

# Anarchist Identity

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February 26, 2018

In considering oneself an anarchist, I have never understood this as an identity. For me, collective identities always tend to constrict us in sealed compartments, in closed, quantifiable, easily identifiable and assimilable categories. I respect all of them, as long as they do not configure themselves in opposition to other identities that are considered to be inferior. Yet in my opinion, the identity that truly belongs and defines us is the individual one, that which we develop even if we had been raised in the dark and on a desert island. It is true that identity is shaped by the environment, sometimes absorbing it and sometimes repelling it (and often a little of each), but I am interested in knowing how much of what we are survives in contact with the environment. I have always thought, certainly erroneously in the opinion of philosophers and sociologists, that what we really are is what remains after this contact with the environment. What the environment adds to us is our social identity; what the environment can not change, what resists its contact, that is what we are. Of course for many this is individualistic romanticism, but it is not my intention to philosophise. Suffice it to say that for me what defines a person is their individual identity, above the cultural, ethnic, generic, etc., identities, that have been imposed or that one has had to choose, from a limited number of options. Sometimes these identities, such as political identities, are not neutral, and significantly mark how the person is (for example, an authoritarian political identity), others are charged with serial privileges (such as the male generic identity) and we must declare ourselves against or in favor of them, and this also defines us as individuals. But in general, when we are simply limited to being something circumstantial, something that we have not chosen, that others chose in our cradle for us (national or religious identities), then all of them can be equally lethal. I have said before and it always sounds just as hard, but I like

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<sup>1</sup> Yo veo mamíferos.

Mamíferos con nombres extrañísimos.

Han olvidado que son mamíferos

y se creen obispos, fontaneros,

lecheros, diputados. ¿Diputados?

I see mammals

Mammals with the strangest of names.

They have forgotten that they are mammals

and believe themselves to be bishops, plumbers,

milkmen, political representatives. Representatives?

“Yo veo mamíferos” (Jesús Lizano, *Novios, mamíferos y caballitos*, 2005).

to insist: all cultures are the same, because they can all be equally bad. In short, group identities do not help me to define people, their individual identity does. For what remains, I do as Jesús Lizano did and “I see mammals” only.<sup>1</sup>

For me to be an anarchist is a sensitivity, a way of understanding life and social relations that involves a real practice and a proposal of an alternative life to that which exists. It is a sensitivity that existed before it was given this name and that will exist after it has been forgotten. Anarchist manifestations precede the label, they predate the Greek coining of the word<sup>2</sup> and a Frenchman calling himself this in a provocative gesture.<sup>3</sup> The name of anarchist is assumed because it gathers together all that this sensitivity implies, but throughout history there have been many and varied nouns that have tried to define the same thing. The one that corresponds to the contemporary age is this one, there is no more. It is possible that now, in not linking it to an ideological or scientific concept, someone enters the door, asks for my anarchist card to tear it up in my face. But what I say is nothing new or original and many before me have so understood anarchy and anarchism. For Malatesta: “Anarchism is an individual and social way of life to be carried out for the greatest good of all, and not a system, nor a science, nor a philosophy”.<sup>4</sup> Rocker explained the matter further:

I am an anarchist, not because I believe in a future millennium where the social, material and cultural conditions will be absolutely perfect and will not need any further improvement. This is impossible, since the human being her/himself is not perfect and therefore can not engender anything absolutely perfect. But I believe in a constant process of improvement, that never ends and can only prosper in the best way under the most free possibilities of social life imaginable. The fight against all tutelage, against all dogma, whether it is a tutelage of institutions or ideas, is for me the essential content of libertarian socialism. The freest idea is exposed also to this danger, when it becomes dogma and is no longer open to any capacity for inner development. [...] Anarchism is not a closed system of ideas, but an interpretation of thought that is in constant circulation, that can not be oppressed in a fixed framework, if one does not want to renounce it.<sup>5</sup>

Anarchism has been for many, who have been able to explain it better than me, an anti-absolute, a special and concrete sensitivity to real problems, that has demanded in turn a specific way of confronting them: practical anti-authoritarianism. It is logical that if this is anarchism, then the anarchist, rather than being tied to preconceived and uniform identities, should correspond to the above.

It is true that anarchism does arise as an identity problem on many occasions. I have already had the occasion to comment on this in several texts. There are those who need to assume a prefabricated identity that they believe will give them prestige among a more or less broad group of affinities. Thus, truly ridiculous phenotypes are produced: the anti-authoritarian who defends

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<sup>2</sup> One of the first written records of the term is offered by Aeschylus in *The Seven against Thebes* (467 BC) where he puts into Antigone's: “I am not ashamed to act in defiant in opposition to the governors of the city.”

<sup>3</sup> Pierre-Joseph Proudhon seems to have been the first to have so defined himself, in his work, *What is property?* (1840).

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Carlos Díaz in the prologue to *La Moral Anarquista* by Kropotkin, 1978 edition.

<sup>5</sup> R. Rocker, “¿Por qué soy anarquista?” (*El Pensamiento de Rudolf Rocker*, anthology compiled by Diego Abad de

with fanaticism the intellectual authority of this or that master; the iconoclast who keeps his libertarian relic, in the form of a flag or symbol, next to the heart; the heretic that heads the “congregation of the doctrine for the faith” in pursuit of the libertarian dogma. Aberrations of this kind are everywhere: anti-capitalist speculators, misogynist feminist allies, believing atheists and ignorant intellectuals. There are also anarchists who are anarchists in an identitarian way, but for me, with all due respect, this is a very poor way of being an anarchist, just as considering oneself an Aryan is a very poor way of being a human.

Far from any aporias, I believe that the anarchist sensibility is of vital importance when it comes to managing our own lives and social conflicts and social inequalities. A life without hierarchies and where our survival is guaranteed by relationships of mutual aid is more necessary than ever. Although most anarchists can agree on this, some comrades have raised a debate that could be summarized as follows: should this sensitivity continue to receive the name of “anarchist”? Although the question seems merely formal and not substantive, the reality is that the implications, by their motivations and consequences, go beyond any nominal issue.

Let’s start by clarifying that this debate is not new. Ricardo Flores Magón already proposed more than a century ago: “Only the anarchists will know that we are anarchists and we will advise them not to call themselves so as not to frighten the imbeciles”.<sup>6</sup> Several voices in the early twentieth century in Spain proposed the use of the term “libertarian socialism” instead of “anarchism” to avoid the negative connotations of this latter.<sup>7</sup> And in the last decades, the very term “libertarian” has become a euphemism for anarchist, when it has not served to clarify that one is an anarchist but in a light, decaffeinated, non-flammable way. In fact, the origin of the word has nothing to do with the search for a kind and sweetened noun to define anti-authoritarianism. The word was coined by the French anarcho-communist Joseph Déjacque who thus titled his newspaper (*Le Libéraire*, 1858-1861) and who had already used it in 1857 in an open letter directed against Proudhon, in which he accused him of being “liberal and not libertarian “for his machismo”.<sup>8</sup> The term was rescued by Sébastien Faure in the face of the anti-anarchist laws (known as “perverse laws”) approved in France in 1893 that expressly prohibited anarchist propaganda and the inclusion of the word in any apologetic text. Thus he gave life in 1895 to his newspaper *Le Libéraire* and so popularised a word that had been forgotten for almost 30 years. The term was used as a synonym for an anarchist when the latter term could not be used, if the

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Santillán), 1982.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by L.L. Blaisdell, *The Desert Revolution*, 1962. In the same work, other recommendations by Magón are cited that insist on the same approach: “Everything is reduced to a mere question of tactics. If from the beginning we call ourselves anarchists, very few will listen to us. [...] In order not to have everyone against us, we will continue the same tactic that has given us such good results. We will continue calling ourselves liberals during the revolution, but in reality we will continue spreading anarchy and executing anarchic acts.”

<sup>7</sup> “Tarrida, speaking in French with me, used the terms: anarchy without qualification and pure and simple anarchy; in 1908, in the reprinting of his essay, he proposed, following Ferrer (in 1906 or 1907), to renounce the word anarchy, which the public interprets too negatively, and to speak of libertarian socialism.” (M. Nettelau, *La anarquía a través de los tiempos*, 1933).

<sup>8</sup> “Half-hearted anarchist, liberal and not LIBERTARIAN, you demand free exchange for cotton and other trifles and advocate systems of protection for man against women in the circulation of human passions; he cries out against the high barons of capital and wants to rebuild the high barony of man over the vassal woman; philosopher with glasses, sees man through the magnifying glass and the woman by the contrary; thinker affected by myopia, he can not distinguish more than what one eye can see in the present or in the past, and can not discover anything of what is above or in the distance, the prospect of the future: you are a cripple!” (J. Déjacque, *De l’être-humain mâle et femelle*, carta de mayo de 1857).

legal consequences were to be avoided. However, it did not necessarily signify an adjustment in commitment or self-affirmation. It is with the passing of the years, with social expressions and persons that did not declare themselves to be anarchists, but still opposed to authoritarianism, that the term begins to be so defined. And it is with the passing of the years, when those who are not comfortable with a name that they take as aggressive or unattractive, that some begin to use the term “libertarian”.

This attitude has sought to justify itself on the grounds of the bad press of the word “anarchist”, given to it especially after the wave of violent attacks and assassinations of the 1890s. It is true that the word has been tinged with negative connotations, but this arose long before the “propagandists by the deed” abruptly broke onto the stage of history. During the French Revolution, the term *anarchiste* was used in a pejorative way to accuse radical political opponents, supporters of the “equalisation of fortunes” and the most active *sans-culottes*.<sup>9</sup> It would be painstaking and unnecessary to reproduce all the fragments of the history of philosophy in which the term anarchy or anarchist, from Plato<sup>10</sup> to Bentham<sup>11</sup>, has been anathematised. Even the first anarchist classics, from Godwin<sup>12</sup> to Proudhon<sup>13</sup> himself (who used the word indistinctly), were affected and used the term negatively. In conclusion, the name was not originally cursed for what the anarchists who employed it did or did not do; there has always been a fear of the term and this can not but follow, in a world organised under order and command, its etymological meaning: absence of leaders. I do not need to dwell on this because anarchists have for centuries tried to explain the paradox of linking anarchy and chaos, authority and order. The fear of horizontalism, autonomy, the deregulation of everyday life, the abolition of private property without subterfuge, is inherent to a world whose functioning is based on some being above and others below. It is thereby logical that any attempt to alter this state of affairs be considered a threat. In fact, in all of the examples I have just mentioned, from Plato to Bentham and from these to the most conservative factions of the French Revolution, the criticism of anarchy and its supposed propagators is not based so much on the fear of absolute freedom as on in the fear of egalitarianism that entails the absence of formal authority. For those cited, anarchy would suppose an inadmissible seismic equalising that would undermine the social hierarchy, put an end to the “natural” superiority of some individuals over others and lead us to chaos. The anarchist, obviously, could not be more unattractive.

The word anarchist, therefore, must be logically and unfailingly negative in a society where the powerful have a monopoly on discourse, where the taboo of authority is rarely publicly questioned, where everything keeps turning because neither the privileges of some nor the duties

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<sup>9</sup> See: P. Kropotkin, *La Gran Revolución (1789-1793)*, 1909.

<sup>10</sup> In the *Republic*, Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates: “[Among the defects of a young man are] pride, anarchy, debauchery and shamelessness [...]. Ah, dear, in such conditions anarchy will penetrate into the families and it will end up even infusing itself in the beasts. The custom is born in the father that his children are his peers, and to fear the children, and the children acquire the habit of being similar to the father, to the point that they neither respect nor fear their parents to attest to their their condition of free men. This is how the foreigner and the citizen are equated, and the citizen and the foreigner; and the same happens with the slave.”

<sup>11</sup> J. Bentham, *Anarchist fallacies*, 1796. This is a libel against the Declaration of the rights of Man and the Citizen approved during the French Revolution. The title says everything.

<sup>12</sup> “The nature of anarchy has not been sufficiently understood. It is certainly a great calamity, but it is less horrible than despotism.” (W. Godwin, *Investigación sobre la justicia política*, 1793).

<sup>13</sup> “In the current state of society, commerce, delivered over to the most complete anarchy, without direction, without facts, without a point of view and without principle, is essentially speculative.” (Proudhon, *De la capacidad política de la clase obrera*, 1865).

of others are changed. What the anarchists have done with that name can help more or less to give ammunition to the enemy, but in no way conditions the connotations of the word. Starting from this, we have to understand that when the first people who consciously went by this name arise, that they know perfectly well what they are doing. They are not taking a vague word that will be stained with use; they are taking an insult, a pejorative epithet, a political disqualification, and they are claiming it. It is an act of provocation, of giving prestige to the tainted, of turning against the established. And provocation, conscious and strategic, is still necessary. This is what most of the repressed and marginalised collectives and people have done when they have turned their accusations against their accusers: black, whore, queer, pariah, have been darts that the oppressed have picked up from the ground to return to their accusers. And the occasions have not been few when they have hit the target of wounded pride.

Leaving behind this historical digression, which I hope has been of some use, we are going to delve into what interests me above all in most issues: its practical dimension. Being an anarchist, as a fetishistic, sectarian identity, as a masturbatory activity, is a hindrance. The anarchism of these anarchists is one I have always criticised: one that lectures to the supposedly illiterate masses, in which the anarchist believes that the absolute truth was revealed to her/him by some dusty book, one that imagines that s/he can give lessons of moral superiority, one which thinks that s/he can not learn anything from people who walk and who are without a definite ideology, the anarchist who does not work because moving stains and reality pushes to contradictions. But the anarchist sensibility, the way of defining an anarchist by what s/he feels, lives, proposes and, above all, does, should s/he stop bearing that name? The argument in favor of abandoning the term goes on to say that it is a very unpopular name, that it creates a distinction between the anarchist and the rest of the people, that it is easier to introduce our practices in social struggles if we leave it in our pocket and that it is in itself a worn, obsolete designation. I do not agree, I have never agreed, with any of these arguments.

Firstly, I have already clarified that the unpopularity of this term comes from its own meaning and from the ability of the powerful to exercise semantic hegemony over a word that is a challenge for them in itself, especially if it were to materialise as a majority option. But regardless of this, we must start from something that is as terrible as it is true: not everything popular is correct. It is one thing to focus the message in a way that resonates with people, to find the best way to express and present it, to stop believing that everything we propose is infallible, that it is the people who have to convert to our creed, and to begin for once to be aware that it is our proposal that has to give an effective response to the most immediate needs of the people. And it is a very different thing altogether to think that our discourse must follow the strategy of demagoguery and adapt to what is generally accepted. Our discourse must be realistic, verifiable in the facts, but that does not imply that it is not provocative, that it must necessarily be comfortable and that it must be accepted without breaking some initial resistance. To think otherwise is to open the door to Machiavellianism, to lack of integrity, to say what people want to hear even if it is not what they need to hear. Letting ourselves be carried away by this raises a dangerous antecedent: why not take on a racist discourse in order to introduce ourselves to those working class neighborhoods where propaganda against immigration has taken hold? Why not accept a macho argument if we want to create a union in a workplace where you breathe testosterone? Why not support animal abuse in exchange for befriending kids who like dogfighting? Why not forget to question private property and capitalism to reach the crowds that flood shopping centers and whose leisure is consumption? These are rhetorical questions, but they exemplify very

well the danger of lowering the intensity of discourse in pursuit of marketing. The end never justifies the means. To let ourselves be dragged in the opposite direction will turn us into some kind of great publicity experts in marketing, but we will be useless as agents of social transformation. When the smoke dissipates, we will not have anything to offer because we will have given up everything to be popular.

Martin Luther King stated the matter very well when he said:

On some positions cowardice asks the question, is it safe? Expediency asks the question, is it politic? Vanity asks the question, is it popular? But conscience asks the question, is it right? And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular but he must take it because conscience tells him it is right.<sup>14</sup>

There are times when it is necessary to do the right thing even if initially it is not popular. Feminism, for example, has been a movement, a struggle and very unpopular, for many years. In fact, it continues to be in many significant environments, despite the efforts of women to not give up space or conquests. Should feminists give themselves another more popular, more acceptable name, so that men do not feel their privileges to be threatened or their male pride offended? No. What they do is quite the opposite: the more uncomfortable the name, the more forcefully they claim it, they dispute the hegemony of meanings of those who control the language and do not allow others to decide how they should be called. Thanks to this vindication, there are many women who come to approach a name that does not need to adapt to susceptible sensibilities and does not renounce being what it is. It is still ceaselessly repeated that to be a feminist is as bad as to be a *machista*, that they are extremes that touch each other, that there is no need to be one or the other. If feminists were to renounce the name, they would lose a battle that goes beyond any formal consideration, they would justify those who denigrate them and hand over to their opponents, exclusive control over the narrative. The same applies to anarchists or any other demonised group and/or demand.

On the other hand, there is the issue of honesty. I remember the beginning of 15M [the 15 of May movement of 2011] in Las Palmas of the Gran Canaria. Initially we were four anarchists who erupted into a quiet camp with leaflets that cried out against the elections or the possibility that parties demobilise the movement. The poor university students who then had the leading voice did not have much of an idea of what anarchism was, and those who knew of it, did not have the most favourable views regarding it. On the first day, an assembly was held to throw us out. Today I remember it with a big smile. That experience was enough to stir things up, people with more political experience or with more empathy towards the persecuted defended us, our adversaries would rethink their supposed pluralism and their democratic convictions and the majority would ask “what the fuck is this anarchy about?” In the end, the results were surprising: many people stopped judging us by their preconceived ideas and began to judge us by our actions; a few days later, anarchists began to emerge from hiding, everyone was or had been an anarchist but nobody dared to say it until we started the commotion; unpoliticised people began to take an interest in our ideas, to debate and to organise; many declared themselves anarchists without being previously (a group of 4 isolated anarchists became a group of 20, not counting supporters, with the ability to call demonstrations on their own); in a public square,

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<sup>14</sup> M.L. King, A proper sense of priorities, speech given on the 6th of February of 1968.

anarchism was spoken of, as perhaps it had not been done in the Gran Canaria since the 1930s of the last century; black flags began to be an identifiable symbol for people (to think that the majority could speak of “mourning for democracy” [this is quite true], that began to appear on posters and statements, as a call to attract libertarians); the anarchists gave workshops or were involved in the commissions and in the resolution of conflicts; there were well-attended assemblies in which, without proposing it and to my surprise, the libertarians were the majority; and so, in a few months, the FAGC was born. There was another important factor: the anarchists never hid the fact that they were anarchists, and rightly or wrongly (I still think it was correct), we decided not to interfere in the assembly decisions collectively (there were no previous agreements on any common position in the voting) so as to preserve the autonomy of the movement. Other groups, on the contrary, especially those fishing politically, tried to manipulate the assemblies quite clearly, vetoing proposals and votes, or promoting votes in series, with strategic compulsive applause. In the end people could perfectly identify if the Humanist Party, DRY [*Democracia Real Ya!*], or whatever, was behind a proposal. The most curious thing is that many of the members of the different collectives or political parties did not openly identify as such, they mobilised under collective slogans, but without making explicit their links or affiliations. This generated some suspicion and animosity among many of the assembled. Is that the tactic that anarchism should follow, that of parachuting and infiltrating? I’ve always thought not. We do not have to be naive. When we declared ourselves to be anarchists, the people from political parties, those who were there to make personal gains, aspiring journalists, those who were tied to institutions or those who sought to turn 15M into a party, they never stopped attacking us and trying to block or even sabotage any initiative launched by the anarchists. People can be influenced and manipulated, but not everyone and not all of the time. If the boycott of political parties could work when demonstrations without flags were called, and when they appeared, they were booed or taken down, these same people who protested were asking us for advice on what to do in case of arrest and celebrated with us when we blocked evictions with human walls, and when we solved the internal problems of coexistence in the encampment without resorting to the police, or when we resisted with our bodies the eviction of the Plaza de San Telmo. Finally, these same people, regardless of the fear that politicians tried to instill against us, approved by majority, without any orientation other than common sense, the proposal for the organisation of 15M that was based on the libertarian principles, laid out by a libertarian.<sup>15</sup> Discovering that the anarchists could not only stir things up, but also build, propose and reason, opened the eyes of many people, regardless of the weight of violent legends and the decades of television news, which had shaped their judgments. Based on close contact with us, they stopped evaluating us by what they had heard and began to value us for our activity.

Is it better to save all this and not have to break down initial prejudices? I do not think so. The more we hide that we are anarchists, the more those prejudices will fester. People are not stupid and as soon as they begin to link our proposals with certain ideological currents they will begin to define us and may feel cheated. The contact will have already brought down the prejudice, but not necessarily the suspicion before a group of people who need to watch out for, as if ashamed of it, what underlies proposals that speak of mutual aid, action without intermediaries, no leaders, staying independent of parties and institutions. On the other hand, that tension that

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<sup>15</sup> The model can still be found online: <https://laspalmas.tomalaplaza.net/2011/08/08/propuesta-para-la-organizac...>

I have described in the previous paragraph is necessary. It is important to remove the hornet's nest, that people face their fears and preconceived ideas, that they have to question what they have been taught and deconstruct what they have learned. Not every provocation is gratuitous and foolish; there are those that are well reasoned and that have strategic purposes. In any case, we deceive ourselves: the important thing is what we do, that is what will condition the opinion that people have about us, about our ideas and about how we define ourselves.

The essential thing is that anarchist practices abandon their isolated spaces and that their discourse turn its back on hyper-rhetoric. Mutual aid must be seen on the ground and in the struggle against evictions; illegality must stop being a fantasy and must be practiced on the picket lines and in the socialisation of housing; direct action should be used when organizing with neighbors, workers, the unemployed, the indigent and the persecuted. And for this, it is not necessary to stop defining oneself as anarchists; quite the opposite. People are underestimated when we take their rejection for granted. Many neighbors pass over the term, or do not know it or do not care. Those who a priori are against it, offer a magnificent opportunity to debate, to confront their beliefs with the reality of the practice, to demonstrate that we have to learn to forget what we have been taught. And maybe we get a surprise and we find ourselves with one or two voices happy to be reunited with us, that remind us of what we read about of 1936 or what happened in 1968, and who pressure us to be up to the task. The experience I have described with 15M shows that saving a name does not serve to reduce the distance with people without a specific ideology, quite the opposite. Defining one's sensitivity serves to galvanize resistances and to magnetise those who are seeking just what we are offering. I repeat that it will be our actions that define us and our anarchist ideas. If we are effective, decisive and practical, our anarchism will be useful and people will adopt the tool without the need for proselytising. If we are charlatans, incapable and abstract, our anarchism will be useless and people will despise it without caring what *Tele 5* says.

In our militant activity in housing, defining ourselves as anarchists has never been a problem for us. As I said before, most people do not know the term nor its connotations (at least in the Canary Islands, and this for many years now). People want solutions to the problems that are overwhelming them, and when those solutions are achieved with anarchist weapons, those are the weapons strapped on the waist or held between the teeth, without caring for other considerations. When your social work is efficient and offers positive results, people associate your anarchism with immediacy and realism. That is the basis of everything. When you continue working along that line, presenting yourself as an anarchist can even be an advantage. People who come to your assemblies or who contact you, first seek information on the Internet or ask their neighbors. When your speech and your achievements speak for themselves, and when in each working-class neighborhood there is someone who in turn knows someone whose cousin, sister or sister-in-law received help from your collective to stop their eviction or to get housing, the term anarchist begins to open doors for you. We have reached out to communities that were to be victims of massive eviction, where they received us worse when they thought we were coming from a political party or platform, than when they learned that we were anarchists. Neighbours who looked at us suspiciously when they thought we were from *Podemos*, have opened the doors of their houses when they discovered that we were those FAGC kids who created squat communities, that we stopped the eviction of entire buildings and that we had been arrested and tortured for it. In the end, the term anarchist can be prestigious and serve as a beautiful letter of introduction. It is only necessary that your actions be up to the task.



Then there is the excuse that the term is old and worn. What words have been more used than equality or freedom, manipulated and directed against their own defenders? Do we renounce them? Do we give them definitively up for lost and deliver them over to power? Socialism, self-management, autonomy and a long et cetera are terms that can also be accused of being anachronistic and outdated. Should we reactualise them with new practices or should we allow our enemies to appropriate them, to reinvent them in twisted ways, or to cast them into the cesspool of history? On the other hand, anarchism is hardly exhausted when its practices are more necessary than ever in neighborhoods and when they take on living forms every time a human community decides to rebel and chooses the libertarian model to organize informally. Perhaps this is the most alarming: after a last decade of political discredit, of disbelief in political parties, we now debate whether to abandon the word anarchist, when perhaps there has been no better moment to exploit it. We allow confidence in the institutions to be rebuilt with recycled political parties, we let patriotism, especially the Spanish one, re-identify the people with the State and all this while we renounce our discourse, beginning with the name. To renounce the term means to give it up so that others may say what it is and what it is not, without any resistance on our part. If you do not vindicate your anarchism nor define it, for fear of being unpopular or misunderstood, others will define it, and define you, at their convenience. And that empty space will be occupied by power, always willing to extend its tentacles into vacant spaces. And if power does not do it, the opportunists will do it. In the Gran Canaria, we once again verified the need to define ourselves as anarchists, without subterfuge or euphemisms, just when we began to intervene on the housing front. At first, out of modesty with regards to our own role, we did not claim as our own the evictions that we stopped or the homes we expropriated. We talked about assemblies and of the people in movement, which was true and very honest on our part, but of the activity of the anarchists, who had prepared and organised the action, we said nothing. It was in this way, due to our abandonment and inhibition, that platforms that had not been in the pickets claimed in the media to have paralysed the evictions of people that they did not know or whom they had refused to help (because they were rent cases, squatters or for personal reasons). This is how we arrived at proposing squatting as if following the model of subcontracting or outsourcing, with us doing the dirty work and running all the risks, while other groups publicly claimed the action and wore the medals. We therefore came to the conclusion that if we did not publicly claim our work as anarchists, it would be others who would do it in our place. And it was not a question of ego or primogeniture, of name and labels; it was a matter of substance. If we were silent, the same work that had been done by mobilising inhabitants of neighbourhoods, organised through assemblies in which migrants, indigents and squatters participated, at the margins of any institution of power, without subsidies, without any kind of institutional assistance, in opposition to the law and private property, based on relations of mutual aid and solidarity from below, would be claimed by people who were no-name representatives of certain political parties, who treated the evicted as “users” who could be charged for the help given, who defended the laws and the rule of law, who fraternised with the police and colluded with institutions of authority and who did not intend to question the foundations of the capitalist world. The same act, to stop an eviction or help in a relocation, could be claimed on the basis of very different premises and values, denouncing or defending totally opposed interests, either assuming a challenge to the System, or concerned to merely repair its excesses. Behind the name, there was much more than the name.

In conclusion, every time we renounce being what we are, hiding it openly, so as not to scandalise, to frighten, to generate alarm, we limit ourselves a little, retreating into the Procrustean

bed of convenience, lowering the discourse, moderating the demands, sweetening the content, softening the program. Each time we cede more and more ground, handing over more and more space, until we have nothing left. And so it happens, until one day you look back and discover the sea behind you. What matters are the facts, these are the foundations of the most humble revolutionary shantytown. But the facts need to be represented and vindicated, because otherwise, as I have already explained, they will be absorbed by the enemy. And to represent them, hollow names or straw letters are not enough; we need clear concepts, forceful ideas, sharp terms that cut like axes. What needs to be done is to think them through, otherwise, in the end, for fear, complexes, a bad sense of strategy, we will have handed over the narrative, the meaning, the verb and the word ... And we are not strong enough to afford to give anything up.

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Ruymán Rodríguez  
Anarchist Identity  
February 26, 2018

Retrieved on September 30 from  
<http://autonomies.org/2018/09/the-call-of-anarchism-an-identity-made-in-practice/>  
Translated by <http://autonomies.org> | Translator's note: "I have left all references as they appear  
in the original essay, translating only when necessary"

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