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ANTHROPOLOGY AND ANARCHISM

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The field of anthropology is a site of epistemological debate involving positions that are differentiated conceptually, ideologically and methodologically. One of the characteristics of this issue is to bring together heterogeneous research and terrains, but whose epistemological approaches are linked to anarchist theories. Some of its problems fall on the wrong side of the dynamics of culturalist, technicist depoliticization and new ontologies, whose categories of thought do not incorporate forms of engagement considered scientifically unproductive.

This has encouraged the emergence of a multitude of researchers committed to an anti-authoritarian or anarchist vision, without creating a real constituted movement. By anti-authoritarian, we mean any theoretical approach and choice of object that is primarily concerned with criticizing the forms of essentialization of power in its various social manifestations. These epistemological

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positions can also, but not necessarily, position themselves as policies of resistance to academic and hierarchical arrangements.

While Marx and Engels found elements of anthropological reflection on the origins of inequalities, the scientific rigour that underlies the means of this liberation has not in reality allowed us to establish any more than a theoretical plan of certainty to carry this emancipatory project beyond its contradictions. The foundations of the Marxist approach in the social sciences, which drew in particular from the theories elaborated within a philosophy of history of the formation of the State, the origin of the family, alienation, the fetishism of merchandise, class struggle and exploitation, augur well for both empirical and descriptive approaches and anthropological theories.

In a certain respect, the post-modern approaches, such as those gathered in the collective work of criticism *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus, 1986), can be perceived as post-Marxist forms of experimentation on the practice of horizontal writing or the politics of ethnographic text, and thus as being less apolitical than adogmatic, at the risk of certain impasses.

“Thus are highlighted the rhetorical processes that underpin scientific authority, the fragmentary aspect – inherent in the limits imposed by sensory perception – of descriptions that claim to be totalizing, and the hidden partiality of data produced in socio-political contexts in which anthropologists participate.” (Mahieddin, 2011)

The recent publication in French of James Scott’s *Petit éloge de l’anarchisme : six fragments sur l’autonomie et la dignité* (2013), *La domination et les arts de la résistance* (2009), *Zomia. Où l’art de ne pas être gouverné* (2013) and David Graeber’s *Pour une anthropologie anarchiste* (2006), which assert their link to anarchist thought, recall the dynamics that animated Pierre Clastres (1974) and the proponents of post-Marxist and post-structuralist anthropology. Here, an anarchist anthropology is a means of understanding and a critical reading of social processes in the world,

based on the choice of objects, the analysis of domination processes, their naturalization or deconstruction.

The Zomia neologism, created by the historian Willem van Schendel in 2002 to define the highlands of Southeast Asia, brought together people who were withdrawn in the mountains. James C. Scott develops the thesis according to which these safe havens arise from the voluntary escape of state constraints by inhabitants, and are spread over the territories of eight Southeast Asian states. However, this analytical grid is questioned by anthropologist Hjorleifur Jonsson (2014), for whom these safe havens are the result of a “disconnection” linked to recent social decay, and not to a strategy of voluntary state avoidance.

Starting from geography, a discipline susceptible to anarchist ideas since the 19th century, Philippe Pelletier examines his links with anthropology in his article presented in this issue. The geography that “is used first to make war”, as ex-Marxist Yves Lacoste titled in 1976, “would also be used to make peace”, as Pelletier wrote in a book published in 2017.

The anarchist geographical space in Berlin, which Ralf Marsault’s punk anthropology questions in this issue, also shows how conflict situations in the Wagenburgen’s insurrectional space are regulated. Elsewhere, in France, two Zones to Defend (Notre-Dame-des-Landes and Bure) have engaged in a battle with state authorities and formed an area for the experimentation of autonomous and independent agricultural practices and environmental policies. In the state rhetoric, these areas are regarded as places of lawlessness, illegal occupation, which must disappear. Constitutionally, the state is responsible for establishing and protecting the rules of ownership.

The mechanisms of mistrust and resistance towards state institutions are manifested in the search for borderline zones. At present, these sites are being drastically reduced by the renewed strategies of the techno-structure, which is deploying simplified access to these unexploited territories through infrastructure projects (airports, dams or nuclear waste landfill sites). Annalisa Lendaro

unveils strategies for activists to circumvent the law in order to protect migrants in the Roya Valley, a territory that is gradually demarcated, limited and controlled by the “right hand of the State” (Bourdieu, 1998).

Indeed, this theoretical aim prompted us to update the work on anarchism in anthropology as a project centred on concepts forged on the margins or in academic circles. In France, a conference was held in 1995 at the University of Bordeaux on anti-authoritarianism in ethnology, which recalled the anarchist youth of Radcliffe-Brown, among others (A. Van Gennep, J. Goody, Cels Gomis). More recently in October 2017, at the initiative of Pierre-Alexandre Delorme and Clément Poutot, the *Pierre Clastres : d'une ethnologie de terrain à une anthropologie du pouvoir* conference showed the ever-present influence of Clastrian studies and the dynamics of the *Anarchist turn* that the reader will be able to discover in the *Echos d'ici et d'ailleurs* section. Also reproduced in our columns, the report of the *Anthropologie critique et critique politique* doctoral days in June 2017 in Nanterre, organized by Julie Cayla, Violaine Héritier-Salama and Brett le Saint, questions the application of the links between anthropological knowledge and political commitment.

The above-mentioned contemporary English-language anthropological research also proves its vitality by analyzing, through anarchist means, resistance techniques, interstitial spaces, and hidden discourses in the face of hegemony, knowledge and legitimate authorities.

In 2012, the *Critique of Anthropology* journal published *Anthropology and Anarchy*, in which authors testified to their attachment to anarchist principles as categories of anthropological analysis. This is the case of Keir Martin's article “The Potlach of Destruction: gifting against the state”, which, as its title suggests, explores the political theorizations on the gift of situationists: “Analysis of how capitalist relations of exchange and consumption helped to structure hierarchy and authority, remained largely unexplored prior to the intervention of the Situationists. [...] In anthropology, a discipline from which the Situationists derived a

great deal of influence, the Situationists remain largely unknown. Yet the Situationists' appropriation of gift theory deserves some attention. In contrast to the assumption that activist appropriations of academic theories inevitably produce simplifications that are of no theoretical value, it was the Situationists' attempt to use the gift as a revolutionary tool that led them to develop gift exchange theory in directions that academic anthropology took decades to catch up with" (Martin, 2012, free translation).

In this special issue, Erin Araujo's article focuses on an economy of gift giving in San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, where objects circulate according to different types of non-hierarchical exchange. Here, the coexistence of exchanges of reused goods and donations in the form of services and knowledge has become, as Keir Martin points out, a central theoretical issue since the work of Christopher A. Gregory (1982), who analyzed "the co-equality of different forms of exchange and their mutual convertibility into each other".

As we briefly noted at the beginning of the introduction, a fringe of anthropology has developed specific categories of apprehension of realities according to the contexts in which specific terminology and ontologies are created, but without including the perspective of political anthropology as a condition for methodological elaboration.

Guilherme Falleiros thus evokes the case of the introduction of astrology in a Brazilian anarchist group in order to remedy conflicts and fight against the unequalitarian temptations paradoxically visible in the practices of people claiming to be anarchists. In his text "On Anarchist Anthropology", Harry Walker correctly describes the recurrent use of supernatural and fictional concepts to overcome the inequalities imposed by colonization: "This rapid reshuffling of priorities following the imposition of colonial rule was possible thanks to the creative reservoir of concepts of witches and sorcerers, which were deployed to redefine coercion and inequality as distinctly foreign or "un-Malagasy". In other words, having a ready supply of concepts of evil linked to oppression or coercion in the

imaginary domain may allow for a more robust and prompt response when such relations threaten to intrude into everyday social life. [...] Graeber suggests this may be a kind of "spectral counterpower" that can become a resource when needed, by enabling a rapid moral re-evaluation of potentially oppressive social relations" (Walker, 2012).

The concept of *teko'a*, explained by Bettina Escauriza and, for the author, signifying at the same time the settlement, the village and the community, sheds light on the bypass mechanisms used by the Guaraní in order, through their own epistemology, to absorb the post-colonial domination of the nation-state and thus problematize their internal relations.

Viveiros de Castro develops the concepts of perspectivism and multinaturalism of Amerindian thought, which contradicts "modern multiculturalist cosmologies" (2014). Western metaphysics is thus counterbalanced by multiple arrangements in the world, notably by a "native state of indifference between humans and animals described in mythologies". (*ibid.*).

In Thomas Siron's view of the egalitarian and distributive division of the land, however, the anarcho-equalist perspective is called into question by the different positions ordered by state reforms and implemented by trade unions. This organization of landless peasants that the author is the first to examine with regard to Bolivia uses multiple strategies according to its location.

Indeed, the problems of occupation, the reappropriation of space and the contestation of major development projects and expropriation measures contribute to the questioning of state and private choices. Informal and sensitive links sometimes prevail over contractual links stemming from hierarchical systems.

"The laws and institutions of formal democracy are the appearances under which and the instruments by which the power of the bourgeois class is exercised. The struggle against these appearances then became the way to a "real" democracy, a democracy in which freedom and equality would no longer be represented by the institutions of law and the State but embodied in

the very forms of material life and sensitive experience” (Rancière, 2006 : 8-9).

Criticism of power and exploitation is not articulated solely in militant circles, but is part of a reflection on the production of analytical categories and the description of ethnographic reality. Nikolai Jeffs’ article discusses, among other things, the link between anarchism, academia and the fictional terrain: “If many activists can be the object and/or subject of the “tyranny of structurelessness” (Freeman, 1972) by which given informal relations within an emancipatory formation or space produce highly authoritarian individuals and practices, then many academics can face a related condition when departments, faculties and universities, albeit still containing vestiges of (academic) self-management, are the targets of various neoliberal offensives.”

Revolutionary perspectives as every radical critique raises the question of violence as a mean between pratique practical necessity and an ethical/sensible limit. According to Pierre Clastres endemic violence is “an essential precondition for certain forms of maintaining independence from the state” (Walker, *op. cit.*). What Jason Royce Lindsey’s article invites us to do is to imagine the practices of neutralising violence in an anarchist setting by relying on speculative fiction. Coercion is one form among others exercised by powers that no longer appear as a homogeneous model, but whose characteristics of domination and subordination are more diffuse because they are subject to an existing order articulated in discourses and patterns dedicated to their unsurpassability. This assimilation or incorporation of norms is produced through certain forms of dependency and subjective links with authority acquired through socialization.

Jason Royce Lindsey summons the notion of security to define the oppressive mechanisms described in fictional literature and to relate the effects described in the imaginary of anticipation to the way they are applied in states.

In 1982, anthropologist Harold D. Barclay (1924-2017) published *People Without Government: An anthropology of*

anarchism (not translated into French), in which hierarchy, social stratification and subordination appear as paradigmatic data or constructions based on voluntary cooperation and mutual aid.

Can anthropologists apply anarchist ideas to anthropological research and academia? David Graeber (2016) pointed to the bureaucratization and commodification at work in universities by grant agencies that, through the allocation of funds, organize and accentuate competition and competitive research. Do teacher-researchers resist the new quasi-managerial methods whereby autonomy, diverted from its emancipatory characteristics, is transformed into an individualistic form of evaluation and submission to the new “process”?

Conclusion

Authors from different disciplines challenge the strict and arbitrary categorizations of specific fields of study commanded by the organization of social science research.

“From this point of view, organizing research involves bringing together projects and surveys that – despite their idiosyncrasies – share a certain “*air de famille*” with others (Wittgenstein, 1953). If the “studies” built around a given theme share the ambiguities of “cultural areas”, it is important to distinguish them from the fields of investigation that are intended to group researchers around a specific object or question. In this case, it is a question of considering that – regardless of the terrain, themes or methodologies – it is essentially the questioning that can be the basis for the most fruitful comparisons.” (Bosa, 2017)

Here, the anarchist perspective seems to open up specialization by associating subjects as diverse as activists from the Roya valley, landless peasants from Bolivia, astrology as a mean of conflict solution in an egalitarian group, the non-market exchange in a women group in Chiapas, the alternative of the “order” in a non-coercitive system or again the way a poetical redefinition of reality frees from categorial boundaries inherited from colonial domination. Anarchist questioning and paradigms, on a political and

methodological level, serve here as a counterpoint to the division of the social work of research.

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