PREFACE: WHERE DOES ANARCHY BEGIN?

Black is negation, is anger, is outrage, is mourning, is beauty, is hope, is the fostering and sheltering of new forms of human life and relationship on and with the earth. The black flag means all of these things. We are proud to carry it, sorry we have to, and look forward to the day when such a symbol will no longer be necessary. (Howard J. Ehrlich)

The misperceived movement that doesn't exist?

This book aims to destroy many of the assumptions and stereotypes about anarchism, anarchists, and anarchist movements.[1] There is ample obscuring fog surrounding anarchism to disorient anyone in a web of unhelpful false assumptions, double-think, and libel. Those who wish to truly understand anarchism must labor to discard much of the popular "common sense" knowledge that many self-anointed experts (e.g., law enforcement officials and hostile journalists) possess and profligate. I argue that we are best served by maneuvering around and out-flanking such assumptions. Herein, an array of sociological tools – theories, methodologies, and analyses – are brought to bear on a movement that has possessed the worst possible reputation, since even before that movement existed in its modern form.

While many popular assumptions about anarchism are simply wrong (as demonstrated here), movement scholars – Americans in particular – seem wholly oblivious to the existence of anarchist movements. Only rarely are anarchists mentioned in American sociological studies of social movements and always in an indirect reference to their main subject matter. Indeed, even when contemplating highly anarchistic movements – such as the anti-capitalist wing of the global justice movement – many academic observers seem incapable of connecting the very obvious dots.

This intellectual deficit can be seen most clearly by surveying the premier English language academic journal dedicated to the study of social

movements, called *Mobilization*. First published in 1997 to create a peer-reviewed journal within sociology and political science for the scholarly study of movements (where no such publishing venue existed before), *Mobilization* has attracted the subfield's biggest names and heaviest hitters. While the incestuous nature of the social movement subfield is itself a worthy topic for critical discussion, it is enough to note the preeminence of *Mobilization*. Thus, a movement that rejuvenated itself in the 1990s, and evolved in numerous ways, would presumably present a fascinating subject matter for the astute movement scholars of *Mobilization*. But, astonishingly, not a single article (of over 1,000 separate pieces) in the history of the journal – nearly two decades' worth and counting – focused on anarchism,[2] although dozens focused on small, locally specific movements.[3] The same paucity can be observed in the leading edited books of the subfield, whose chapters are written by the same prestigious scholars.[4]
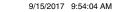
Despite their willful avoidance of anarchist movements, these scholarly attempts to better understand social movements are important in many ways. First, they are cracking open the very difficult to understand – let alone predict – phenomena of social movements. Second, they respect and acknowledge the need for numerous methodological strategies; they use both qualitative and quantitative methods, ethnographic, content analysis, and statistical analysis of survey data. And many of the scholars are themselves dedicated to many progressive movements. Yet their approach has been to distance themselves in value-neutral language from their subjects. They study certain movements because those movements provide excellent examples of the specific abstract movement dynamics they wish to write about – not because those movements are themselves important for readers to know about. I suspect – but cannot prove – that this desire to be *objective*, to be *scholarly*, and to be *respectable*, is also what has kept their analytical focus away from one of the most unrespectable of movements: anarchism (that, and the reformist interests of these scholars, generally).[5]

It could be that movement scholars view anarchism as something other than a movement – perhaps a revolutionary tendency. But even the dynamics of contention theories (discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4), which incorporate revolutions into the study of movements, forgo the potential of analyzing anti-state movements. Scholars of revolution have themselves avoided opportunities to analyze anarchism, even in regards to some of the most widely studied revolutions, like the Spanish Revolution of the late-1930s, the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the Mexican Revolution, and others. The participation of anarchists within these revolutions – and most surprisingly, their anarchistic qualities – are simply skipped over and omitted. Even the prestigious studies by Barrington Moore (1972), Theda Skocpol (1979), and Pitirim Sorokin (1967) typically pass on critically analyzing anarchism. Moore (1972) dismisses anarchists in the Russian Revolution using the same argument of Marx and Engels (apparently

missing Mikhail Bakunin's observations that rejected their now-falsifiable claims). And Sorokin's (1967) deep familiarity with anarchism during his own time in Russia is all the more puzzling given its absence in his work (see Jaworski 1993; Williams 2014). These scholarly blind-spots regarding anarchist participation in revolutions as diverse as the Russian, Spanish, and Chinese revolutions is curious, especially given the ample evidence of crucial anarchist contributions in each instance (e.g., Avrich 1967; Dirlik 1993; Peirats 2011).[6]

What should we conclude from the eerie absence of anarchism within the scholarly study of movements? A few possibilities – some of them just plain silly – exist: anarchist movements don't really exist or simply aren't movements, per se. Anarchist movements may be of only marginal significance and impact, and thus not worthy of mention. Or, anarchism may be consciously kept off academics' radar – movement scholars' radar, especially – owing to some sort of malevolent intent, discriminatory or ideological bias, inability to study, or intellectual lack of curiosity. Some of these reasons are less likely, while others are almost assured. Lacking actual evidence for the reasons for this absence of research, I can only speculate here on these possibilities.

Some scholars may assume that anarchist movements simply don't exist – any discussion of them is as circumstantial and absurd as discussing mythical creatures. Thus, if anarchist movements are *not real*, why study them? Even if anarchists themselves *are* real, they surely can't be part of movements – given their chaotic natures – and especially a wholly anarchist movement! To those with a strong belief in hierarchy, why not discount the sanity of anyone who chooses to resist hierarchy? Or, if individuals seem to be using anarchist slogans or symbology in the context of a movement (e.g., at a political march), the scholars may have concluded that we're not really seeing an anarchist movement, just other legitimate movements (such as squatters, radical queers, or revolutionary syndicalists) who have adopted anarchist symbols.

Other scholars may have decided that anarchist movements aren't movements. Since anarchists are widely assumed to be ultra-individualists, then large numbers of anarchists are just that – a random collection of individuals. They are not "social," they do not "move" together (and thus do not exist in movements), and the thought of organized anarchists is akin to imagining flying pigs. Thus, "anarchist movements" are nothing like other movements, so we ought to just think about groupings of anarchists as something else altogether.

Some movement students believe that only major movements are worthy of study. Anarchist movements seem to be of such marginal significance in the world – participants almost seem to be deliberately self-marginalizing. And, since anarchist movements lack broad visibility, they must be small in size. So, why study small, marginal movements? Why care about movements

that also have almost no practical policy demands (assuming the slogan "abolish the state!" refers to an action-able policy)? Why consider movements that have so little policy impact on the world? Since policy is a major preoccupation of social scientists, why study something that is openly hostile toward state-based policy?

Scholarly avoidance may be linked to a general dislike of anarchism. Presumably, people with advanced degrees have been thoroughly socialized into dominant systems and within hierarchical institutions (like universities), thus making it difficult to appreciate anti-authoritarian movements. Most movements studied by scholars are reformist-oriented; the revolutionary aspirations of anarchism could be a potent turn-off. Likewise, anarchists may have annoyed these scholars in some way (e.g., criticized or thwarted movements they do like, been obstinate students in their classes, etc.), causing them to spurn the study of those radical movements. Anarchists also appear to most people to be too violent and chaotic to be a social movement worthy of study. For example, the movements most lionized in the USA – like the civil rights movement – are usually considered liberal, reform-oriented, and strictly nonviolent (incidentally, all of these widely believed stereotypes about the civil rights movement are, in various instances, easily disprovable).

The ability of scholars to study anarchism may be limited. In order to conduct interviews, gather surveys, or make observations, a scholar has to know some of their subjects or at least where they can be found. Even if anarchists were easy to locate, most scholars do not know any. Consequently, anarchists – who are legitimately concerned with spies and provocateurs (having been victims of them throughout their history) – may not trust those they don't know, especially people claiming to be "scholars" wanting to study them. Such intrusive people are apt to appear to anarchists as little different than an undercover cop intent upon tricking activists to commit thought-crimes. In order to properly study and understand anarchists, one has to be able to understand the guiding logic of anarchism, which is at odds with how most movements are organized – with charismatic leaders, lobbying directed at politicians, and reformist, system-preserving ideologies.

Finally, scholars may simply not care about anarchists. Other movements may appear – for personal, political, or professional reasons – to be more interesting and valuable. If a scholar lacks intellectual curiosity about a group of people, they are unlikely to study them in greater detail. If anarchists seem too oddball-ish or strange to understand, many observers may cease trying.

Whatever the reason for the scholarly silence, *Black flags and social movements* serves as a counter to the staggering silence from social movement researchers. In other words, this book thoroughly and conclusively disproves the above claims. Even though they are more ideologically diverse

than most comparable movements, I argue that it is still appropriate to refer to "anarchist movements." This book attempts to gather together the scholarship that does exist, combine it with activist accounts of their movements, and present new data and analysis that can help advance a realistic, interesting, and useful sociological accounting of anarchist movements.

So, why study anarchist movements? Many possible reasons exist. For example, anarchism has become a key topic of discussion in the mass media (while less so in academia), which has led to much intrigue. It has been, and continues to be, feared by governments and policing agencies – or they at least pretend to fear anarchism (see Borum & Tilby 2005 for a more intellectual manifestation of these fears). Many young people have come to be influenced by anarchism, arguably more than Marxism, the "Occupy" movement being the best current example in the USA (Bray 2013: Schneider 2013: Williams 2011a). Finally, anarchism is having a noticeable impact on contemporary politics, often via anarchists' participation in broader social struggles.

The uses of sociology in the study of anarchist movements

In academic disciplines beyond sociology and the field of social movements, "anarchism" and "anarchy" usually refer to conceptions that are entirely theoretical, thus uncoupling anarchist movements from their historical and contemporary context, and ignoring the use of the term "anarchism" by the very activists who call themselves anarchists. Since this is a sociology book, a case should be made for using sociology to study something like anarchism and anarchist social movements. First, sociology represents an established tradition, which has for decades (in Europe, North America, and elsewhere) honed its sights upon social movements. In the process, multinational strands of sociology have generated a diverse and occasionally contradictory set of analytical tools for the study of the phenomena, so robust that some elders of the discipline, like Alain Touraine (1981) (controversially) refer to as the core subject matter of sociology.[7] Successive waves of theorizing have occurred, each either building on or demolishing the old, or augmenting a previously incomplete picture. The methodological strategies for generating these theories are equally diverse, involving numerous approaches. The diversity represented in sociology's study of social movements represents – in microcosm – the poly-theoretical, poly-epistemological, and poly-topical focus of the broader discipline itself. As Michael Burawoy (2005) wrote in his scathing analysis of the discipline's trajectory, sociology is analogous to (ironically, for this book's focus)

anarcho-syndicalism. By this, Burawoy meant that incredible decentralization, tolerance of difference, and autonomy exists in the discipline; the different subject areas, paradigms, and types of scholars need not toe any "party-line." Instead, sociologists can pursue their own interests and contribute to the overall whole as they see fit.[8] Sociology's diverse approaches make it flexible and able to study topics as controversial and diverse as anarchism.

Additionally, the sociological study of anarchist social movements makes sense, as it has been sociology's historical mission to study all forms of social organization. And, whatever one may think about anarchism, it is undeniable that anarchist's social organization is unique and worthy of a sociological eye. Needless to say, mainstream jokes about anarchist disorder or lack of order are poorly informed, stereotype-dependent jokes. In fact, there is substantial evidence that sociology and anarchism have far more in common that many may assume (Williams 2014). The cross-over between early sociologists and anarchists, and their frequently parsimonious focus upon society suggest that sociologists may be the best breed of academically trained scholars to study anarchist movements.

The compatibility between sociology and anarchism does not imply that anarchists are unable to eruditely observe their own movements. Thus, anarchists also may make solid arguments cautioning against entrusting the study of their movements to professional sociologists. In fairness, there is great merit in these concerns: sociology has often shown itself to be either liberal in orientation or flagrantly in favor of status quo. Regardless of the specific ideological orientations that sociologists adopt,[9] it is likely uncontroversial to state that most sociologists – especially American sociologists, with whom I am most familiar – adopt anti-radical positions. Unsurprisingly (for anyone with a modicum of familiarity with political history), Marxist sociologists are often the most hostile to anarchism, even though they may superficially appear to have the most in common (among sociologists) with anarchists.

Others may note that sociology is still a *discipline*, which means it is premised upon a limiting and bounding of knowledge, analysis, and interests. Martin (1998a) charges that the hierarchical nature of disciplines themselves pose a threat to freedom within the academy – surely a substantial threat when studying a freedom-prioritizing movement like anarchism. Disciplines – which have links to interest groups, value specialization, and engage in internal and external power struggles – typically translate their subject matter into objects for the purpose of study. While the entire purpose of *Black flags and social movements* is to study anarchist movements, we should be conscious of concerns that reducing such movements to mere objects of study can also reduce – rather than enhance – their revolutionary potential. As an author with deeply held sympathies with the anarchist

tradition – and on my good days, I'd call myself an anarchist – I should express my personal concern that getting lost in the ivory tower of an academic discipline may mute a movement that I believe (and hope) has the potential to radically transform a deeply troubled planet.

Compared to many other scholarly topics, work on anarchism has been relatively scarce and academics have only recently increased their focus on modern-day anarchism. Consequently, a research program that aspires to achieve stronger ontological conclusions of, and greater practicality for, anarchist movements has not been attempted with a sociological lens. So far, most anarchist movement studies have been histories of particular organizations (e.g., Direct Action, Angry Brigade, Iron Column, or Earth First!), campaigns or episodes (e.g., anti-poll tax campaign, Spanish Revolution, or a specific series of protests), individuals (Gustav Landauer, Voltairine de Cleyre, Rudolf Rocker, or Ricardo Flores Magón), or focused in one specific geographical space (e.g., the USA, Argentina, Britain, China, Spain, or France). This book, however, focuses its analysis on anarchist social movements generally.

Some academic studies have considered radical movements (especially radical organizations – e.g., squatters, Weather Underground, the Black Panther Party, Marxists guerrillas, etc.), but few have broadened their analyses to include movements that transcended national borders. Many comparative studies exist (e.g., comparing radical student movements in the USA and Germany), but few try to consider global movements (although this is changing with analyses on global justice movements – but most focus remains on the reform/moderate tendencies within that movement).The closest efforts made by academics in recent years (since the early 2000s) to focus on anarchist movements seem to focus on the global justice movement and the strong anarchist influence on its more radical (read: non-NGO-based) sectors. Many studies have remarked on the anarchistic nature of this movement (Epstein 2001; Graeber 2009; Juris 2008; Notes From Nowhere 2003), but few have written about anarchism as an independent dimension both within and outside of that movement (this is a relative observation, not an absolute one).
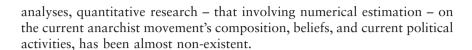
An international community of anarchist scholars has grown since the 1990s, leading to the founding of the British peer-reviewed journal *Anarchist Studies*, a grant-giving foundation for anarchist research called the Institute for Anarchist Studies, occasional theoretical conferences like Renewing the Anarchist Tradition, various online forums for anarchist academics, and other projects (including the Anarchist Studies Network in the UK and the North American Anarchist Studies Network). The ASN and NAASN have held semi-regular conferences, which gather participants from across dozens of countries, with varied scholarly and activist backgrounds. Yet, the English-speaking academy has rarely studied the anarchist movement itself as a social movement. Further, even more so than qualitative

analyses, quantitative research – that involving numerical estimation – on the current anarchist movement's composition, beliefs, and current political activities, has been almost non-existent.

What is anarchism?

This is not a book about the social, economic, and political philosophy of anarchism, per se. Instead, *Black flags and social movements* focuses on anarchist movements. Our subject here is the organized expressions of anarchism. But since the entire book is about anarchist movements, a few initial words about anarchism will help.

The word "anarchism" is typically used to refer to stateless societies. Thus, to be an anarchist means to oppose the existence of the state. However, anarchism entails so much more than this myopic, dictionary definition.[10] Anarchists generally critique many things beyond just the state, in fact, anything with "rulers." Most anarchists consider "anarchism" to be an opposition to rulers, not all of existent social order – although "anti-civilization" anarchists exist, too. Earlier in the nineteenth century, anarchist opposition centered on the newly solidifying nation-states of Europe, but also on industrial capitalism and organized religion. These three dominant institutions wielded enormous political, economic, and cultural power over Europe at the time. Anarchism existed as a counter-hegemonic reference point and ideology, adopted by single individuals often, until it grew into an active movement. The influence of the Russian Mikhail Bakunin was crucial in this, helping to unite various Proudhonian, collectivist, and anti-authoritarian factions within the First International (Graham 2015). Anarchism grew as an ideological competitor to classical liberalism – which also sought greater freedoms – but which was more preoccupied with the independence of the bourgeoisie class, and thus did not care as much about the accompanying economic inequality created by capitalism.

Marxism and social democracy were also ideological competitors to anarchism; while they agreed about capitalism's injustice and the need to create a more equal, socialist society, Marxists and anarchists disagreed about the role of the state. Marxists and social democrats wished to *use* the state to create socialism (and communism), while the anarchists thought that impossible, since political elites (whether capitalist or pro-socialist) would not like to give up their power. Bakunin assessed this confluence of political anti-authoritarianism and economic Leftism – and captured the essence of anarchist thought – when he famously, and succinctly, stated: "liberty without socialism is privilege, injustice; and […] socialism without liberty is slavery and brutality" (Maximoff 1953: 297).[11] This interpretation has been echoed by many others who have tried to categorize the major

Table 0.1 Ideologies of the twentieth century

	High equality		
Low state power	Anarchism	Communism	High state power
	Libertarianism	Fascism	
	Low equality		

Adapted from Chirot (1986: 145).

ideologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including sociologist Daniel Chirot. As shown in Table 0.1, Chirot (1986) classified anarchism – in contrast to communism, fascism, and libertarianism – as valuing low state power, but high equality.[12]

Anarchists (and Bakunin) were kicked out of the First International by Marx's supporters (who then cynically moved the organization to the USA to distance it from the influence of European anarchists – a move that effectively killed the International). But, from this point on, the anarchism encountered by most people (regardless of country) was within the context of the revolutionary labor movement. Anarchism became deeply embedded in the working class's intellectual analysis of capitalism and its strategies for combating capitalism (direct action). It is difficult to differentiate most anarchists of this "classic period" from other members of the revolutionary labor movement.[13] After leaving the International, anarchism goes international. While heavily concentrated in Europe, it also appealed to workers in many poorer countries, including Mexico, Argentina, China, and Ukraine.

Anarchist philosophy is often identified at the intersection of its ends and means. Anarchists generally oppose hierarchy, competition, and domination, and instead support efforts of horizontalism, cooperation, and self-management. These goals can be viewed as dialectical. But the means through which this opposition and support are pursued must be consistent with the ends. Thus, the methods utilized to pursue a society free of hierarchy, competition, and domination ought to be just, empowering, potentially collaborative (not top-down), and democratic. It would be illogical (and philosophically inconsistent) to have bosses within anarchist organizations. Anarchists' opposition to Marxist strategies stem from Marxism's misalignment of ends and means; it is inappropriate to create a world free of oppressive authority figures by using the state – a major institution of oppressive power – to eradicate oppressive authority.

Anarchism is very social – and thus, as Jeff Shantz and I have argued (Williams & Shantz 2011), highly compatible with sociological analysis – since it considers the problems (and alternatives) that humans face to be rooted in social structures and institutions. For example, inequality does not result from the random behavior of individuals, nor does violence occur

just because of a few "bad people." Most modern societies are organized – deliberately, consciously, and for the benefit of some – with hierarchy, competition, and domination as their core. For example, George W. Bush (or Barack Obama or Donald Trump) are not the problems (by themselves), as they are mere representatives of an unjust, violent, and undemocratic American state. This does not mean that anarchists let Bush or Obama personally "off the hook," since it is "the system" that is ultimately responsible for inequality and violence. Instead, anarchists advocate for looking to the individual instances of "bad things," but also remembering that they are not isolated anecdotes. Consequently, it should perhaps not surprise people that C. Wright Mills, who coined the term "the sociological imagination" to help people connect their personal troubles to social issues, was himself strongly sympathetic to anarchism.[14]

Early notes of caution for anarchist subject matter

It is crucial to acknowledge a triumvirate of misperceptions about anarchism: chaos, violence, and fantasy. Allow me to explore each of these three misperceptions in greater detail below.

First, anarchism is associated with chaos. As any dictionary can confirm, the word "anarchy" is routinely used as a synonym for disorder, confusion, and anti-logic. This assumption is likely why many people are surprised to discover that an *organized* and self-conscious anarchist movement exists (see how often people ask, "How could there be anarchist organizations if anarchists are against order?"). This is perhaps the oldest and most cynical misperception about anarchism. The framing of anarchism as chaotic stems from: (1) the belief that a social order lacking hierarchical leadership is no order at all, and (2) the observation that anarchists (as radicals opposed to the existing order) would stop at nothing to up-end that order and replace it with something else.

Since the anarchist alternative was usually open-ended, the anarchist future looked chaotic to many observers. To believe this misperception requires us to ignore numerous, central characteristics of anarchist movements. By avoiding these facts, the chaos misperception is allowed to persist. First, anarchist movements *do* possess order. Anarchists belong to organizations (despite jokes to the contrary)[15] and these memberships are not oxymoronic. Second, anarchists make decisions. Although it may appear that anarchists are always spontaneous actors, doing whatever emotions move them to do at any given moment, most anarchist actions are premeditated, and decided upon, or prepared for, in some kind of collectivity. Thus, third, anarchists are deliberate. They do not act without reason or purpose. Even

things that appear to be senseless (smashing the window of a chain store, graffiting a wall, or blocking the traffic on a busy road), are in fact saturated with meaning, intent, and rationality. Finally, although the chaos frame suggests otherwise, anarchists are highly conscious. Not only do anarchists tend to be thoughtful, engaged, and (in many cases) well-read, they also are highly aware of their surroundings and the ramifications of their actions (as this book continually demonstrates). Anyone who has witnessed internal anarchist movement debate over things of concern to anarchist values (e.g., veganism, property destruction, decision-making rules, the role of vanguards, etc.), know well the degree to which anarchists regularly engage with their individual and collective consciousnesses.

By ignoring the contradictions and omissions of evidence with the chaos misperception, a fear of anarchists is generated. Much of this fear is abstract, and portrays anarchists as "crazy," incapable of rational thought or predictability. Critics who encounter anarchists who say they have formed an organization are likely to scoff at this claim and dismiss them as deluded. All of this will imply that people who wish to act collectively in the world must either place their faith in authoritarian leaders, or at the least form organizations whose leaders who will help to steer change.

Second, to many, the word "anarchy" implies violence (Monaghan & Walby 2012).[16] Consequently, anarchists are perceived as dangerous, aggressive, and possibly terrorists. ("How could you honestly trust someone who *calls themselves* an anarchist?") Allegedly, the dog-eat-dog approach of anarchism throws every individual against each other in a crazed fight for bloody domination. To believe that anarchists are inherently violent requires either great confusion or self-delusion. Begin with radical feminists' assertion that governments are the most dangerous gangs of violent men. Consequently, all those who have directed states throughout history, whether they identified as democrats or Democrats, republicans or Republicans, fascists or Marxists, social democrats or autocrats, have all relied upon violence. Sociologists in particular cannot forget Weber's key observation that the state holds the monopoly on violence; the evidence can be witnessed in murderous wars, incarceration of citizens, and symbolic and actual violence against people. Thus, to associate "anarchist" with "violence" misses the most obvious of contradictions: when the state uses violence, it is simply *being the state*; but when others, especially anarchists, use force (not even violence), they are acting criminally. This contradiction thus ignores the regularly stated goals of peace and justice sought by anarchists (note that these two are joined-requisites, one must accompany the other – thus the chant "No justice? No peace!"). The anarchist opposition to state violence (e.g., anti-imperialism) clearly shows its opposition to the most extreme and destructive forms of violence. Then, the violence that is associated with anarchists in the past was the isolated act of *attentats* against rulers[17] or today of self-defense against police. Even if such acts *are* violent, they are

of a different caliber than hierarchical forms of violence. Except for paci-
fists, few today would argue that to kill Hitler and avert the genocide and
madness of World War II (granted, with considerable hindsight) would not
have been a sensible act of *anti*-violence.

By propagating the misperception of anarchist violence – mainly by
refusing to compare the violence used by the powerful and the out-of-power
– police violence against protesters is justified. Media can show images of
unarmed protesters "fighting" riot police who have large arsenals of
weapons, but also plainly claim "protester violence" caused police *response*,
even when the opposite is usually true. This all reinforces the perceived
"need" for the state to intervene in society's madness – which it contributes
to and manages – and "protect" citizens from each other. Thus, the claim
that we need police and their violence to prevent us from killing and robbing
each other.

And third, even though many may appreciate anarchist ideas, it is often
dismissed as fantasy ("yes, a world without bosses does sound nice, but be
realistic!"). Consequently, to identify as an anarchist is to be naive, utopian,
to have one's head in the clouds, and to be foolishly ignorant of "human
nature." This may be the most serious misperception (although it appears
to be the most benign), since it means anarchism is rejected as being child-
ish, poorly thought-out, or absurd. Consequently, this misperception is
incredibly devastating to anarchist movements in the long run. Chaos and
violence myths prevent short-term goals from being achieved and others
from joining the movement.

But the notion of anarchist fantasy permanently stalls the potential for
anarchism altogether. Those who believe in another world, one without
hierarchy, are clearly delusional, according to this misperception. However,
this myth ignores a number of key realities to anarchist movements. First,
anarchism is notoriously practical, going so far as to provide for the most
essential provisions. Consider Food Not Bombs' catering protest events; this
is not fantastical, but a practical acknowledgement that people get hungry,
and that movements ought to and *can* provide for themselves and others.
Second, anarchists are actually prefiguring the world they would like to live
in through their actions. In other words, they do not simply make lofty
statements about what kind of world should exist in the future or what
they should do, but instead try to do it right now in the present. If they can
make it work on a small-scale basis, it demonstrates the potential for entire
societies to be organized differently. Third, these conscious projects and
actions convey a reasonableness that is alleged to be absent from anarchist
movements. Finally, it is rather obvious that change *does* occur and that
most past changes have been considered ludicrous to many people before
those changes happened. Consider the fall of American slavery. Of course,
the systems of racial dictatorships and domination were slow to be com-
pletely dismantled (and they still persist in impressive ways), but slavery

was *officially* ended. How many Americans in the late 1850s (even within the Abolitionist movement) actually thought that possible? Yet, it happened. Or consider the Russian Revolution of 1917 or the worldwide revolutionary movements of 1968. Who could have expected that these uprisings would occur when and where they did?

The ultimate consequence of the fantasy misperception is that is dismisses, out of hand, anarchist values. While these values may sound attractive to many people – most publicly or secretly crave and favor the ideas of freedom, solidarity, and self-management – they also appear naive and absurdly optimistic. Thus, the core of anarchist ideology is presented as contrary to "human nature," which is itself proposed as selfish, individualistic, and aggressive. Of course, these expressions of human behavior are also part of our nature, but they are not the only potential expression of our humanness. Most of our lives are lived via norms of solidarity with others (especially our families and friends). Anarchism acknowledges the Janus-faced qualities of human nature, thus encouraging skepticism of those in power, but encouraging optimism towards all others (this is the essential observation made at the end of Chapter 7). Anarchism is inherently pragmatic and cognizant of human nature, which is why it prioritizes an array of values that might appear internally contradictory (e.g., solidarity with others *and* self-management).

This triumvirate – chaos, violence, and fantasy – or at least one element of it, is usually present whenever anarchist subjects – whether topical or personified – are discussed.[18] These misperceptions find their way into media, history books, and the mouths of everyday people who repeat the same narrative everyone else has told them.[19] This book goes beyond such "common knowledge" to explore the values, beliefs, actions, and goals of anarchists. It quickly becomes clear that the triumvirate is a sophisticated smokescreen that makes understanding anarchist movements almost impossible and undoubtedly makes people unlikely to support and join them. Like all propagandistic distortions, these misperceptions ignore key facts that would refute their claims. And the repetition of these misperceptions throughout societies cause very specific consequences that adversely affect anarchist movements' opportunities for increased success.

However, as the saying goes, even stereotypes often contain kernels of truth. Anarchists do embrace decentralization and what often looks like "chaos," even inviting a healthy measure of unpredictability, spontaneity, and catharsis. Also, many anarchists advocate "self-defense," which, in societies enamored by "mythos" of nonviolent social movements, sounds almost like a call to war. Even more, other anarchists advocate or at least defend positions of armed struggle or civil war. (Of course, few who might hear such advocacy will be able to comprehend its meaning without seriously considering the arguments that these anarchists will surely provide.) And finally, some anarchists are utopians (although usually practical ones,

too), and most are "dreamers" who wish to see a better world. This does not make them unrealistic, although the world they envision and try to create might *sound crazy* to others.

In the interests of fairness, we should ask whether other movements or systems of thought are also linked to these same stereotyped outcomes – chaos, violence, fantasy. Would representative-democrats really be honest enough to admit that their system requires massive violence, through police, prisons, and armies? (And comparatively, whose violence is more widespread, indiscriminate, and vicious – the *behaviors* of nation-states or that which activists are alleged to *argue for*?)[20] Would capitalists admit the sheer fantasy inherent in a "self-regulating market"? Or would they be willing to acknowledge the indiscernible chaos it causes internationally or the violence necessary to enforce these "markets"? In other words, if incriminating accusations are going to be made, following the lead of Zinn (1997), is it not worth asking: when the most powerful institutions in modern society – militaries, multinational corporations, and states – call anarchists chaotic, violent, and naive, is this merely an example of the pot calling the kettle black?

Authorship and readership

I'm a sociologist and I study social movements. I teach classes on social movements. But, just as importantly, I've participated in social movements. And for all the movements I have participated in (both deeply and superficially), many have inspired me. Towards the top of that list is one of the more challenging to define, complicated to interpret, and one that wears a scarlet letter: anarchism.

I wanted to know how I could better understand the anarchist movement, a movement I value and want to succeed more often. Thus, I have a large stake in the humble results of this book. This doesn't mean I write as a propagandist who will twist facts to glorify anarchism. I do not think it serves the movement to overlook its shortcomings and its blemishes. If we care about someone or something, we don't mislead others about it, but we speak honestly. More personally, I have been involved in some of the activities described here. Most academics and writers would admit as much in their more honest moments: we often write about that which is most dear and within our own experience.

Like many sociologists receiving their PhDs after the 1960s, I and numerous others of my generation were influenced by the radical social movements that we participated in. Marxists, feminists, anti-imperialists, and other radicals started their "long march through the institutions" (consciously or not), including American higher education, earning the highest

degrees available to them in various social science and humanities disciplines, including sociology. It was almost a foregone conclusion that the movements that were having such a dramatic impact upon American politics, culture (and subcultures), and daily life, would eventually trickle into the academy. For me and other young scholars, the radical movements of the 1990s and early 2000s were a source of political and intellectual engagement.

Of course, we and many others take inspiration from the exciting and dramatic events around us, the movements we helped to create and participated in. For us, the highly educated – and some might say (not necessarily incorrectly) the over-educated – we have taken that inspiration into our classrooms and graduate programs. Some have made these movements the topics of their term papers, their classroom discussions, even their theses and dissertations. All this activity augments – but in no way substitutes – the activities that take place in the streets, the meetings, community campaigns and project, and informal conversations of movements.

Exactly which audiences could benefit from this analysis? I see two primary audiences: sociologists and anarchists. Sociologists could benefit from a critical analysis of these unique and under-studied movements. Beyond the subject matter itself, sociologists will also likely have their theoretical perspectives challenged by a radical movement that does not conform to typical expectations and goals. Liberal and reform movements – the subject of most scholarly research on movements – do not follow trajectories that are similar to anarchist movements. Some sociology instructors may see value in using this text within a social movements course, while most will hopefully find scholarly interest in it.

Anarchists are another obvious audience for this book. Radical activists have done far more critical exploration of their own movements than scholars, owing to their intense stake in movement outcomes. Still, this book offers a unique analysis, very different from those typically generated by anarchist movements. I offer an explicitly sociological viewpoint; while many anarchists are implicitly sociological in their analysis, fewer have training in the epistemological tools of social inquiry or familiarity with sociological concepts that could inform their political work. Many anarchists have a seemingly intuitive sociological sensibility (perhaps due to schooling or movement activity), but this sensibility is usually not self-conscious or reflexive. For example, most anarchists are probably unfamiliar with sociological social movement theories, which could provide strategic assistance. This book attempts to emphasize and re-characterize discussions of anarchist movements as sociological.

I think many anarchists who have an interest in engaging in sociological social movement theories will happily take on the task of reading a work that appears to address a mainly university audience. I think this is in line with much of the writing being produced under the label or rubric of

"anarchist studies" today – generated largely by academics and written for college audiences (including students), but meant to be accessible to wider groups of readers, including movement activists.

I would like this book to be a provocation. By thinking of issues outside the usual frames of reference, we can grow – or at least be challenged to grow. Activists rarely engage with social science scholarship. Its topical selection seem irrelevant, its theories esoteric, and its analysis unhelpful. Sociologists often believe that they can operate in academia's bubble, not worry about the consequences of their scholarship, and study that which amuses them but whose impact is indeterminate. Instead, I think we can actively participate in studying, articulating, *and* participating in actions that will create a more just, equal, and liberatory world.

I hope both anarchists and sociologists read this book. As my co-author Jeff Shantz and I wrote in our introductory chapter in *Anarchy & Society*, these two parties can learn from each other. They don't have to become best friends – and they probably won't – but they can develop a mutual appreciation for things of shared importance, which may contribute to the construction of anarchist-sociology – or, better still, the construction of a better world.

About this book's methodology

The book includes a broad, multifaceted analysis. Data is collected from multiple levels, involving many units of analysis, using and testing many theoretical perspectives, and interrogating a smörgåsbord of topical subjects pertinent to anarchist movements. I use data gathered from quite a few unexamined movement sources (multiple surveys of anarchists and other activists, movement news stories, the Anarchist Yellow Pages directory and International Blacklist), as well as providing a re-analysis of existing movement documents and interviews. The analysis involves a wide array of quantitative and qualitative techniques, including content analysis, historical analysis, means testing, associational statistics, and geographic mapping. While each chapter uses one or two of the above, they are orchestrated to mutually reinforce each other and to triangulate across chapters. We can thus interrogate the anarchist movement from many vantage points (especially macro- and meso-analyses), in both longitudinal and cross-sectional contexts. Consequently, *Black flags and social movements* can be characterized as having a mixed-approach design (Brannen 2005). All the characteristics of a mixed-methods study are present here, while a partisan drive propels along the practical conclusions. A mixed-methods orientation necessitates continual reappraisal, testing interpretations and conclusions with new methods and data.[21]

I refer to "triangulation" to suggest that there is not one way of viewing the world and that a better understanding comes with considering multiple perspectives. Here, I argue that utilizing multiple data sources and analytical techniques is a good strategy. We should be wary of conclusions drawn from simply one data collection method or source. If we were to simply trust the first story we heard about anarchists (likely from mass media), many would not take it serious, nor seek out second or third opinions.

Black flags and social movements differs from most all mainstream sociological studies of social movements in its focus on a radical, anti-state movement, conceptualized as a movement that exists in a global context. While some scholars deal with the latter (global movements), hardly any have addressed the former (anti-state movements – at least as movements, per se). Although I engage with sociological social movement theory throughout, my objective is somewhat divergent from most of my peers (especially those who work in the North American tradition) – I am a bit less interested in simply refining theoretical explanations, and instead prefer to richly describe a unique, particular movement.

The book also differs from most that have been authored by anarchist movement participants (or their sympathizers), in that it does not rely upon "militant ethnography" (i.e., inductive, radical participant observation). There is nothing bad about this approach – it generates a rich, provocative, and satisfying depiction of its subject matter. But, by itself, it may be too unduly influenced by the limited experiences one is able to have and possibly the researcher's own particular biases. I have been a participant in anarchist activities and projects, yet I do not rely upon my own observations, conversations, or ethno-methodological conclusions here.[22] (My experiences, of course, do influence the choices I make in respect to focus and in providing me with certain initial insights.) While it is pointless to discard my own experiences and perceptions, I look beyond them, seeking additional evidence, especially that which is broader than what I can individually experience. Also, while participation is sometimes helpful for analysis, it can also distract from general patterns. I wish to construct a bigger picture of anarchist movements than ethnographic strategies can alone provide. Some of the following chapters focus on the subjective interpretations of anarchists, while other chapters seek independent verification and identify macro-level phenomenon which impact anarchist movements. Many chapters are focused upon critiquing empirical evidence to substantiate claims made by anarchist movement participants. All involve efforts to gather data and references independent of my own experiences, in order to answer research questions. This allows me to address the big, gaping deficits in the field (such as sociologists' general allergy to investigating anarchist movements or themes). I begin the task of describing anarchist movements from the vantage point of a sociologist, emphasizing sociological concerns and utilizing sociological theories.

In 2013, Jeff Shantz and I argued that the study of anarchist movements was a tricky proposition. After defining exactly *who* is an anarchist and *what* constitutes a movement, other challenges remain. To name just a few: do we study anarchism as practice or anarchism as a movement, do we focus on individuals or their organizations, are overt anarchists more important than the covert ones, and exactly what qualifies as supportive evidence? Answers that are "correct" 100 percent of the time ought to be viewed with extreme skepticism. But, the inverse of this conclusion is also significant: there are things we can still say with incomplete data and all data offer at least some insight into their content matter. See the Appendix for a longer digression on error-making with movement analysis.

Finally, a necessary disclaimer: while anarchism is assuredly internationalist, this book will not satisfy the reasonable standards this requires. While I am versed on a variety of anarchist movements throughout the world, and while Chapters 2 and 5 are deliberately international and cross-national analyses, this work is unfortunately Euro-centric (for reasons that are described later). I have tried to compensate for this, but most of my experience and insights have been generated as an American and most accessible data available is in English and from the Global North, so the book mainly uses examples from the USA. Thus, while I hope *Black flags and social movements* works towards a broadly helpful analysis of anarchist movements, I realize – and readers should be aware – that it is likely most illuminating of a Western context generally and an American one specifically. I encourage others to attempt comparable sociological analyses that widen the scope of inquiry, and consequently, shrink the world a bit more.

Key questions

This book attempts to answer some basic, exploratory questions about anarchist movements, from a sociological perspective. Unlike other analyses that are more concerned with anarchist philosophy, history, or culture, this study emphasizes and focuses on social movements as the primary – but not exclusive – unit of analysis. These four broad sets of questions include: (1) Are anarchist "movements" really social movements? More specifically, do individual anarchists participate in a social phenomenon identified as a movement, as per sociologist's definitions? This is the main focus of Chapter 1, where I situate anarchist movements within the broader ecosystem of movements, explore the various components that constitute anarchist movements, and consider how the study of these movements is a unique task. (2) Who are anarchists and where are they? Since anarchists *do* exist, what kinds of people are they and what do they believe? I answer these questions

in Chapter 2, via the use of surveys of individual anarchists. Chapter 3 addresses the questions, Where do anarchists tend to be located and what do they do there? via an analysis of anarchist organizations throughout the world. These micro and meso analyses, respectively, are complemented by macro analyses in subsequent chapters. (3) What explains the prevalence and activities of anarchist movements? How can we better – via the use of social movement theory – understand the micro- and macro-level dynamics of anarchist movements? Specifically, what explains their rise and fall in certain societies and are they different than in the past? What strengthens anarchist movement bonds? Chapter 4 gives a general overview of socio-logical social movement theories and uses some popular theories to incompletely, but convincingly, interpret anarchist movements. I focus on political opportunity and new social movement theories in Chapters 5 and 6 (respectively) as more robust, but still contentious, frameworks. Given the radical and disadvantaged positions of anarchists, I argue that social capital theory is also of primary importance for anarchist movements, a contention I explore in Chapter 7. Finally, (4) what is the relationship of anarchist movements to other social movements? Chapter 8 investigates how anarchist ideas and practices are continuously borrowed and recycled by activists for organizations that are not often explicitly anarchist. Do anarchists participate with other non-anarchists on the basis of shared values or shared organizing strategies?

<div align="right">

Dana Williams
Chico, California

</div>

Notes

1 I refer to "anarchy" exclusively in regard to ideas, not movements. Instead, the organized efforts of individuals within movements who are motivated by the ideas of anarchy, I call "anarchists" and "anarchist movements." There are numerous, sensible reasons for making this deliberate distinction. First, it is easier – and maybe more helpful – to describe movements in terms of their members and actions as opposed to their ideas. Second, as Russian-American anarchist Alexander Berkman once wrote to Emma Goldman, distinguishing between a social arrangement and a philosophy: "None of us are ready for anarchy, though many are for anarchism" (12 March 1904).
2 Determined by an EBSCO database search of the journal, using "anarchist" and "anarchism" as terms in article titles and abstracts; searched up to the year 2016.
3 In fairness, one article did discuss black bloc tactics (Wood 2007).
4 The UK-based journal *Social Movement Studies* is less tied to American-style theory-bashing and has featured more work on anarchist movements (e.g., Atton 2003; Karamichas 2009; Pallister-Wilkins 2009; Rosie & Gorringe 2009; Starr 2006; St. John 2008).

5   While it may be inappropriate to over-psychoanalyze these scholars – especially given my lack of training in such an endeavor or any hard, explanatory evidence – I think another observation about this conundrum is warranted. There seems to be an assumption – that I sometimes find myself persuaded by – that if we scholars know more about movements, this knowledge could be translated into an advantage for the movements we sympathize with. Of course, most sociologists lean left (see Zipp & Fenwick 2007), and this is probably particularly true for those who study movements. However, there is a strangely liberal (and dare I say naive) assumption that even if conclusive knowledge could be ascertained, this could somehow be used strategically by movements and not by the forces that aim to repress movements (counter-movements as they will be called shortly). I wonder if it would not be a better use of our time – and better for the movements we care about – if we spent less time writing about them and more time organizing within them, furthering their goals?

6   Sanderson (2005) also describes the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions, without noting the substantial anarchist movement that pre-dated, as well as collaborated early on with, Castro's 26 July movement's overthrow of Batista (Fernández 2001), nor how the namesake of the Sandinistas, Augusto Sandino, himself identified as an anarcho-syndicalist (Hodges 1986, 1992) – thus the red and black colored flag of the Sandinistas.

7   Additionally, Touraine (1984) has argued that social situations are the result of the conflict of social movements.

8   Burawoy (1982) is a Marxist sociologist and does not seem to suggest anything about the study of anarchism, nor its relationship to the discipline of sociology. As a side note, Burawoy associated – undoubtedly with his tongue planted firmly in his cheek – the field of economics with state Communism: there is only one tolerated dogma (Friedmanian, free-market ideology), from which no deviance is tolerated. Say what you will about Burawoy and public sociology, but he was really on to something here!

9   Lofland (1988) associates functionalism and conflict theory with both right and statist-left ideologies.

10 As Gordon (2006) points out, the varied meanings – both slanderously negative and supportively positive – date all the way back to the original, classic Greek usages.

11 Bakunin made this argument in an address to the League for Peace and Freedom in 1867.

12 A popular adaptation of this sort of typology can be found in the "political compass" found on the Internet.

13 Similarly, anarchism became a large, prominent part of the radical second-wave feminist movement in the West in the 1970s, so much so that some observers (Farrow 2012) have argued that radical feminism and anarchism were virtually inseparable.

14 See Mills's own correspondence, in which he wrote "way down deep and systematically I'm a goddamned anarchist" (cited in Mills & Mills 2001: 217–218).

15 The joking, tongue-in-cheek faux-Marx-inspired slogan is an old standard: "Anarchists of the world, unite!"

16 The irony is that rarely is there an actual identifiable act of "violence" associated with anarchists when that label is applied. On further investigation, most instances of "violence" turn out to actually be property destruction, self-defense, or hostile rhetoric – and *not* violence.

17 *Attentats* were usually small or singular conspiracies, although most attackers were active participants in anarchist movements.

18 The principal medium that delivers this triumvirate to people throughout the world is the mass media. Television news, newspapers, movies, and other corporate popular culture disproportionately presents anarchists as crazy, untrustworthy, and malevolent. While media is the key propaganda institution perpetuating and propagating the triumvirate, others are at work, too, such as most societies' educational systems. Even when schools do not directly engage with anarchism, they provide orthodox narratives that intend to negate anarchist arguments and evidence (the "democratic" natures of many polities, the meritocratic quality of economic labor markets, and the necessity to engage in war-making on behalf of national (read: corporate) interests.

19 These notions are widely present, so much so that otherwise anarchist-sympathetic organizations are susceptible to replicating these misperceptions. For example, while working with Food Not Bombs (FNB), we encountered resistance from a local Catholic Worker collective (the CW is itself often anarchistic) *due to* FNB's loose ideological affiliation with anarchism.

20 Although we ought to reject Asal and Rethemeyer's (2008) characterization of anarchists as "terrorists," their empirical conclusions are noteworthy: "Anarchists are the least likely to kill of ideological types that we could test probabilistically" (2008: 257). The other ideologies evaluated included leftists, religious, ethnonationalist, and ethno-religious.

21 Detailed information about all data sources can be found in the chapters which utilize each source. The chapters that follow not only analyze these data, but also reflexively critique that data sources themselves.

22 This book is not opposed to ethnographic research or writing. Nothing could be further from the truth! I highly value these approaches and respect the contributions of ethnographic research conducted thus far on anarchist movements. My multi-methods orientation values the continual appraisal of ideas from multiple vantage points, testing interpretations and conclusions gathered via one method with other methods and data sources. I think this is a fair and appropriate way to do social science, but I also think it is a politically critical way to engage in self-appraisal in movements, too, where we judge the multiple perspectives/vantage points, experiences, and concerns brought to the table to arrive at the best possible, collective course of action. My own activist experiences are anecdotal (by definition) and specific to the time and place where I have participated. So, the ideas I have developed about the anarchist movement are not completely wrong, but they are limited. Even after many conversations with a wide array of anarchists, my ideas are still confined to whom I have had the chance to dialogue with. This should not suggest that I believe in positivist objectivity, but simply that it's possible to improve upon past research, theory, conclusions.