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Anarchism, degrowth, and food sovereignty: exploring overlaps and tensions

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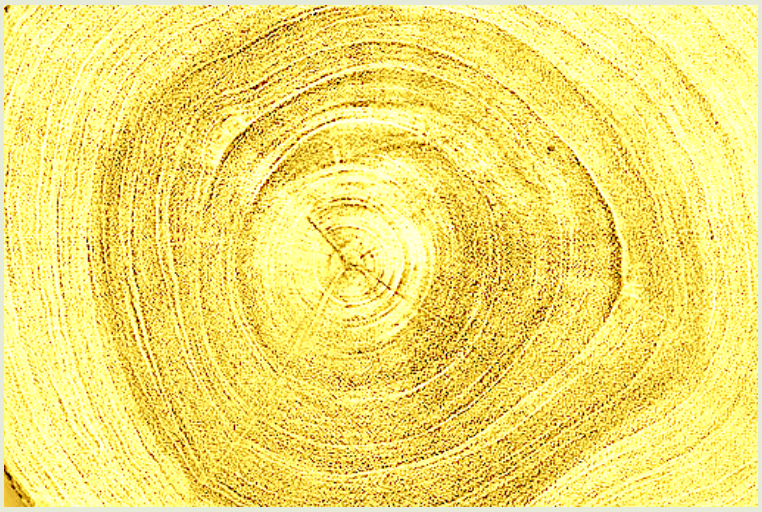
Abstract

This paper explores how anarchist ideas and practices might be useful for goals of societal transitions to food sovereignty and degrowth—and the limits to that usefulness. It discusses how various anarchisms resonate with either concept and their associated movements, ideas, and practices, and practical implications thereof. It concludes by raising three questions for those interested in libertarian socialist approaches to degrowth and food sovereignty, asking us to consider the relative marginality of such radical frames, and the importance of robust (economic and political) theories to effective action.



Introduction

This paper is an attempt to advance a conversation on degrowth and food sovereignty as political projects, informed by ideas from the broad world of anarchism, but without succumbing to the tendency and pressure in left theory to advocate one position against others, to tote a political "line" in order to convert others to it. I find toting a political line boring, tired, and often counterproductive. There never is, nor ever will be political certainty about what to do. There likewise won't ever be full or guaranteed political alignment, even among "left" or broadly anti-systemic forces[1]—so

[1] It feels important to state that many social forces opposed to capitalist growth, including many Indigenous groups, do not necessarily fit conventional European-descended political categories.

why frame one's writing to move us towards either of these outcomes? I am not writing this to convince others that anarchism is, for instance, "the" path towards degrowth.

Furthermore, it is easy to dismiss others' theories of change and change-making strategies, saying "they don't work"—a common refrain in leftist (especially dogmatic leftist) analysis and critique. But if we are being honest, looking around at the world we inhabit, we'd have to admit that nothing has worked so far, and nothing is certain to work to escape the capitalist world system. If anything does work, it will likely be the result of a combination of strategies as outlined by Schmelzer et al. (2022). An alternative to academic and activist arrogance is an open-hearted embrace of uncertainty, not retreating into the false certainty of so-called "social laws," or "scientific socialism." Being interested in truth and facts does not require making broad normative generalisations. I hope this paper subjects its topics to honest critique, but without condescension or presenting myself as having the right conclusions.

To that end, this paper simply asks what anarchism[2] is good for—in relation to degrowth and to food sovereignty—and what it isn't good for. A concluding section raises questions for those interested in these concepts, their interpenetrations, and practical implications. Rather than attempt a synopsis of my findings here, I hope to entice readers with a simple proposition: while not a panacea, anarchism is indeed relevant to food sovereignty and degrowth, and it merits greater attention and respect as an animating ontological philosophy and inclination, and as a force for concrete political organising that can strengthen social movements generally. My methodology is more conversational than didactic; more exploratory than declaratory; more practical than theoretical or scholarly. After all, each of these categories of concepts/movements—food sovereignty, degrowth, and anarchism—is a world unto itself, and any rigorous research program would not justifiably fit in such a single authored paper.

Anarchism encompasses diverse definitions and competing schools of thought, and instances where anarchistic ideas and behaviours resonate with its broad principles. In her historical research, Zoe Baker (2023) shies away from such transhistorical framings of anarchism, emphasising instead concrete, organised, ideologically-explicit movements. In contrast, this paper addresses today's difficult-to-disentangle mix of anarchism as both a philosophy and a political force, focusing on anarchist politics while recognising its essential rootedness in less strictly delineated ontological and philosophical ideas. I engage with "anarchism" here as a loosely defined anti-authoritarian activist method and a philosophical inclination rather than as a strict ideology. While "capital-A" Anarchist ideology certainly offers resources for thinking and action, it also may smuggle in dogma: doctrinaire adherence to precepts that limit adaptive, contextual action (the most central of these which denies the possibility of any social benefit by way of compromised, hierarchical institutions). Rather than foregrounding anarchism as a European-descended ideology, I follow Ramnath (2011) in preferring a "small a" anarchism that emerges in a variety of cultural contexts:

> *[Anarchism] implies a set of assumptions and principles, a recurrent tendency or orientation–with the stress on movement in a direction, not a perfected condition– toward more dispersed and less concentrated power; less top-down hierarchy and more self-determination through bottom-up participation; liberty and equality seen as directly rather than inversely proportional; the nurturance of individuality and diversity within a matrix of interconnectivity, mutuality, and accountability; and an expansive recognition of the various forms that power relations can take, and correspondingly, the various dimensions of emancipation.* (p. 7)

[2] I recognise multiple varieties and flavours of anarchism, but *not* so-called "anarcho-capitalism." For simplicity, I mainly deal here with communist/collectivist anarchism (a.k.a. "libertarian socialism"), market anarchism ("mutualism"), and individualist/insurrectionary forms. In practice these are overlapping, mutually-influencing while also mutually-contradictory, and each is more complex than how I present them.

What anarchism can offer degrowth and food sovereignty

1. What is anarchism good for vis-à-vis degrowth?

One of the things that anarchism is best known for is critiquing—rather than seeking—power as it operates in movements for social change and processes in which people seek to make change. Of course, most commonly known is its critique of state power. Anarchism has often been associated with leftist politics, but it also contains partisans of insurrection who reject the institutionally-oriented social change aspirations associated with (Marxist) "revolution" and new (leftist) social orders (Dunlap, 2020).[3] Anarchist critiques include and overlap with feminist, anti-colonial, and anti-speciesist ones. Here, however, I describe just two of these relevant critiques and how they are helpful to degrowth theorising.

The anarchist critique of states is deep and wide, covering everything from the way states shape everyday peoples' worldviews to the physical, coercive violent infrastructures (e.g. borders) that sustain unequal economic relations. Perhaps most relevant to degrowth theorising is the state's commitment to growth. While many Marxist-informed theorists of course also point out this dynamic, "viewing the state as incapable of initiating transformational change" (or at least hard-pressed to do so), most still end up "making a political appeal to it to do precisely this via targeted eco-social policies" (Koch, 2022, p. 1). From Koch's position, this is reasonable, as "existing state apparatuses can play a constructive part in an ecological and societal transformation" (Koch, 2020, p. 129). While most Marxist and liberal belief systems leave space open for such a contradictory expectation, anarchism is consistently critical of the state, refusing to trust it as a vehicle for change. It sees state power as underpinning noxious growth, meaning, growth oriented towards accumulation rather than satisfying human needs, which invariably causes harm to human and nonhuman communities.[4]

Some degrowthers go even farther, arguing explicitly for a coercive state to achieve degrowth (Bärnthaler, 2024). Against those who "lack an understanding that domination is an important and desirable feature of society, because collective self-limitation in a context of diverging sectional interests requires a monopoly of legitimate violence," Bärnthaler (2024) wishes to "establish the will to coerce and rule as [a] prerequisite for degrowth to escape its political marginalisation" (p. 7). This is, to an anarchist, frankly offensive. But at least it is an honest proposition from someone willing to defend and reproduce the dominance logic that evolved under capitalist, colonial, and white supremacist state power—a logic which is essential to reproducing that power. It is not simply a moral critique to claim domination is wrong, or a bad goal and method for those seeking degrowth; anarchists claim such views are erroneous because they assume it possible to change the balance of forces such that institutions of domination would be reoriented towards rather than against degrowth.[5] Historical precedent for such reorientation is lacking, but there are examples of state failures to coercively mandate environmental actions among populations (for instance, France's Yellow Vest revolts). Bärnthaler's proposal also lacks anarchism's imagination—based on existing sociality and history—in failing to recognise means of "collective self-limitation" that do not rely on state monopolies of violence. Anarchists can imagine forms of human organisation that self-limit but are not state-like. What's more, the end position of Bärnthaler's degrowth-via-state-domination logic is

[3] Dunlap refers here to Max Stirner, an early anarchist theorist advocating insurrectionary over revolutionary approaches. I will not debate these conflicting positions here but only wish to point out that revolutionary and insurrectionary action are both preferable to inaction or reproduction of status quos.

[4] The fact that Koch (2022, 2020), among other recent degrowth theorisers, spends entire articles discussing theories of the state while failing to consider or even mention any anarchist ideas or theorists indicates the still-marginal position of anarchism in degrowth scholarship.

[5] Perhaps this parallels the never-achieved "dictatorship of the proletariat," which was supposed to usher in a new era of communism via the capture of state power?

simply liberal statecraft: interest politics adjudicated by way of existing institutions. In other words, a long march back to the status quo.[6]

Importantly, the anarchist critique of the state as a promoter of noxious growth involves an interpretation of social conditioning within state institutions, not simply a materialist explanation based on the rule of capital as in some Marxist analysis. Certainly, that materialist explanation has its merits, especially in pointing to the ways that rule-for-capital happens "behind the backs" of state managers due to Marx's "law of value" (Copely, 2024). Anarchists argue, as do some Marxists, that states promote economic growth through decisions that are structured to benefit existing capitalists directly. However, they also point out that institutions of state power sociologically reproduce the state manager role, and state managers thus maintain conditions for growth in order to preserve their own political position and power (Baker, 2019, 2023). This can be seen in how leftist parties in Greece and Spain, once in power, moved to manage capitalism rather than enact their rhetoric of challenging it (Holloway et al., 2020). The "behind the backs" nature of capitalist growthism via the state is also visible in the prevalence of legitimate and understandable—yet limited in vision or ambition—demands for "jobs, jobs, jobs" that few on the left dare question. There is also a dynamic in which some progressive liberals want to strengthen the state against nominally anti-systemic, right-wing politics when the latter are surging (as they are of late). Yet, an anarchist history would remind us that those same strengthened state forces will be more forcefully used against the left than against the right. For instance, new "anti-terrorism" legislation in the US was used against individuals involved in environmental direct action (see Pellow, 2014).

The anarchist critique of statism becomes all the more important as environmental themes are taken up by political leaders, and as policies to address environmental issues are more and more legitimised and expected from populations. After all, if there is space for states to become "ecological states," then social movements should push them to become so. But what if the nature of state power nearly universally undermines environmental initiatives insofar as they challenge capitalists and/or state actor interests (Davidson, 2012), and instead encourages policies that put ecological responsibility on non-elites while largely reproducing existing power relations? And what if state policies, even when enacted for ostensibly ecological reasons, cause harm while simplifying socio-ecologies and prioritising the reproduction of state power (Rolando & Barletti, 2024; Scott, 1998)? If "the state in capitalist society is hamstrung by the accumulation imperative, which represents an insuperable barrier to it pursuing sufficiently robust environmental policies" (Davidson, 2012, p. 36), then another calculus for degrowth strategy demands elaboration.

In talking abstractly about what states could do, it would be helpful to address the evidence on what states and those who lead them actually do. Marxist reformist authors like Koch (2022) and Bärnthaler (2024) look to theorists of Gramsci, Poulantzas, and Bourdieu, among others, in order to assert theoretically that an ecological state is possible, but do not address recent history or contemporary actuality.[7] Are capitalist states implementing degrowth or agrowth policies, favouring ecology over accumulation? Of course, answering this is a matter of degree or perspective since one could always argue that a particular policy is perhaps not adequate, but is heading in that direction—or alternately, that it is not enough even if it is something.[8] When I look at California and the U.S., where I live, it seems clear that ecological policies are not impossible, but what is possible to pass and implement are policies that are far from constituting degrowth or any variety of socialism.

[6] Still, it must be admitted that approaches similar to Bärnthaler's are simply "pragmatically" concerned with what *seems* feasible, vis-à-vis the state, just as some socialists have, in envisioning "feasible" socialisms, abandoned Marx's vision of a post-market economy (e.g. Nove, 1983).

[7] Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro (2021), in contrast, has looked deeply into the histories of *socialist states'* environmental policies, finding a less-awful record than anarchists and liberals alike have assumed/believed.

[8] For their part, Koch and Bärnthaler are convinced of the possibility of greater political coalitions arising that pull states towards ecological policies.

There are common patterns across issues like redirection of state funds to environmental justice (EJ) communities,[9] the regulation of emissions from private automobiles such that electrification is incentivised, solar energy developments, or the decades-old carbon market, from which the state has created and raised funds for various policy priorities including ecological ones. Surveying these issues (e.g. Cushing et al., 2018; Dunlap et al., 2024; Fassler, 2024; Gonzalez, 2001; Liévanos, 2012; London et al., 2013; Lopez, 2023; Pulido et al., 2016; Young et al., 2018), we might argue the state (a) simplifies complex socio-ecologies in order to rationalise interventions, (b) prefers market-friendly over business-penalising forms of regulation (for example, it may be willing to countenance land access for socially disadvantaged farmers, but does not consider land expropriation from polluting businesses to underpin land reforms to improve that access), (c) seeks to placate obstreperous communities, like those people of color who have organised into EJ organisations to demand redress, by tying their sources of reparative state funding to sources of environmental harm (as in the cap-and-trade funds earmarked for EJ), (d) retreats from or does not enforce policies that go against capital interests, and (e) cuts funding for climate response once budgets are constrained. These may be specific conditions and not generalizable, but they speak to materialist skepticisms of statist environmentalism, and to the embedded reproduction of hierarchy and social order of structural violence that states are accused of by anarchists.

The second important critique from anarchism is on the ways that power corrupts and makes less effective subaltern ways of contesting the established order. Not only limited to "co-optation of civil society movements by state bureaucracies" (Koch, 2022, p. 7), states steer civil society action away from radical change in multiple ways. Understandably, anarchists tend to avoid direct participation in electoral and state processes. But they are also skeptical of non-state institutions that are organised hierarchically and which reproduce the unequal social order in other, sometimes more hidden, ways—often by redirecting radical efforts towards demobilising state processes. Anarchist arguments describe the counter-revolutionary effects of reformism (Milstein, 2015). The prime example here is of nonprofit organisations. Even though it is not an explicitly anarchist text, The Revolution Will Not Be Funded (INCITE!, 2017) is a seminal argument about the counter-insurgent nature of nonprofits. The essay collection warns of the effects when social change-making is placed within organisational units—as it is in the case of nonprofits—so strongly shaped by the state's regulations, by the wealthy as funders, and by an enforced pyramidal form of social organisation. Such nonprofit organisational forms embed and reproduce hierarchies: paying staff with power over volunteers and "clients," valuing "expert" knowledge above that of clients, prioritising negotiation over confrontation with the powerful, normalising surveillance in the conduct of coercive, means-tested, and punitive programs, creating divisions between decision-making and executive functions such that programs are minimally shaped by those they are intended to serve, and so on. Considering how common it is for degrowth and food sovereignty efforts in the Minority World to be organised via nonprofits, we can see how such a critique could be revealing.

Beyond this specific book, we see critiques of power within social change-making forms in all sorts of anarchist literature analysing recent social movement activity. This includes critiques of Filipino authoritarian socialist insurgencies' failures to mobilise the poor and peasant classes (Umali, 2020), of liberal identity politics undermining the US Occupy movement (CROATOAN, 2012), of charity models in the context of serving poor populations in urban centres (Spade, 2020), and of recalcitrant forms of dominance that plague "development" work in the Majority World (Wald, 2014). We can also see it in South African movement reflections on housing justice struggles among the poorest (Mdlalose, 2014).

Besides its negative critiques, another key contribution of anarchism as a theory is its positive theory of mutual aid. The original theorisation of the concept—essentially, that it is as natural for humans and other species to cooperate to survive

[9] EJ communities are those facing disproportionate environmental harms, usually due to their racial and economic status.

as to compete—was developed by the famous anarchist Peter Kropotkin (1902). The idea has resonated among various populations and at various times, even skeptics of European anarchism like Indigenous anarchist Aragorn! (2005), who described it as a "very traditional anarchist concept." As a strategy whereby communities tangibly help one another outside exchange relations but in a reciprocal manner, mutual aid forms one approach to decommodifying survival—a necessity for degrowth futures. By provisioning people with food, clothing, housing, medical supplies, and so on, people are able to survive and organise against systems of power, especially when freshly politicised by engagements in mutual aid projects. Clearly, different political groups use such tactics; in the hands of non-anarchists, aid may operate as a charity or a tool of recruitment into organisations. For anarchists, mutual aid aims to build alternative senses among participants of the possibility of a (degrowth) world based on mutual aid rather than exchange economies and state power. Statist socialists may disparage mutual aid as inadequate to the scale of degrowth action needed. Yet, just as resistance to colonisation has relied on mutual aid amongst Indigenous peoples more than it has appeals to state power (Benally, 2023), existing mutual aid work has undoubtedly helped to generate the political affinities/subjectivities and material relationships/infrastructures that underpin any future degrowth transitions. Ultimately, mutual aid helps subaltern groups survive capitalism, while reminding its participants and onlookers alike that non-state actors make life livable, especially when the state does not.

Mutual aid, in turn, is simply one form of direct action among many. Direct action is, again, not the exclusive purview of anarchists. But it is a pillar of anarchist politics in a way that is shared by few other political groups, mostly militant and guerilla formations. Rather than the mediated political action of petitioning the powerful, running electoral campaigns, or conducting a Gramscian "long march through the institutions" (which are rarely conducive to bottom-up control), anarchists organise actions that mobilise people to directly interfere with injustices, provide needed resources, create spaces for politicisation towards autonomy, and inspire participants and onlookers to rethink what is possible of human self-organisation. While mutual aid operates as a constructive force for building power by allying anarchist principles with any number of people in need, direct action can be constructive (building alternatives) or oppositional. Indeed, anarchist theorists like Dunlap (2020) have emphasised anarchism's attack approach, as opposed to a politics of mere resistance, as lending itself to more transformative outcomes, constituting "viral subversion" that can spread and is difficult for the powerful to control (p. 1005).

Anarchists have been involved in many examples of oppositional actions that could be called degrowth in action, operationalising a call for "degrowth now!" Rather than wait for political change, small groups representing only fractions of the population are taking action against infrastructures of growth and capitalist accumulation and defending particular territories and their connections to it. Some examples include:

1. Decades of Earth Liberation Front (ELF) activities against deforestation (ELF being a franchise model for organising like the 40+ year old mutual aid effort Food Not Bombs, not a formal organisation; see Williams, 2017 for elaboration of the anarchist franchise model);
2. The Ende Gelände movement's direct actions to stop coal mining operations in Germany;
3. The occupation of the Hambach Forest, Germany;
4. The various "zones to defend" (ZADs), place-based direct action movements that are popping up all over France, which upon engaging and merging with peasant movements in various French localities, evolved into;
5. Les Soulèvements de la Terre, a network that "have carried out more than twenty blockades, land occupations and 'disarmament' actions (a term used for mass sabotage against toxic infrastructures) to defend the soil and water from criminal industries" (LST, 2024), including infrastructures of industrial agriculture (see also La Via Campesina, 2023);

6. Stop Cop City,[10] a broad movement against the installation of a militarised police facility in the Weelaunee Forest (one of the few remaining urban forests of Atlanta, Georgia, USA), comprising anarchists, prison industrial complex abolitionists, environmentalist green space defenders, the local Muskogee tribe, and others (see Kass, 2025);
7. Indigenous anarchist struggles, which hold diverse perspectives that are not always grounded in western political ideologies, have been involved in defences of territories across so-called North America, including Diné struggles against desecration of San Francisco Mountain, Tohono O'odham against border walls, Standing Rock Sioux against pipelines, and Muskogee against Cop City (see Benally, 2023).

And although not anarchist, many other groups have organised in anarchistic fashion to confront capitalist land uses, facing down private and state forces, including by self-organising horizontally, through directly democratic participation, and using direct action (Bray, 2019; Cattaneo et al., 2012). These confrontations go back dozens of years globally. Examples include: the land takeovers of Indonesian peasant unions, leading to the establishment of cooperative, communal agroforest livelihoods (Gilbert, 2024); the Sarayaku Kichwa resistance to oil extraction in Ecuador, which itself led to the Yasuní ITT initiative to leave nearly 20% of that country's oil in the ground (Goodman, 2015); the very visible anti-pipeline organising at Standing Rock and the dozens of similar battles across the United States. Arguably, this resistance may have done more to build a degrowth future than a hundred academic papers.

These are not marginal actions when placed in contrast to contemporary movements of other types and issues. The reactions of governments illustrate clearly the state's perception of the threat they portend, and the key state role in suppressing degrowth in action.[11] The state has responded to Stop Cop City through violence, intimidation, and bending the rule of law to their favor, including filing dubious organised crime charges against protesters and shooting dead one anarchist Weelaunee Forest occupier (Kass, 2025). During Les Soulèvements de la Terre's (2024) recent action:

> *[a]gainst the construction of a mega-basin at Sainte-Soline, which mobilised more than 25,000 people, the state went to war against those fighting for water. It deployed 3,500 armed police who attacked us with more than 5,000 grenades, injuring and maiming more than 200 activists.*

Beyond ecologically harmful infrastructures, degrowth-oriented direct action movements have yet to target the arenas where consent to capitalist growthism is manufactured. Mainstream media infrastructures, essential to normalising growth and capitalist ideologies, but also of demonising and delegitimising oppositional movements, have yet to feel equivalent pressure for their complicity in capitalist unsustainability.[12] A similar attention may be helpful to direct towards producers of the violent technologies of war, state surveillance, and oppression, as militant formations have done for years, with recent escalation in response to Israel's genocide in Gaza (e.g. Palestine Action, 2021).

One aspect of the range of direct actions anarchists take includes the possibility, discomfiting to some, that interventions and projects established now may get taken up and institutionalised at a wider level, including through cooptation by

[10] See https://defendtheatlantaforest.org/

[11] That suppression is one place where anarchism may not be any more helpful than other approaches: heightening conflicts with "the system" does not inevitably lead to success. Environmental defenders are regularly assassinated; communities in revolt are put down by armies; revolutions fail. It's hard to argue for confrontation given these possibilities, but there may be no alternative.

[12] See this film on the 2006 Oaxacan uprising for examples of both constructive and oppositional uses of media (especially radio).

governments or capitalists. Examples include the Dutch Provo agit-prop group's innovative white bike program, a decommodifying bike-sharing direct action against car dominance and local government (Reid, 2017). This intervention led circuitously to the development of Netherlands' biking infrastructure, the emergence of a bike-friendly culture (and self-perception) in the country: in short, a more degrowth-oriented world. It also influenced later bike-share programs the world over, many of which are at this point owned and managed by municipal governments and corporate sponsors. Whether one likes it or not, for better and worse, constructive grassroots direct action is a feeder of ideas into the maw of degrowth's institutionalisation.

In most direct action, concrete goals are pursued, but the form of action also produces co-benefits for participants, including political education, the creation or consolidation of new senses of self, and the spread of useful knowledge such as food production, forest stewardship, or basic first aid. Because the growth of movements themselves is needed, and it is of practical benefit for populations to know how to sustain themselves and care for one another, direct action organised with intended co-benefits is an anarchist approach deserving wider mobilisation. It is also important to acknowledge, even if it is not comfortable for anarchists to consider, that oftentimes movements use direct action in combination with reformist and mediated strategies, such as petitions to government or pressure campaigns on companies. Many movements move from one tactic to the other, depending on circumstances. In South Africa, the neoliberalisation and privatisation of electricity led poor people's movements to ask the electric company for reductions in charges for individual households, until this strategy proved an overall failure and movements turned to directly pirating electricity themselves as Al-Bulushi explained in an interview (Lilley & Soong, 2024). In the case of Occupy the Farm, the occupation followed decades of by-the-book advocacy to gain access to the farmland for urban agroecology, which was consistently rebuffed by the University of California administration (Roman-Alcalá, 2015). Movements also utilise direct and state-oriented action alternatingly and synergistically, as in Stop Cop City's months of direct actions before and after petition gathering to place the issue up to a vote in local elections.

Another area where anarchism has shown its effectiveness and applicability—even when not explicitly anarchist—is in responses to disaster, moments of institutional collapse, and moments where the state is particularly weak and unable to provide for people's needs (Firth, 2022). A Master's thesis on the US-based network Mutual Aid Disaster Relief illustrates the relevance of anarchist ideas, even without focusing on anarchism itself (Kenney, 2019). Another US-based example is Common Ground in New Orleans, founded by anarchists after Hurricane Katrina and leading many to learn the benefits of organising disaster relief anarchistically (crow, 2014). Common Ground is one of many examples explored in Rebecca Solnit's (2009) book, A Paradise Built in Hell, which along with post-9/11 attacks, Mexico City and San Francisco earthquakes, shows "that what happens in disasters ... tends to be anarchy in Kropotkin's sense of people coming together in freely chosen cooperation rather than the media's sense of disorderly savagery" (p. 91). One need not be an anarchist to admit that anarchist principles of decentralised, horizontal, and voluntary cooperation are helpful to organising responses to disaster (Norris et al., 2008). This is true for practical purposes of meeting people's needs, but also for the aforementioned co-benefits of politicisation and relationship building which are useful to degrowth's long-term prospects. By showing that people can and will look out for each other, anarchist mutual aid teaches by example that what is needed is not necessarily more stuff (growth) but a reorientation towards collective care (degrowth).[13]

There are more extensive examples of what happens in much larger breakdowns of state legitimacy and power. Anarchist Ukraine and Spain come to mind as the most extensive ones, wherein hundreds of thousands of people acted to expropriate the expropriators in the absence of state capacity to restrain them. Two movements seen as anarchistic but

[13] Yet another need is for radical degrowth/food sovereignty/anarchist movements to work on disaster preparedness—not just response.

not claiming dedication to (European) "anarchism," the Zapatistas and the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, sometimes referred to as Rojava, have managed to self-organise alternatives to the state for decades, even when faced with state and paramilitary violence. To a lesser degree, squatting movements from midcentury Europe to late 20th century South Africa are also places where anarchist forms of direct action have met harmful capitalist dynamics and weak states with bottom-up reclamation and innovation of new social forms, even if these were later partially crushed or co-opted (Mdlalose, 2014).

Although we may hope for more societal stability, there is a strong likelihood that conditions of state instability will visit much of the globe as crises of climate chaos, mass migration, and political strife combine and amplify. It is debatable how strategic it is to put degrowth organisational efforts into state structures, as Bärnthaler (2024) and Koch (2022) suggest, that often fail in such conditions, instead of community-level structures, norms, and practices that may prove more resilient. Even if one is not willing to let go of the state, at least anarchism offers an indisputable benefit to movements by organising for degrowth now and developing future constituencies for it.

2. Anarchism's benefits to food sovereignty

> *[A]narchism promotes: building decentralised capacity (rural and urban, reproductive, productive, and discursive), towards subsistence or socialism, and in anticipation of societal breakdown; directly attacking infrastructures of oppressive, ecocidal capitalist extraction; linking communities through prefigurative efforts; and in the processes of horizontal self-organisation, countering and undermining the Othering that is key to [rightwing] power.* (Roman-Alcalá, 2021, p. 321)

Anarchism offers ethics of human (self-)organisation—more voluntary, horizontal, participatory, grassroots, federated, and in respect of nonhuman nature—that support food sovereignty by advancing decentralised, socialised (though not necessarily nationalised), and non-capitalist stewardship of nonhuman nature as commons. These same ethical principles also engender the kinds of subjective transformations that strengthen Food Sovereignty Movements (FSMs), through reclamations of peasant and worker identities and practices of mutual aid and solidarity in food and land stewardship. Combined with anarchism's love for direct action, disruptive confrontation, and building "power to" among non-elites, it is clear that anarchist ideas do resonate with and promote food sovereignty. After describing some of these resonances, I focus primarily on how anarchism raises critiques of power that may be helpful, such as in the case of degrowth, to theorising and actualising food sovereignty.

One central tenet food sovereignty shares with anarchism is localisation, alongside decentralisation of production, knowledge, and resource access, among others (Robbins, 2015). Anarchism seeks to devolve power away from central and high-level authorities to avoid the control of resources by those who are not immediately impacted by that control, and to develop the means of self-determination by local and small communities via their own capabilities and desires. Alongside this, there is a primacy given in food sovereignty to more direct and deliberative forms of decision-making within movements and in spaces and processes of food system regulation (e.g. Food Policy Councils, the Committee on World Food Security). My experience with founding and facilitating an "urban agriculture alliance" that operated on consensus across various local food initiatives indicates these are widely-held values and are not unique to anarchists (see Roman-Alcalá and Glowa, 2020). Anarchism fits well with localism and furthers attention to reducing undemocratic hierarchies within decentralised, localised systems.

Localisation and democratisation come together in commons, an idea and practice widely supported in food sovereignty literature. The anarchistic resonance of commons is evident in the title of a popular book: The Wealth of the Commons: A World Beyond Market and State (Bollier & Henfrich, 2012). Anarchism emphasises that communitarian productive activities, such as commons management, supports communities' material autonomy, enabling a wider space for political autonomy, echoing van der Ploeg's (2008) promotion of peasant autonomy. Anarchistic commons are a food-sovereignty-friendly mode of production, while anarchistic direct action for food sovereignty can be productive or antagonistic. It can counter industrial tree plantations by burning them down, or it can support community resilience by developing storm barriers out of native tree plantings. It can defend existing commons, liberate or renew enclosed commons, or create them anew.

Often unseen, efforts to grow food outside of capitalist markets, to care for others by way of local food infrastructure, and to build affective ties among peasant(-like) producers might all be considered everyday acts of building food sovereignty via anarchist means, or "subversive forms of resistance" (von Redecker & Herzig, 2020, p. 665). These everyday acts are relatively autonomous and reflect Scott's (1985) idea of "weapons of the weak." They are important practices and show how anarchist praxis coheres well with the non-commodified food production, social self-organisation, and everyday resistance of food sovereignty's existing protagonists. This also exhibits anarchism's affinities with Indigenous practices, where territorial belonging and subsistence practices have maintained Native communities through waves of genocidal attack (Simpson, 2017). Zibechi (2012) has argued that Latin American peasant and indigenous movements, like anarchists, emphasise social belonging with territorial autonomy as the point of localisation. Affinity does not imply that Indigenous peoples require anarchism, but that its orientations seem to cohere with Indigenous ways of organising and imagining futures more than other Europe-descended ideologies, and thus relations between anarchists/autonomists and Natives and their strategies deserve greater consideration and thoughtful solidarity (Benally, 2023; Dupris-Derí & Pillet, 2023; Lewis, 2017; Rosset & Barbosa, 2021). This is not to argue that food sovereigntists or Indigenous peoples are already practicing anarchists, but that anarchist inclinations encourage actions similar to theirs.

Anarchism's attention to power at any level means it encourages criticism, analysis, and action on injustices regarding gender, generation, sexuality, the treatment of animals and onhumans more broadly within peasant communities, activist projects, and social spaces.[14] Anarchists are willing to call out class oppression in spaces where the homogeneity of the community might be assumed, for example, in peasant-populist type of politics; in this way, they might be appreciated by Marxists. On the other hand, anarchists are unlikely to dismiss non-economic forms of domination and injustice as merely epiphenomena of capitalism, as some Marxists do. As I have argued, anarchism "theoretically challenges agrarian populism's homogenisation of 'community' and Marxism's overly-economistic analyses of it" (Roman-Alcalá, 2021, p. 320).

At the macro level, anarchism generates critiques of state and capital dynamics vis-à-vis food systems—critiques that are still too rare among food sovereignty's constituent organisations and scholar-advocates. Although mainly a Marxist tradition, food regime theory has been ably anarchised by Kass (2022). In this study, Kass (2022) looks at historical and contemporary food regimes to argue that the "complementary State-making and war-making apparati of militarisation and civilianisation, and their reliance on the wage, property and state system, undermines food sovereignty and subordinates it to the State" (p. 2). State-led coercive violence is accompanied by the state's construction of consent and

[14] Granted, in practice this is not pegged to ideology as are most instances in which humans behave badly; anarchists can and do perpetuate injustices of this kind. But their ideology is at least explicitly against this, compared with Marxism which can align with homophobic, nationalist, or otherwise bigoted doctrines. Anarchism is explicitly against systemic domination of any predefined population, although it is explicitly in favor of using force against those who hold hierarchical power.

legitimacy. By roping populations into the state via reformist programs and funding (e.g. loans and grants for farmers), state reforms become indispensable food regime elements. Kass (2022) also discusses how "statist food sovereignty interventions ...have fallen short as a result of State capture by capital" (p. 434; see also Giunta 2014; Andrade 2019; Tilzey 2019; Vergara-Camus and Kay, 2017). Extending food regime theory leads to an implication of state violence and social control at the core of the harmful food system, rather than indicating that regulatory potential could be brought about through pressure on the state, as seems common among FSMs.

Anarchist ideas and analysis thus imply a negative judgment of existing, largely Gramscian, FSM strategy. This is perhaps one reason why FSMs largely ignore anarchism.[15] In particular, anarchism questions the alignment of some La Via Campesina (LVC) members with supposedly allied national governments, and FSMs' engagement of global state-based institutions. FSMs have certainly shown a capacity and taste for multinational fora such as the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (UN FAO), Committee on World Food Security, and Human Rights Council, with decades of engagement netting wins such as the 2018 Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (Claeys & Edelman, 2019), the 2012 voluntary "Tenure Guidelines" intended to reduce land grabbing (see LVC, 2015; Franco & Monsalve, 2017), and the integration of "agroecology" into the FAO's discourse (Anderson & Maughan, 2021; Rivera-Ferre, 2018).

LVC claims that such new international instruments and valorised discourses will aid peasants. There are undeniably positive signs in some cases—for instance, the Tenure Guidelines have reportedly helped some peasants in Colombia and Guatemala (Castañeda et al., 2022; Tramel, 2019). Yet the Guidelines as a "potentially powerful instrument for holding states accountable" (Brent et al., 2017, p. 1379) remain only as potential over a decade later. Such small gains are overwhelmed by the dominant direction of events: a continuation of state-sanctioned land grabbing, human rights and ecological abuses, state collusion with capital, and political corruption. Considering their anti-capitalist rhetoric, FSMs might also consider the efficacy of their approach with regards to larger goals of systems transformation. Arguably, wins in "soft law" and discourse are easily ignored by states, reversed, undermined by capital, and have yet to translate to sustained power for non-elites over food systems or a transition away from capitalist rule. This isn't to say these strategies failed, but that movements might debate the relative helpfulness of these compared with alternative, more direct and grassroots approaches, such as communities "grabbing back" as explored by Reid Ross (2014).

LVC's email announcing 2024's "Day of Peasant Struggle" asserts that "The capitalist system ... corrupts governments in the interest of a few elites, violating nature and ecological balance, thereby compromising the future of humanity." While decrying governments as corrupt because of capitalism, LVC relies on these governments, capitalism intact, scaling up into regulative bodies like the UN. The email also declares: "Those who control and commodify our commons hinder youth peasants from accessing land and break the autonomy of peasants and peoples, pushing them toward agrarian conflicts, poverty, starvation, and agriculture without peasants." Clearly, food sovereignty supports and defends commons. But FSMs look to states, not beyond them, for at least some of that defence. How do we reconcile the long history of state involvement in the destruction and commodification of commons with FSMs' current campaigns to get states and interstate bodies to rule in the other direction? Can we expect such institutions to change direction? Should we?

In a letter to Committee on World Food Security member states, LVC (2015) states:

[15] FSMs' general disinterest in anarchism (and degrowth, for that matter) may also have to do with FSMs' rootedness (unlike myself) in the Global South. To be absolutely clear here, this section is not to disparage or question FSMs' intelligence, but to surface contradictions and tensions, which may help refine our strategic thinking in shared political projects and spaces of debate.

As social movements and CSOs, we know how difficult it can be to engage with governments and state authorities at all levels. In some cases states are promoting resource grabs (often justified with the need to create an "enabling environment for investments"), or are even acting as grabbers themselves. These are human rights violations for which they have to be held accountable. However, it is the states and their public institutions that have the mandate to serve the public interest and the obligation to protect the people from human rights abuses by companies and private investors through appropriate legal frameworks.

The idea that states "have a mandate to serve the public interest" is, from an anarchist perspective, idealism. It might equally be argued that states' mandate is to maintain a (colonial)-capitalist economy and culture, while staying within a range of social legitimacy to ensure stability. Still, considering the general common consensus that the state is needed to advance food sovereignty (see section 4), FSMs might—short of adopting anarchist ideas and strategies—at least appreciate how anarchist radicalism could offer synergies with reformism, especially via the so-called radical flank effect.

This happens when disruptive, obstreperous action (the kind prioritised in anarchism) encourages elites to offer concessions or moderate their views, in favour of less radical, reformist ideas and social actors. The 2012 "Occupy the Farm" action is a smaller-scale example from my research where this happened (Roman-Alcalá, 2018). Anarchistic prioritisation of direct action could thus help advance food sovereignty via policy effects, in addition to its creation of new and renewed capacities for autonomy-boosting production.

Debates over strategy tend to fall into binaries of "either-or." Even if one accepts the need to advance both "autonomist" and "sovereigntist" strategies, as do Giraldo and McCune (2019) who respectively describe what are essentially anarchist and statist strategies, time and energy is limited among organisers and masses. The limited results of global policy efforts after decades, the sunk costs, and the effect of such global policy work of distancing grassroots activists from their comrades all behoove reconsideration. Although it does not necessarily require a complete abandonment of such arenas, "the anarchist lens suggests shifting strategy away from states [and global foral and towards ideological development and grassroots capacity," and to "use direct action and mutual aid to provide for material needs, disrupt and oppose injustice, and bolster moral economies at the grassroots level" (Roman-Alcalá, 2021, p. 320). A more anarchist food sovereignty strategy would focus on local territories, orient towards building autonomy, strengthen commons and participatory decision-making, and empower those most marginalised by various kinds of domination. And such efforts would seek to delegitimise rather than legitimise state forms of power.

An anarchist squint also leads to critiques of self-described socialist states as inadequate or worse in terms of advancing pro-peasant politics. Beyond the historical complaints about, for example, the early USSR's suppression and exploitation of Ukrainian peasants of all classes (not only so-called kulaks), or the largely horrendous outcomes of forced collectivisation in China, Russia, and across the USSR, we might ask LVC members from ex-Soviet Republic states about the dynamics they faced there before the transition to capitalism. We might hear critiques (like I have heard from food sovereignty movement leaders from such countries) of state communist failed attempts to simplify and control food production and markets— critiques that parallel those made by anarchists about state socialist authoritarianism for generations (Baker, 2023). LVC members also defend "progressive" (though not quite socialist) administrations like Mexico's.

Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) or Nicaragua's Ortega, even when these have been credibly accused by Indigenous and other non-elite groups within the countries of forced neoliberal modernization, increased extraction, and political oppression. In the former case, Mayan communities are fighting against AMLO's Tren Maya project, and the government-supported mass expansion of industrial pig farms across the Yucatan peninsula, while in the latter, a canal project has been pushed forward by the president and Chinese backers against local community opposition (Adler, 2019). Nicaragua's Ortega administration has also been accused by myriad leftists of political repression of students, indigenous organizers, and even other leftists (Robinson, 2021; Rocha, 2017; Confidencial, 2022).[16] FSMs more influenced by anarchism may be less likely to support states—including leftist ones—against their populations of internal dissenters who are themselves also struggling for food sovereignty.

Anarchism: Not a panacea

3. What is anarchy not good for regarding degrowth?

The main limitation I see with anarchism as a vehicle for degrowth strategy regards its inadequacy to what we might call the politics of normalcy. In contrast to my claim earlier that anarchism is well-suited to crises, disasters, and (temporary, localised) collapse, anarchism has a hard time seeming relevant as a political strategy in contexts where people—righteously or not—are in, or are seeking, conditions of normalcy. Here, normalcy is defined by modernity: availability of food-as-commodities in the supermarket; reliable lights, electricity, and internet; no active or visible war happening close by; no crises (or worse—politics!) interrupting one's enjoyment of entertainments and hobbies. One can question if such a desire for normalcy is ethical or desirable, given it is made possible via structural violence, global inequality, and ecological harm—the "imperial mode of living" as it has been named by Brand and Wissen (2021). However, such questioning cannot deny that many people in wealthier countries indeed seem to have such an attachment to normalcy. The imperial mode of living is not sustainable or just, but when it comes relatively easily, it is rarely challenged by those who live it.

While people may act like anarchists in crisis, when the smoke has cleared, they more often than not revert to self-interested, narrow-minded, and hedonic pursuits that align with the status quo. As John Jost (2020) has argued, "system justification" is a common position for various reasons, a psychological tendency exacerbated by instability. It is a rare and self-selected minority among denizens of wealthy countries that would choose challenge over convenience, sustainable sufficiency over satisfying whims, dangerous confrontation and uncertain political organising over simply going along to get along. Not always, and not everywhere, indeed—but in a context of normalcy, anarchism is hard-pressed to provide a guiding motivation for a mass-oriented project of global societal redesign and transition, as degrowth demands. Anarchism may convince those who already believe that collapse is on its way (or here) that its principles provide the best path forward towards self-organised alternatives to the capitalist death machine. But for those who believe that society can and will continue operating more or less as it has, anarchist politics do not offer much appeal. These people constitute a supermajority of Minority World populations.

[16] I might also mention here my 2023 experience in Cuba, where farmers I spoke with referred to failures of the government in supporting peasant production with infrastructure, even after their much-lauded transition to agroecology during the "special period." One analysis I heard was that once tourism became an economic development option for the state, it abandoned the peasant sector (a view supported by Thiemann & Spoor, 2019): few tools made available, trucks not showing up to deliver produce as promised, no support to make degraded land productive after being given access via new land reform laws. These problems predate the rise of tourism and are no doubt related to the US embargo and sanctions, but have deepened in impact recently. In this context, farmers expressed desire for a more marketised food sector, as this would mean more autonomy in its organisation, but perhaps as importantly, more functionality.

Related to this is anarchism's relative lack of strategies to change the conditions of life for the masses—conditions by which those masses are more capable of extricating themselves from capitalist-colonial ways of being. Structuring people's choices to allow easier escape is a key task. If the goal of degrowth is to meet needs, including those related to social reproduction, with less material demand, the scale for meeting them is important. Efforts that are local, unfunded, or voluntaristic are not bad, but appear inadequate to allow escape at scale, under "normal" conditions. Insofar as they aspire to systemic change, such efforts cannot simply claim "we are prefigurative seeds" and leave it at that.

It is no surprise that anarchists are not big on envisioning or pursuing state policies for degrowth. As individuals, anarchists can and do engage in policy processes and elections (see Franks, 2020), efforts which may be dismissed by more dogmatic anarchists. In my experience, anarchists more often relate to anarchism philosophically and ethically rather than a necessarily "correct" political strategy. They focus on living anarchistically in daily life while occasionally engaging hierarchical institutions pragmatically for political change, a perception matched in other research (Bray, 2013; Raekstad, 2019). Still, the general lack of nuanced anarchist theory on policy strategies is worth pressing anarchists on—as policy, at the very least, is a form of defence. And as many degrowthers suggest, policy also forms one tool by which that easier escape from capital can be advanced. Welfare provisions of states— compromised as they are by the simplifying, contingent, and dignity-undermining tendencies of state programs—do allow better life outcomes for people when accessed. When people are not required to pay capitalists for health care, housing, food, education, and other needs because they are provided by the state, this can benefit people and degrowth, even if this provisioning has negative issues rooted in state power dynamics (and, for the Northern populations most benefiting from it, global imperialism). One might argue that anarchism equally lacks a positive view for "planning," which can be seen as a form of policy. However, Albert and Hahnel's participatory economics (Parecon) model (Albert, 2004) shows that libertarian socialists indeed have thought about the need for rational, ecological planning of production and consumption, and have developed models to explore, implement, and advocate such planning.[17]

Many authoritarian socialists and degrowthers alike insist on the state as the only vehicle that has sufficient force to "expropriate the expropriators." They may be correct. States have, for instance, at times nationalised industry. Most nationalisations maintained existing management structures and divisions of labour (with profits going to states rather than private owners), rather than reorganising production towards degrowth's aspirations of democratised participatory economies. Nor were nationalisations geared towards dismantling harmful industries like fossil fuels or mining. Nationalisations, aside from communist and socialist ones, usually compensate capitalists in the process, and some states reverse course when capital flight and outside intervention threaten greater domestic instability. Hence, history does not show great precedent for state-led expropriation at scale, against capital, for non-elites, towards degrowth, in a transformative and sustained fashion.[18] The exception is perhaps certain communist states post-revolution such as Cuba, China, and the USSR. But these also included tremendous bloodshed and mistakes, including supporting ideologies and policies against peasants and non-elites as well as prioritising growth against ecology.[19] The point is this: if proponents of authoritarian means and state monopolies on violence can advocate a "dictatorship of the proletariat" approach based on limited proven efficacy, anarchists should be allowed to do the same, from the opposite direction.

[17] See also https://participatoryeconomics.info/

[18] Not at scale or a matter of nationalization, per se, but needing to be contended with by anarchists nonetheless, are examples where states have directly suppressed harmful economic activity, such as state-involved crackdowns on illegal, unsustainable fishing operations off the coast of Africa (Zoppi, 2019).

[19] Another historical example demanding consideration is 1980s Burkina Faso, wherein a communist revolution quickly generated ecological and anti-capitalist actions that were within years ended via counter-revolution. It is an open question if, undeterred, this would have provided a historical precedent for successful Global South feminist-degrowth-socialism.

Why shouldn't we hope for a sufficient force of people's movements rather than states to conduct that expropriation, as occurred in Ukraine or Spain during anarchist uprisings, or more recently on smaller scales in Argentina, Brazil, Turkey and throughout the world?[20] Well, if we choose to do so, we should at least admit that our movements generally are small and weak compared to those historic examples. And today more than ever, state surveillance and suppressive capacity is strong, even if not total and insurmountable. In sum, a degrowth transition requires force against existing capitalist and colonial infrastructure, organisation, and institutions, and if the question of force is one that anarchists and statists might debate forever, it is also one that anarchists, like others, have yet to resolve.

4. Anarchism alone cannot build food sovereignty

In my experience, FSM actors are often dismissive of anarchism, or, like the rest of society, ignorant of it. Yet I have also met national- and international-level FSM organisers who are interested in anarchism, even when they cannot easily integrate it into their work, like human rights policy for instance. In private conversations, FSM and food justice activists have expressed reluctance to accept anarchism as useful to them, sometimes out of uncertainty about what alternative forms of action would look like if they refuse to contest state and interstate policy spaces. Such a reluctance also stems from the fact many communities facing dispossession and exploitation look to any and all tools available to contest the status quo. How helpful, we might ask, is it for anarchists to ideologically judge these communities?

Clearly, anarchism is not too helpful in directly addressing food sovereignty policy, existing or new, given its inherent skepticism of statist laws, courts, and the entire western-liberal form of republican governance. Anarchists certainly critique policies of dominant states, such as the U.S.'s domestic politics that support agribusiness in myriad ways. Many reject such manifestations of state-capital collusion as they reject private property and state power generally as interwoven fetters on human flourishing. Because it rarely theorises how political power should be organised towards goals like degrowth or food sovereignty, anarchism has few suggestions for (defensive) policy manoeuvring or its attendant need for compromise in the course of creating viable legislative and advocacy alliances. Nor does it tell us how to navigate the fact that the state does hold resources that movements can use and benefit from, even in some cases to build autonomy (Giraldo & McCune, 2019). In California, radical food movements inspired by food sovereignty have leveraged state funding to buy land. This includes a Black cooperative young farmer project that rallied with other nonprofit support to obtain $1.5 million in 2024 from the state. Planting Justice, a permaculture plant nursery, landscaping business, and education nonprofit that hires formerly incarcerated people to work in their own communities, has leveraged millions in state and federal funds. Each of these has built autonomous production capacity out of state funding. Planting Justice's co-founder told me he draws inspiration from anarchist ideas and does not find that taking state funds necessarily compromises their vision, values, or form of operation. Even anarchist scholar Hannah Kass (2022) recognises the "very real needs for these [state] programs and policies, at least in the short term, for as long as we are ruled by the capitalist State" (p. 12). It seems that most agree, even some anarchists, that to completely refuse any use of the state is unlikely to build forces towards food sovereignty.

This limitation also extends to global governance, wherein the trade policies of powerful blocs pose key barriers to local self-determination as one Dutch farmer-activist insisted to me during one of my talks discussing ideas for this paper. This goes for the "soft law" of UN policy recommendations for nation-states, like the Tenure Guidelines, and supposedly "hard" international law, like the Geneva Conventions. Anarchists might argue that the recent Israeli/U.S. genocide in Gaza has shown such laws to operate more as a function of power relations than consistently, according to the often-touted rule of law. Still, against anarchist pronouncements that this shows the hollowness of state-based law, we might

[20] See https://ejatlas.org/

note how administrations at the heads of states like South Africa who have brought genocide charges against Israel can alter the calculus of war-making in the context of international law. Law, like the state, is an arena of struggle where not every outcome is foretold. No one can predict whether international law instruments will tangibly help prevent atrocities or ensure Palestinian futures, or whether fewer peasants will suffer when multilateral trade rules are reformed. Dogmatic rejection of all statist action can problematically ignore, or worse, actively undermine poor people's movements in the South that have managed to access the state and are attempting to use it against the hegemonic imperialist, exploitative status quo, exemplified by today's Colombia under Gustavo Petro. In dismissing global law and state policies as tools of capital, and nothing else, some anarchists may flatten complex reality.

Anarchist theories of economy vary (Shannon et al., 2012). There are "market anarchists," also known as mutualists, who, like market socialists and many food sovereigntists, take from a history of markets prior to capitalism the possibility of a future non-capitalist role for markets. In a way, these lineages argue that "MCM' ≠ CMC": that it is ethically defensible to produce commodities in order to sell them and earn an income which in turn buy the commodities one needs, and that this generates different systemic outcomes from the investment of capital to produce commodities for the sole purpose of earning more capital. Against the preservation of markets in any form, anarcho-communists have advocated along the lines of Marx's maxim 'from each according to ability, to each according to need' for overcoming commodity production, exchange value, and resulting "socially necessary labor time" as preconditions for any new world worth being called 'socialist' (Hudis, 2023, p. 15).[21] That is, anarchist communism, like Marx's communism, seeks completely non-market, non-price mechanisms to coordinate production and consumption, as in Parecon. Then, there are insurrectionary and individualist anarchisms which seem to lack any constructive economic theories. In terms of post-capitalism, "mutualism" may have a more developed theory for economics than anarcho-communism, and certainly more than insurrectionism. Market anarchism essentially sees a small business solution to big-capital capitalism. However, few market anarchists follow mutualist Proudhon's assumption that non-capitalist firms and worker cooperatives could displace capitalist firms and instead insist that revolutionary kinds of political action are necessary. Still, I have yet to find in anarchist literature a robust theory of change for systems transformation from capitalism toward non-market economies aside from calls for interstitial strategies in the now and abstract invocations of future revolution.

While anarchists have critiques ready for both state-dominated and market-dominated economic forms (e.g. Soviet and post-Soviet conditions for Eastern Europe, each of which has not been pleasant for peasants), they do not necessarily have a holistic alternative economic vision that compels peasants or their organisations. Certainly, there exist various anarchist economic ideas and practices and analyses of them (Shannon et al., 2012), and fleshed-out visions for organising production (e.g. Parecon). Many anarchists point to mutual aid practices themselves as promoting a particular way to organise economic relations, at least for resource distribution (Spade, 2020). But beyond mutual aid and prefiguration, anarchists arguably have less robust theories for how a future anarchist economy would work, and how anarchist practices today would realistically bring about that economy from the existing one. Alongside their focus on prefiguration, some anarchists reject holistic "visioning" as unnecessary, or even as hubristic social engineering. I would critically counter-argue that the refusal to engage in world-building theorisation beyond your own prefigurative practices may undermine the collective construction of alternative economies alongside other sectors like peasants who are by and large not anarchists. Possibly, more engagement of anarchist ideas by peasants, especially from communities turned off to socialism as a concept because of their historical negative experiences of state socialism, could develop such visions (e.g. a market anarchist food sovereignty economy). But this is conjecture. Limited conscious engagement

[21] Hudis here is interpreting the Critique of the Gotha Program, a rare text where Marx makes explicit his communist vision.

between FSMs, peasant communities, and anarchists, resulting in limited conceptual debates of food sovereignty and anarchism, gives little information to go on.

Lastly, one of anarchism's limitations (though not unique to it) is its inability to resolve the "sovereignty" in food sovereignty. FSMs make it clear that too much sovereign power is wielded by transnational corporations, but it is not clear if food sovereignty means more sovereignty for states, communities, or both, or how such sovereignties relate (Patel, 2009). Additionally, there is an entire realm of Indigenous food sovereignty discourses and practices that complement FSMs yet challenge conventional understandings of sovereignty, including its connection to the state (Coté, 2016). Theorists may agree that multiple and competing sovereignties define the world today and food sovereignty futures, but few agree on what this means for praxis (Schiavoni, 2015). Anarchisms offer different interpretations of sovereignty. These include individualistic and autarkic understandings of sovereignty as personal autonomy, accompanied by concomitant distaste for formal organisation or consistent political commitments, as logically follows from Max Stirner's (1844/2017) 'egoist' philosophy.[22] That said, some followers of Stirner insist on the necessary connection of individualism and "internal insurrection"—that is, personal transformation—to collective action by way of his proposed "union of egoists." More appropriate than individualism, contested as it is, insurrectionary anarchisms emphasise the vital role of self-generated action as constituting other, more solidarity- and care-focused forms of being-with nonhuman nature and other humans (Dunlap, 2020). Most appropriate to food sovereignty are perhaps the communitarian, communist, and syndicalist anarchist traditions which understand individuals as inextricably caught in webs of social interdependence. These might place "proper" sovereignty at the most grassroots, place-based level possible: the village, the workplace, the neighbourhood. And yet, we know that internal debates would still arise on issues of urban-rural divides needing bridging, tensions between proper levels of labour-mechanisation and conflicting needs between producers and eaters (Woodhouse, 2010), alongside remnants of racism, patriarchy, and other injustices that are relatively endogenous to such local levels. None of these are solved by anarchist theory. Nor are larger-scale sovereignty-related issues like the means of coordination of food economies across distances, which is at least needed for famine avoidance in context of localised weather disasters.

Conclusion: Three questions

By way of concluding this exploratory essay, I offer a few questions that I believe libertarian-leaning socialists, food sovereigntists, and degrowthers must contend with. These questions may also help those unconvinced by anarchism's premises or strategic potential to think through their own positions.

First of all, how can one advocate for anarchy, knowing most people do not believe that an anarchist society is possible? The reality is that overt (i.e. political) anarchism is a smaller portion of a wider field of leftist and anti-systemic ideas, a field which itself attracts only a minority of people who even concern themselves with politics.[23] Overt anarchism is marginal, largely unknown, unencountered in daily life, misunderstood and demonised when it is. One can assume alongside Graeber (2009) that many everyday people are already anarchists without knowing it. But this does not tell us how to build the political self-identification— conscious commitment to the values and tactics of anarchism, rather than an attachment to labels, per se—needed to underpin any mass-scale political transformation of society. The challenge of politicisation and basic political education beyond activist and academic subcultures remains pressing.

[22] Individualist anarchism of this variety may feed (and feed on) liberal "natural rights" philosophies where individual autonomy includes command of not just self but of property.

[23] In some parts of the world, it is not even a majority who care to concern themselves so; in the USA, the population is largely alienated from conventional politics and a plurality do not even vote (Pew Research Center 2023).

Secondly, in considering anarchism's prioritisation of action over theory, how do we act without being pure 'accionistas'? Simply acting, while claiming such action is a prefigurative "laboratory" for future changes that somehow will scale up is not a defensible game plan. Theory is a helpful challenge to anarchists and to all who seek a path out of the status quo as it demands we think clearly and convincingly about pressing challenges of creating or walking that path. This is especially relevant regarding sticky questions of provisioning needed goods and services via markets, planning, or otherwise. And since empirical realities are important to contend with in order to develop accurate theories of how the state actually acts, and how it changes over time, anarchist theories can be too coarsely anti-state or economically-ambiguous to be of much use in linking the beyond-state, beyond-capital vision of the post-growth future to the pressing (state-and-capital-mediated) struggles of the here and now.

Third, and related to the first question, how do we contend with the fact that degrowth, food sovereignty, and anarchism are each marginal positions within the world system? It is one thing to grapple with political marginality at the local level wherever you may be. Local battles have and will continue to be waged which bring together diverse constituencies and political beliefs, and counter growth-as-usual politics (e.g. Stop Cop City). But on the global scale, where core-periphery dynamics are dominant, where monetary policy meets military policy— perhaps the two most consequential arenas of statist struggle—it is difficult to imagine constituencies for degrowth, food sovereignty, or anarchism gaining meaningful access to spaces of decision-making, becoming viable narratives outweighing the voices and preferences of state and capital, much less becoming hegemonic.

Ultimately, for a transition to degrowth or food sovereignty to succeed, either concept would need to gain wider acceptance among populations. This is true regardless of whether that transition is anarchistic or state-oriented in character, or most likely both. These concepts would need to turn even more into global social movements, and mass ones at that. Given the concepts' existing marginality, this behooves advocates to get more serious about strategies to make them normal, visible, believable, compelling, and actionable.

On the one hand, these ideas are off the map of mainstream discourse and political possibility. On the other, masses express displeasure with the status quo regularly. We live in an age of crises. Many are apparently sick of capitalism and are open to alternatives. Many distrust conventional politics. Leveraging such attitudes towards affinity for the positive programs of degrowth, food sovereignty, and socialism is essential. As one libertarian socialist put it:

> *On the question of popular apathy and complicity, the most optimistic anti-authoritarian interpretations of this prevailing phenomenon claim ordinary peoples' non-engagement with political matters to be a result of capitalist dominance and hence contingent to the ongoing perpetuation of such; the suggestion here, then, is that people in general would involve themselves passionately in the management of society, if they felt they had access to an effective means to going about doing so.* (Sethness Castro, as cited in Reid Ross, 2014, p. 3)

At the same time, the motive force for vast changes in society tends to be disruptive action among non-compliant non-elites combined with the insider efforts of so-called policy entrepreneurs leveraging disruption towards elite concessions, or revolutionary vanguards taking power in the vacuum created by sustained disruption. This indicates a need to develop the disruptive and oppositional forces that heighten the stakes of noxious growth and food-farm-land-water injustices. Yet people are more likely to become "system justifiers" during times of crisis and uncertainty, especially those with personality types predisposed towards right-wing views (Jost, 2020, 2021). A key under-considered area, therefore, may be how to legitimise and follow up on disruptive forms of action so that they strengthen rather than undermine movements, and contribute to the popularisation of these transformative concepts.

A built-up legitimacy, an enlarged constituency, and heightened tensions can be leveraged by movements to advance their ideas and their tangible strategies. These are necessary considerations for a transition whether one is still convinced of the state's centrality in social change or expects the transition to take place despite the state rather than because of it.

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❖ **Tags:** capitalism, democracy, degrowth, anarchism; food sovereignty; strategy; praxis.

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