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21 Anarchism, or the cultural logic of networking

Jeffrey S. Juris

Anti-corporate globalization movements, particularly in Europe and North America, have been characterized by a resurgence of anarchist ideas and practice (Chesters 2003; Epstein 2001; Farrer 2006; Graeber 2002; Juris 2004, 2008). Since the first Peoples' Global Action (PGA) inspired Global Days of Action, including the Carnival against Capitalism on June 18, 1999 and the protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle that November, radical movement sectors have put into practice classic anarchist principles such as decentralized coordination, non-hierarchical organization, consensus decision-making, and direct action. This has been particularly evident in Barcelona, a city with a strong culture of opposition and a powerful anarchist legacy. Indeed, anti-corporate globalization activists in Barcelona, dubbed the "Rose of Fire" during the anarchist bombings in the 1890s (Smith 2002), often point to the city's anarchist past as a major influence. Yet many do not identify as anarchist in the strict sense. Rather, anarchism forms part of a wider movement culture shaped by the interaction between traditional patterns of opposition and an emerging cultural logic of networking.

This article explores the links between classical anarchist praxis and contemporary anti-corporate globalization activism in Barcelona. Rather than a one-to-one *identity*, I argue that anti-corporate globalization movements involve a *confluence* between anarchist principles and a wider networking logic associated with late capitalism. Given this affinity, anarchism represents one among several related positions that radicals adopt in particular local contexts.

Anarchism and the movements against corporate globalization

Two kinds of arguments have been put forward regarding the relationship between anti-corporate globalization movements and anarchism. The strong case suggests that radical movement sectors, or the practices driving the movement as a whole, *are* anarchist. This does not mean a rigid, doctrinaire anarchism, but a flexible, post-structural version attuned to the multiple, shifting forms of power and identity in today's post-modern world (Chesters 2003; Farrer 2006; Mueller 2003; cf. May 1994). For example, Graeme Chesters (2003: 43) suggests that emergent properties of the "alternative globalization movement" as a complex, self-organizing system are generated by the "adherence to anarchist principles of organization and

decision-making." These include: participation, antipathy to hierarchy, consensus processes, directly democratic decision-making, respect for difference, and the goal of "unity in diversity." Chesters (2003: 60) then asserts: "If there is a spider at the centre of every web the one spinning this new wave of networked resistance is resolutely and undoubtedly anarchist." I am sympathetic to Chester's argument, but he overstates the case. The principles he identifies may be characteristic of anarchism, but they are also expressions of wider social trends.

The weaker case argues for a looser affinity between anarchism and anti-corporate globalization activism, but generally fails to specify the logic of this connection. For example, Barbara Epstein (2001) suggests that anti-corporate globalization activists have an "anarchist sensibility" more akin to organizational culture than a coherent worldview. For his part, David Graeber (2002: 1) maintains that "[a]narchism is the heart of the movement, its soul; the source of most of what's new and hopeful about it." At the same time, although principles such as anti-authoritarian organization, prefigurative politics, and direct action emerge from the libertarian tradition, they do not necessarily constitute a strict anarchist ideology, as Graeber (2002: 7) points out: "The motto might be, 'If you are willing to act like an anarchist now, your long-term vision is pretty much your own business.'" In this view, anarchism constitutes a spirit of resistance, an anti-authoritarian ethic, and a set of guiding principles (cf. Goaman 2003; Grubacic 2004; Welsh and Purkis 2003). *Why* anarchism assumes this role within contemporary movements, however, is not as readily apparent.

This article should be taken as a contribution to the weak case regarding the relationship between anarchist sensibilities and anti-corporate globalization activism, but I want to extend the argument in two ways. First, I suggest that we can best understand this affinity by considering broader social trends, including the emergence of a cultural logic of networking associated with late capitalism. Second, given this context, anarchism represents one among several related anti-authoritarian identities that radicals adopt according to local political conditions. In Barcelona, for example, radical anti-corporate globalization activists alternatively identify as anarchist, libertarian, autonomist, or simply anti-capitalist, and often express multiple, fluid subjectivities.

Anarchist principles in practice

Social movements are increasingly organized around flexible, distributed network forms (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001; Castells 1997; Hardt and Negri 2004). I employ the term "cultural logic of networking" to characterize the guiding principles, shaped by the logic of informational capitalism, which are internalized by activists and generate concrete networking practices (Juris 2008). These include: (1) building horizontal ties among diverse, autonomous elements, (2) the free and open circulation of information, (3) collaboration through decentralized coordination and consensus decision-making, and (4) self-directed networking. Networking logics are an ideal type. In practice, they are unevenly distributed and always exist in dynamic tension with competing logics, often generating a complex "cultural politics of networking" within concrete spheres.

At the same time, there is nothing *inherently* anarchist or even progressive about network forms and practices. Indeed, distributed networks have expanded more generally as a strategy for enhancing coordination, scale, and efficiency in the context of post-Fordist capital accumulation. Networks are decentralized, but they also involve varying levels of hierarchy and can be used for divergent ends, including finance, production, policing, war, and terror. Despite their structural similarities, networks differ according to their values and goals. While networks of capital are oriented toward maximizing profit and police networks are concerned with maintaining order (Fernandez 2008), activist networks employ similar tools and logics to build mass movements for social, political, and economic change. Radical movement networks further emphasize openness, horizontality, and direct democracy. Although they are not *necessarily* egalitarian, distributed networks suggest a *potential* affinity with egalitarian values. It should thus come as no surprise that radical anti-corporate globalization activists express anarchist sensibilities.

Non-hierarchical organization

Despite widespread popular belief, anarchism does not mean disorder. On the contrary, one of the threads uniting the diverse strands of anarchism involves precisely the importance of organization, although one based on grassroots participation from below rather than centralized command from above. The anarchist rejection of the state derives from this critique of centralized power, as the Russian anarchist Voline argued in strikingly familiar network terms: "The principle of organization must not issue from a center created in advance to capture the whole and impose itself upon it but on the contrary, it must come from all sides to create nodes of coordination, natural centers to serve all these points" (quoted in Guérin 1970: 43).

Anti-corporate globalization networks are organized along similar lines. In Barcelona, digital technologies have reinforced traditional cultures of opposition involving open assemblies, grassroots participation, and mass mobilization. At the same time, such technologies have led to a growing emphasis on autonomy and decentralized coordination. For example, this networking logic was evident in the organization of the Citizens Network to Abolish the Foreign Debt (RCADE), founded to organize a Zapatista-style Consulta Social in March 2000 around whether the Spanish government should cancel the debt owed to it by developing nations. RCADE specifically involved a statewide network of local, autonomous collectives, which coordinated the effort via e-mail lists and a central website. The network exhibited an affinity between classical anarchist strategies, including decentralized coordination among small-scale affinity groups, and the networking logic of the Internet, as Joan, an RCADE activist, commented to me: "We organized ourselves as nodes, using the nomenclature of the Internet . . . The nodes

were the spaces where information was produced and made public, the physical embodiment of the Internet, what we might call affinity groups today."

Several months after the Consulta, RCADE-based activists joined their counterparts from squatted social centers, Zapatista support networks, environmental and feminist groups, and anti-Maastricht collectives within the Movement for Global Resistance (MRG). Rather than top-down central command, MRG-based activists preferred loose, flexible coordination, with a minimal structure involving open assemblies, logistical commissions, and several project areas. Indeed, a networking logic was inscribed directly into MRG's organizational architecture, as its manifesto declared: "We understand MRG as a tool for collective mobilization, education, and exchange, which at the same time, respects and preserves the autonomy of participating people and groups, reinforcing all the voices taking part in the action."

Anti-corporate globalization networks such as RCADE or MRG are not anarchist in the strict ideological sense. Rather than a specific political cast, they constitute broad "convergence spaces" (Routledge 2004) organized around basic guiding principles, including decentralization, grassroots participation, autonomy, and coordination across diversity and difference. Like their counterparts in other regions, radical anti-corporate globalization activists in Catalonia also favor consensus decision-making and grassroots assemblies. At the same time, these ideals are often contradicted in practice and can generate informal hierarchies (Juris 2008).

Self-management and federation

Anarchists fervently believe in local autonomy and self-management, as Colin Ward (1973: 58) explains: "The anarchist conclusion is that every kind of human activity should begin from what is local and immediate." As a result, according to Voline: "True emancipation can only be brought about by the direct action of those concerned . . . and not under the banner of any political party or ideological body. Their emancipation must be based on concrete action and 'self-administration'" (quoted in Guérin 1970: 37). In this sense, anarchist praxis means acting on behalf of one's own group or community, rather than another (Franks 2003). In contrast to representative democracy, Kropotkin (in Raymond 1999) thus promoted a mode of political organization that is closer to self-government, to government "of oneself by oneself." This does not necessarily mean that larger associations are never justified, but rather that these should always be based on local needs and autonomy.

The degree of emphasis on self-management varies among anti-corporate globalization activists. Some activists are more concerned with translocal ties and horizontal networking, while others stress local control. In Barcelona, for example, this latter position is widespread among an informal network of radical collectives, including squatters, anti-militarists, and media activists, which emphasize self-management and confrontation with the state.

At the same time, anarchists are also staunch internationalists, but they favor voluntary federations involving horizontal coordination among locally autonomous groups. Bakunin thus envisioned a future social organization "carried out from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, starting with associations, then going into the communes, the regions, the nations, and, finally, culminating in a great international and universal federation."[1] Indeed, networking logics involve precisely this conception of horizontal coordination among diverse, autonomous groups. In this sense, Colin Ward (1973: 26) specifically views anarchist federations as distributed networks, explaining that communes and syndicates would "federate together not like the stones of a pyramid where the biggest burden is borne by the lowest layer, but like the links of a network, the network of autonomous groups." A truly anarchist society would thus involve a global "network of self-sufficient, self-regulating communities" (Ward 1973: 134).

Radical anti-corporate globalization activists in Barcelona share this utopian vision, while transnational anti-corporate globalization networks such as Peoples' Global Action are putting it into practice. PGA was founded in February 1998 as a tool for transnational coordination among local struggles against free trade and neoliberalism. PGA is a flexible, distributed network form, which has no members and seeks to help "the greatest number of persons and organizations to act against corporate domination through civil disobedience and people-oriented constructive actions."[2] Anyone can participate as long as they agree with the basic hallmarks, which include: a clear rejection of capitalism and all systems of domination, a confrontational attitude, a call to direct action, and an organizational philosophy based on decentralization and autonomy. Rather than a centralized coordinating committee, each continent selects rotating "conveners" who are responsible for organizing regional and global conferences, assuming concrete logistical tasks, and facilitating communication within the network, often with the help of various support groups.

Despite frequent internal conflicts and power struggles (cf. Juris 2008; Routledge 2004; Wood 2002), PGA's hallmarks reflect an affinity between anarchist principles of federation and non-hierarchical organization and emerging networking logics. However, PGA is not, strictly speaking, "anarchist" (contra Mueller 2003: 142). Indeed, the network was designed with a diffuse, flexible ideological identity, in part, to facilitate communication and coordination among groups espousing different political visions, goals, strategies, and organizational forms. While many participating groups from Europe and North America are smaller anarchist-oriented collectives, not all identify as anarchist, while the mass-based indigenous, peasant, and labor struggles from the Global South, including the formerly active Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST), often maintain hierarchical structures.

Self-organization

Anarchist thought and practice are also characterized by an emphasis on self-organization and the theory of "spontaneous order," involving what Kropotkin (in

Raymond 1999: 52) referred to as "the severe effort of many converging wills." As with free and open source software (FOSS) development, cooperative forms of production involve horizontal collaboration and exchange among a multitude of autonomous participants coordinating and interacting without the need for hierarchical mediating structures or central command. As Colin Ward (1973: 5) has argued, "cybernetics, the science of control and communication systems, throws valuable light on the anarchist conception of complex, self-organizing systems."

Emerging networking logics involve precisely this conception of self-organization through decentralized coordination among autonomous elements. Similarly, Graeme Chesters (2003: 54) has employed the language of complexity, arguing that, "[w]hat the AGM (Alternative Globalization Movement) seems to demonstrate is a set of *emergent* properties that are the outcome of complex adaptive behavior occurring through participative self-organization from the bottom up." Elsewhere I note that complexity theory provides a useful metaphor for depicting abstract patterns of self-organization within contemporary movements (see also Escobar 2004), but such system-oriented language can also obscure the micro-level practices and political struggles that actually generate such patterns (Juris 2004, 2008).

This need not be the case, but to avoid this tendency I recast self-organization as part of a wider networking *ethic*, inspiring concrete networking practices within particular social, cultural, and political contexts. In this sense, expanding and diversifying networks is much more than an organizational objective; it is also a highly valued *political* goal. Indeed, the self-produced, self-developed, and self-managed network becomes a widespread cultural ideal, providing not only an effective model of political organizing, but also a model for re-organizing society as a whole. Moreover, anti-corporate globalization activists increasingly express their utopian imaginaries directly through concrete organizational and technological practice. This self-organizing network ideal is reflected in the diffusion of distributed network forms within anti-corporate globalization movements as well as the development of self-directed communication and coordination tools, including electronic listservs and collaborative web-based projects.

In Barcelona, for example, RCADE-based activists self-consciously employed the idiom of computer networks to characterize their organizational architecture. In this sense, the Network was specifically composed of local, regional, and statewide "nodes." Local nodes constituted the Network's organizational and political base, and were specifically defined as "self-defined, self-managed, and self-organized spaces." Local nodes further coordinated with their regional and statewide counterparts through periodic meetings and annual gatherings, as one early RCADE document explained:

> We are building an organizing formation that is difficult to classify. We have called it a "citizens network" formed by independent persons and collectives that adhere to the network and can take advantage of its structure. Many of these people are organized into local nodes, which determine the dynamic of collective action.

The Network was thus "self-organized," generated through the autonomous practices and collaborative interactions among participants who were themselves distributed across a network of decentralized local nodes.

Direct action

Anti-corporate globalization activists are also committed to another traditional anarchist principle, namely "direct action" (cf. Graeber 2002; Franks 2003). In some ways direct action reflects the individualist, expressive branch of anarchism, including the nineteenth-century "propaganda by the deed" and the recent turn toward mediated, theatrical, and carnivalesque forms of protest (cf. Farrer 2006; Goaman 2003). The mass action strategy itself has practical (i.e. stop the summit) and symbolic (i.e. communicate resistance) effects. However, the focus on "prefiguring" – living your vision of an alternative world as you struggle to create it – means contemporary direct actions also express utopian values such as horizontal coordination, direct democracy, and self-organization.

Indeed, the "diversity of tactics" principle, whereby activists divide the urban "terrain of resistance" (Routledge 1994) into distinct spaces, reproduces a horizontal networking logic on the tactical plane (Juris 2008). During the September 2000 protest against the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Prague, for example, color-coded zones were established for various protest tactics, ranging from non-violent civil disobedience to militant conflict. These included the use of vulnerable bodies to occupy urban space (Pink Bloc), festive dancing and drumming (Pink and Silver Bloc), physical and symbolic confrontation (Blue and Yellow Blocs), and autonomous pack maneuvers (Southern Actions). Although the action did not entirely stop the Summit, protesters successfully used a "swarming" strategy (Arquilla and Rondfeldt 2001) to block delegates inside the conference center, forcing them to cancel the proceedings a day early. Given the changing contexts and shifting police tactics, such a clear-cut victory has been difficult to reproduce, but the model continues to be employed during mass anti-corporate globalization actions, including the July 2005 protest against the G8 in Gleneagles, Scotland (cf. Farrer 2006).

Emerging political subjectivities

The previous section explored how anarchist principles are manifested in practice within anti-corporate globalization networks in Barcelona. Rather than being anarchist per se, these networks reflect a growing confluence between classical anarchist principles and a wider networking logic characteristic of late capitalism. But, how do radical anti-corporate globalization activists in Barcelona identify and define their own political identities? To better grasp the connections between anarchism and contemporary anti-corporate globalization movements, it is important to listen to the voices of activists themselves – which I did through a series of interviews and conversations in Barcelona in the spring of 2002.

On the one hand, when I asked activists from MRG, RCADE, and allied networks about their political visions and strategies, most expressed views consistent with anarchist principles. Contrasting parliamentary and network politics, for example, Pau explained: "We are promoting decentralized participation, making each group responsible for their part so decisions are taken among many people as opposed to the old politics where a small group has all the information and decides everything." Networks are thus the most effective way "to balance freedom and coordination, autonomy with collective work, self-organization with effectiveness." This focus on autonomous networking has gone along with the diffusion of anti-party sentiment, as Marc suggested: "Political parties are filled with people who have objectives and modes of organizing radically different from ours. The division between institutional politics and social movements is becoming more and more evident." More radical activists in Barcelona increasingly view social movements as directly democratic alternatives to representative democracy.

With respect to their visions for an ideal world, many radicals expressed views similar to traditional anarchist visions of self-management and federation. For example, Nuria described a planet composed of "small, self-organized, and self-managed communities, coordinated among them on a worldwide scale." New technologies make such visions seem plausible; as Pau explained, "the Internet makes it possible to really talk about international coordination from below. It allows us to interact according to models that have always existed, but weren't realistic before." In this sense, rather than generating entirely new political and cultural models, new technologies reinforce already-existing ideals.

On the other hand, when I asked radicals how they define themselves politically, many hesitated to identify as anarchist. Some objected to the prospect of having to identify themselves at all, as Manel protested: "It's been a long time since I've been asked to do that!" Others rejected rigid labels; as Pau expressed, "I don't have an 'ism,' it's all about being open to what everyone can contribute, including those from a particular 'ism.' Above all I believe in participation . . . and making collective decisions." Some radicals did identify as anarchist, but often in a visceral way, as Nuria explained: "I'm close to the anarchist position, particularly around self-organization. I have a lot of issues with power, obedience, and injustice, but I can't give a precise definition."

At the same time, most exhibited a significant level of ideological flexibility, combining various perspectives, including anarchism, socialism, and autonomous Marxism. Activists were particularly influenced by Barcelona's anarchist past, the Italian autonomous workers movement, and the Zapatistas. When I asked about his political identity, for example, Fernando explained that "I'm struggling to end inequality and injustice. I believe strongly in direct, self-managed action. You might call this libertarian communism, beyond the market and state." He identified with the German and Italian autonomous movements, and the writings of Antonio Negri. He was also strongly influenced by Catalan anarchism, noting that;

> during the civil war there were cultural houses, *ateneos populars*, and cooperatives. We haven't come close to that, but we're saying similar things.

> When I talk about autonomy, we have the example of the worker's movement here and their experiences with popular, direct, and self-managed democracy.

When I asked Marc how he identifies himself, he responded in this way:

> Political labels don't mean much today; we should be defined by what we do, but for me the anarchist ideas from the beginning of the twentieth century were very important, and also the ideas of diffuse autonomy during the 1970s and autonomous movements in the 1980s. I'm also influenced by Zapatismo . . . a new way of doing politics that isn't based on ideology.

For his part, Gaizka had identified as anarchist for most of his life and was involved in the efforts to reconstruct the CNT after the transition. He soon burned out on internal politics, however, and began working with a series of small, self-managed projects and collectives, before getting involved with the Zapatistas in the mid-1990s. When I asked how he describes himself politically, he replied that:

> a few years ago I said I was anarchist. Now I say I come from the libertarian or anarchist tradition, but I don't know where I'm going. Saying I'm a Zapatista makes sense to me, if not for everyone. I define myself as searching for new ways of doing politics, far from power, coming from anarchism, but I wouldn't use a particular label.

These sentiments reflect a shift toward more open, fluid political identities, combining influences from various political traditions shaped, in part, by a cultural logic of networking. If there *is* a label most radical anti-corporate globalization activists would identify with it is "anti-capitalist." As Joan suggested, "anti-capitalism was a prohibited word five or six years ago, but capitalism has become so brutal. Until recently I used to talk about neoliberalism, but today we all use anti-capitalism to characterize a diversity of positions." Sergi explicitly linked his vision of anti-capitalism to an emerging network ideal: "The revolution is also about process; the way we do things as social movements is also an alternative to capitalism, no? Horizontalism is the abstraction we want, and the tools are the assembly and the network." Indeed, what seems most important for many activists is perhaps the collective search for new political forms and identities itself. As Pablo suggested, "we're in the moment of deciding exactly what kind of political subjectivity we want to create . . . a mix of the old and the new, a diffuse, an unknown subject; it clearly doesn't have a name."

Conclusion

Anti-corporate globalization movements exhibit many classical anarchist principles, yet an *affinity* with anarchism does not mean that such movements *are* anarchist in a strict ideological sense. Rather, as I have argued, anti-corporate globalization movements reflect a growing confluence between anarchist ideas and

practices and a wider networking logic associated with late capitalism. As we have seen, radical anti-corporate globalization networks in Catalonia are characterized by a strong commitment to non-hierarchical organization, autonomy, and self-organization, all values that are part of, but not *restricted* to the libertarian tradition.

This was further evidenced by the way radical anti-corporate globalization activists in Barcelona identify *themselves*. On the one hand, many radicals express political strategies and visions that are consistent with traditional anarchist views regarding political parties, the state, self-management, and federation. On the other hand, when it comes to political identity, many are uncomfortable with rigid categories. Indeed, most radicals in Barcelona are influenced by multiple perspectives, including anarchism, autonomous Marxism, socialism, ecology, and *Zapatismo*. This suggests the emergence of a new anti-capitalism based on an ethic of openness, fluidity, and flexibility, and is associated with "networks" as a broader political and cultural ideal.

What are the implications of all of this? Does it make any difference whether we identify radical anti-corporate globalization networks as anarchist or not? On the one hand, there is an issue of analytic precision. Unless a network identifies as anarchist, then it should not be considered anarchist in the strict sense. Moreover, claiming an *identity* rather an *affinity* may obscure larger processes at work, including the rise of a broader networking logic. At the same time, neglecting the flexibility and fluidity in the way activists identify misses a critical point regarding the nature of contemporary political subjectivity. On the other hand, this analysis also has important political implications. To the extent that networks such as RCADE, MRG, or PGA have been successful it is because they are broad spaces where activists from diverse political backgrounds converge. The attribution of a specific ideological cast would effectively exclude those who share similar values and practices but do not identify in the same terms. Indeed, what has been particularly notable about anti-corporate globalization movements in Barcelona and elsewhere has been the rise of a new anti-capitalism characterized by openness, fluidity, and flexibility, and the search for accompanying political norms, forms, and practices.

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