

“[It is not] ‘anti-national’ to be deeply suspicious of all nationalism, to be anti-nationalism. Nationalism of one kind or another was the cause of most of the genocide of the 20th century. Flags are bits of coloured cloth that governments use first to shrink-wrap people’s minds and then as ceremonial shrouds to bury the dead.”—*Arundhati Roy*

Decolonizing Anarchism

An Antiauthoritarian History of India’s Liberation Struggle

By Maia Ramnath

Training an antiauthoritarian lens on the history of South Asian struggles against colonialism and neo-colonialism, *Decolonizing Anarchism* highlights lesser-known dissidents as well as neglected aspects of iconic figures. This reveals an alternate narrative of decolonization, in which achieving a nation-state is not the horizon of freedom. Debates central to the anarchist tradition—on rationalism, industrial development, and modernity—also shaped the dynamics of South Asian anticolonial resistance, with the additional dilemma of whether these were to be seen as quintessentially alien. Without imposing the specific language and history of Western anarchism, key principles nevertheless appear in different guises, with tendencies ranging from the progressive modernism of the antiauthoritarian Left to romantic antimodernism and insurrectionary nihilism. This facilitates not only a reinterpretation of the history of anticolonialism in India but also insight into the meaning of anarchism itself.

Anarchists and antiauthoritarians in colonized regions have been among the most progressive (though seldom dominant) elements in their own countries’ anticolonial resistance movements from Mexico to China. “Western” anarchists have acted on their principles by standing in solidarity with national liberation struggles in places such as nineteenth-century Poland to twenty-first-century Palestine. While it’s natural that there should be an affinity based on the principles of self-determination, autonomy, and self-governance (plus anticapitalist and anti-imperialist) rebellion, many anarchists wrestle with the contradictions of supporting a nationalist state-building project.

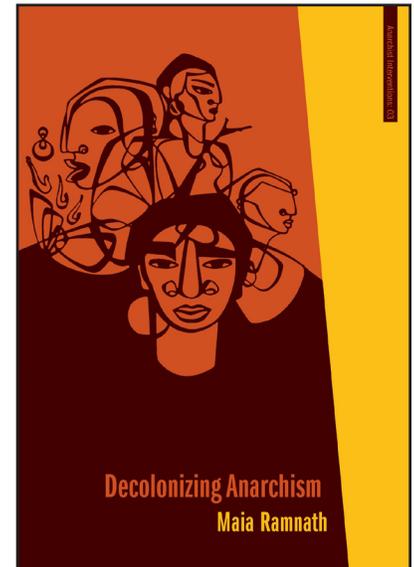
But, Ramnath argues, anticolonialism is not reducible to nationalism; it has also manifested in far more comprehensive visions of emancipatory transformation. In fact, an anarchist vision of alternate society closely echoes the concept of total decolonization on the political, economic, social, cultural, and psychological planes. Decolonization in the global South is also intrinsically linked to racial and economic justice in the global North. This emphasis illuminates the substantive contribution of an “anarchist people of color” politics to anarchist analysis and strategy—namely, foregrounding colonialism as a primary structure of oppression, as a nexus of the logics of state, capital, and race, while combating it in nonnationalist, antiauthoritarian ways.

Maia Ramnath is a board member of the Institute for Anarchist Studies, a steering committee member of Historians Against War, and active with Adalah-NY and South Asia Solidarity Initiative in NYC. She currently teaches global history in the Interdisciplinary Humanities and Social Thought program at NYU. As a dancer, aerialist and choreographer, she is also co-founder/director of the Moving Company, a mixed media performance collective.

The Anarchist Interventions Series—a collaborative project between the IAS and AK Press—strives to contribute to the development of relevant, vital anarchist theory and analysis by intervening in contemporary discussions. Works in this series look at twenty-first-century social conditions—including social structures and oppression, their historical trajectories, and new forms of domination, to name a few—as well as reveal opportunities for different tomorrows premised on horizontal, egalitarian forms of self-organization.

Decolonizing Anarchism is the third title in the AK Press Anarchist Interventions Series, co-published with the Institute for Anarchist Studies.

Maia Ramnath will be touring to promote *Decolonizing Anarchism* at bookstores and universities, with stops in New York City, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, DC, LA, Santa Cruz, San Francisco, and Portland!



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