disciplinary mainstream. Even Linklater, who is avowedly a non-anarchist,¹⁶ recognises that anarchist ideals for the despatching of

¹⁴ See Richard Falk, 'Anarchism and World Order', *Nomos, XIX: Anarchism*, (J. R. Pennock, J. Chapman Eds.), (New York: New York University Press, 1979).

¹⁵ See Alex Prichard, 'What Can the Absence of Anarchism Tells us About the History and Purpose of IR Theory?', *Review of International Studies*, 2010 (forthcoming).

¹⁶ See Andrew Linklater, 'Citizenship, Harm and the Transformation of World Politics', in *Critical Theory in International Relations and Security Studies: Interviews and Reflections*, (S. Brincat, L. Lima, J. Nunes Eds.), Routledge, 2011 (forthcoming).

monopoly powers to local communities resonate with his own critique of totalising logics.¹⁷ While this is an important view, it does not register the cosmopolitan or global dimensions of anarchism as evident in the works of Bakunin, Kropotkin and later Bookchin. These authors recognize that while the autonomy of communities and the individual should be at the forefront of our understanding of community, that these necessitate global solidaristic bonds in which this diverse array of free communities may relate through mutualism and confederalism. Communities do not exist in a self-contained bubble – nor should they, for they would be the breeding ground of parochialism, inwardness and authoritarianism.

As anarchism involves a defence of free individual subjectivity and non-coercive social-relations at the local and global levels, it offers a distinct solution to one of the key debates in contemporary IR theory that has exhausted itself in a fundamental conceptual antagonism; the cosmopolitan/communitarian divide. The central problem of this seemingly intractable dispute arises because of communitarian ideologies propounded in IR theory that view norm generation as bounded by the local (state) in which social learning, shared norms, and relations of solidarity are deemed to end at the state's border. Such views are largely blind to processes of social-interaction that occur over the increasingly porous nature of community boundaries within world politics. What follows is a deliberately narrowed conception of community that falsely believes that the local derives its social-ordering principles solely from itself. This artificial and contingent consensus is then upheld as a universal and natural order that orients all social processes in reference to itself and excludes any and all social-relations that are external to it. It subsequently mistakes itself as the necessary, objectively given, and perpetual order of human community. Such a discourse

¹⁷ Andrew Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 196.

produces a world-view that is completely self-referential, closed, and suitably employable as an ideological tool against any move that would look to social-relations *outside* its ambit – by which cosmopolitanism comes, naturally, to be viewed as the ‘great enemy.’¹⁸ In forcing closure on social-relations to the immediacy of the locale, communitarianism perpetuates an unduly limited form of sociality against higher forms of community that are immanently plausible. That is, it purposefully serves to distort notions of social-relations in ways that secure its dominant (communitarian) consensus of the nature, scope and learning potential of human community. This is the ‘great fiction’ that conceals how socio-political practices and forms of community are constituted across and between borders.¹⁹

Yet the tradition of cosmopolitanism, even so-called ‘new cosmopolitanism,’²⁰ suffers equally under the imposition of the notion of community that takes the state as its sole referent. Ulrich Beck and Robert Fine have attempted to develop the theory of cosmopolitanism through their shared critique of methodological nationalism, the belief that the human community *naturally* inheres in the nation-state.²¹ For Beck, the issue was to

¹⁸ For example, Chris Brown, *Practical Judgment in International Political Theory: Selected Essays*, (London: Routledge, 2010), Chapter 18.

¹⁹ See Hastings Donnan, Thomas M. Wilson, *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 6. See also R.B.J. Walker, ‘State Sovereignty and the Articulation of Political Space/Time’, *Millennium*, 20(3) (1991): 445-461.

²⁰ See Daniele Archibugi, David Held, *Cosmopolitan Democratic: an agenda for a new world order* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995); Daniele Archibugi et al (Eds.), *Re-imagining Political Community: studies in cosmopolitan democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998); David Held, Anthony McGrew (Eds.), *Governing Globalisation* (Oxford: Polity, 2002); Vivienne Boon, Robert Fine (Eds.), *European Journal of Social Theory*, special issue on cosmopolitanism: between past and future, 10(1) (2007).

²¹ See Ulrich Beck, ‘Toward a new Critical Theory with a Cosmopolitan Intent’, *Constellations*, 10(4) (2003): 453-468; Robert Fine, *Cosmopolitanism* (New York: Routledge, 2007), Preface and Chapter 1.

replace methodological *nationalism* with a new methodological *cosmopolitanism* that had been analytically excluded by traditional social science which was defective because it assumed the state as something closed and self-contained.²² Yet because methodological nationalism had never been able to provide a satisfactory account of the state, normatively or historically, it meant that even Beck's otherwise strident argument for the need to move away from state-centrism seemed to too readily accept the historical validity of methodological nationalism that set the state at the apex of political community.²³ That is, Beck's approach accepted the premise of methodological nationalism and sought only to move beyond it so that the state was no longer the 'end of history.'²⁴ It did not negate nationalism but in fact presupposed it through its desire to transform the concept into a 'cosmopolitan' form.²⁵ Attempting this reconciliation left the divisive particularity of nationalism unproblematised so that while the theory was intended to not overshadow pluralism at the local level, it left it to be dominated under the mythical universal of the 'nation.' Such an attempt to transcend the duality was in vain because by assuming the national path to the global community merely served to re-invoke it.²⁶

²² Ulrich Beck, 'The Terrorist Threat: world risk society revisited', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 19(4) (2002): 52 and Anthony Giddens, *The Class Structure of Advanced Societies* (London: Hutchinson, 1973).

²³ Fine, *Cosmopolitanism*, 10 citing Daniel Chernilo, 'Social Theory's Methodological Nationalism: myth and reality', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9(1) (2006).

²⁴ Fine, *Cosmopolitanism*, 10 citing Peter Wagner, *Theorising Modernity* (London: Sage, 2001), 83

²⁵ Ulrich Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 49.

²⁶ This problem is evident in the confused cosmopolitan ideas of Jordaan that sometimes invokes communitarian principles or postmodern accounts of the 'other' in order to move to cosmopolitanism. See Eduard Jordaan, 'Dialogic Cosmopolitanism and Global Justice', *International Studies Review*, 11 (2010): 736-748 and Eduard Jordaan, 'Cosmopolitanism, Freedom, and Indifference: A Levinasian View', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 34(3) (2009).

In the context of this fundamental contradiction lying at the heart of the concept of political community in world politics – trapped as it is under the logical confines of the anarchy problematique and the idealised notion of the sovereign state that it essentialises – IR theory may benefit from the application of the ‘Double Reading’ pioneered by Richard Ashley. This method can be utilized in order to reveal the questions, assumptions and possibilities left unexplored by the cosmopolitan/communitarian dualism. In ‘*Untying the Sovereign State*’ Ashley offers a method to critique the dominant discourse in IR theory and to problematise the ‘anarchy problematique that he saw as being the fundamental knowledge-practice that controlled the thought, disciplined the meaning, and defined all imaginable possibilities in world politics.’²⁷ The ‘fact’ of anarchy, or the absence of central agency to enforce global order, is widely perceived as the foundational truth in IR theory, an interpretation which is so readily assumed that it defines the very compass of imaginable possibility and is the background ‘reality’ which anyone concerned with collaboration or cooperation in world politics *must* respect. While Ashley was more concerned with exploring how this discourse worked and became recognised as something so compelling and self-evident, we are interested in showing how the anarchy problematique leads directly to the cosmopolitan/communitarian divide through the privileged position it endows the state as the *only* form of political community that can overcome the problem of anarchy. Because this discourse privileges the state as the objective and natural form of political community it closes off possibilities for the expansion of, and differentiation in, human community at local and global levels that the philosophy of anarchism promotes.

²⁷ All quotes and discussion in this section refers substantively to Richard Ashley, ‘Untying the Sovereign State’, 227-232.

The anarchy problematique is characterized by a belief in the absence of central agency in world order. The state is upheld as the sole means to overcome the chaos deemed to be inherent in the state of nature and also to manage the anarchic relations between states in the international system. This discourse shares the precepts of methodological nationalism in that the state is considered the ‘natural’ form but it goes even further by implying that the state is the only form of human community effective to overcome the problem of anarchy. The anarchy problematique is therefore characterized by an inner tension between sovereignty *and* anarchy, a dualism that presupposes the ascendancy of political authority centred on the sovereign state *over* anarchy. The anarchy problematique is therefore Janus faced – it is ostensibly concerned with the condition of anarchy but at the same time champions statehood against all other forms of human community. Most disconcerting from the vantage of anarchist philosophy however, is that under this dominant discourse all notions of community revolve around, and replicate, the sovereign presence as the ‘originary voice’ of political community.²⁸ Under this orthodoxy, IR theory perpetuates an idealized conception of the sovereign state against all other alternative forms of human community. Participants to the discourse observe the absence of a central organising sovereign power in world politics but rather than seeing ambiguity, contingency, and open-ended global political possibilities therein, they ‘find’ the sovereign state as a pure, rational and self-sufficient presence amidst the alleged chaos. Here, the sovereignty/anarchy dualism supplies the necessary conditions for the binding inference of the anarchy problematique that flows from the absence of central rule in world politics. This historical fixing of the principle of sovereignty serves as the ideological limit of reason and critical thought in IR theory, because for even those who would seek to revolutionise world order it is through the anarchy problematique that their touted alternative must successfully traverse. All approaches in order

²⁸ Ashley, ‘Untying the Sovereign State’, 230.

to be seen as ‘valid’ must pay homage to this interpretation, to this disciplinary orthodoxy. Accordingly, the sovereign state becomes *the* ‘ideological’ principle and the heroic practice *the* ‘generative’ foundation to which IR originates and ‘endlessly’ returns.²⁹ For Ashley this serves to guarantee the dichotomy of realism and idealism as the dominant ideological divide in IR theory, but we would go further and allege that it is also the background assumption that serves to reify the communitarian and cosmopolitan divide – both of which privilege the sovereign state to the extent that any alternative form of human community that eschews such conceptions *a priori* are inconceivable. The dominant discourse therefore defines absolutely the ‘the condition of possibility’ in world politics.³⁰ So while our intentions may differ from Ashley’s original purpose, our conclusions are shared; that the anarchy problematique is not a necessary condition but an arbitrary political construction that is always in the process of being imposed *and* resisted. On this basis, new and potentially liberating practices of ‘global political seeing, saying, and being,’³¹ something that anarchist philosophy has long called for, become possible.

Through Ashley’s Double Reading, how the communitarian/cosmopolitan divide emanates from the anarchy problematique and the privilege it accords the sovereign state as the objective, natural, and self-contained unit for human community is made clear. What takes centre-stage in this framework of analysis is the state; the individual, the local, and cosmopolitan all recede into the background. Under the confines of ‘the anarchy problematique’, international cooperation and, by implication, the possibilities for expanding

²⁹ Ashley calls this the *blackmail of the heroic practice* for one can either honour its representation or attempt to initiate a counter-discourse – yet the ‘poverty’ of either option is indicative of the range of possibilities excluded by the dominant discourse itself.

³⁰ Ashley, ‘Untying the Sovereign State’, 232.

³¹ Ashley, ‘Untying the Sovereign State’, 229.

cosmopolitan community are of necessity severely restricted if not impossible. At the same time, it denies that the state is something contested, ambiguous, incomplete and resisted so that all the diversity within global society is subordinated to this originary and foundational claim of the state *as* political community. In this regard, the anarchy problematique fails to recognise the ‘reality’ of world politics in which the state is a historically effected mode of political community that has a precarious existence, that constantly vies with other modes of community, and which is reliant on historical practices and strategic power that *are* alterable.³² The state-centrism of the anarchy problematique cannot account for the plurality of expressions of individual freedom and community that do not neatly cohere within the grand-narrative of the sovereign state. Yet, the ‘Double Reading’ demonstrates that the state is not the only possible form of human community and exposes how such relations of authority are represented as fixed in modern global life through the anarchy problematique itself. This provides a means to overcome the false choice between communitarianism *or* cosmopolitanism in which the former is seen as ‘below,’ the latter as ‘above,’ but in which both assume the very notion of political community to coalesce solely through the state.

Indeterminacy, disorder, and ungovernability, and the privileging of the state as the principle form of human community are all presumed in the common (mis)conception of anarchy that is propagated by the anarchy problematique. It is a word that the modern discourse of politics and IR theory uses to mark off ‘marginal places and times’ and in making this demarcation, renders it a place to be feared and disciplined.³³ Yet from the absence of central rule, nothing follows as a logical necessity. It could be populated by any

³² Richard Ashley, ‘The Geopolitics of Geopolitical Space: Toward a Critical Social Theory of International Politics’, *Alternatives*, (XII) (1987): 415, 417, 419.

³³ Ashley, Walker, ‘Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline’, 262.

type of community and does not preclude social cooperation without coercion as *per* Hobbes, nor does it automatically inhere in the egoistic pursuit of individual self-interest as *per* Locke – these are possibilities of course, but only some among many.³⁴ Yet what if the condition of anarchy were viewed differently, away from the orthodoxy of the anarchy problematique, away from the assumed primacy of the sovereign state as the *only* form of human community? Here, alternative forms of human community that accept the ontological relation between individual, local and cosmopolitan could be explored without giving primacy to either level.

Anarchism and the principles of mutualism and confederalism

So while the ‘anarchy trap’ has ensnared the vast majority of IR scholarship, it is important to not remain bounded by the orthodox interpretation of the anarchy problematique. We contend here that a means to circumvent the impasse reached in the stifled debate between cosmopolitan and communitarianism is that advocated by anarchist philosophy. For anarchism, individual freedom, the plurality of local communities, and the global or cosmopolitan community, can be genuinely reconciled without either sphere being dominant over the other because anarchism endeavours to establish non-coercive social relations through a reconciliation of universal human solidarity *with* the particular solidarities at the local level.³⁵ In this section, we will detail how plurality and difference does not preclude solidaristic cosmopolitan relations between different communities through anarchism’s principles of mutualism and confederalism.

³⁴ Ashley, ‘Untying the Sovereign State’, 239.

³⁵ On this point see D.A. Hollinger, ‘Not Universalists, Not Pluralists: the new cosmopolitans find their own way’, *Constellations*, 8(2) (2001), 238.

Anarchism's insistence on the right of the individual to assert themselves – to manage their own affairs without external interference or coercion, and to have the complete expression of all their latent powers – is made at the same time that it insists on equal opportunities for self-development within social-relations for *all*. Some have observed that this implies a liberal critique of socialism and a socialist critique of liberalism,³⁶ resulting in the confluence and synthesis of those two great currents of the French Revolution, the former which was wrecked on the realities of capitalism, the other which withered under totalitarianism.³⁷ The central tenet of this left or libertarian wing of socialism³⁸ is the notion that it is possible to revolutionise human relations to a complete harmony at the individual, local, and global levels, without need for coercive power or control.³⁹ As argued by Rocker,

³⁶ See David E. Apter, 'The Old Anarchism and the New – Some Comments', *Government and Opposition*, (1970): 397-399.

³⁷ Chomsky has posited the link between radical Marxism and anarchist currents, particularly in regards to council communism. See Noam Chomsky, *Notes on Anarchism* (Brunswick: Barricade Books, 2002), 4, 9, footnote 14, citing Rudolph Rocker, *Anarchosyndicalism*, 28. Kropotkin also observes the synthesis between these two traditions. See Peter Kropotkin, 'The Scientific Bases of Anarchy', in *Anarchist Communism: its Basis and principles* (The Nineteenth Century, 1887) 243.

³⁸ Peter Kropotkin, *The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution* (1887), cited in Chomsky, *Notes on Anarchism*, 4. Some however, have argued that anarchism and socialism are antithesis, though these views are now widely discredited. See E.V. Zenker, *Anarchism: A Criticism and History of Anarchist Thought* (London, 1898) and R. Stammler, *Die Theorie des Anarchismus* (Berlin, 1894).

³⁹ Chomsky has claimed that coercive power with may nevertheless be necessary in some situations such as violent crime or public safety but that 'burden of proof has to be placed on authority, and that it should be dismantled if that burden cannot be met.' See Noam Chomsky, *On Anarchism, Marxism, and Hope for the Future*, an interview with Kevin Doyle, 1995, <http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/rbr/noamrbr2.html> (accessed on: April 2, 2010).

anarchism rejects *all* absolute schemes and concepts and *does not believe in any absolute truth, or any definite final goals for human development*. In the place of utopianism, anarchism posits the ‘unlimited perfectibility of social arrangements and human living conditions’ which for them is always straining for higher forms of expression and which, for this reason, cannot be assigned some fixed terminus or end goal.⁴⁰ Anarchy is not some blueprint for the future but a spontaneous ethos by which people can solidarise organically, both locally and internationally, to direct their *own* lives.⁴¹

The ontological and normative commitment of anarchism is diametrically opposed to the Hobbesian imaginary and the tradition of *real-politik* it spawned regarding the assumed modes of human behaviour conditioned by anarchy. For the Hobbesian, because of its reduction of human behaviour to self-interested competitive egoism that it presumed would lead to social disorder and violence, the only possible answer was the subordination of individual interests under a unifying and all-powerful sovereign authority. Here, all individuals are mere subjects, drawn together seemingly under the legitimacy of the fictive social contract but who, in reality, are bound only by the constant threat of state violence. The state keeps the oppressed groups defenceless against those who wield its power and who maintain such subjugation by armed force and imprisonment; obedience to state-laws consign the weak to a state of prostration, while state-authority degrades their sensibilities.⁴² For the anarchist, the ‘protection’ of the individual and the social ‘order’ afforded by the state is one purchased at too great a cost.⁴³ For anarchism it is erroneous to suppose the state was the

⁴⁰ Rucker, *Anarchism: Its Aims and Purposes*, 5.

⁴¹ See William O. Reichert, ‘Anarchism, Freedom, and Power’, *Ethics*, 79(2), (1969): 146.

⁴² Isaac Puente, *Libertarian Communism* (Sydney: Monty Miller Press, 1985), 4.

⁴³ Rucker, *Anarchism: Its Aims and Purposes*, 4.

spontaneous creation of mutual agreement and social contract, a myth that both the Hobbesian and Lockean traditions perpetuate, but arose from the tendencies towards domination from particular interests within society.⁴⁴ The very notion of such a universal, based as it is on coercion and violence, contradicts the foundational claim of the state's assumed 'universality' and legitimacy, exposing it as a dominant sectional interest that has been popularly but erroneously cast as something in 'the common interest.'

In distinction to both Hobbes and Locke, for the anarchist, the type of human behaviour conditioned by anarchy is seen to be full of potential for the consolidation of harmonious social-relations without the need for coercive authority. Under this conception, the condition of anarchy does not necessitate the imposition of sovereign power to monopolize the instruments of force in order to render all subjects subservient under some mythical universal. For the anarchist, its ideal of society that is formed without coercion is the result of natural blending of common interests, brought about through voluntary adhesion and not an organisation that compels conjoining people of 'arbitrary tastes and interests' into one body.⁴⁵ This claim is not based on a spurious anthropology, some fundamental claim regarding the nature of humankind, but only intimates the *potential* for social life in which harmony grows out of the solidarity of interests in community rather than some assumed common nature possessed by all.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Jouvenal makes this point. See Bertrand de Jouvenal, *On Power* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 99.

⁴⁵ Emma Goldman, 'What I Believe', in *Red Emma Speaks: Selected Writings and Speeches*, (A.K. Shulman Ed.) (New York: Random House, 1972), 46.

⁴⁶ Goldman however does retreat to problematic arguments for a harmonious conception of human nature. See Emma Goldman, 'Anarchism: What it Really Stands For', in *Red Emma Speaks*, 57.

So while anarchism cannot rely on alleged objective laws of human nature, where anarchism is decisive against the Hobbesian and Lockean imaginaries is in its social-relational ontology that recognizes the social basis of individual freedom and opposes any nominalist account of the self that Hobbes and Locke problematically relied. As argued by both Bakunin and Kropotkin, the notion of *isolated* autonomy is non-sensical in that all persons are inescapably social-beings whose freedom is interdependent with that of all other human-beings.⁴⁷ Complete ‘independence’ of the self is neither possible, nor desirable, since it would mean the dissolution of society on which the existence of the individual is ultimately dependent. Any purely egotistical freedom is illusory and would constitute the extermination rather than the fulfillment of human individuality.⁴⁸ Freedom requires more sociality, not less. For the anarchist, freedom and individuality have never existed apart from society but are coextensive with it,⁴⁹ through what Goldman called the ‘unity of life’ that blends both individual and social harmony.⁵⁰ Similarly, Rocker asserted that it was only in appropriate economic conditions in which the individual is no longer subject to any form of exploitation by another that human-beings can live in freedom.⁵¹ In these conditions each person’s ‘freedom finds in the freedom of others not its limitations, but its security and

⁴⁷ Fowler, ‘The Anarchist Tradition of Political Thought’, 742.

⁴⁸ See Mikhail Bakunin, ‘The Organisation of the International’ (1869), in *Bakunin’s Writings*, http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/firstinternationalhist.html (accessed March 15, 2010).

⁴⁹ Bookchin, *What is Communalism?* 11.

⁵⁰ Goldman, ‘Anarchism: What it Really Stands For’, in *Red Emma Speaks*, 50-52.

⁵¹ Rudolf Rocker, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism* (Brunswick: Anarcho-Syndicalist Group of Melbourne, 1997), 9.

confirmation,⁵² something Bookchin analogized with the Greek conception of ‘paideia’, the *bildung* of self in community and citizenship.⁵³ This is an idea taken up in Hegel and Honneth’s recognition theoretic, albeit in a more sophisticated manner – but the sentiment is shared in both conceptions.⁵⁴ Social justice and personal freedom can only develop genuinely when it emanates from and is based on the recognition of the personal freedom of all others – which necessitates conditions of common ownership, mutualism and confederalism by which social freedom becomes feasible. This plays on the possibility for a common interest in the freedom of self and other so that mutual agreement is possible and therefore serviceable to all.

Yet even through these general principles, it is not possible to unequivocally state what anarchism *stands for*. Despite Goldman’s otherwise useful summation⁵⁵ it remains difficult to determine anarchism as a specific theory of society and social change⁵⁶ and a common perspective amongst anarchist writers is difficult to discern.⁵⁷ In one study, all that Eltzbacher found common was their rejection of the state in the future,⁵⁸ for others it was

⁵² See Rocker, *Anarchism: Its Aims and Purposes*, 7 and Rocker, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 13. See also Murray Bookchin, *The Ghost of Anarcho-Syndicalism*, Anarchy Archives, (1992), http://134.173.117.152/Anarchist_Archives/bookchin/ghost2.html (accessed April 1, 2010).

⁵³ Murray Bookchin, ‘The Meaning of Confederalism’, *Society & Nature*, 1(3) (1993): 48.

⁵⁴ See G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (A.V. Miller Trans.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) and Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, (J. Anderson Trans.) (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995).

⁵⁵ Goldman, ‘Anarchism: What it Really Stands For’, in *Red Emma Speaks*, 48.

⁵⁶ Chomsky, *Notes on Anarchism*, 1.

⁵⁷ Fowler, ‘The Anarchist Tradition of Political Thought’, 739.

⁵⁸ See P. Eltzbacher, *Anarchism* (New York: London, 1908), 276, 292.

their complete rejection of power and formal organization,⁵⁹ and for others the only commonality was the moral nature of its critique.⁶⁰ So while there is no recognisable set of principles that would be acceptable for all of adherents of anarchism, it is possible to indicate certain general libertarian characteristics whilst acknowledging that these will vary in accordance with the needs of the time and of unique societies. Anarchism is a *living force*, to borrow from Goldman, that is constantly creating and re-creating itself in accordance with the needs of the people, the ‘needs of each place and clime’, and is not some set program to be carried to fulfilment.⁶¹ With this caveat, anarchism can be broadly conceived as a society in which coercive authority, the state, and capital, are replaced by the free union in all places of work and the free assembly (or municipality) at local and global levels.⁶² As explained by Puente, anarchist social organisation runs on federal and democratic principles – the only obligation being that all communities federate with one another for communications, production and cultural concerns based on the mutual agreement between localities.⁶³ For Puente – and Kropotkin before him – what holds these societies together is not compulsion of

⁵⁹ See Reichert, ‘Anarchism, Freedom, and Power’, 140.

⁶⁰ See George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1962), 28.

⁶¹ In this way we find no contradiction in identifying anarchist tendencies in the La Via Campesina movement (discussed in the final section), despite the fact that only few of its members explicitly share anarchist ideals. However, another study is needed to more adequately differentiate anarchism from La Via Campesina and indicate ways in which this contemporary social movement may benefit from having a closer affinity to anarchist principles. See Goldman, ‘Anarchism: What it Really Stands For’, in *Red Emma Speaks*, 60.

⁶² Isaac Puente, *Libertarian Communism*, 3.

⁶³ It should be noted that it is this loose form of federalism that led Marx and Engels to disparage anarchism because of its weakness in dealing with counter-revolutionary threats. Sadly, their prognosis has proven correct. See Frederick Engels, ‘Letter to Philipp Van Patten, 18th April 1883’, in *Marx and Engels Correspondence* (New York: International Publishers, 1968). See also Puente, *Libertarian Communism*, 18.

law, or foresight in government, but our social need for mutual aid which meets with the ability of human-beings to make improvements spontaneously to their social organization. Any limitations and problems that arise are overcome through social learning rather than social engineering.⁶⁴ This is in complete distinction to the form of political power of the state which is destructive in the sense that it is always bent on forcing competing interests ‘into the straitjacket of its laws.’⁶⁵

In this context, it is important to recall that anarchists have long called for decision-making from the bottom-up.⁶⁶ Here social organisation and cooperation do not involve the derogation of authority away from the person or community as in representative democratic systems but serve purely administrative functions. In the famous words of Saint Simon, the art of governance is replaced by the art of administration.⁶⁷ That is, there is no executive transfer of substantive decision or policy making away from the locale. In this way, individual freedom and group solidarity are enmeshed so that what was considered the ‘vast problem’ between ‘autonomy’ and ‘community’ is overcome.⁶⁸ The very nature of *political power* – understood as the means by which individuals or groups pursue their interests – is radically transformed toward the notion of *social power* in which people voluntarily cooperate through mutual agreement.⁶⁹ As argued by Wieck, ‘freedom is not merely the absence of

⁶⁴ Puente, *Libertarian Communism*, 8-9.

⁶⁵ Rocker, *Anarchism: Its Aims and Purposes*, 18.

⁶⁶ See Mikhail Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁶⁷ Saint Simon quoted in Rocker, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 4.

⁶⁸ See David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2009), 266; Peter Kropotkin, ‘Communism and Anarchy’, 30-38, reprinted in Peter Kropotkin, *Small Communal Experiments and Why They Fail* (Petersham: Jura Books, 1997).

⁶⁹ Reichert makes a similar point. See Reichert, ‘Anarchism, Freedom, and Power’, 147.

restrictions – it is responsibility, choice, and the free assumption of *social obligations*.⁷⁰ Rather than coercive laws, it is human sympathies and solidarities that are considered the effectual barrier to anti-social behaviours and form the basis for positive social cohesion. This allows for a certain fluidity in social organisation rather than the immobility of law that has a tendency to crystallise what in principle should be constantly modified and developed.⁷¹

For anarchism, the replacement of authoritarian governmental decrees with ‘solidaric collaboration’ does not just apply to the socio-political sphere but applies equally within the economic or productive relations. As argued by Rocker, places of work *and* community systematically carry out production and distribution ‘in the interests of the community on the basis of free mutual agreement.’⁷² Mutualism here denotes forms of social engagement and obligation that are derived through reciprocity, voluntary agreement, and free association, which captures anarchism’s ability to confirm individual freedom *within* genuine social-relations. This understanding of mutualism has been seen to be straddle both individualist and collectivist currents of anarchism,⁷³ yet our understanding of mutualism should be clearly distinguished from the Proudhonist tradition that contradicted itself in its proto-capitalist notions of contract, ‘free-credit’ and the ‘people’s bank’ that neglected the social basis of

⁷⁰ Emphasis added. D.T. Weick, ‘From Politics to Social Revolution’, *Resistance*, XII, (1954): 3.

⁷¹ Peter Kropotkin, *Law and Authority*, 16, 3.

⁷² It should be noted that one limitation of Rocker’s approach is that it focuses on work, production and the methods of syndicalism at the expense of wider anarchistic ideals that relate to community and social-life. Moreover, it seems to emphasise administration as something done *in* the interests of the community rather than *by* it directly. See Rocker, *Anarchosyndicalism*, 94, quoted in Chomsky, *Notes on Anarchism*, 2-3.

⁷³ See Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voice: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

freedom in deference to business transactions.⁷⁴ For us, mutualism is not about *relative gain* even in an economy in which businesses are controlled by the workers themselves, for they would remain enslaved by competition in a free market. Rather, it is about *mutual interest*, *mutual gain* and *absolute gains* for society as a whole, which is of course contingent on different ideas of human development and freedom. De Santillan gives the outlines of such a method in which his so-called ‘federal council of economy’ (i.e. a body that consisted of all delegates from each branch of work and community assembly) did not wield political power but was purely an economic and administrative regulating power that ‘receives its orientation from below and operates in accordance with the resolutions of the regional and national assemblies.’⁷⁵ In a similar vein, Rocker aimed to free society from institutions and procedures of political power through mutual agreement based on co-operative labour and planned administration.⁷⁶

While anarchism has tended to privilege in its analysis the free development of the individual and the self-determination of local communities, this has always been complemented by wider community interactions – the town and municipality, to the city, region, nation and the globe. The personal memoirs of Rocker highlight the cosmopolitan ethos of anarchism that acknowledged that while the outlook and methods of each unique

⁷⁴ Such an institution – even one of the people – would embody coercive power rather than overcome it. Moreover, this adopted the view of the individual as a contractual bearer of goods and services which was socially atomistic. See Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *General idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, (J.B. Robinson Trans.) (London: Freedom Press, 1923), 40-45, 205-207; Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *The Principle of Federation* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1969). See also See James Joll, *The Anarchists*, 2nd Edition (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 83.

⁷⁵ Diego Abad de Santillan, *After the Revolution*, 86, cited in Chomsky, *Notes on Anarchism*, 3.

⁷⁶ Rocker, *Anarchosyndicalism*, 108 cited in Chomsky, *Notes on Anarchism*, 2.

locale would be shaped by specific cultural conditions they were nevertheless solidaristic at the global level.⁷⁷ As we have seen, the social ontology of anarchist philosophy held that freedom could not be achieved through isolated independence but could appear only in a social environment that was dependent on the anarchist social ties of free human association. So while anarchism lauded negative liberty, the liberation of the individual sought was held possible only *in* community.⁷⁸ This set up a powerful dialectical relation between freedom and community; one's own freedom was dependent on the freedom of all others and could not be divorced from relations in, and across, communities. In this dialectic of community, local anarchistic communities and the global relations between them are considered *one* – neither form of community is complete without mutual relations that combine both spheres. It was in widening this understanding of, and associations between, communities that fed into the anarchist notion of (con)federalism.

Proudhon espoused, at a general level, these ideals in his *Principle of Federation* (1863) and the basis of his conception of 'government' was of 'delegation, convention, federation' that he regarded as 'the free and spontaneous consent of all the individuals which make up the People.' As he famously quipped, under anarchism 'everyone is the government, so there is no government.'⁷⁹ Proudhon's communal notion of federalism was unsullied by his capitalistic mutualism and was explicitly intended to prevent hierarchy and centralization.⁸⁰ Each locale (or commune) was self-governing through its assemblies which

⁷⁷ See Rudolph Rocker, *The London Years*, (J. Leftwich Trans.) (London: Robert Anscombe & Co, 1956), 98-106, 188-196.

⁷⁸ Fowler, 'The Anarchist Tradition of Political Thought', 743, 746.

⁷⁹ Pierre Joseph Proudhon, *Le Révolution sociale démontrée ar le coup d'état du Deux Décembre*, Paris, 1938, 288, 290 quoted in Joll, *The Anarchists*, 57-58.

⁸⁰ Proudhon, *The Principle of Federation*, 41, 45, 48.

through the presence of its own delegates, vested the county or regional levels with certain functional powers. The county, which was also self-governing through the delegates from each of the federated communes that comprised it, then vested certain administrative functions onto the national federation which in turn entered into federative contacts with other such confederations.⁸¹ While the broad brushstrokes of this system remain current within anarchist thought, Proudhon's approach presupposed a *relationship of interests* within community for there to be an absence of government and the problem remained that Proudhon never explained the difficulties in forming associations between external communities other than a vague, unstated, faith in Kantian moralism.⁸² Moreover, as argued by Bookchin, Proudhon's account placed too much emphasis on the surrender of rights of each federated body to the so-called 'higher' level. This idea was problematic in the light of the non-derogable rights of self-determination of each locale and the principles of direct democracy and assembly at the civic level.⁸³

So while Proudhon contributed to the advancement of the idea of federalism at the local level, it was Bakunin who saw the need for international solidarity based around the 'Federation of the Associations.'⁸⁴ In his formulation, federation proceeded 'from the base to the summit,' from the commune to the coordinated associations at national and potentially global levels. These larger groupings at the provincial, national, regional and global levels

⁸¹ See Edward Hyams, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: His Revolutionary Life, Mind and Works* (London: John Murray, 1979), 254.

⁸² See Joll, *The Anarchists*, 59.

⁸³ See Bookchin, *The Ghost of Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 1-3.

⁸⁴ See Rocker, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 12.

would therefore be ‘nothing but [the] free federation of autonomous communes.’⁸⁵ So whereas under political authority hierarchy becomes accentuated towards the apex, under anarchism’s federalism recognition is given to the autonomy and independence of every municipality and place of work so that power emanates from the bottom up.⁸⁶ In this federal system there was to be no fixity or petrification of function or role; all positions were revocable so that any tendency toward hierarchy was precluded. This reflected Bakunin’s idea of the revolutionary movement that was to embody the harmonious and libertarian form of social organisation that it aimed to establish – and hence Bakunin’s vehement attack on the authoritarian communists whom he argued wrongly assumed that dictatorship could lead to freedom.⁸⁷

Kropotkin explored this problem through a more sophisticated and focused analysis and came to distinguish between two forms of governmental authority within the Western canon, the Roman or imperialist tradition based on hierarchy and formalized authority and the other which he called the popular or federalist tradition.⁸⁸ The latter expressed anarchist social-relations that denied the necessity for compulsion in government for the maintenance of peace, order and justice. For Kropotkin, rather than requiring the formation of the state peace, order and justice could only be achieved when the idea of coercive institutions were abandoned and replaced by self-discipline, mutual aid, and federalism.⁸⁹ In this context,

⁸⁵ Mikhail Bakunin, ‘Revolutionary Catechism’ (1866), in *Bakunin on Anarchy* (S. Dolgoff Ed.) (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 82-83.

⁸⁶ See Puente, *Libertarian Communism*, 11.

⁸⁷ Mikhail Bakunin, *Oeuvres*, Vol. II, 297, xlix-l, quoted in Joll, *The Anarchists*, 91-92, 87.

⁸⁸ See Peter Kropotkin, *The State: Its Historic Role* (London: Freedom Press, 1946), 44.

⁸⁹ Note the obvious conceptual overlap with open discourse, mutualism and confederalism. For a discussion see Reichert, ‘Anarchism, Freedom, and Power’, 144.

Kropotkin illustrated the limitations of small and isolated communal experiments that remained independent and argued for the federation of communes that would maintain the diversity of individuality and local self-determination, whilst providing links between communities and the satisfaction of material needs.⁹⁰ Kropotkin called this the ‘No-government system of Socialism’ in which ‘the functions of government are reduced to a minimum, and the individual recovers his full liberty of initiative and action of satisfying, by means of free groups and federations – freely constituted – all the infinitely varied needs of the human being.’⁹¹ For him, the advancement of social-relations and freedom does not lie in the concentration of power and regulative function in the state but in decentralisation, that is, a ‘subdivision’ of public functions to the initiatives of freely constituted groups with respect to the type of action and character of the function. Yet as Kropotkin’s discussion of the Paris Commune shows, these forms of self-government and self-administration must be carried further territorially than the locale – to be effective they must be carried to wider spheres necessary to satisfy the various needs and functions of social life as a whole. This made fundamental the connection of the *interdependencies* between persons, groups and communities who may live thousands of miles apart but who nevertheless require federal associations between them to ensure internal and external forms of freedom.⁹²

From this discussion, it is clear that anarchists share a commitment to the ‘federation of free communities’ that are bound ‘by their common economic and social interest’ and ‘arrange their affairs by mutual agreement and free contract.’⁹³ As explained by Rocker, the

⁹⁰ Kropotkin, ‘Communism and Anarchy’, 30-38.

⁹¹ Kropotkin, ‘The Scientific Bases of Anarchy’, 238.

⁹² Kropotkin, ‘The Scientific Bases of Anarchy’, 242, 249.

⁹³ Rocker, *Anarchism: Its Aims and Purposes*, 1 and Rocker, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 1.

anarchist ideal of federalism is based on the ‘free combination from below upward, putting the right of self determination of every union above everything else and recognising only the organic agreement of all on the basis of like interests and common conviction.’ Specifically, this meant the joining of individuals to their local community and places of work in ‘cooperative societies’ which are federated to their city, rural districts, nation and beyond, along cooperative lines that provides the necessary coordination of support for each local grouping.⁹⁴ The move to free cooperation and social ownership of production was assumed to make the need for coercive political institutions superfluous. Ultimately, the aim was to overcome the hostile division between classes and nations with social solidarity between the various levels of community – to free society from all institutions that ‘stand in the way of the development of a free humanity.’ However, there are serious limitations to the type of federalism envisaged by both traditional anarchists and later anarchist thinkers of 1930s such as Rocker and Puente. For example, Rocker provides for communities to provisionally disassociate with each other a move that, while being nominally consistent with a pure notion of self-determination, leads ultimately to a lessening of the social conditions of freedom and endangers parochialism and isolation.⁹⁵ By allowing communities to withdraw unto themselves re-creates the restrictions on human freedom as experienced on Crusoe’ Island – material want, mono-culturalism, aloneness. A similar problem can be seen in Puente’s work when he asserted the self-sufficiency of communities that eroded the necessity of federal relations between them, leading to their isolation and defencelessness against fascism.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Rocker, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 21-22.

⁹⁵ Rocker, *Anarchism: Its Aims and Purposes*, 10.

⁹⁶ Puente does suggest “regional or country federations” but these are of only limited including hydrographical, forestry or electricity. Yet the principle of global federalism is latent in his thought for he does mention that national federations will freely offer services to localities and individuals who cooperate jointly. What was

A means to overcome this inherent weakness of federalism has been provided by Bookchin's notion of confederalism, an idea we contend is both normatively and organizationally superior to traditional anarchist views.⁹⁷ The crucial limitation of previous anarchist thought was that it championed decentralisation without understanding the need for a form of liberatory confederalism. Yet despite this oversight, what underpinned the anarchist visions of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin was communalist ethics (expressed as mutualist, collectivist or communist respectively) that, while being expressed differently, assumed some form of *confederalism* as the 'moral cement' tying communities together. Confederalism was the source of communal solidarity that transcended narrow self-interest and widened the notions of ethical community to external associations between communities.⁹⁸ Bookchin's idea of confederalism maintains the libertarian ideas of federalism in which power emanates from the bottom-up and is decentralised.⁹⁹ Yet it also brings together Bookchin's ideas of grass-roots, face-to-face participatory democracy in the locale sphere, with the integration of communities that are inevitably interdependent at regional and global levels. Bookchin reiterates the need for such regional and global integration against both the dangers of localist isolation and cultural parochialism *and* as

lacking therefore was recognition that this same principle needed to be raised to the global level. See Puente, *Libertarian Communism*, 15, 18.

⁹⁷ Bookchin, 'The Meaning of Confederalism', 41-54.

⁹⁸ We employ the term confederalism as it implies a more cosmopolitan form of association that eschews the formal hierarchies usually associated with federalism in which the federal centre is seen as the 'higher' sphere and possesses more power and authority 'above' the local areas. See Bookchin, *The Ghost of Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 5-10.

⁹⁹ See Murray Bookchin, *The Rise of Urbanisation and the Decline of Citizenship* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1987).

against universalist mentalities that tend to overlook the uniqueness of different cultural and ecosystems. The essence of confederalism is the network of administrative councils whose delegates, elected by popular, face-to-face democratic assemblies at various locals (villages, towns, places of work, cities), are immediately revocable and responsible to their assemblies. The sole task of these delegates is the coordination and administration of the policies formulated by the assemblies themselves. As posited by Bookchin, and consistent with the anarchist tradition since Proudhon, these delegates serve purely administrative and practical functions – the execution of adopted policies – as opposed to the policy making functions of imperial republican systems.¹⁰⁰ Administration and coordination are then the responsibility of confederal councils and are the means by which various locales are interlinked. The flow of power from the bottom up continues through these councils ranging territorially from localities to regions and on to ever-broader territorial areas (i.e. the globe). While Bookchin downplays the obvious cosmopolitanism of this arrangement in deference to ‘authentic mutualism’, he does emphasise the practical nature of this consociation in which the satisfaction of material needs and common political goals are interlinked with the ‘greater whole’. In this way, he is satisfied that this democratises interdependency without surrendering local control and creates a ‘general interest based on shared community problems.’¹⁰¹ For Bookchin, in this confederation – anti-hierarchical and classless as it is – specific self-interests would give way to communal ones, even ‘to the abolition of interest as such by placing all the problems of the community and the confederated region onto a shared agenda... the concern of the people at large.’¹⁰² As such, the idea of confederalism links well

¹⁰⁰ Bookchin, ‘The Meaning of Confederalism’, 46.

¹⁰¹ It should be noted however that Bookchin does defer to the local municipality as the authentic arena for public life which is, of course, contestable. Bookchin, ‘The Meaning of Confederalism’, 48.

¹⁰² See Bookchin, *The Ghost of Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 8.

with the cosmopolitan program of ‘humane governance’ pioneered by Richard Falk that is to be activated by diverse democratic forces that are associated through what he calls ‘globalisation-from-below.’¹⁰³ Here a global confederalism is advanced because of the necessity of ‘vital solidarity’ between fellow human-beings and the shared moral responsibility for our actions that compels the development of cosmopolitan associations in the furtherance of each community’s freedom.¹⁰⁴

The Via Campesina movement and its relation to anarchism

‘We have accomplished this through a bottom up, not a top down, process. The local already existed (thousands of them), what La Via Campesina has done is give them a body of common analysis, and linked them with each other. What all this adds up to is the strengthening of universal demands and struggle.’

– European peasant leader¹⁰⁵

Having now outlined the key features of anarchist theory, in this section we show how La Via Campesina, an international peasant’s movement, reflects certain anarchist principles and modes of social organization. In this analysis we acknowledge that Via Campesina, which is made up of highly diverse actors operating within the socio-historical framework of

¹⁰³ On the idea of ‘humane governance’ see Richard Falk, ‘Humane Governance for the World: Reviving the Quest’, *Review of international Political Economy*, 7(2) (2000): 317-334. On the idea of ‘globalisation-from-below’ see Richard Falk, ‘Resisting ‘Globalisation-from-above’ through ‘globalisation-from-below’, *New Political Economy*, 1(2) (1997): 17-24.

¹⁰⁴ Rocker, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 21.

¹⁰⁵ Maria Elena Martinez-Torres and Peter M. Rosset, ‘La Via Campesina: the birth and evolution of a transnational social movement’, *Journal of Peasant Studies* 37, no. 1 (2010): 149-175.

neoliberal globalization, does not necessarily fit neatly with all aspects of anarchist philosophy. We are wary of the danger of conflating anarchism as consonant with Via Campesina and yet, as our discussion will show, we are satisfied that there are enough commonalities to draw out such a comparison. So while traditional anarchism (i.e. that typically associated Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin) and Via Campesina are clearly distinct, rather than detracting from the relevance of anarchist thought in contemporary world politics, this reveals how people in different times and contexts make their *own* history according to their need, experience and socio-historical conditions.¹⁰⁶ This fluidity and organicism has always lain at the heart of anarchism in action.¹⁰⁷ In this sense, it can be argued that certain aspects of Via Campesina represent a unique and modified form of anarchism that has adapted to the changed socio-historical conditions of the world economy. As anarchism's rejection of utopianism shows, there is no fixed terminus or goal of human development but the ever-present possibility for higher forms of its expression. Both anarchism and Via Campesina share the view that conceptions of development and human betterment are not linear or predetermined.¹⁰⁸ That is, neither support closed systems that permit no further development or divergence but rather focus on safeguarding and extending the liberties and freedoms of communities in particular contexts, times and places. There can be different forms of cooperation and social organization existing simultaneously that can change and be altered in the future according to context and to need.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Philip, McMichael, 'Peasants Make Their Own History, But Not as They Please...'. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8, no. 2-3 (2008): 205-228,

¹⁰⁷ The Spanish Revolution shows the differentiated nature of anarchism in practice. See Eddie Conlon, *The Spanish Civil War: Anarchism in Action*, E-Mail Edition (1994), Chapter 2, http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/spain/pam_intro.html (accessed May 1, 2010).

¹⁰⁸ *Emphasis added.* Rocker, *Anarchism: Its Aims and Purposes*, 15-17.

¹⁰⁹ Rocker, *Anarchism: Its Aims and Purposes*, 10.

The fundamental assumption common to both anarchism and La Via Campesina is that people will spontaneously organize in ways to achieve a life that reflects the freedom they desire. To offer some comprehensive utopian blueprint of the future or rigid typology of organization is both impossible and undesirable, for it would subtract from the critical agency of the people themselves.¹¹⁰ This takes us away from modernization theory and industrialization, the ‘one-size fits all’ approach to development, to a theory that promotes community rights for the formation of their ‘own’ development frameworks. Via Campesina reflects anarchism’s acceptance of the relative significance of ideas and social forms and its upholding of the ‘plasticity of organization,’ the ‘admirable adaptivity’ to the needs of cooperation.¹¹¹ Rather than doctrinaire programs, it is the practical experiences of everyday life that precipitate spontaneous change in organizational forms. Through experiential learning communities develop, interact and adapt – something clearly reflected in the diverse movements, organizations and communities involved with Via Campesina. Moreover, the daily economic struggles of the peasants who constitute Via Campesina, contribute to the development of cosmopolitan solidarity and the mutual aid between its members leading to enhanced forms of cooperation. Rocker referred to this as the growth in understanding of oneself in a shared ‘community of fate’. While this truly global community is made up by distinct individuals and groups they suffer under similar impositions of advanced capitalism and state authority, albeit expressed uniquely in accordance with their different culture, nation and relative position in the world economy. Yet burdened by the same overarching

¹¹⁰ Many have pointed out anarchism’s rejection of such utopian blueprints. See Reichert, ‘Anarchism, Freedom, and Power’, 146; Kropotkin, ‘The Scientific Bases of Anarchy’, 238. Rocker, *Anarchism: Its Aims and Purposes*, 1, 16.

¹¹¹ Kropotkin, ‘The Scientific Bases of Anarchy’, 243; Rocker, *Anarchism: Its Aims and Purposes*, 16; Rocker, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 7.

politico-economic systems, an ever widening alliance of communities has been created for and by themselves that anarchism has maintained is the preliminary ethical assumption for their co-emancipation. In this way, La Via Campesina represents ‘the required basis for solidaric mass action adequate for the demands of the time.’¹¹²

La Via Campesina is considered by many to be the most significant transnational social movement in the world.¹¹³ La Via Campesina – made up of peasant groups and family farmer organizations from North America, South America, Europe, Africa and Asia – was formed in 1992 as a response to the negative outcomes and social consequences that neoliberal policies have had on peasantries around the world. Similar to most global social movements, Via Campesina is made up by a large number of diverse social organizations. As of 2007, the movement represented 148 rural social movement organizations from 69 countries.¹¹⁴ The movement is most notably marked by its diversity in terms of class, gender, ethnic terms and ideological persuasions of its member organizations and their members. Nevertheless, despite these differences, unifying commonalities exist as well. Most notably, La Via Campesina represents economically and political marginalized sectors and groups and the movement is recognized as the global voice of marginalized rural peoples.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Rocker, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 17; Rocker, *The Methods of Anarcho-Syndicalism* (Brunswick: Anarcho-Syndicalist Group of Melbourne, 1998), 5-6, 11.

¹¹³ Martinez-Torres and Rosset, ‘La Via Campesina’, 150, 156, 170.

¹¹⁴ La Via Campesina, ‘*What is La Via Campesina?*’, http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=27&Itemid=44 (accessed April 20, 2010).

¹¹⁵ Borrás, ‘La Via Campesina and its Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform’, 260.

La Via Campesina is important social movement for any contemporary examination of the potential for anarchism because it reflects Kropotkin's ideal that rather than looking to the state for protection and the construction of law, the various peasant communities of La Via Campesina take upon themselves responsibility of overcoming what is undesirable in their socio-economic life.¹¹⁶ This intersects with the tradition of anarcho-syndicalism whose central tenet is the control by the workers of the conditions of their own work proceeding upward from the workers to society.¹¹⁷ Here, the freedom to control their labour has the double function of defending the workers in the present, while preparing them for the reconstruction of social life by their own hands in the future.¹¹⁸ Yet it also goes beyond the confines of syndicalism's essentially economic dimension, and resonates with the broader societal, cultural and environmental goals of anarchist philosophy that includes, but pushes beyond, class struggle.¹¹⁹ Instead of mere economic solidarity based around the pursuit of material ends, Via Campesina provides for an enhanced form of human community that does not look only to the (narrow) interests of these economically oppressed classes but towards the anarchist ideal of the 'complete liberation'¹²⁰ and emancipation in 'all spheres of life'.¹²¹ In this context, Via Campesina reveals a diverse range of peoples and individuals that are concerned not only with their own oppression but with various ideals of social justice,

¹¹⁶ Kropotkin, *Law and Authority*, 1-3.

¹¹⁷ However, a problem with the syndicalist movement is that it assumes that workers take control and then provide material needs to the community which may narrow the basis of its emancipatory appeal. See Gaylord Wilshire, *Syndicalism: What it is* (Free Labour Edition, Brunswick, 1996), 4, 8.

¹¹⁸ Rocker, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 20.

¹¹⁹ See Bookchin, *The Ghost of Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 13-15.

¹²⁰ Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 267.

¹²¹ See Bookchin, *The Ghost of Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 13.

ecology, and communal freedom that are receptive of libertarian ideals that reflect anarchism's holistic account of human freedom.¹²²

The stated aim of La Via Campesina is to defend the interests of its members by developing 'solidarity and unity among small farmer organizations in order to promote gender parity and social justice in fair economic relations; the preservation of land, water, seeds and other natural resources; food sovereignty; [and] sustainable agriculture production based on small and medium-sized producers.'¹²³ As such, the 'defence of the interests of its members' does not necessarily refer to placing these interests over or above the concerns of others. Rather, it involves a movement of solidarity that is based on obtaining mutual benefit and social justice so that there is parity in the conditions of freedom between all. More specifically, Via Campesina's main agenda has been to challenge and provide a counter-argument to the dominant neoliberal doctrines whilst developing an alternative 'voice' from below. This alternative framework for social relations is rooted in their concept of 'food sovereignty',¹²⁴ which refers to the rights of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own unique and culturally, socially, ecologically and economically appropriate agricultural, labour, food and land policies.¹²⁵

¹²² See Castels work which has shown that many radical workers movements were concerned with wider civic concerns than work alone. See Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983).

¹²³ La Via Campesina, 'What is La Via Campesina?', http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=27&Itemid=44 (accessed April 20, 2010).

¹²⁴ Saturnino Borrás, 'La Via Campesina and its Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform', *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8, no.2-3 (2008): 258-259.

¹²⁵ Katherine Ainger, 'The New Peasants' Revolt', *New Internationalist* 353, Jan/Feb (2003): 9-13.

On a broad level, La Via Campesina reflects anarchist principles that advocate the possibilities of human betterment (without a predetermined or homogenous fixed end goal) through ethical and liberatory social relations and the potential for the consolidation of harmonious social interactions without the need for coercive authority. Via Campesina provides a platform for the united agency of peasantries oppressed under the imposition of neoliberal market relations.¹²⁶ The movement engages rejects ‘the uniform vision of capitalist modernity and the singular liberal subject’ and in its place ‘articulates distinct social, cultural and ecological realities as part of a complex movement in process.’¹²⁷ As its slogan – ‘we have a world to gain’ – captures eloquently, ultimately, Via Campesina looks to a world *beyond* the catastrophe of the corporate market regime, in which agrarianism, communal life and ecological sustainability are revalued as central.¹²⁸ More specifically, La Via Campesina clearly resonates with anarchism through its non-hierarchical or ‘bottom-up’ approach to community that is autonomous, pluralist and multicultural. In this context, national and regional movements within Via Campesina are ‘part of the wave of social movements that have broken free from paternalistic political party sponsorship and control.’¹²⁹ La Via Campesina is independent not only of all political parties but also of governments, funders (including foundations and aid agencies), and NGOs so that the movement remains uncompromised by any external political or economic type of affiliation.¹³⁰ Moreover, it has

¹²⁶ Martinez-Torres and Rosset, ‘La Via Campesina’, 156, 167.

¹²⁷ Philip, McMichael, ‘Peasants Make Their Own History, But Not as They Please...’. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8, no. 2-3 (2008): 205-228, pg 224.

¹²⁸ See McMichael ‘Peasants Make their Own History’ and Raj Patel, *Stuffed and Starved* (Melville House Publishing: Brooklyn, New York, 2007), 302, 303.

¹²⁹ Borras, ‘La Via Campesina and its Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform’, 277.

¹³⁰ Martinez-Torres and Rosset, ‘La Via Campesina’, 158, 171.

been built from the interests and actions of the members themselves so that its agenda is defined by the movement itself and not by other actors. Through mobilisations, protests, and non-violent but radical action, La Via Campesina has built up strength in its opposition to global powers that negatively affect the livelihoods of peasants and farmers worldwide. In doing so, it has created a mass-based peasant movement that operates within a radical democratic framework.¹³¹

With their coordinated actions within the realm of both global and local social relations, La Via Campesina challenges diverse forms of coercive authority, repressive practices, and social power relations entailed in the capitalist model of accumulation. In line with anarchist principles, Via Campesina rejects capitalism because it allows for the appropriation by individuals the title to things which are really the collective products of society.¹³² In particular, the movement is opposed to the neoliberal orthodoxy of the Washington Consensus because this is seen to constrict the development of a society's productive powers, depriving the great majority of its members the necessities of life which would otherwise be available to them because it is a system of production for profit not production for need.

La Via Campesina's 'food sovereignty' movement has served as a mechanism to challenge the dominant discourse of capitalistic accumulation in the international economy

¹³¹ Martinez-Torres and Rosset, 'La Via Campesina', 171.

¹³² Machinery, technical skills, 'know-how' and raw material are appropriated by the capitalist but are really the outcome of centuries of human endeavor and cooperation and are part of the collective earth and should be held in common, as these are expressions of human solidarity they should not be made into the possession of the capitalist. For a similar claim see Kropotkin, 'The Scientific Bases of Anarchy', 252.

under neoliberal globalization. More often than not, these market-oriented development policies have exacerbated social disparities and exclusion.¹³³ According to McMichael:

Essentially, ‘food sovereignty’ serves to appropriate and reframe dominant discourse, as a mobilizing slogan, and as a political tactic to gain traction in the international political-economy *en route* to a global moral economy organized around ‘cooperative advantage’ – as a counterpoint to ‘comparative advantage’ and its licensing of corporate manipulation of the state system and world economy as a chessboard for accumulation.¹³⁴

This focus on ‘cooperative advantage’ instead of ‘comparative advantage’ is deeply reflective of anarchism’s emphasis on mutual benefit for all.

More than contestation to neoliberal globalization and its negative effects on peasants and small-scale farmers globally, La Via Campesina’s struggle is a struggle for alternatives in search of a better world. In this vein, Via Campesina has articulated radical democratic demands for the freedom to decide what food to produce, how to produce it, and how to consume it. The concept of ‘food sovereignty’ broadly refers to the right of peoples to define their own agriculture and food policy and to determine the cultural, social and ecological

¹³³ Robert Wade. Globalization, poverty, and inequality. In *Global political economy*, ed. J. Ravenhill. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 302-315; Thomas, Caroline. ‘Poverty, development, and hunger’ in *The Globalization of World Politics*, ed. J. Baylis and S. Smith. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 646; Michel Chossudovsky, *The globalisation of poverty : impacts of IMF and World Bank reforms* (London : Zed Books, 1998), 41.

¹³⁴ McMichael ‘Peasants Make their Own History’, 220.

conditions under which it is sustained.¹³⁵ For many, the ‘food sovereignty’ movement ‘embodies the construction of new rights and the transformation of society as a whole’.¹³⁶ It challenges the normative conception of individual interest and individual gain and focuses on what could be viewed in anarchist terms ‘communal freedom’ or freedom for all.¹³⁷ The ‘food sovereignty’ movement can be viewed as a non-hierarchical social engagement and means to mobilize communal social relations. It is a call for people to engage with each other and to determine for themselves the meaning of food in their communities ‘bearing in mind the community’s *needs*, climate, geography, food preferences, social mix and history’.¹³⁸

In addition to alternative narratives of development and social relations that are sensitive to specific locales and cultures, as a transnational social movement, La Via Campesina provides a unique example of a movement in which local and global social relations are viewed as mutually related and implicated in each other as sites of human community. Nettie Wiebe, one of the founding members of Via Campesina explains the organizing strategy of the movement:

The way in which we’ve approached this is to recognize there are people like us everywhere in the world who are farming people, who are rooted, culturally rooted, in their places. And what we need to do is build bridges of solidarity with each other which respect that unique

¹³⁵ La Via Campesina, ‘What is La Via Campesina?’, n.p.; McMichael, *Development and Social Change*, 337. ‘Food sovereignty’ also focuses on the organization of food production and consumption according to local needs and therefore production for local consumption is prioritized.

¹³⁶ Martinez-Torres and Rosset, ‘La Via Campesina’, 160; Patel ‘Transgressing Rights: La Via Campesina’s Call for Food Sovereignty’, *Feminist Economics* 13, no 1 (2007):87-93

¹³⁷ See McMichael, ‘Peasants Make their Own History’, 213.

¹³⁸ Patel, ‘Transgressing Rights’ 88, 91.

place each of us has in our own community, in our own country. These bridges will unite us on those issues or in those places where we have to meet at a global level.¹³⁹

This building of ‘bridges of solidarity’ through the local *to* the global levels can be viewed as reflective of anarchism’s principle of *confederalism*, the association of communities non-hierarchically and without centrism. As a global social movement, Via Campesina seeks to coordinate social learning and social interaction at these wider levels without a power structure that is limiting or oppressive. The national, regional or locally-based organizations involved with Via Campesina engage in struggle on a global level with regards to common issues.¹⁴⁰ Yet, at the same time, the autonomy of the member organizations is respected.¹⁴¹ In the words of McMichael, within Via Campesina ‘micro-politics articulate with macro-politics in the sense that the strength of these individual movements draws on the ability of members to recognize and connect their particular conditions and political projects.’¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Ainger, ‘The New Peasants’ Revolt’, 10-11.

¹⁴⁰ Organizationally, La Via Campesina is made up of an International Coordinating Commission (ICC), which is made of up regional coordinators (one female and one male) from each of the regions and meets twice yearly to evaluate compliance with the International Conference Agreements and to analyse the situation of each region. The International Operative Secretariat is in charge of coordinating actions and implementing Conference and ICC agreements. It would be important here to analyse the nature of these actions to assess whether they reflect delegated authority or are given powers of policy-making which would be incompatible with anarchist principles of confederalism. Activities are then divided among issue groups coordinated and carried out International Working Commissions, which are led by one male and female who are elected from each of the regions. In other words, social interaction and learning occurs at multiple levels ranging from local communities to regional and national organizations to the International Coordinating Committee and the International Conferences. See Martinez-Torres and Rosset, *La Via Campesina*, 157, 165.

¹⁴¹ Martinez-Torres and Rosset, ‘La Via Campesina’, 170.

¹⁴² McMichael ‘Peasants Make their Own History’, 223.

The 'food sovereignty' movement provides a common platform of struggle that builds unity in diversity through a shared opposition against the dominance of neoliberalism. La Via Campesina builds coalitions with other social movements and alliances with other actors¹⁴³ to pressure international institutions on certain policies.¹⁴⁴ Organizations involved in La Campesina understand that it is important to organize themselves on a transnational level to be able to fight transnational corporations and international finance capital which they view as the driving forces behind policies of the WTO, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and free trade agreements.¹⁴⁵ Through their contact with each other across international borders they are able to identify common causes and common enemies, learn from each other, and devise counter-hegemonic discourses through 'oppose and expose' strategies.¹⁴⁶ A key example of this was given at La Via Campesina's international conference in 2006 where delegates from almost all countries could relate to discussions regarding the drops in prices due to unfair competition, government subsidies or cutbacks to large producers and a loss of domestic markets to imports.¹⁴⁷ When a representative from Thailand talked about how multinational corporations wanted to patent their rice seeds,

¹⁴³ Local, national and international groups were intricately connected in La Via Campesina's effort to oppose market-led agrarian reform and to work towards an alternative framework. The information revolution including use of free web-based email allowed national and transnational peasant groups to share important information to coordinate more quickly. For examples see Borras, 'La Via Campesina and its Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform'

¹⁴⁴ McMichael 'Peasants Make their Own History', 215; Martinez-Torres and Rosset, 'La Via Campesina', 161.

¹⁴⁵ Martinez-Torres and Rosset, 'La Via Campesina', 153.

¹⁴⁶ Martinez-Torres and Rosset, 'La Via Campesina', 153.

¹⁴⁷ McMichael 'Peasants Make their Own History' 222.

‘Mexican peasants realized that the Thais’ rice was their corn’.¹⁴⁸ Examples from this conference reveal that the movement’s global solidarity is based on the mutual recognition of diverse struggles.¹⁴⁹

Ultimately it is the complexity and diversity of contexts combined with solidarity based on mutual recognition of differences that gives strength to this global movement.¹⁵⁰ In contrast to the unidimensional contemporary industrial agribusiness model that concentrates economic and political power, exploits workers and is structured through the vertical integration and domination of all agriculture activities, Via Campesina advocates a decentralized model where production, processing, distribution, consumption and social relations more broadly are controlled by the communities themselves and not by transnational corporations or capital.¹⁵¹ To achieve these goals, La Via Campesina demands the *formal* guarantee of food sovereignty rights at a global level, with the *content* of these rights to be context-specific and locally determined. In the word of Patel ‘while demanding a *formal* guarantee of food sovereignty rights (including a certain measure of protection), the movement maintains that the content of these rights ... is to be determined by the communities and countries themselves – thereby asserting a *substantive* reformulation of sovereignty through context-specific rights, situated in particular, historical subjectivities’.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ McMichael ‘Peasants Make their Own History’, 221.

¹⁴⁹ For more on how the power of social movements is drawn from the diversity and solidarities that are formed through their respective causes see Martin Weber, ‘Understanding and Analysing Social Movements and Alternative Globalization’ in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Ethics and International Relations*, (P. Hayden Ed.), (London: Ashgate, 2009), 431.

¹⁵⁰ José Bové, and François Dufour, *The World Is Not for Sale* (London, Verso 2001), 168

¹⁵¹ La Via Campesina, ‘What is La Via Campesina?’, n.p.

¹⁵² McMichael, ‘Peasants Make their Own History’, 220.

Conclusion

In a period of advanced or monopoly capitalism, in which social-relations are increasingly alienated and fragmented, a political philosophy that has been misunderstood and demonized in mainstream IR now appears as the most rational form of human community. The promise of anarchism is that it can provide for non-hierarchical and non-exploitative social, cultural, economic, environmental and political relations at local and global levels. For anarchism social justice and personal freedom can only develop genuinely when it emanates from the recognition of the personal freedom of all others – which necessitates conditions of common ownership, mutualism and confederalism in which a global freedom of humanity becomes feasible. It is for this reason that it is the ethically *consistent* form of human organization that can overcome the false dualism of the cosmopolitan/communitarian divide.

An ethically *consistent* communitarianism would benefit from anarchist principles by no longer having to shut the locale off from the global sphere in which it is immersed. It would no have to defer to the ethicality of the former in exclusion of the later. Under anarchist principles, the ethical primacy of the locale can be secured without giving up harmonious relations with external communities in which both interact symbiotically at this ‘higher’ level. At the same time, anarchism could push the cosmopolitan framework away from the assumed teleological ascent to the global sphere that would trample over the rights of the local spheres. An ethically *consistent* cosmopolitanism would seek to do justice to the plurality and difference in the world whilst maintaining universal freedom in the community of humankind. In this way, cosmopolitanism would do well in borrowing from anarchist

philosophy the principles of local autonomy and mutualism *within* a wider confederation (that is, federation without executive power) at the ‘higher’ levels of the region and globe. In re-rendering the conception of both communitarianism and cosmopolitanism in this way, each tends to dissolve into its other at the conceptual edges. The boundary between communitarianism and cosmopolitan would no longer be opposed but would exist as a dependent and mutual relation.

In this context, La Via Campesina and its ‘food sovereignty’ movement provides an alternative understanding of community that is both communitarian and cosmopolitan. It promotes and struggles for freedom at the levels of the local and the global simultaneously, through radical and deliberative processes of mutualism and communal freedom. The movement has built bridges of solidarity between local and global levels through the coordination of egalitarian social learning and action. The movement offers a ‘grounded, localized and yet international humanism around the food system and its call is an active attempt to incite context specific transformation within a context of universal (and defensibly humanist) principles of dignity, individual and community sovereignty, and self-determination.’¹⁵³ In this way, La Via Campesina makes fundamental the connection, as does anarchism, of the *interdependencies* between persons, groups and communities who may live thousands of miles apart but who nevertheless require confederal associations between them to promote their internal and external forms of freedom.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Raj Patel, ‘Global fascism, revolutionary humanism and the ethics of food sovereignty’ *Development* 48, no.2 (2005):79-83.

¹⁵⁴ Kropotkin, ‘The Scientific Bases of Anarchy’, 249.

