

Élisée Reclus and the Circle of Anarchist Geographers (1872 – 1890)

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Abstract

The objective of this work is to take a brief journey in the life and work of the French geographer Élisée Reclus, from 1872 to 1889. For that, this work presents a picture of his involvement with the anarchist movement and of how he sought to bring such theorizations of freedom closer to geographic thinking. The approximation between geography and anarchism was achieved by establishing bonds between Reclus and other anarchist characters of his time, who constituted a circle of studies around geography and communist anarchism.

Keywords: Élisée Reclus. Anarchist geography. Circle.

Resumo

O objetivo principal desse trabalho é fazer breve percurso pela vida e obra do geógrafo francês Élisée Reclus, entre os anos de 1872 a 1889, com a intenção de demonstrar seu envolvimento com o movimento anarquista e como o mesmo buscou aproximar essa teoria das liberdades com o pensamento geográfico. A aproximação entre geografia e anarquismo ocorreu devido ao vínculo estabelecido entre Reclus e demais personagens anarquistas de sua época constituindo um círculo de estudos em torno da geografia e do anarquismo comunista.

Palavras-chave: Élisée Reclus. Geografia anarquista. Círculo.

Resumen

El objetivo principal de este trabajo es hacer un breve viaje a través de la vida y trabajo del geógrafo francés Élisée Reclus, desde 1872 hasta 1889, con la intención de demostrar su participación en el movimiento anarquista y cómo buscó acercar esta

teoría de las libertades al pensamiento geográfico. La aproximación entre geografía y anarquismo se produjo debido al vínculo establecido entre Reclus y otros personajes anarquistas de su tiempo que constituyen un círculo de estudios sobre geografía y anarquismo comunista.

Palabras clave: Élisée Reclus. Geografía anarquista. Círculo.

Introduction

Élisée Reclus (1830 – 1905), anarchist and revolutionary activist who became involved with the Paris Commune (1871), was arrested and exiled. He had his sentence commuted to banishment from France, after which he lived in Switzerland during a period of intense dedication to radical political engagement and geographic studies.

The period from 1872 to 1890 in Reclus' life would be marked by his involvement with the circle of geographers and other revolutionaries from various fields who dedicated themselves to setting the foundations of a communist anarchist geography, departing from traditional imperialist conceptions of geographical knowledge produced at the time.

By describing such period of Reclus' life, the main purpose of this paper is to draw a picture of his intellectual production and of his involvement with other anarchists of the time. Such involvement fueled the emergence of an *intelligentsia* of anarchist geographers that laid the foundations for the creation of the principles of communist anarchist geography. By observing the history of geographical thought, it is possible to argue that these principles have been partially forgotten. This work brings them to the foreground in the course of the journey through Reclus' life and production.

A second exile and the involvement with anarchists

In his second exile¹, during which he lived in Switzerland, Reclus would go through a period marked by extensive bibliographic production. He would also resume his relations with other anarchists, including Bakunin, who resided in Zurich. The same year in which he arrived in Switzerland, Reclus signed a contract with publisher Hachette to finally write his *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle*, his largest geography work consisting of 19 volumes of about 900 pages each.

Hachette was convinced to embark on the project by the argument that the Malt-Brun Universal Geography was published over 50 years before and it was necessary to write a new one with updates, but keeping the former's encyclopedic character. The new encyclopedia would be gradually published in many short issues. The publisher, however, restricted the presence of any religious, political and social connections in the work because, even though he knew of the notoriety Reclus had

¹ Reclus's life is marked by three exiles and various moments of political persecution because of his involvement with revolutionary movements, be it in 1848, with the Paris Commune in 1871 and the I International. For more details on Reclus' life and work see Nettlau (1928), Sarrazin (1985) and Giblin (1986).

acquired as a geography writer, he did not approve of his relationship with the anarchist revolutionary movement. But as Ferreti demonstrates in an important thesis on Reclus' work (2011a), his extensive and accurate research confirms that Reclus sustained a libertarian tone even in face of Hachette's censorship. This way, Reclus continued the path initiated with *La Terre*, which aimed at constructing an eminently anarchist geography.

The period from 1872 to 1890 in Reclus' life would be marked by a greater theoretical production in geography and also by a greater theoretical dedication to anarchism. After the torturous arrest that resulted from his involvement with the Paris Commune in 1871, he sought to mature his notion of Bakunian-based collectivist anarchism, approaching what later became known as Communist anarchism.

During the time he remained exiled in Switzerland, Reclus made several trips to Milan and became directly involved with Italian internationalists, marginalized from the First Socialist International by Marx. Beginning in 1874, he contributed with the organization and publication of Bakunin's manuscripts, who asked Reclus to do this work because he was feeling very tired of his militant life. He also had the feeling that his life was coming to an end (SARRAZIN, 1985). Soon after, in 1876, Bakunin died. Reclus' second wife and son had also died, in 1874, due to complications in childbirth. As a result of such tragedy, Reclus moved to Vevrey, near Geneva, as he needed to be closer to a larger city with good libraries. Also, the situation made him become actively integrated to the revolutionary anarchist movement.

He then joined the Jura Federation, one of the most important anarchist organizations of the time in Europe. The organization was directly opposed to the socialism led by Marx, who had expelled Bakunin from the First International in 1872, and also the Italian anarchists and the Confederates of the Jura (as the Swiss federation became known) in 1873.

The contentious period in the heart of revolutionary ideas and the way such split occurred within the workers' movement resulted in a profound distinction between authoritarian socialists and libertarian socialists. The schism, fueled by ideological and methodological divergences in political struggle, would result in significant fragmentation amid the revolutionary movement, separating the radical activists of the time in two opposing poles.

Creating a communist anarchism

In the Jura Federation, Reclus would find satisfactory ground to multiply his productions and theoretical speculations about anarchism, producing together with James Guillaume, Carlo Cafiero and Piotr Kropotkin what later became known as Communist Anarchism, as Nettlau highlights (2008, p. 188), in which,

Kropotkin then agreed with Dumartheray and Herzig from the Geneva group, then with Reclus and Cafiero – probably between July

and September 1880 – to propose anarchist communism to the Jura Federation's congress (October 9 and 10), what was done. [...] Caffero delivered the speech "Anarchie et communisme". Kropotkin and Reclus spread the anarcho-communist idea in numerous speeches, and the congress adopted it. [...] The term "*anarchist communist*" spread rapidly in France. A poster from January 1881 mentions: *Libertarian and Anarchist Communism*.

In another paper, Nettlau (1928), in developing an important biography of Reclus sought to define four major moments that marked the evolution of his conception of anarchy: the first phase occurred when Reclus wrote the manuscript entitled *Development of Freedom in the World* between 1849 and 1851, a phase named metaphysical anarchy; the second moment was defined by the speech entitled *Federalism and Territorial Divisions*, given in 1868 at the Congress of the League of Peace and Freedom in Bern, whose ideas adhered to Bakunian collectivist federalism; the third moment was marked by the article published in 1873 in *L'Almanach du Peuple* under the title *Quelques Mots sur la Propriété*, when Reclus would enter a transitional phase between collectivism and communism; the last phase, communist anarchism, which he would defend to the end of his life, is marked by the speech delivered on February 18, 1876 in Bern, in which for the first time he defined his anarcho-communism or libertarian socialism as the symbol of the split with authoritarian socialism.

Reclus' first meeting with Kropotkin would take place in February 1877 in Vevey. The meeting became a deep friendship, even more because Kropotkin was also a geographer, skilled in matters related to physical geography. "L'amitié entre Reclus et Kropotkine s'est nourrie d'estime réciproque; ces sentiments, au cours de leur vie, ne sont jamais démentis"² (SARRAZIN, 1985, p. 177).

The two would develop the foundations of anarchist geography and introduce geographic discourse to anarchism by means of the openness of the communist episteme, considering the issues of federalism and borders, conflicts and confrontations with state power preponderant. Moreover, they emphasized the constitution of research on the communes and their autonomist organizations of libertarian governance, introduced the concern with urban issues into anarchism, the separation of men and industrial issues, thus placing a strong emphasis on agrarian issues and the peasant struggle, mainly in the works of Kropotkin (1892, 1910) entitled *Champs, Usines et Ateliers* and *La Conquête du Pain*.

According to Lourenço and Buen (1986), Reclus and Kropotkin would together begin the development of a work restricted to the methodological and epistemological issues of geography, which they would call *Geographical Sketches*. Unfortunately, the project has never been completed. Even so, Kropotkin's collaboration with the French

² "The friendship between Reclus and Kropotkin is nourished by reciprocal esteem; these feelings in the course of their lives will never be shaken."

geographer was considerable, as he reviewed several sections related to the physical geography of *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle*, wrote much of the volume devoted to Russia and Asian countries, and contributed greatly to the technical data and experiences that Kropotkin had performed in countries subjected to cold and polar climates, in particular the region of Siberia.

Ce volume, le sixième de la *Nouvelle géographie universelle*, n'est signé que d'un seul nom et n'a été rédigé que par une seule personne; mais, comme les précédents, il appartient, pour une honne part, à des collaborateurs, que je tiens à remercier de leur précieux concours. M. Kropotkin surtout peut revendiquer bien des pages de ce livre. Faisant revivre pour moi le souvenir de ses explorations géologiques dans la Sibérie orientale et dans la Mandchourie, et m'a communiqué ses notes et ses observations et m'a indiqué, ce qu'il pouvait mieux que personne, la valeur relative des mémoires insérés dans les publications scientifiques russes ³ (RECLUS, 1881, p. 893).

When Kropotkin created the journal *La Révolte* in Geneva, which after his arrest was closed and then reopened and renamed *Le Révolté*, Reclus contributed greatly to the production of anarchist texts and translations of other libertarian productions from various languages. For some time, Reclus coordinated the magazine when Kropotkin was arrested, gathering various texts by the Russian anarchist geographer and assembling them in the book *Words of a Rebel* (KROPOTKIN, 2005).

The Circle of Anarchist Geographers

Reclus invited the great cartographer established in Geneva Charles Perron, also an internationalist anarchist, to develop all the numerous maps in his universal geography. He also hired an assistant to help carry out such huge geography project, Gustave Lefrançais. Lefrançais was later replaced by explorer and geographer Metchnikoff, who did not leave him until the last works. The Russian anarchist participated of the Expedition of the Thousand, with Garibaldi, and traveled the Far East. He had lived in Japan for a considerable time, an experience that enriched his contribution to the fascicles devoted to Japan and other Far Eastern countries, as he was very knowledgeable of that region, as noted by Pelletier (2007).

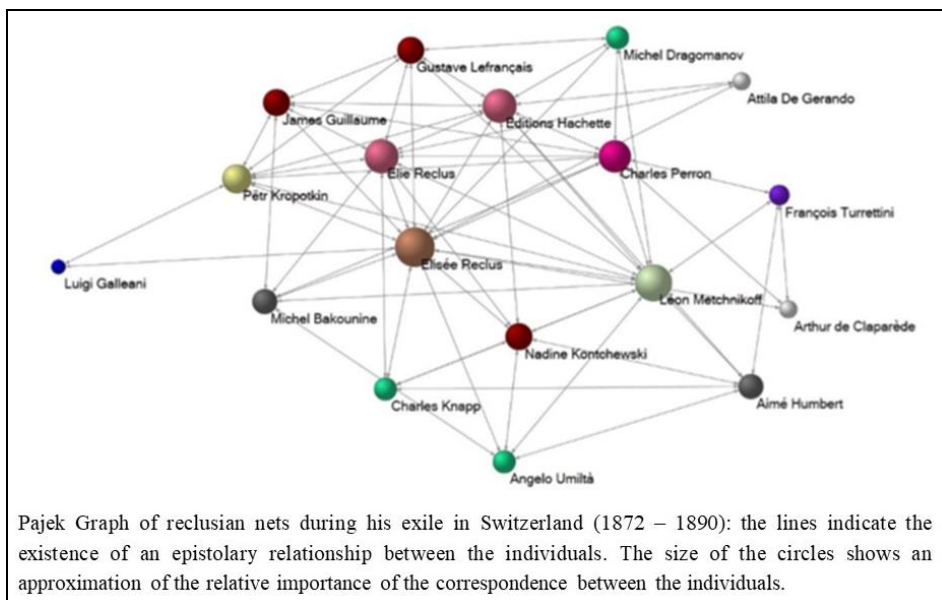
In addition to the journal called *Le Révolté*, coordinated by Kropotkin, the journal *Le Travailleur*, coordinated by Reclus and Perron, would be a space of

³“This volume, the sixth in the *Nouvelle géographie universelle*, did not single out a name and was not written by one person only; but, like the precedents, it was constituted by, in an honorable part, his collaborators, to whom I have to thank for their precious contributions. Mr. Kropotkin above all can claim many pages of this book. Making me relive the memory of his geological explorations in eastern Siberia and Manchuria, he communicated to me his notes and observations and indicated that he could better than me give the relative value of the memories embedded in Russian scientific publications.”

libertarian geographical construction, following the Reclusian maxim of making geography with anarchy and anarchy with geography. Reclus obtained the contribution of other anarchists to further qualify the work *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle*, such as Dragomanov, along with Lefrançais and Desjardins, as already mentioned. They worked to correct the monumental universal geography and also contributed with the journal *Le Travailleur*. Slomezynski also participated, being in charge of producing the maps of the Caucasus, Near East and Middle East, because he knew these regions very well.

In other words, Reclus's anarchist geography was being created amid an anarchist marginal intelligentsia of diverse academic composition, such as geographers, sociologists, historians and cartographers, all aligned with the communist anarchism in vogue in the heterodox marginal circles of Geneva and the Jura, as represented in the flowchart (illustration 1) developed by Ferretti and Pelletier (2013). It is also important to note the other names that appear as great contributors of this libertarian circle, being them Bakunin, Élie Reclus, Aimé Humbert, Attila de Gérando and Dragomanov.

Figure 01: Reclusian Nets During Exile in Switzerland (1872 – 1890).



Source: FERRETTI, F., PELLETIER, P. Indígenas do Universo: espaço, dominação e práticas de libertação social na obra dos geógrafos anarquistas Elisee Reclus, Piotr Kropotkin e Léon Metchnikoff. *Revista Território Autônomo*, nº 2. Autumn 2013, p. 5 - 16.

Such groundbreaking circle of debate and political practice, a kind of anarchist geographical intelligentsia, is unique because it has introduced geographical knowledge in its agenda. In the past, such connections had always been more inclined to the studies of history and social, economic and political sciences, but had been considered unaccep-

table in any circle of revolutionary socialist discussions. The period of exile in Switzerland would be the richest in the formation of Reclus' geographical thinking, and also in his anarchy, the moral and political foundation of his geography.

Between Travels and an Engaged and Original Geographic Writing

Another differential element of this period is linked to the many other trips that Reclus had to make to fulfill his universal geography with quality, trips which induced the proliferation of his pedagogical activities. This field of study continually present in Reclusian thought deserves further scholarly research, particularly as to how it defines the teaching of geography, most significantly because of the emergence of environmental and ecological themes because it denies all the vulgarization and libertarian critical insufficiency that separates the social from the environmental.

In his travels to London, Brussels and Stockholm, and to countries such as Australia and Hungary, Reclus taught several courses that he sought to classify as *comparative geography in space and time* (RECLUS, 2010b). This is the case of the courses taught in Geneva, at the University of Neuchâtel, where he also held geography conferences, as he explained to his friend Gérando in a letter dated February 15, 1876. In the letter, he said that when he was passing “quelques jours à Genève où la municipalité m'a demandé de faire un cours. J'ai choisi pour sujet de mes conférences ‘la Méditerranée et les Peuples de son bassin’. C'est un cours de géographie appliquée à l'histoire”⁴(RECLUS, 1911, t. II, p. 177).

Always fighting against geography manuals and aiming at an increasingly lively and thought-provoking geography that leads the individual to the discovery and questioning of the complexity of the world, Reclus (1911, t. II, p. 183) strongly criticized Mr. Drapeyron, founder of the *Revue de Géographie*, saying that his starting point for the teaching of geography is very poorly selected, since it starts with topography and not cosmography; that is, he understands science very narrowly, because

La vie ne s'accommode pas de ces modes arbitraires d'enseignement. Or la science doit être un chose vivant; sinon, elle n'est qu'une misérable scolastique. Comme une plante qui va puiser au loin sa nourriture par toutes ses racelles aussi bien que par les pores de ses feuilles, la géographie doit commencer par tout à la fois: cosmographie, histoire naturelle, histoire, topographie. La nature ambiante est une immense synthèse qui se présente à nous dans tout son infini et non partie par partie, à nous de distinguer peu à peu les éléments divers de cet ensemble confus en apparence. C'est ainsi que l'enfant, se servant de tous ses sens à la fois, apprend peu à peu à reconnaître tout ce qui l'entoure. Le grand art du professeur, qu'il soit professeur de géographie ou de toute autre

⁴ “[...] a few days in Geneva where I was asked to give a course. I chose as the subject of my lectures ‘the Mediterranean and the peoples of its basin’. It’s a geography course applied to history.”

science, est précisément de savior montrer tout dans tout et de varier à l'infini les points de vue, afin de tenir toujours l'esprit en éveil et de lui faciliter incessamment de nouvelles conquêtes.⁵

The fertile period in Switzerland would enable the production of 15 of the total 19 volumes of his *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle*, a work that carries important contributions to geographic knowledge. It carries out the work of updating the scientific studies of the time and presents a categorized distribution of analysis and information. Besides, it has in its discourse the unorthodox permanence of libertarian analysis, especially in the field of political geography from all parts of the world, which can be said to be the main feature of this work. The work was not written in inaccessible, tautological language or rhetorical exaggeration, but in simple, engaging and clear language, with which Reclus wanted to reach as many people as possible, especially as a way of unraveling the space, the relationship of land with men, to the workers who were engaged in the social struggle. For this reason, it was published in small issues, costing a negligible price, managing to reach the hands of the anarchist workers' organizations that used it as an important source for the unraveling of social masks and power in the territory, as described by Ferretti (2013).

In addition to being involved in the production of his most extensive work devoted to the universal description of the earth by geography, Reclus also produced several other minor works, such as articles and conferences, which can be found in the compilation by Danielle Ronco (2010). While still in prison, he published some works related to the struggle for democracy and criminal abolitionist themes, being the latter marked by an exciting anarchist position on prisons and the death penalty. In the short writing entitled *Death Penalty*, Reclus (2011b, p. 93) states at the outset that “the origin of the death penalty, as it is currently applied by states, is certainly revenge, unruly revenge, as terrible as hatred can inspire it.” Consequently, such hatred and revenge reproduce themselves, just as Foucault (1987), at libertarian moments, showed. When Foucault investigated the evils of control and punishment transfigured in punishing prisons, Reclus (2011b, p. 96) similarly argued that “it is around the scaffolds and prisons that murderers and thieves are formed. Our courts are schools of crime.” For him, the solution lies in social justice, in the wide distribution of income, because “to the right of force, which prevails in the wild, it is time to bring about justice, which is the ideal of every man worthy of the name” (RECLUS, 2011c, p. 99).

⁵ “Life does not settle for these arbitrary modes of teaching. But science must be a living thing; otherwise, it is only a miserable scholastic. Like a plant that will fetch its food from all its roots as well as the pores of its leaves, geography must begin everywhere at once: cosmography, natural history, history, topography. Environmental nature is an immense synthesis that is presented to us in its entirety and not part by part, our task is to gradually distinguish the diverse elements of this confusing set in evidence. This is how the child, using all his/her senses at the same time, learns little by little to recognize all that surrounds him/her. The great art of the teacher, whether he/she is a teacher of geography or any other science, is precisely to be able to show everything in everything and to vary the points of view infinitely, in order to always have an alert mind and to make it easier for him/her to make new achievements.”

Hachette published the first volume of the synthesis of *La Terre*, entitled *Les Phénomènes Terrestres*, which in fact has very little synthesis. There has also been several publications of his works in other languages. But in 1872, when he was released from prison, the anarchist geographer published an excellent work in defense of the peasantry, not much used by Marxist-based radical agrarian geography, called *A Mon Frère le Paysan*. In this paradigmatic article, published in the journal *Les Temps Nouveaux*, of paramount importance for agrarian geography today, Reclus (2011a, pp. 83 and 91) seeks to demonstrate how much he maintains his commitment to the defense of the social revolution by means of class struggle by evoking his Peasant brothers to the fight.

Avoid this death at any price, comrades. Carefully preserve your land, you who have a piece; it is your life and that of the woman, of the children you love. Join the fellows whose lands are threatened like yours by the mill owners, the hunting lovers, the moneylenders; forget all your little grudges from neighbor to neighbor, and group yourself into communes where all interests are in solidarity, where every tuft of grass has all communes as defenders. [...] With these people, you will attack, you will tear down the walls of these domains; with them you will found the great commune of men, where you will work in concert to quicken the soil, beautify it, and live happily on this good land that gives us bread.

In the same year he published *Quelques Mots sur la Propriété*, a work that marked the transitional phase between anarcho-collectivism and anarcho-communism, giving rise to maturation vectors of the reclusian anarchist conception permeated by geographical discourse. In the year 1894, he would publish an almost homonymous work, *Quelques mots d'histoire*, an equally paradigmatic article that approaches the historical transformations of the geographical space anticipating the space-time debate of the technical area and of the world-system. In this text, Reclus (2010a, p. 80) highlights the symptoms of the process of cultural standardization and the integration of spaces by technical levels, in which civilization was moving towards the “fusion of local histories in universal history” and the blurring of borders, universalizing spaces and times, as can be seen in the passage below.

Now the history is that of the whole world: it develops around Seoul and the shores of the Petchili Gulf, in the deep forests of the Congo and the Abyssinian plateaus, in the Sonda Islands and the Antilles as well as in all the famous places once considered the "navels" of the great earthly body. [...] Only in our days can history be said to be 'universal' and applied to the whole family of men. [...] Conventional boundaries, always uncertain and fluctuating, are gradually erased, and unwillingly the most ardent patriot becomes a citizen of the world: despite his aversion to foreigners, despite customs protecting him from foreign trade in spite of the cannons on both sides of the taboo line, he eats the bread from India, drinks

coffee harvested by blacks or Malayans, wears fabrics made from the fiber sent from America, uses inventions due to the combined work of a thousand inventors of all ages and races, experiences feelings and thoughts that millions of men experience with him from one end of the world to the other (RECLUS, 2010a, p. 81).

In 1873 other Reclusian works related strictly to geography appeared in renowned specialized magazines, and one on internationalism in the magazine *Almanach du "Peuple"*, an important libertarian internationalist journal. In 1876, the first volume of *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle* was published, several other specialized works between 1873 and 1877, in addition to anarchist articles. The year of 1878 represented the heterodox character of Reclus's theoretical production, with synthetic works on anarchy, exercising the evolution and organization of this political way of viewing society, for example: *A Propos de L'Anarchie* and *L'évolution Légale et L'Anarchie*, both in the libertarian socialist periodical *Le Travailleur*. Also, he published important works criticizing the notion of orient and of political geography in the United States.

In 1880 it is important to mention three works that composed this uninterrupted movement of formation of Reclus' thought: the *Évolution et Révolution* conference, and the article of the Juracian press and *Le Révolté* magazine: *Ouvrier, Prends la Machine! Prends la Terre, Paysan!*, and the book *Histoire d'une Montagne*. The first two articles are about the foundations of communist anarchism, the first being Reclus' response to what he means by Revolution, how evolution is fundamental to that process, and how the struggle restricted only to evolution limits social revolution, since it becomes evolutionism.

He shows that the need for caution, organization and, at the same time, spontaneity and spirit of revolt are fundamental for achieving social revolution. This idea may approach what Camus (2003) defined, fifty years later, as *measure and revolt*, clearly emphasizing that the Franco-Algerian writer and philosopher denied the idea of revolution because he positioned himself exclusively in favor of revolt.

This lecture by the French geographer on evolution and revolution would later become an important book by Reclus (2002), entitled *The Evolution, the Revolution and the Anarchist Ideal*, a work in which he demonstrates greater maturity with respect to the revolutionary struggle, makes an interesting distinction between evolution and Darwinian evolutionism, and emphasizes the need to value the communalist ideal of anarchism, breaking with certain elements of Bakunian collectivism.

In the article *Ouvrier, prends la machine! Prends la terre, paysan!* published in the anarchist journal *Le Révolté*, Reclus calls on both industry workers and peasants to fight the exploitative capitalist model. He argues for a profound connection between the working class and the peasantry, which is frequently claimed nowadays but has once been profoundly uncharacterized because Marxist geography had abdicated this classical integration since, in line with the more orthodox Marxism, it saw in the peasantry a kind of petty bourgeoisie. Such view culminated in the persecution, operated by Lenin and the subsequent Soviet government, of the social revolution in Ukraine built by Nestor Ma-

ckno (2001), for example, which was eminently libertarian and peasant, and was expressly annihilated by the totalitarian regime of the Soviet Union.

In *Histoire d'une Montagne*, an excellent work that presents the mountain as a protagonist and shows its relationship with the human being who makes his/her living out of it, Reclus follows the same methodology as *Histoire d'un Ruisseau*, 1869, in which the author also addresses the history of the physical phenomenon of the river, from a drop of water to the river mouth. Similarly, the history of a mountain would also be directed to the teaching of geography, with the purpose of launching the student into the complex and dynamic universe of such an imposing geological structure, demonstrating the various geographies printed on the altitude steps of the mountain, from the base to the summit.

At about the same time that Reclus (1882) took his man to the mountain, Nietzsche (2011) took Zarathustra there too, but in a different way. Importantly, *Histoire d'une Montagne* was first published in 1880, and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 1883. In Reclus's work one finds deep consideration about that geographical form, its dynamics, strength, and performance as a provider of singular geography, showing the life forms of this physical configuration and explaining how man interrelates with its laws, how he aggrandizes and rediscovers himself, to return to the urban world in the end.

Similarly to Zarathustra, Reclus's man was sad and sought ways to reconcile with himself, with nature and with the world in the seclusion of the mountain, seeking to rebuild his consciousness of self in the world, denying the hypocrisy of many moral values, the ills and the dissolution that the brutalized society operated in the autonomy of the free-spirited individual. Still in comparison with Zarathustra, Reclus' man also returns from the mountain deeply happy and transformed.

J'étais sad, abattu, las de la vie. La destinée avait été dure pour moi, elle avait enlevé des êtres qui m'étaient chers, ruiné mes projets, mis à néant mes esperances [...]. L'humanité tout entière, avec ses intérêts en lutte et ses passions déchaînées, m'avait paru hideuse. Je voulais à tout prix m'échapper, soit pour mourir, soit pour retrouver, dans la solitude, ma force et le calme de mon esprit⁶ RECLUS, 1882, p. 1).

But this important book by Reclus is not only marked by figurative and somewhat literary or possibly philosophical language. It seeks to debate the human condition in relation to its connection to the world. It is a text that deserves great attention from geography; it deserves to be reviewed and better worked in the teaching of geography due to its deep physical analysis of the mountain, passing through geological and geo-

⁶ "I was sad, downcast, tired of life; fate had been hard on me, snatching loved ones out of me, ruining my projects, annihilating my hopes [...]. All of humanity, with the struggle of its interests and its unbridled passions, seemed to me hideous. I wanted to escape at all costs, to die, to recover, in solitude, my strength and the tranquility of my spirit."

morphological considerations, the structural conformation of the geographic accident in question, the water dynamics that take shape in it. Moreover, and most importantly, it discusses the different genres of life that form on and above the mountains, identifying the differences between the human groups standing on different altitudes, the changes in cultivation and animal rearing, and even the relationship to the non-mountain world and the political and social conditioning of the flat space.

Reclus sought such profound knowledge and turn it into this book because of his extensive mountaineering experience, his favorite sport, which he believed was necessary for all people who sought to improve as human beings, as he highlighted in *On the feeling of nature in modern society (Du sentiment de la nature dans les sociétés modernes)* (RECLUS, 2010c). In addition to that, he had a strong involvement with the mountaineering revolutionaries who lived in the Jura region of Switzerland. The book represents a moment in which he was able to combine political struggle with natural experience, shaping his unique form of geographical thinking.

This short book is made up of twelve chapters, with about two hundred pages in total, covering from the man's exile to the mountain to the various geological forms, ridges, valleys, and the mineralogical structure of rocks. It demonstrates how the mountain originates, forms and develops and how it transforms by means of erosive processes and mass movements.

Moreover, this modest book contains considerations on the hydrological regimes and the snow system in the mountain, the variability of vegetation that develops as a result of altitude, slope, climate and soil quality, and, as a result, life forms typical of this geographical phenomenon, the climatic escalations and the co-existing human life genres. It also contains a chapter especially devoted to the free highlander, evoking the transcendental relationship between human freedom and nature, which is primarily responsible for this autonomous condition of the free spirit.

In the end, unsatisfied, Reclus dedicates the book's conclusion to the theme of man, closing the loop with his return to the outer surface of this significant microcosm, demonstrating how this discrete writing is an extraordinary geography lesson because it addresses various themes, concepts and geographical phenomena using only one material and symbolic element: the mountain.

At epistemological and methodological levels, Reclus would use Humboldt's chorography, following the holistic methodology from micro to macro under the theoretical bias of romanticism joined to the metaphysics of nature and of humans. He compared the rock fragment from the mountain and its process of formation to the dimension of the cosmos, seeking to demonstrate that in the essentially complex cosmic logic all the dynamic relationships of the physis come together. The human being would be the self-conscious nature of such transcendental universality; in him resides the whole foundation of existential immanence, as it is always touched by cosmic material reality, demonstrating the need to overcome Kantian transcendentalism in the geography inherit-

ed from Ritter and Humboldt by the materialistic immanence of human relations with the environment.

Ainsi, jusque dans sa plus petite molécule, la montagne énorme offre une combinaison d'éléments divers qui se sont mélangés en proportions changeantes; chaque cristal, chaque minéral, chaque grain de sable ou parcelle de calcaire, a son histoire infinie, comme les astres eux-mêmes. Le moindre fragment de roche a sa genèse comme l'univers; mais, tout en s'entr'aidant par la science les uns des autres, l'astrologue, le géologue, le physicien, le chimiste, en sont encore à se demander avec anxiété s'ils ont bien compris cette pierre et le mystère de son origine⁷ (RECLUS, 1882, p. 39).

From 1882 to 1889 Reclus published new articles in specialized geography journals as well as others in anarchist journals. But the most noteworthy works are *Les Produits de la Terre*, from the Jura Federation, and *Les Produits de L'Industrie*, published in the periodical *Le Révolté*. These two works, among many others, which will be mentioned further on, are fundamental examples of anarchist compositions of geography, and are also initial presentations of anarchist geography.

The works *À Propos d'une Carte Statistique* and *Australasia* are important contributions to the definition of methodological parameters for spatial representation and regionalization of the globe, as well as several other works devoted to what has been called regional monographs, addressing regions of Africa, Asia, and the Far North.

In 1882 a strong repression against anarchists was initiated due to some attacks and conflicts that tried to confront the situation of economic crisis that Europe was experiencing, mainly in the fields of industry and agriculture. More than sixty anarchists were arrested and convicted. Reclus and Kropotkin came out in defense of these fighting brothers; because of that, they were accused of being mentors and leaders of the rebel movement. Kropotkin was expelled from Switzerland and later arrested on December 21st. He was sentenced to five years in prison. Reclus was threatened with arrest once again, but continued to denounce the abuses of authority and the horrors of state repression.

To ease the pressure, Hachette forced Reclus to travel. The geographer traveled through Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria. He returned to Algeria several times, as his eldest daughter resided there. In 1885 he traveled to Istanbul and toured various parts of Asia Minor. He also crossed Hungary, where he met his Hungarian friend Attila de Gerando, who has been a great collaborator of his geography work on the region. In the same

⁷ "Thus, even in its smallest molecule, the huge mountain offers a combination of diverse elements that have blended into transformative proportions; each crystal, each mineral, each grain of sand or limestone fragment has its infinite history, like the stars themselves. The smallest rock fragment has its genesis similar to that of the universe; even all the cooperating science, astrology, geology, physics, chemistry, they are still wondering if they have satisfactorily understood this stone and the mystery of its origin."

period, Reclus prepared the volume on Africa and South America. He frequently attended the library of Lisbon, Madrid and Barcelona, and took the opportunity to meet Iberian companions. In 1886 he went to Naples and traveled through Eastern Europe. In 1889, he arrived in the United States for his second visit and went to Canada. He admired the extent of spacial transformation in these new worlds. He absorbed a great deal of information from the United States library, returning joyfully to visit the place where he lived in 1855.

Conclusion

From 1872 to 1889 Reclus' life was surrounded by intense research activity, of theoretical and scientific production. In the same period, the revolutionary geographer became involved with various radical manifestations. But the most important factor to be emphasized is his involvement with the many anarchists who, moved by the revolutionary cause, also set out to produce an engaged and anti-colonial geography that departed from traditional nationalist writings in the service of nation-states.

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Note

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