
Michael Schmidt’s *Cartography of Revolutionary Anarchism* seeks to do exactly what the title implies: to map revolutionary anarchism to present a global history of the emergence and significance of mass, organized anarchist movements. Co-author of *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism* (Schmidt and van der Walt 2009), a deeply involved and researched endeavor with a similar aim, Schmidt’s *Cartography of Revolutionary Anarchism* recalls key dates and happenings to outline what he defines as the “five waves of anarchist/syndicalist history”. Central to the structuring of the book is the argument that anarchist historiographies have typically relied upon an “anemic version” (p.19) of anarchist movements, exclusively focusing on five North Atlantic events: [i] the Haymarket Protests (1886) and subsequent executions (1887); [ii] the French General Confederation of Labor’s (1906) *Charter of Amiens*; [iii] the Kronstadt Uprising (1921); [iv] the Spanish Revolution (1936-1939); and [v] the French Revolt (1968). Criticizing this “quasi-religious tragedy” of historical recollection, which is too often “recited like an anarchist rosary” (p.21), for its reduction of anarchist traditions, Schmidt responds with his waves-based approach—one that he presents as a more balanced narrative of both “triumphs and tragedies” (p.22) to demonstrate the global reach of anarchist and syndicalist movements. The wave metaphor is intended to represent the ebbs and flows, highs and lows of movements on a global scale. After striking down much of the events-based recollections of isolatedly Atlantic anarchist histories, albeit with much rigour, he continues by presenting his theoretical interpretation and subsequent use of the terms syndicalism and anarchism.
If the reader up until this point does not realize the author’s deep commitment to the anarcho-syndicalist tradition, which is extremely difficult to overlook, it is strikingly clear here that what is to follow will be a determinedly targeted historical representation complete with “syndicalism” and “anarchism” used interchangeably. Syndicalism is here defined as a revolutionary form of anarchism dependent upon the formation of unions as key to resisting the ruling class. Although Schmidt does differentiate between the explicitly anarchist “anarcho-syndicalist” tradition and that of “revolutionary syndicalism”, he criticizes the later due to its “ignorance about the anarchist roots of syndicalism” (p.26). Boiling each tradition down to variants of a “basic revolutionary trade union approach” (p.26), alternative histories of anarchist movements, such as origin stories starting with Pierre Joseph-Proudhon’s (1840) fundamentally anti-state, anti-capitalistic treatise *What is Property?* (see, for example, Anarcho 2013), are dismissed and instead replaced with anarcho-syndicalist accounts.¹

Schmidt identifies the birth of anarchism in the pan-European revolts of 1848 that emerged in opposition to the imperialist expansion of capitalist economies. With a distinctly socialist movement emerging from this dissent, Schmidt positions anarchism as branching off from emerging socialist sentiments in the 1860s, catalyzing a “mass tendency of anarchism” (p.32). The following five chapters, with the final thrusting the reader back into anarchism defined narrowly as anarcho-syndicalism, densely list acronyms of syndicalist organizations, their geographic location (or not), years of operation, and, at times, key members who went on to influence other syndicalist struggles.

The First Wave (1864-1894) begins with the formation of the International

¹ For a history of the discipline of geography and anarchist traditions, see Springer (2013).
Working Men’s Association. Schmidt continues to outline a number of anarchist-syndicalist models that emerged across the globe, including the year that they were established, new and/or weakening movements, and, for some, when they were extinguished. It is in this chapter that key thinkers such as Pyotr Kropotkin and Mikhail Bakunin are introduced, with the latter’s disciplinary philosophy of anarchism propelling much of the remaining work. On the Second Wave (1895-1923), Schmidt similarly outlines the rise and fall of anarcho-syndicalist movements within the context of the First World War. The author identifies three diverse ideologies and contexts behind syndicalist struggles: industrial revolutions (e.g. current Russia, USA, and Canada); “apolitical” contexts (e.g. current Egypt, Brasil, and India); and libertarian communist sentiments (e.g. current Chile, Mexico, and Bolivia). Towards the end of the chapter, the author constructively delves into foundational texts for organizational strategies against the popular, militarized Bolshevik tradition of the time; of note is the Makhnovist *Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists*, a 1926 pamphlet published in France by exiled anarchists and the *Workers Cause* (*Dielo Truda*) group outlining a pro-organization stance in anarchist movements to form a revolutionary society. The *Platform* would continue to fuel much debate in the anarchist movement with critiques such as Sébastian Faure’s 1928 *La Synthèse anarchiste* arguing for a more ideologically-fluid approach (p.66-73); these debates continue to divide anarchist traditions today.

The Third Wave (1924-1949) era is highlighted as most detrimental for anarchist struggles due to the conservative counter-revolutions that permeated the globe during war time. The Fourth Wave (1950-1989), however, was the “lowest ebb” (p. 95) of anarchism. The longstanding intolerance between communists and anarchists, a rivalry that Schmidt often recalls in his presentation of the anarcho-syndicalist tradition, resulted
in iron curtains weighing heavily on anarchist dissent. The author argues that most revolutionary models of this time were explicitly syndicalist, as opposed to anarcho-syndicalist, in areas such as China and the USSR, and were thus more in line with communist rule. Syndicalist sentiments also flowed from post-war Europe, with much of South America and North Africa following a libertarian communist approach. Lastly, the Fifth Wave (1990-today) presents an anarcho-syndicalist resurgence, with a focus upon European responses to the end of the Cold War and the Libertarian communist syndicalist movements emerging in much of western South America–struggles which the author implicates himself in.

While this is a coherent and novel way to present the massive undertaking that Schmidt attempts, these waves come at the reader relentlessly–endless laundry lists of movements and their acronyms, names patchily connected to broader social contexts, and key meetings which brought allies together or fractured existing struggles. The long history of the competition between anarchism and communism occupies much of the lineage that Schmidt recreates. Personal interjections are frequent with little backing–brief chirps at splinter groups that have gone from, as he sees it, the black to the red side, or comments dismissing communist critiques of anarchist struggles.² Central to Schmidt’s work is the struggle to reposition anarchism from its often-criticized origins in the minds of academics back to the factories and streets. Although a noble venture, and one that indeed warrants investigation, the author often denies anarchism’s hybridized roots–roots that stem from within both the classroom and the factories and streets (see, for example, Kropotkin 1978).

Schmidt does attempt to insert instrumental individuals–notably women–and

² For a theoretical discussion of anarchism and communism, see Botticini (2013).
groups from regions outside Europe, and this somewhat unsettles the monopoly of white-patriarchy that dominates so much anarchist theory and praxis. For instance, the author acknowledges the contributions of Russian exile Ida Mett, whose analysis of *The Kronstadt Commune* (1948) was a “devastating critique of Bolshevism” (p.67). Critiques of anarchism highlighting its staunchly Eurocentric (Barker and Pickerill 2012) and androcentric (No Pretence 2011) birth abound, so Schmidt’s provision of female revolutionists’ names without further investigation of the context and relevance of their struggles is a missed opportunity—one that could have greatly benefited the field of anarchist studies. And this missed opportunity isn’t the only one. Admittedly intended to be a cartography rather than theoretical investigation of anarchism, and a short one at that, deciding to locate non-European and non-cisgendered males without intertwining or even clearly linking these struggles to surrounding happenings is rather unfortunate due to the obvious knowledge that the author has of anarcho-syndicalist history. An examination of the connections between anarchism and broader movements would be a vital resource to those first exploring the field of anarchism. On a practical level, the absence of a glossary or list of key organizational acronyms makes wading through the body of the text somewhat like navigating a labyrinth that attacks the senses: right as the reader believes they are approaching a point of navigation, they turn the corner (or the page) to be completely disoriented both in geographic location, time, and with a new barrage of acronyms.

It is obvious that Schmidt is extremely knowledgeable on the topic that he tackles. Due to the immense undertaking in this book, Schmidt’s exclusionary approach to anarchism as syndicalist/communist may part-in-parcel reflect a strategy to syphon a

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3 See also, for an anti-racist critique of anarchist historiography, Evren (2014).
portion of history that can manageably be recalled. The vocally anarcho-syndicalist outlook, however, inhibits the book; little attention to, or even mention of, alternative traditions such as queer anarchism, anarcha-feminism, or anarcho-passivism means the full potential of Schmidt’s work isn’t realized. The book at times feels more like an op-ed piece rather than a concise history of revolutionary anarchism, no doubt reflecting the author’s background as a journalist. *Cartography of Revolutionary Anarchism* would, however, be a valuable read for anyone seeking a reference guide on anarchist-syndicalist organizations. Without a list of acronyms or a glossary, it is suggested that this book be read with a pen and paper in hand to record organizations that may warrant further personal investigation.

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