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CONTEMPORARY ANARCHISM AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE DOMINANT NARRATIVE ABOUT THE WESTERN WORLD

ABSTRACT

The subject of this article is anarchism interpreted as a form of opposition and an alternative to the dominant narrative about the contemporary Western world. The aim of the article is to indicate the areas that shape the dominant narrative about the world and the methods and arguments used by anarchists in attempts to disrupt this narrative by creating their own narrative. The author formulated a hypothesis according to which European anarchism defined the idea of freedom in opposition to the concept of freedom inherent in liberal democracy and consumerism, redefined democracy, criticized the tendencies inherent in modern politics, such as European integration and militarism, as well as the spread of economic patterns inherent in neoliberalism and materialistic and consumerist attitudes of modern societies. The method used to verify this hypothesis is an aspectual analysis carried out in the context of the above mentioned problems on the basis of program documents, propaganda texts and journalism of the contemporary anarchist movement in Europe.

Keywords: anarchism, political thought, social movements, narrative, consumerism, liberal democracy, European integration, militarism

Anarchism is a current of political thought in which the idea of freedom is a value that is superior and primary to other values. In anarchism it is maximized and even absolutized. In the negative (critical) layer of political thought it manifests itself in the contestation of all coercion, authority, the state, social hierarchy, and all other organizations that limit the freedom of individuals and social groups: churches and religious associations, the military, large companies and transnational corporations, unions of states, international political, military and economic organizations, as well as popularized rules, customs and traditions. Anarchism understood in this way *is a philosophy opposed to hierarchy and authority, and is used as a critical lens to analyse the whole of human society*.¹ One has to agree with this assertion with regard to the anarchism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Benjamin Franks and Ruth Kinna, on the other hand, noted that: *Notwithstanding the significant disagreements between individuals within the historical movement, nineteenth-century anarchists articulated a number of common principles which continue to resonate in contemporary anarchist politics*.² For contemporary anarchism, however, not only opposition to authority is characteristic. This is because the language of debate in anarchism has changed: *Oppression tends to be conceptualised as domination and the rejection of exploitation is popularly conceived as anti-capitalism. Similarly, anarchists now prefer to talk in terms of direct action rather than anti-parliamentarianism and of prefiguration and DIY (do-it-yourself) politics instead of the rejection of revolutionary elitism*.³ The above claims justify the possibility of using anarchism as a thought to analyse contemporary society. They also testify to the criticism of the dominant narrative in the contemporary world of Western civilization and to the construction by anarchists of their own alternative narrative, the shaping of which is influenced by the dominant narrative.

Thus, the aim of the article is to indicate the areas that shape the dominant narrative about the world and the methods and arguments used by anarchists in attempts to disrupt this narrative by creating their own narrative. The author formulated a hypothesis according to which European anarchism defined the idea of freedom in opposition to the concept of freedom inherent in liberal democracy and consumerism, redefined democracy, criticized the tendencies inherent in modern politics, such as European integration and militarism, as well as the dissemination of economic patterns inherent in neoliberalism and materialistic and consumerist attitudes of modern societies. Anarchism understood in this way created its own narrative about the Western world, alternative to the dominant one. The method used to verify this hypothesis is an aspectual analysis conducted in the context of the above mentioned problems on the basis of program documents, propaganda texts and journalism of the contemporary anarchist movement in Europe.

¹ D.M. Williams, "Red vs. Green: Regional Variation of Anarchist Ideology in the United States," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 2009, vol. 14, no. 2, p. 189.

² B. Franks, R. Kinna, "Contemporary British Anarchism," *La Revue LISA / LISA e-journal* 2014, vol. 12, no. 8.

³ *Ibid.*

THE DOMINANT NARRATIVE IN THE WESTERN WORLD

According to Jerzy Trzebiński, from a psychological perspective, narrative means telling someone about something. Thus, it is a special kind of communication between people. It is also a product of this communication. For it is a text, through which people express a story. Finally, and most importantly, narrative is a special form of cognitive representation of reality, so it is also a way of understanding reality. Therefore, someone can be considered to understand the events and situations around them as stories, and themselves and other people as characters in those stories. The relationships between them, on the other hand, are those of characters bound together by a narrative thread. The general knowledge of the world within which people can understand, recall, and imagine events, situations, and the characters who appear in them is in narrative form, i.e., it models reality as a stage on which characters appear with specific intentions and encounter specific problems.⁴ Narratives are a specific way of communication in which the sender constructs his own identity. They are the result of cognitive processes during which knowledge about the external world is organized in such a way that certain patterns of behaviour in it are created. According to psychological theory, the universal structure of narratives can be defined as a form of understanding reality.⁵

So what is the Western world in the dominant narrative? It is a world in which people are focused on satisfying material needs. Satisfying them gives a sense of happiness, which, however, lasts only until new needs appear. These are created in order to achieve profit by their creators – managers and shareholders of large corporations, mass media, politicians, but also consumers themselves. The latter need continuous sensations the shallow and passive experiencing of which gives the impression of happiness. It does not require activity and effort, which is fostered by mass culture and the popularized patterns of consumer lifestyle. They have just replaced the spiritual needs of man, the satisfaction of which has been ‘pushed’ to churches and religious associations tolerated in the Western world. The few individuals who do not find the possibility to satisfy them there seek them in abandoned libraries, exotic entertainment or monasteries, while others escape to sects that offer a narrative based on religious gnosis. Even traveling no longer has a spiritual dimension. Its purpose is no longer to seek peace and rest in the quiet of the mountains or surrounded by the sounds of the sea. Tourists are no longer travellers. Instead of spiritually experiencing the atmosphere of a medieval castle, they choose to see it through the glass of a camera or the screen of a smartphone.

Freedom in the story of the modern world is the ability to satisfy needs and purchase goods offered on the market. It is an idea that has undergone processes of economization and marketization. It is converted into material values. Its realization can only

⁴ J. Trzebiński, “Wstęp”, in J. Trzebiński (ed.), *Narracja jako sposób rozumienia świata*, Gdańsk 2002, p. 13.

⁵ A. Dziob, “Badanie narracji – między psychologią, socjologią a językoznawstwem”, *Kwartalnik Językoznawczy* 2010, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 1-3.

take place within this world. What is outside it is an area without freedom, and therefore alien and dangerous. This justifies the integration of Western countries and the military interventions and wars conducted outside the area of consumer freedom. For they are a form of defence of the principles of neoliberalism and a form of its expansion. Other narratives also contradict stories of liberal democracy, in which voters can influence the political sphere through periodic elections or influence it through the media. In turn, politics itself has become similar to a store where promises are bought, and politicians no longer fight to realize their concepts of the good for all, but for themselves, although they give the impression that the opposite is true.⁶

Such a system and the perceptions of the public sphere perpetuated by it, however, provide a sense of personal stability that suits voters. They are by nature passive and oriented towards the realization of personal and egoistic happiness, or rather the impression of happiness. Spontaneous and group activity, which should be one of the foundations of democracy, would in fact prevent the free realization of individual happiness. Social groups become active only when such freedoms are violated. But even then, they are monitored by ubiquitous cameras and by algorithms and cookies on the Internet. This, by the way, is the dominant form of activity – individual, solitary and virtual activity, not real activity.

In such a system, the role of government is to either enable or not to disrupt the consumption of goods. Democratic government is ‘democratic’ because the majority of consumers accept the rules of elections that do not require active involvement – elections from among parties that do not challenge the principles of consumerism and the foundations of the neoliberal market. It preserves social passivity in the public sphere and market power in the economic sphere. At the same time it does not allow for the emancipation of social movements which try to annihilate or at least disrupt the dominant story about the world. It discredits them, scorns them, ridicules them, considers them exotic and calls them utopian – it pushes them to the margins of social relations and politics.

THE ANARCHIST MOVEMENT IN EUROPE AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES

One such social movement whose internal narratives differ from the dominant one is the anarchist movement. It creates narratives about the world as it is – critical of it, and narratives about the imagined world – as it thinks it should be.

The anarchist movement has been forming since the second half of the 19th century. Due to the wave of anarchist terrorism at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, it became a politically marginalized movement. Anarchists operating in that period were responsible for the deaths of thousands of people, including government

⁶ See more: K. Śledzińska, “Hipokryzja i narracja symboliczna w polityce”, *Seminare. Poszukiwania Naukowe* 2012, no. 32, p. 114.

officials, policemen, politicians and people holding state power, e.g. Russian Tsar Alexander II, French President Marie François Sadi Carnot, Austrian Empress Elisabeth, King Umberto I of Italy, or U.S. President William McKinley.⁷ Although the terrorist activity of contemporary anarchists is rather marginal, the movement can still be associated with violence in the dominant narrative, can be ignored and downplayed in it, or can be absorbed and processed by it according to the requirements of mass and popular culture.

Nevertheless, on the aforementioned margins of politics at the turn of the 20th and 21st century there were anarchist groups. In almost every European country there were informal or legal organizations, but they did not have a significant political importance comparable to the historical power of anarchism. An example of this may be the Spanish anarchists associated in the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labour). The CNT played an important role during the Spanish Civil War between 1936 and 1939, and the organization was outlawed after General Francisco Franco took power in Spain. After his death it was reactivated, but did not regain its former importance. Other anarchist organizations with a long history active in the analysed period include: the Portuguese Federación Anarquista Ibérica (Iberian Anarchist Federation), which was founded in 1927, the French Fédération anarchiste (Anarchist Federation), established in 1945, Unione Sindacale Italiana (Italian Syndicalist Union) created in 1912, Federazione Anarchica Italiana (Italian Anarchist Federation) founded in 1945. At the international level, anarchists were united by: the International of Anarchist Federations / Internationale des fédérations anarchistes, formed in 1968 in Italy and the International Workers' Association founded in 1922 in Germany. The face of modern anarchism was also created by hundreds of groups and federations, often ephemeral or with a short history, whose activity focused on organizing protests against the directions of contemporary politics, living in squats and organizing in them centres of alternative culture, publishing newspapers and manifestos and other messages on the Internet. These manifestations of anarchist activity were also a tool for disrupting the dominant narrative. The most relevant anarchist journals are, for example *Direct Action, Freedom, Organise! ...for revolutionary anarchism* and *Class War* from Great Britain, *Red & Black Revolution. A magazine of libertarian communism* from Ireland, *Apoio Mútuo* (Mutual Aid) from Portugal, *Tierra y libertad* (Land and Liberty) from Spain, *Le Monde Libertaire* (World of Liberty) from France, *Umanità Nova* (New Human) from Italy, *Direkte Aktion. Anarcho-syndikalistische Zeitung* (Direct Action) from Germany, or international: *Anarkiiista Debato* (Anarchist Debate) and *Abolishing the Borders from Below. Anarchist Courier from Eastern Europe*.⁸ It should be noted, however, that the influence of these titles relates to the anarchist movement itself, not to the influence on the dominant currents

⁷ B.W. Tuchman, *The Proud Tower. A Portrait of the World Before the War 1890-1914*, New York, NY 1966.

⁸ See more: P. Malendowicz, *Ruch anarchistyczny w Europie wobec przemian globalizacyjnych przelomu XX i XXI wieku*, Warszawa 2013.

of political thought and the dominant narrative. In the second decade of the 21st century, the Internet has become the main means of communication for anarchists.

In the modern anarchist movement, two currents of political thought dominated – anarcho-communism and anarcho-syndicalism. Apart from them, the face of anarchism was shaped by anarcho-feminism, green anarchism, regionalist anarchism and insurrectionist anarchism. The anarchist movement did not associate with libertarians and was sceptical of new trends in political thought, such as anarcho-transhumanism or crypto-anarchism. Instead, it firmly rejected the trend known as national anarchism.

DEFINING FREEDOM AND REDEFINING DEMOCRACY

The idea of freedom is a fundamental value in anarchism. Slogans such as this one printed in a magazine *Abolishing the Borders from Below – no more nor less than total freedom*⁹ – were the most frequently repeated slogans about the ideas of freedom in anarchist thought. The idea of freedom is in anarchism superior and primary to other values. It can also be identical with other values. For anarchists, freedom is a determinant of equality, but also the existence of equality is one of the basic guarantees of freedom. Similar relationships occur in relation to the concept of justice. Justice in anarchist thought is determined by freedom. What constitutes freedom is just. This is because a free man will maximize the layers of goodness inherent in him. In an anarchist society there will be no reason to be unjust.

Freedom in anarchism is both negative freedom – ‘freedom from’ and positive freedom – ‘freedom to’. Negative freedom is, for the epigones of anarchism, freedom from authority and all forms of coercion. Modern anarchists primarily deny all forms of domination over people, and sometimes over all living beings. It is therefore freedom from domination by people, organizations (including transnational corporations and financial institutions), institutions (including the state and international organizations), the political system (including democracy), the economy (modern capitalism and neoliberalism). It is also freedom from the dominance of a narrative that sees them as necessary cogs that regulate the functioning of contemporary societies and individuals, thereby ensuring relative social order. In such a narrative, not only is there no room for opposition and rebellion to their existence, but there is no room even for imagining a world without these hierarchical structures and a system based on dominance-subordination relations. There is a widespread belief in the indispensability of such structures and relationships. It is, for anarchists, an axiom that forms the basis of the plot on which the dominant narrative is based.

It is what defines freedom as the ability to choose in the marketplace of available consumer goods. But their availability comes from the creation of needs. The same is true of the need for liberal democracy. After all, people who are not familiar with other

⁹ “No more nor less than total freedom”, *Abolishing the Borders from Below. Anarchist Courier from Eastern Europe* 2006, no. 23, p. 55.

forms of democracy cannot want another democracy. Anarchists think of themselves as precisely those who have learned the truth about the world and know that liberal democracy is contrary to the idea of freedom. As Laurent Bosal put it in the magazine published by the French Anarchist Federation *Le Monde Libertaire* – contemporary democracy is a democratic illusion and its opposite is direct democracy.¹⁰

According to the creators of such an alternative narrative, in the current political system, man has no power over his life. He is dependent on external power. Therefore, he is not a free man. In contrast, in the anarchist narrative, freedom is the ability to participate in the decision-making process and influence one's destiny. Anarchists were proponents of direct and participatory democracy, allowing people to 'decide' their own fate and to co-decide about the fate of other members of the community thanks to their direct, voluntary and informed consent. This was made impossible, in their view, by other forms of democracy, such as liberal democracy. But such anarchist freedom is also the freedom not to participate in an anarchist community. And 'freedom within the state' does not give the possibility of living outside the state. By giving up life in one state, one is forced to live in another state anyway, according to its rules and laws, under a new authority.

AN ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE ABOUT EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND MILITARISM

Anarchists have used similar arguments in their criticism of the European Union. Anarcho-sindicalists from the Irish Workers Solidarity Movement asked: *What ever happened with the European Union? Privatisation of services, introduction of charges for needed services, massive congestion on the roads and the collapse of the health services. These things don't happen by accident. There is a motor that is driving these policies and you'll find it in Europe. This is why the European summits, which bring together the heads of all the EU member states, are accompanied by massive demonstrations against the Europe of the Bosses. Meeting behind closed doors, a tiny number of those who rule Europe are making decisions that will affect the lives of every one of the hundreds of millions of people living in the European Union as well as the countries to the east and North Africa.*¹¹

In fear of deepening processes opposed to democratization, anarchists opposed the construction of a single European megastate. In the period of the formation of the European Union and already after its formal establishment, the anarchist press was dominated by slogans such as: *No to Euro-State*¹² or *The state is against the people.*¹³

¹⁰ L. Bosal, "Vous avez dit démocratie?", *Le Monde Libertaire* 1999, no. 1160, p. 2.

¹¹ "What's Wrong with the European Union?", 25 May 2011, at <https://struggle.ws/wsm/pamphlets/eu/index.html>, 20 May 2021.

¹² "No to Euro-State", *Counter Information* 1993, no. 37, p. 3.

¹³ "L'État contre les peuples", *Le Monde Libertaire* 2004, no. 1356, p. 1.

A particular object of opposition of the anarchists was the immigration policy of the European Union. The unifying thread of the anarchists' narrative were slogans of humanitarianism and calls for freedom and equality for all people, regardless of background or material status. Anarchists analysed: *War, economic imperialism, civil conflict, environmental degradation and a host of other factors, combined with the increased technological monitoring and militarization of the borders, means that people will take even greater risks to exercise the freedom of movement and settlement, to find safe homes or jobs with even a bit of economic perspective if they otherwise have none. The European Union has made itself a fortress and seeks to control immigration to fit its demands and the demands of world capital. It is, after all, in the interest of business to have captive labour markets in countries with poor wages and no labour organizing, to allow their capital and movement of goods to be mobile but to keep people immobile.*¹⁴

The slogan *Fortress Europe*, as the opposite of the dominant narrative of the inevitability of the integration of European countries – ‘open’, ‘friendly’ and ‘free’ – was the foundation of the alternative narrative of the anarchists: *No matter how tight controls at EU borders are, immigration to the EU is inevitable and people fleeing persecution, war and poverty, will continue to risk their lives trying to get into the EU zone. However, by maintaining strict control over migration into the EU and by turning down the vast majority of asylum requests, thousands of immigrants are forced to live in Europe illegally. This creates a workforce that will accept the most insecure working conditions together with the worst salaries and conditions. Entire sections of the EU economy base their profits on the exploitation of these people: building companies, restaurants, textiles, agriculture, etc. Illegal workers are a workforce that can be easily controlled and which, against their will, can put pressure on fellow insecure workers. [...] Fortress Europe has other advantages for the European bosses. It acts as a wall, keeping people into the areas of the world where working conditions, human rights etc. are poor. Although the European bosses do not want to allow immigrants to enter Europe they do want access to these same people as cheap labour. For example, the EU is continuing the exploitation of the people of North Africa through creating a special trade zone of some of the North African countries similar to the free trade zones North America has created in Mexico. [...] Finally, racist EU policies and propaganda which marginalize immigrants and portray them as a social, political and economic threats create useful scapegoats for European bosses.*¹⁵

Thus, anarchists talked about the European Union differently than European elites and mass media did. For them, the European Union was not at all democratic, nor was it conducive to maximizing freedom. They described it as an organization closed to outsiders, restrictive of freedom, and conducive to racism and neoliberalism.

As an alternative to the integration of states in Europe, anarchists talked about the need to abolish states and large corporations, a world without powers, borders and

¹⁴ “Resistance Against Frontex”, *Abolishing the Borders from Below. Anarchist Courier from Eastern Europe* 2008, no. 32, p. 6.

¹⁵ D. Hogan, “Fortress Europe. Increased Integration of EU Asylum and Immigration Policy”, 2004, at <https://struggle.ws/wsm/pamphlets/eu/fortress.html>, 20 May 2021.

ethnic and racial divisions, and the construction of self-governing communities based on an economy whose goal is not profit, but the satisfaction of real, and not artificially created human needs.

In the anarchists' narrative about the modern world, the integration of European states was treated as one of the elements of globalization processes. Another criticized process was militarism. The anti-militarist narrative in the journalism and documents of the anarchist movement intensified after the terrorist attacks on the USA on September 11, 2001. Already several days after the attack, anarchists in Europe expressed fears not only of an inevitable and long war, but also of the introduction of restrictions on personal freedoms by Western governments.¹⁶

In the following years, they focused their narrative on the war in Iraq. Their story about it is a story revealing its true – from the perspective of British anarchists – face: *The Iraqi crisis isn't a war against an Evil Dictator. It's a war for control, money, oil and power.*¹⁷ According to them, regime change in Baghdad was necessary for the United States with its ever-increasing demand for oil. In their narrative, they challenged claims of American leadership in the world and opposed the American imperialist strategy.¹⁸ The narrators in such stories were also anarchists from other countries. Anarchist journalism, such as that of the Czech Republic, compared Western leaders to 20th-century dictators¹⁹, and accused NATO of crimes.²⁰

In the anarchist narrative about the Western world, militarism was a tool of states to achieve their goals, and the armed forces were treated as agencies to protect the interests of large transnational corporations. They also served as a tool for spreading neoliberalism in the world.

A CRITICISM OF NEOLIBERALISM AND CONSUMERISM

The neoliberal approach to globalization consists in eliminating state intervention in the market, especially through liberalization, deregulation, privatization, and minimizing fiscal policy.²¹ In the dominant narrative, economics based on neoliberalism is a guarantee for the realization of individual human freedom. However, in the anarchist narrative, the opposite is true. Neoliberalism is a form of dictatorship of the absolute laws of the market. It favours wealthy people, causing them to become even more wealthy, and opposes poor people, causing them to become even poorer. Wealth, on the other hand, enhances power, and poverty enhances slavery.

¹⁶ "Facing the Abyss", *Freedom* 2001, vol. 62, no. 18, p. 1.

¹⁷ "No Blood for Oil", *Freedom* 2003, vol. 64, no. 3, p. 1.

¹⁸ A. Pawluk, "Regime Change Begins at Home", *Freedom* 2003, vol. 64, no. 6, p. 1; M. Johnny, "It's Official: American Empire Stands Revealed", *Freedom* 2003, vol. 64, no. 11, p. 1.

¹⁹ "Irák: Další cíl teroristické války", *A-kontra* 2002, no. 117, p. 1.

²⁰ "Proč nesouhlasíme s existencí a politikou NATO?", *Svobodná Práce* 2002, vol. 8, p. 1.

²¹ J.A. Scholte, *Globalizacja. Krytyczne wprowadzenie*, transl. by K. Ślęczka, Sosnowiec 2006, p. 41.

In order to prevent social revolutions against such a system, mass culture was created. According to Piotr Rymarczyk, who in the past published texts critical of culture in the anarchist press: *Commercial mass culture provides easy entertainment, which does not create opportunities for internal activity or creative participation. It offers passivity to its viewers, listeners and readers and can thus count on popularity among them, because it is passivity – submission to external requirements and guidelines – that their work has made them used to. As a result, however, the pleasures they experience are limited, because in the course of their consumer life no inner development takes place in them that could intensify and elevate their possibilities in this sphere.*²²

Social hierarchy and interpersonal dependence are reinforced by consumerism, which gives the illusion of freedom. For it is the ability to buy goods on the market within the scope made available by the market. This also applies to political ideas. For the anarchists, such ideals not made available to the general public were exactly their ideas. This explains the limited possibilities of anarchists in their efforts to emancipate the anarchist narrative.

ALFREDO M. BONANNO'S IDEAS ON FIGHTING THE DOMINANT NARRATIVE

The anarchist movement operating at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries used the same methods of disseminating criticism of the state and capitalism and the free vision of society as the anarchist movement a century earlier. Only the tools of propaganda changed. At the beginning of the 20th century, the printed press was replaced by the Internet. However, the word printed and spoken or displayed on the computer in the form of manifestos, programs, proclamations, did not create a language that could change the dominant narrative. These forms of expression were understood only by anarchists. Due to the lack of interest in them by the mainstream media, ignoring of anarchist thought in educational programs, and due to algorithms that direct Internet users to specific content, the propaganda of anarchists reached only them. The consequence of this was that the language of anarchists became understandable only to anarchists. Society, on the other hand, functioned according to the dominant narrative about it. It was therefore characterized by apathy, which the anarchists themselves pointed out.²³

In the late 20th century, Italian anarchist insurrectionist Alfredo M. Bonanno formulated a concept to overcome the dominant narrative. It was to be used by anarchists to organize riots and then insurrections based on 'affinity groups'. Bonanno wrote a pamphlet entitled *From Riot to Insurrection. Analysis for an anarchist perspective against*

²² P. Rymarczyk, "Dwa oblicza chwili teraźniejszej. Czas w kontrkulturze i kulturze współczesnego kapitalizmu", in P. Żuk, P. Żuk (eds), *O kulturze protestu jako rdzeniu tradycji europejskiej*, Warszawa 2015, p. 215.

²³ "Interview with Anarcho Resistance", *Abolishing the Borders from Below. Anarchist Courier from Eastern Europe* 2005, no. 20, p. 36.

post-industrial capitalism, published in 1988 by Elephant Edition in London. In his introduction to this lecture, Jean Weir, following the thought of Alfredo M. Bonanno, diagnosed the state of his contemporary society and the prospects for its change: *In the 'western world' the traditional worker, cornerstone of the authoritarian revolutionary thesis and still a principle element in many anarchist ones, is being tossed out of the grey graveyards of docks, factories and mines, into the coloured graveyards of home-videos, brightly lit job-centres, community centres, multi-ethnic crèches, etc., in the muraled ghettos. As unemployment is coming to be accepted as a perspective of non-employment, capital continues to refine its instruments and direct investment to areas more befitting to its perennial need for expansion. Production of consumer goods is now realised by an intercontinental team of robots, small self-exploiting industries, and domestic labour, in many cases that of children. The trade unions are at an ebb, and the parties of the left are creeping further to the right as areas for wage claims and social reform are disappearing from the electoral map. What is emerging instead are wide areas of progressive 'democratic dissent' in political, social and religious terms: pacifism, ecologism, vegetarianism, mysticism, etc. This 'dissenting consensus' sees its most extreme expression in the proposals of 'delegitimisation' and 'deregulation' by a privileged intellectual strata that reasons exclusively in terms of its own rights. An ideal society, it might seem, from capital's point of view, with social peace as one of its prime objectives today; or so it would be, this 'self-managed' capitalist utopia, were it not for the threat coming from outside the landscaped garden.*²⁴

According to Bonanno, capitalists create a qualitatively better life only for the privileged stratum. This will create a situation where the privileged are equal to each other and separated by a wall from others. He called the privileged 'the included' into a social stratum that extends to capitalists and upper middle class executives. The included, however, do not have to separate themselves from the excluded by a system of state repression, police cordons and ghettos. For it is enough to cut off the excluded from communication. Bonanno wrote about the consequences of not having a common language: *This will be the real wall: the lack of a common language. This will be the real prison wall, one that is not easily scaled.* The excluded, using a different linguistic code, will not have needs based on the absence of something because they will not know of the existence of that something. The excluded will use a code that allows them to satisfy basic, secondary needs. In the future, with communication the concepts of equality, humanity, and brotherhood will be cut off. The included will feel that they are different from the excluded, but their relationship to them will be similar to that of a human to a domestic animal: *In the same way that today I consider my dog 'different' because it does not 'speak' to me but barks. Of course I love my dog, I like him, he is useful to me, he guards me, is friendly, wags his tail; but I cannot imagine struggling for equality between the human and the canine races.*²⁵

²⁴ J. Weir, "Introduction", in A.M. Bonanno, *From Riot to Insurrection: Analysis for an Anarchist Perspective Against Post-Industrial Capitalism*, London 1988, transl. by J. Weir, at <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/alfredo-m-bonanno-from-riot-to-insurrection-analysis-for-an-anarchist-perspective-against-post>, 19 May 2021.

²⁵ A.M. Bonanno, *From Riot to Insurrection...*

The communication codes of the included and the excluded will be different. If capital cuts off the word, it loses the ability to change the world through traditional communication, which will be available only to the included. In turn, it will provide the excluded with simple forms of communication: *And, indeed, what will be supplied to the excluded, what will make up that limited code, if not what is already becoming visible: sounds, images, colours. Nothing of that traditional code that was based on the word, on analysis and common language* – Bonanno wrote. Consequently, fewer and fewer people will read anarchist books and statements because they will not understand them. In contrast, images and sounds reach people's irrational feelings. So the anarchist movement should use images and sound to organize riots based on irrational reasons and then turn them into insurrections. Bonanno urged anarchists: *Now that the owners and dispensers of the capacity to rationalise have cut communication, we cannot construct an alternative. That would be identical to many illusions of the past. We can simply use the same instruments (images, sounds, etc.) in such a way as to transmit concepts capable of contributing to turning situations of riot into insurrection. This is work that we can do, that we must begin today. This is the way we intend insurrection.*²⁶

However, the aim of the insurrection should not only be to attack the world of the included, but also the linguistic mechanism that cuts off one from the other. Bonanno analysed that in the past the proletariat rebelled against the capitalists for material reasons, while in the future the anarchists will rebel against the included in the name of the pointlessness of life of the excluded, who have material goods but communicate in their own language, different from the language of the included. Therefore, the methods of reaching the excluded cannot be based on material arguments and the old language of propaganda.²⁷

Bonanno's concept is a project for an alternative narrative using old means and tools that were considered double-edged weapons by contemporary anarchists.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary European anarchists defined the idea of freedom in opposition to the concept of freedom inherent in liberal democracy and consumerism. The consumerism limits freedom. Only the possibility of buying material goods is a manifestation of freedom. Anarchists criticized contemporary states and democracies and the narrative about them. They are right that freedom is an idea that has undergone processes of economization. It is converted into material values. They redefined democracy, criticized European integration and militarism, as well as the spread of economic patterns characteristic of neoliberalism and materialistic and consumerist attitudes in contemporary societies.

Anarchism created its own narrative about the Western world, alternative to the dominant one. Its essence was to oppose the dominant narrative and to create a new

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

storyline that bound together ideas about the world as it should be. What constituted the recurrent theme in the anarchists' narrative of the new imagined world was the idea of freedom. Perhaps that is why anarchists were paradoxically – to use the words of Marquis de Sade – people enslaved to freedom.²⁸

Anarchism is a political thought that has certain utopian predilection. According to anarchists, the state is the enemy because it limits people's freedom. Nevertheless, recent political history proves that the state is indispensable in the struggle for freedom. Anarchists believe that when the state is destroyed, libertarian communities will arise spontaneously and they will be peaceful. However, this is only their faith.

Anarchism is a political thought that contains many pitfalls and understatements. This applies to criticism of the state, democracy and other aspects of the present day. This also applies to the concept of methods of changing reality and the vision of the future. The main disadvantage of the anarchist concept is that anarchism is based on absolutized values, which makes compromise, pluralism and the coexistence of multiple views impossible. This also applies to other radical currents of political thought. Nevertheless, anarchist values can contribute to the reform of modern democracies.

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