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# THE FEDERATIVE PRINCIPLE: AN ALTERNATIVE POLITICAL-SPATIAL PROJECT OF THE MODERN STATE'S LOGIC<sup>1</sup>

O PRINCÍPIO FEDERATIVO: UM PROJETO POLÍTICO-ESPACIAL  
ALTERNATIVO À LÓGICA DO ESTADO MODERNO

EL PRINCIPIO FEDERATIVO: UM PROYECTO POLÍTICO-ESPACIAL  
ALTERNATIVO A LA LÓGICA DEL ESTADO MODERNO

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## Abstract

The Federative Principle is inscribed in the tradition of libertarian thought over the last two centuries as an alternative political-spatial project to the centralist logic of the modern State. Such project was the object of reflection by several authors and geographers. This paper features this tradition under a geographical approach, highlighting the Federalism's spatiality and identifying what the selected authors understood by nation, region, borders, and important ideas to think about the organization of human space. First I do a background for the systematization of this Principle; after I present the Federalism for Proudhon and Bakunin; then the geographers Reclus and Kropotkin are analyzed; for the twentieth century I approach ideas from Landauer, Rocker, and Bookchin. I end the paper offering some ideas to think of Federalism nowadays.

Keywords: Federalism, Libertarian Thought, Modern State.

## Resumo

O Princípio Federativo se inscreve na tradição do pensamento libertário ao longo dos últimos dois séculos como projeto político-espacial alternativo à lógica centralista do Estado moderno. Tal projeto foi objeto de reflexão por parte de diversos autores, inclusive geógrafos. O que este artigo traz é um resgate desta tradição sob um olhar geográfico, colocando à luz a espacialidade do Federalismo e identificando o que os autores selecionados entenderam por nação, região e fronteira, ideias importantes para se pensar a organização do espaço humano de modo geral. Primeiramente, mencionam-se antecedentes da sistematização deste Princípio; após, apresenta-se o Federalismo de Proudhon e Bakunin; em seguida, os geógrafos Reclus e Kropotkin são analisados; para o século XX, são abordados Landauer, Rocker e Bookchin. Finalizo colocando algumas ideias para se pensar o Federalismo hoje.

Palavras-chave: Federalismo, Pensamento Libertário, Estado Moderno.

## Resumen

El Principio Federativo se inscribe en la tradición del pensamiento libertario en los últimos dos siglos como proyecto político-espacial alternativo a la lógica centralista del Estado moderno. Tal proyecto fue objeto de reflexión por parte de diversos autores, incluyo geógrafos. Este artículo hace un rescate de esta tradición por una mirada geográfica, destacando la espacialidad del Federalismo e identificando lo que los autores seleccionados entendieron por nación, región y frontera, ideas importantes para pensar la organización del espacio humano de modo general. Primero menciono antecedentes de la sistematización de lo Principio; después presento el Federalismo de Proudhon y Bakunin; luego, los geógrafos Reclus y Kropotkin son analizados; para el siglo XX son abordados Landauer, Rocker y Bookchin. Finalizo el artículo poniendo algunas ideas para pensar el Federalismo hoy.

Palabras clave: Federalismo, Pensamiento Libertario, Estado Moderno.

## Introduction

To think of the Federative Principle, or Federalism is to realize at the same time an exercise of geographical imagination and a surrender of the human experience of resistance to the model of centralistic spatial organization of the modern territorial State. Federalism is embedded in the tradition of libertarian thought and praxis<sup>2</sup> and constitutes an important political-spatial project that permanently lays emphasis on contemporary heteronomous institutions, mostly the state. What this article brings are elements contributing to the field of Political Geography, realizing a revival of this tradition under a geographical perspective, highlighting the spatiality of Federalism, and identifying what the selected authors understood by nation, region, and frontier. These ideas are important to think about in the organization of human space in general, particularly in the free federation of territories. Firstly, an overview is given including a history of the systematization of this Principle. After, Federalism according to Proudhon and Bakunin is presented. Then the geographers Reclus and Kropotkin are analyzed. For the twentieth century, the authors Landauer, Rocker, and Bookchin are addressed. In conclusion, some ideas are put forward to think about Federalism today.

## Overview and background of Federalism

Synthetically, Federalism can be understood as the spatial projection of libertarian thought and praxis. From the point of view of Geography, it is permissible to say that Federalism embodies an alternative logic in geopolitics to that of the modern state. Diverse thinkers, both within and outside the academy, contributed to the reflections and development of this political-spatial project, based on the social struggles and spatial insurgent practices of real men and women. The political organizations alternative to that of the state in general (not just capitalist) in the wake of the constitution of a society with greater social justice and quality of life, propitiating a socio-spatial<sup>3</sup> development, and in search of a basically autonomous society, were and continue to be the goals of those who have committed themselves to the realization, albeit partially, of Libertarian Federalism.

A hasty reading of the historical (political) geography of social struggles embedded in a conservative and/or biased look could claim the impossibility of applying the principles that will be presented and analyzed in this article; however, it should be noted that the seminal federalist writings of classical anarchists such as Bakunin and Kropotkin are in part inspired by the reality of European cities in the so-called low Middle Ages, and in experiences of diverse spatial and temporal scales such principles became spatial practices<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, it is understood that Libertarian Federalism has a tradition of thought and action that refers approximately to the last two hundred years.

With the aid of a geographical view, it is possible to understand that some authors refer to what in our field of study is understood as a region. In most writings, with important exceptions, the regions would be clusters of territorial units that would correspond to a smaller scale than that of a nation or country. This is very similar to the conventional meaning of region as an intermediate scale between local and national. Nationalism (and nation) was already approached more profoundly and in a controversial way among libertarians. Biological concepts (nations are human nature, so every human society has established itself threw nations), naturalizing or uncritical postures (a nation is something given, what remains is to reflect about what to do with it), extremely critical positions (nation and nationalism are intrinsically conservative and reactionary, it is, therefore, necessary to counter such ideas), and somewhat more elaborate visions (the nation is different from the state and is a legitimate component of societies, nationalism already refers to the defense of the state and, therefore it is something to be fought) can all be found within the ideas of the libertarians.

Grauer (1994) distinguishes three positions of the classical anarchists regarding the nation and nationalism: absolute rejection (Proudhon and Bakunin); gradual importance in the face of certain conjunctures, since the maintenance of a "nation-state" would be interesting to guarantee the non-subjugation of one people by another which is common in wars (Kropotkin); and the recognition of the legitimacy of the nation (not confusing it with the State) as a space of identity reference and the basis of social organization of a human group or people (in the case of the Jewish anarchists and their thoughts about kibbutzim in Palestine before

the establishment of the State of Israel) which curiously led the author to call them “anarcho-nationalists”.

The advent of the modern territorial state occurred unevenly and with enormous resistance in its “cradle”, the European continent. At the end of the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance period, Europe had at least two spatial patterns (Bookchin, 1995): the best known, the fiefdoms, and another known but not so prominent is that of freely associated cities<sup>5</sup>. This second spatial pattern included a large number of commercial cities which, when united, had a non-capitalist market. In this context, populations had to identify with a “nationality”, where the notion of citizenship, long rooted in the city and its public body, was dissipated towards a large territorial entity – the “nation”. There was then a professionalization of power with the state and its institutions (Bookchin, p. 159).

Rocker (1933) goes a little further in history and states that with the fall of Rome several groups of people considered “barbarians” began to rebel against kings and other authorities. Because of this, between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, many cities had their own constitution, where their shortcomings were supplied through agreements with other cities (medieval communes). The power of sovereigns, kings, clerics, etc., was relatively limited to the non-urban medieval world.

### Federalism for the first anarchists

The first militant/thinker to declare himself (and also considered the first author) anarchist, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon [1809-1865], left several reflections and laid the foundations for the future development of Libertarian Federalism. He developed his ideas in the counter current of his era when Italy tried to unify centrally and the United States was criticized in a federalist way by him. The only interesting model would be the Swiss, which should still be supplemented. His work *Du Principe Fédératif*, from 1863<sup>6</sup> provides a synthesis of his thinking about the suppression of the state with the free federation of territories, differentiating from the proper libertarian federalism of state administrative federalism that was taught in the manuals of constitutional law<sup>7</sup> at the time.

Proudhon's idea, based on the considerations made by Aníbal D'Auria in the preface to the Argentinian edition of that work, can be considered

dialectical, but not a dialectic in the idealist Hegelian style nor in the Marxian materialist style, but a dualistic and simplifying dialectic where the synthesis is the balance between the extremes, not a product of the contradiction between pairs. The principal pair of dialects elevated by Proudhon is the Authority-Freedom: the first corresponds to the realm of family, which, when extrapolated to the larger social plane, constitutes authoritarianism to be fought against; the second would be the sphere of the social, where the State would incarnate the threat to Freedom. The problem of the hegemonic political system, philosophically speaking, for Proudhon is that the extremity of Authority provoked a breakdown of public affairs by undermining the freedom of the association of social groups, and the federative Principle would serve to balance the extremes.

For Proudhon, anarchy refers more to a plane of ideas and is related to the principle of “each one for himself”, a fact only proclaimed by the so-called individualists of Max Stirner’s verve. The Federation (or progressive confederation) would combine anarchy and democracy (complementary to Proudhon) as well as agriculture and industry (which Kropotkin years later will expand). The sphere of production is the privileged one in the Proudhonian analysis, and the territorial units thus would form the said progressive confederation: agricultural-industrial commune – a federation of communes - confederation (State) – a federation of States.

In this way, Proudhon (2008, p. 71-72) offers a kind of “step-by-step” for the federative process:

1º) Form small groups, each one sovereign, and to unite them into a Federation by agreement;

2º) In each federal state organize the government according to the law of separation of organs; separating in power whatever separable, defining everything that is definable and distributing between distinct organs or officials everything that has been separated and defined; surround the public administration with all conditions of publicity and control (transparency);

3º) Instead of absorbing, under a central authority, the federal states or provincial authorities, to reduce its attributions to the simple role of general initiative, mutual guarantee and vigilance: that its decrees can only be implemented with the assistance of the Confederate governments and its own agents, in the same way as a constitutional monarchy with any order of the king requiring a referendum from a minister to perform.

In the context of the progressive federation, nations and regions refer to aprioristic scales. Proudhon sees nation and state as complementary, the nation being something given and natural of the human social organization and the State an expression of this organization, this being the state as it is known or a confederation state of communal federations - curiously it does not abandon the term State, fitting it into his project. Nationalism, on the other hand, would act as a driving force behind the expansion of states and should be fought.

As for regions, the French thinker does not explicitly mention this term, but from the reading of his work it is understood that a region would be a grouping of federations on an intermediate scale between local and “national”, that is, not very different from which is conceived even today, at least in the common understanding of the term. In turn, the boundaries in his project would be the divisions between nations, marking the territory of sovereignty and “internal autonomy” of a confederation state. In addition, it is made clear that natural boundaries do not exist because they would be political inventions of States.

The best-known militant of classical anarchism, the Russian Mikhail Bakunin [1814-1876], bequeathed us programmatic writings, pamphlets, and letters<sup>8</sup> in which he elaborates a plan for a European federation and then, universal, inspired by and advancing in certain aspects the ideas of Proudhon. The Russian militant, quite sympathetic to the kind of federalism practiced then in Switzerland and the northern United States, sought the construction of what he called the United States of Europe. For this purpose, he proposes 13 principles for Federalism (Bakunin, 2015 [1867-1868]), similarly found in his “Catechism of a Revolutionist”, 1886.

The first principles defend that the United States of Europe would not be formed from the pre-existing states, nor with a confederation of monarchies, nor with a confederation of centralized states, even if they are called “Republic”. The fifth principle shows us what we might call a “policy of balances” in Bakuninian thought, thus revealing its spatial sensitivity:

To strive to reconstitute their respective homelands, in order to replace the old organization founded from top to bottom on violence and the principle of authority, with a new organization, based only on the interests, needs and natural attractions of the populations, and in principle only free federation of individuals in communes,

communes in the provinces, provinces in the nations and, finally, those in the United States of Europe initially, and later in the world (Bakunin, 2015, p. 22).

The sixth principle refers to the conception of borders only associated with state borders, with an absolute rejection of them, whether “natural” or not. In “Revolutionary Catechism” Bakunin reinforces the need to abolish (state) borders towards the construction of an international federation of countries: “Abolition of borders, passports, and customs.” Every citizen of a federated country must enjoy all political rights in all other countries belonging to the same federation” (Bakunin, 2015, p.163).

The seventh principle of Bakuninian Federalism shows that the nation, for the author, is a legitimate and natural cluster of people sharing a common history and culture (and space), and respect for nations is related to maintenance of the internal autonomy and, therefore, of the self-determination of a people. In addition to the recognition of the nation as a legitimate social entity, an interesting distinction was made by Bakunin between country and state in the eighth principle - the fact that a country has been part of a State does not imply an obligation to remain in that State; and that, for him, nation and country would be synonyms, but in a differentiated conception of state logic: “the nation must be nothing more than a federation of autonomous provinces” (Bakunin, 2015, p. 161).

Symptomatic of the nineteenth century under the aegis of positivism and naturalism, the naturalization of the nation by Bakunin (and also by most anarchists at the time) is an element that, in the light of the twenty-first century, must be criticized in an attempt to update the role of nations in the process of the federalization of territories.

### Federalism for “classical” geographers

The anarchist geographer Élisée Reclus [1830-1905], in the wake of the naturalist and evolutionist ideas typical of the nineteenth century (despite presenting dialectical reasoning frequently), left us with deeper reflections on the theme of nations/nationalities and frontiers, although his ideas about Federalism is far from absent in his work. For Reclus, the federation of communes would only be achieved through an improvement or harmonization of society-nature relations, with the human being adapting to the most varied conditions provided by the “natural” space.



We can say that Reclus was a thinker of universal fraternity among human beings, among people of different cultural origins<sup>9</sup>, where what we would call cultural hybridization today would be a very important element in the federative process.

Examining his masterpiece, *L'homme et la Terre*<sup>10</sup> (1905-1908), one can see the depth and sophistication, at the time, with which Reclus dealt with themes such as nations and frontiers. The homeland, for him, referred to the extrapolation of the imaginary meaning of private property, where a territory is constituted which all others around it are potential enemies. Nationalities and homelands thus pose themselves as enemies of universal fraternity by mobilizing elements of the universe of values and symbols of a people (language, feelings of belonging to places and regions, etc.), where state borders (Often disguised as “natural”) fulfill the role of separation and a zone of control (the critique of naturalized frontiers can be found in several passages of Reclus’ work). The interesting thing is to note that the French geographer already had in mind the great artificiality and the innumerable limitations of taking the map of the world and dividing it into states and state borders, a reasoning very dear to one with libertarian ideas. This brings us to the problem of the division of space into states and their state borders:

The planet is politically cut by a network of borders that divide the various parts of the Earth declared an imperial, royal, or national property, and a whole revolution of thought must be made before modifying traditional conventions (Reclus, 1906- 1909, v. 5, page 326).

By invoking the need for a revolution of thought to change the traditional conventions of separating the globe into States or Empires (or more appropriately: into heteronomous territorial structures), we identify the start of a line of reasoning that would reach the second half of the twentieth century with the libertarian Castoriadis and other authors very close to the libertarian line of thought, like Deleuze and Guattari<sup>11</sup>, although they make no mention of Reclus: the State as a heteronomous historically dated territorial structure of government of men and women uses imaginary meanings that allow the internalization/“acceptance” and “naturalization” of its existence (impact on subjectivity) without the need for clearer or more rational justifications (the State is a natural consequence of the evolution of society, all men and women must have

nationality, otherwise they will not fit in society – if not stateless but also of all those excluded from or precariously included in the hegemonic civilization model, or who do not have their citizenship active). Hence the institution of the state also occurs within the psyche<sup>12</sup>. Thus the overcoming of state logic lies not only in the simple destruction of the state (as Bakunin would say) but also in the modification of social imaginary significations in the wake of countless molecular revolutions<sup>13</sup>, and changes not only in social relations and space but also in the psyche. Not forgetting that for Reclus, evolution, and revolution go together, the latter being a moment of faster evolution.

The French geographer goes even deeper in analyzing the frontiers of the States by problematizing the securitization of the borders, a very contemporary debate, and which for him more than a hundred years ago was already the subject of reflection. Reclus relates the psyche very well to social relations and spatiality by mentioning of the “hypnotism” that frontiers cause in the agents of national security (Reclus, 1906-1909, v. 5, 332).

In addition to controlling population mobility in a highly securitized space, (state) borders are justified by the invocation of nationalism, even delimiting the “end” of one mode of social organization and the “beginning” of another. Reclus, attentive to the mobility of people in border regions, and that state divisions would not be able to stop exchanges between communities except by deprivation of liberty with the implementation of border security. (Reclus, 1906-1909, v. 5, p. 341).

In this context, Reclus envisions a tendency to extrapolate boundaries (which often change, as seen in history) and an increasingly accentuated migration, since the individuals' connections with their native group would become more fragile. Is this not a precursory reasoning of ideas that we contemporaneously associate with the phenomenon of globalization and its reflections on culture and identity?

Considering that “natural” frontiers would be conjectural inventions resulting from the constitution of states, the free cultural exchange would necessarily pass through federations of free communes. In this sense, one can affirm that, from Reclus's idea, the “legitimate” frontiers of an anti-heteronomous point of view would be those arising from the transition between one region (as lived space) and another, approaching the notion of “cultural boundaries”.

Another important anarchist geographer in the development of Libertarian Federalism is the Russian Piotr Kropotkin [1842-1921], who was responsible for spatializing and refining the accumulation of ideas about the Federative Principle at that time. *Fields, Factories, and Workshops*, whose first edition dates back to 1898<sup>14</sup>, is the work in which we can find the most profound *insights* into the spatial federalist organization. In it, Kropotkin sees two basic dimensions of the federalist project: *economic-spatial deconcentration* and *territorial decentralization*. The path to the first dimension would be achieved with a combination of agriculture and industry, on the one hand, and overcoming the separation of manual labor from intellectual labor, on the other. The establishment of free communes and multi-scale federation networks between communes would correspond to the second dimension.

In Kropotkin Federalism, the economic dimension has a significant weight. An Adept of the so-called anarcho-communism (summed up in the maxim “of each according to his possibilities, to each according to his needs”), the Russian geographer conceived as inseparable the economy of the spheres of political decision in local assemblies and in federations to make ends meet on supra local scales. Kropotkin’s spatial thinking encompasses a multiscalarity that, however, gives primacy to the local scale – the scale of production and consumption as such.

The entry Anarchism of the Encyclopedia Britannica published in 1910, written by Kropotkin, summarizes its federalist project, outlining the libertarian reflections accumulated until then and also advancing them in certain aspects. Here are some excerpts:

Periods of rapid change will follow periods of slow evolution, and one must take advantage of these periods - not to increase and broaden the powers of the state, but to reduce them, through organization, in each district or commune, local producer groups and consumers, as well as regional and possibly international federations of such groups.

[...]

Rejecting all legislation, even when originating from universal suffrage, Bakunin demanded, for each nation, each region and each commune, full autonomy, provided that this does not constitute a threat to its neighbors, and full independence for the individual, adding that it is only possible to become truly free when and to the

extent that all others are free, free federations of communes would constitute free nations (Kropotkin, 1910 apud Souza, 2017, p. 176).

The nation, for Kropotkin, as advanced in the mention of Grauer (1994, p. 3), is a legitimate grouping of people around sentiments, values, and common spaces. The author points out that Kropotkin and his followers presented a gradualist approach to the nation: nationalism and internationalism would serve two different purposes at different times in the historical development of the ideal social order. Nationalism is seen as the necessary force to rid people of outside/foreign domination. Once national independence was achieved, people could channel their resources and motivations and fight for a new world order in accordance with internationalist principles. The Russian geographer considered the role of national liberation movements in general to be a positive force in the process of the destruction of capitalist society (Grauer, 1994, p. 6) - which brings him closer to the Jewish anarchists near to the Zionist movement. Therefore, Kropotkin saw no nationalism (or, rather, a kind of nationalism) and internationalism as conflicting but complementary acts. True harmony among nations would be attained if each nation had the opportunity to develop freely, without foreign oppression. The complete development of each nation would ensure the harmonious existence of humanity (Grauer, 1994, p.17).

Kropotkin understood the region as an intermediate scale between local and national, a first and more immediate scale of association of territorial units (communes). Borders, however, are not explicitly mentioned or debated in any more profound way, only being invoked to mention the borders of states or the division between nations.

### Federalism for twentieth-century anarchists

Inspired greatly by Kropotkin's ideas, the German anarchist Gustav Landauer [1870-1919] left us a refinement of the reflections on the nation, state, and community, among other elements. A first and important contribution is the idea, beyond Kropotkin's, that the state, in its nature, is not an institution that can be destroyed by a revolution. The State is a social relation, a conditioner of social behavior; we eliminate it by building other sociabilities, valuing community life (which has always been present

in the history of humanity) until community relations are strengthened to the point of suppressing the state, as found in various writings by Landauer (2010)<sup>15</sup> and also highlighted by Buber (1949, p. 46 and 49). Landauer epistemologically distinguishes the nation-state - the state is an artificial political structure born of certain historical processes more than the fruit of the natural experience of the people; yet the nation would be close to the notion of *volk* (people), an entity of “organic” development that always exists independent of the structure of the state. Both are social constructs, but the nation distinguishes itself by encouraging the self-determination of groups of people (*volks*) and social activism while the state brings authoritarianism, slavery, and passivity (Grauer, 1994, p. 7).

In addition to the ideas of nation, state, and community, Landauer develops a third “entity”, Spirit (*Geist*), which is not present in the State, while *volk* has a “Spirit” that binds each individual to the community, a kind of communal legitimacy. *Volk*, then, is a cultural and spiritual unity, not a political or economic structure, nor a biological entity determined by fixed and unalterable blood ties (Grauer, 1994, p. 8). Clarifying the “Spirit” in Landauer, Buber (1949, p. 51) explains that *geist* is not merely a product or reflection of the material world, mere “consciousness” determined by social being and explained in terms of technical-economic relations. It is more *sui generis* of the individual in relation to the social being, which has some connections with the imaginary presented by Castoriadis<sup>16</sup>, building a bridge between libertarians of different epochs. In contrast to Bakunin, who saw the rejection of nationality as a prerequisite for universalism, Landauer viewed nationality as an essential part of existence.

A final important element is what Landauer called the regional community (see Buber, 1949, p. 49). First, for him, the community has always been present in human history. What libertarian socialism does is to detach it and place it at the head of any state. At the time when strong community relations suppress the state and nationality remains the same as the state is eliminated, the regional community becomes a fundamental geographical entity for the establishment of Federalism. The regional scale is valued for being what we might call a lived and experienced space, a space for building sociabilities, and each regional community must establish its own borders in free negotiation with other regional communities. Thus, from the singular community to the nation,

we have a federation of communities on a regional scale (between local and national).

One of the most profoundly interested writers on the subject of nationalism in the context of classical anarchism was the German Rudolf Rocker [1873-1958]. Historian, propagandist and anarcho-syndicalist, Rocker argued that the nation is not naturalizable nor necessarily a legitimate grouping as a family or a tribe - the individual is not born "national", he must have the nation internalized in the process of socialization in a certain cultural context. In his work *Nationalism and Culture*, Rocker (1933) traces the development of the idea of nation from the beginning of human history to modern times, concluding that national feelings are neither inherent nor natural. An individual is not naturally bound to the nation as it is to the family or to the tribe, he must be trained to think that he is part of a nation in a manner similar to that of a church.

National consciousness is more of an artificial construct that does not emerge from people but has to be imposed. Grauer (1994, p. 8), commenting on Rocker, emphasizes the distinction between folk and the state used by him in the analysis of nationalism and historical development, where folk is the result of external (independent) social union to the state.

By contrasting the state ("power") and culture, nothing is more incorrect for it than associating the state with the cultural progress of humanity. From the outset the State was the force that prevented the development of any form of cultural expression; thus, States do not create culture. power (state) and culture are in the end opposed and irreconcilable<sup>17</sup>. A powerful state machine is the greatest obstacle to any cultural development: where states are dying or where their power is quite limited the culture flourishes best (Rocker, 1933, p. 46).

Federalism is a necessity of social organization in its meaning through consensus, voluntary unions and the unity of goals, a unity of forces of free communities. For an authentically libertarian movement, federalism is the only form of organization possible; far from signifying the crumbling of forces and opposing unified action, it is, on the contrary, a unity of forces, but which rests on the voluntary and free action of each particular group, on the living solidarity of its community (Rocker, 2007, p. 133-134).

Regions and boundaries are not present terms in their writings since space is rarely mentioned directly. As in Bakunin, the region is between the lines, approaching the ontological principle of the differentiation of space; since borders are simply the borders of states and therefore must be destroyed.

Decades after the fall of the anarchists in the Spanish Civil War, American Murray Bookchin [1921-2006] renews and refines libertarian thought with a profound sense of spatial sensitivity, where the Federative Principle gains new contours with its proposals of libertarian municipalism<sup>18</sup> and of confederalism. Libertarian municipalism brings the political-pedagogical appreciation of the local scale as a human scale of assembly establishments in co-presence even in the large global urban centers.

The combination of institutional struggle and direct action, despite having generated heated debates in the libertarian media, as a renewal of federalist ideas by not reducing concepts such as power (something not necessarily bad), government (any association or institution related to public negotiations), and law (necessary for all social organizations, as Castoriadis believed), understanding the State as a complex instance where certain gaps of certain conjunctures can be harnessed for the purpose of gaining autonomy, taking direct action as a necessity and institutional struggle as a possibility<sup>19</sup>. Thus, libertarian praxis must deal with the contradictions of the State, taking advantage of instances to take back the socially produced wealth and municipalize the economy, giving back to the city its effectively public character of debates and collective decision-making.

Unlike the proposals of some classical anarchists, Bookchin's Federalism is primarily spatial, not sectoral, and Bookchin's spatial sensitivity is not limited to the local scale. He understands the federative process in its multiscalarity, placing a supralocal agenda beyond the municipal agenda (Bookchin, 1995, p. 244): the replacement of the state by a confederate network of municipal assemblies where all forms of social property were absorbed by a political economy in which municipalities, interacting economically and politically with one another, would solve their material problems as citizens in open assemblies (and not just as sector professionals), the municipalities therein are placed on a human scale and physically decentralized.

In addition, Bookchin (2002) envisions a territorial unit on a regional scale fundamental to its municipalism: the township. Under

the inspiration of an administrative division present in some parts of the United States, the township would be a region within other larger regions that would transcend the countryside-city conflict, with an urban space as the core of its rural production and surrounding villages, so similar to that imagined by Kropotkin. Bookchin's scalar vision is also expressed when he treats his confederal proposal as to avoid territorialisms or parochialisms through the interdependence of regions with public control.

Bookchin rarely mentions the term nation, mostly associating it with the state (nation-state) and on a (national) scale; nationalism is simply a reactionary movement (Bookchin, 2002). On the otherhand, no mention was made of frontiers in the works consulted, only quick references to the borders of the States.

### Synthesizing towards Federalism today

In order to think about spatial organization in contemporary regarding the Federative Principle, it is important to know the intellectual trajectory and legacy left by the authors and the concrete experiences throughout history. In this article, for reasons of focus, it was decided to approach writings of militant thinkers, considering the interesting availability of praxis analyzes, such as the aforementioned Samis (2011) and Rodrigues (2016), as well as Brancalone (2015) and Öcalan, (2016), that studied the cases of the Zapatistas in southern Mexico and of the Kurds in northern Syria, respectively.

As a summary of the key ideas analyzed in this article (Federalism, nation, region, and frontier), we have Table 1.



	FEDERALISM	NATION	REGION	FRONTIER
<b>PROUDHON</b>	Expression of the balance between Authority and Freedom; Agricultural-industrial federation (sphere of production). "States" are confederations of communal federations.	The nation is something given, natural in the organization of human societies. Nation and people are synonymous. Nationalism is the motor of the expansionism of the States.	Grouping of federations on an intermediate scale between local and national.	Implicit between federated "states" / confederations. There are no natural boundaries, only political boundaries.
<b>BAKUNIN</b>	Collectivism; "To each according to his work"; scale policy in the building of the United States of Europe.	The nation must be nothing more than a federation of autonomous provinces. Nationality is natural and a universal right that corresponds to the self-determination of peoples.	Not mentioned directly, one reads between the lines. Next to the ontological principle of the differentiation of space.	Rejection of the "historical right" of the state as to borders that are natural, political, strategic, etc. Suppression of borders.
<b>RECLUS</b>	Achieved with the suppression of the state order, with the harmonization of the relation of society-nature and with "progress". Free communes adjusted as much as possible to "natural" space	The nation is a legitimate grouping of identity. Nationality and nationalism justify (state) borders, making fraternity difficult among groups of people, and must be combated.	A portion of space differentiated under some criterion, close to the ontological principle of the differentiation of space.	Conjunctions of moveable human inventions (the historicity of the frontier) justified by nationalities
<b>KROPOTKIN</b>	Anarcho-communism; a combination of agriculture and industry; "From each according to their ability, to each according to his needs." Economic-spatial decentralization + territorial decentralization.	Nations can have a legitimate character and identify a people with their space; Nationalism relates to states and must be fought.	Grouping of freely federated communes on an intermediate scale between the local and the "national".	Implicitly, divisions between states or between nations.
<b>LANDAUER</b>	Free association between regional communities equal between the local community and the nation.	Nation and nationality are legitimate elements of identity in any society and may exist independent of State.	Regional community: a feeling of belonging to a community on a regional scale. The region is lived, experienced, and socialized space.	Areas between regional communities freely negotiated between the parties.

<b>ROCKER</b>	Unit of forces of free communities.	Nations are products of authoritarian socializations and should be combated, not naturalized.	Not mentioned directly, one reads between the lines. Next to the ontological principle of space differentiation (like Bakunin).	Borders of states must be destroyed.
<b>BOOKCHIN</b>	Libertarian municipalism; institutional struggle and direct action; the primacy of the local scale and situations of co-presence (assemblies spatially - and not sectorally - referenced)	The nation is similar to State. National refers to a scale. Nationalism is a reactionary movement.	Township: transcends the countryside-city conflict; a region where the urban entity is the core of its agriculture and nearby villages.	Implicitly, the borders of the States.

Table 1 - Synthesis of selected ideas of anarchism.

Source: Elaboration of the author (2017).

When we think about the contemporary, highly globalized world for the flow of capital and (some) people, various advances, updates, and corrections must be made to deal with reality and not have an anachronistic project in our hands and minds. Based on the tradition of Federalism in libertarian thought, Souza (2006) defends a spatial organization compatible with the autonomy that does not lapse in territorialisms or parochialisms that a democracy of local scale could entail. Radical territorial decentralization must be accompanied by cyberdemocracy and spatial reshaping and restructuring that democratize modern communication and information technologies and combat the “dictatorship of large numbers”; far from a bucolic and naïve return to a mythical rural and “pure” past, it is necessary to deal with a space densely inhabited by millions of people.

It is not, therefore, a teleologist or statist thought, but an exercise of geographical imagination with the elaboration of future scenarios based on the real struggles of the past and the present, since it would be a mistake “to want to theoretically anticipate something that only history can decide: the concrete institutional formats of a hypothetical society of the future, basically non-heteronomous” (Souza, 2006, p. 551-552). Thus, the Federative Principle in the tradition of libertarian thought and praxis

becomes relevant to the analysis of Political Geography and poses as an alternative geopolitical and an inspiration to reflect on the political organization of human space in an emancipatory way and having the autonomy as the horizon of thought and action.

## Notes

1 This article is based on a chapter of my doctoral thesis which I defended while studying in the Postgraduate Program in Geography of Federal University of Rio de Janeiro in December 2017.

2 Libertarian thought and praxis are characterized by a multiplicity of tendencies and perspectives ranging from classical anarchism to neo-nationalism and contemporary autonomism. What these perspectives have in common is, the simultaneous rejection of the capitalist civilizational model (inclusive capitalist state) and the bureaucratic-centralist alternatives arising from Marxism-Leninism. For further study, see Souza (2017).

3 See, on socio-spatial development, Souza (1996 and 2013).

4 Federalism was put into practice at various times in history and with more or less successful results. Regarding two of these moments, the Paris Commune and the Revolution during the Spanish Civil War, see Samis (2011) and Rodrigues (2016).

5 Examples are some Mediterranean cities, such as Genoa and Venice, and the so-called Hanseatic League, whose spatiality covered northern Europe and the vicinity of the Baltic Sea.

6 For the present work, I consulted the Argentine edition *El Prinio Federativo*, published in Buenos Aires in 2008.

7 And that inspired the formation of the United States of America, among other federative states.

8 For the present text the book Mikhail Bakunin: Selected Works, organized by Plínio Augusto Coelho and published by the publishers HEDRA and Imaginário in 2015, has been consulted for the most part.

9 Although here and there Reclus has been somewhat condescending with a kind of "humanitarian colonialism" in some settlement colonies, slipping into ethnocentrism. See, about this, Badouin (2009) and Souza (2017, p. 123).

10 For the present article was consulted the translation into Spanish *El Hombre y La Tierra*, published in Barcelona between 1906 and 1909.

11 With regard to the repercussions of heteronomous structures in the subjectivity of the subject, refer to, among other works, Guattari (1987) and Deleuze and Guattari (1995).

12 Keeping in mind the trinity, psyche - social relations - space: "the concrete society exists only with these three 'components' at the same time because each of them is relational and, therefore, can only be conceived, in the concrete plane, in relation with

the others and incorporating, in a way, the others (SOUZA, 2017, p. 46, italics of the original).

13 More on the molecular revolution in Guattari (1987).

14 For the article, the second edition of the book, published in 1901, was consulted.

15 Compilation of writings dating from the first two decades of the twentieth century.

16 Concerning the imaginary social significations, see Castoriadis (1983).

17 By offering the problematic opposition to Power X Culture, by reducing power to something negative and to the state (common in classical anarchism), Rocker restricts the potential that a libertarian approach to culture could present; nations, in fact, are social and unnatural constructions (in that the author advances on the thought of previous anarchists), but to confuse power with the state and to take it with only destructive obfuscates a vision that understands the culture, or rather the dimension symbolic-cultural society, as fundamental to the development of social struggles in general, making it a political-cultural dimension.

18 For Bookchin, the municipality of his proposal does not correspond to the state administrative division but rather to the local scale, to the territorial unit that in the tradition of libertarian thought was called commune.

19 More on the issue of institutional struggle and direct action from a libertarian perspective is found in Souza (2015, p.55 et seq.).

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