

## Rural Conservatism or Anarchism? The Pro-state, Stateless, and Anti-state Positions

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**ABSTRACT** Popular discourse today so weds rurality and conservatism together in the United States that one does not seem quite at home without the other. But what is it really about the rural that beckons slapjack labels of conservatism? Scholars and practitioners, only a handful of them rural sociologists, have suggested a variety of explanations: antigovernmentalism, religion, lack of education, manual labor, poverty, primitivism, and a culture of poverty, among others. Each of these approaches, though, misses a sustained agent of rural dispossession and depopulation: the state. This article theorizes rural politics through pro-state, stateless, and anti-state positions. I bridge literature that documents the state as an agent of industrialization, extraction, exploitation, consolidation, and corporatization in rural America and literature on politics and the rural. In the process of my review, I suggest anarchism can help explain the significance and potential of the stateless and anti-state positions in rural politics.

### Introduction

In wake of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, pundits and news reporters leveled their attention on the rural red. “Revenge of the rural voter,” *Politico* called it (Bottemiller Evich 2016). “Urban and Rural Voters Are Becoming Increasingly Polarized,” warned the *Washington Post* as it pointed out the heavily populated but geographically small centers of blue amid the crimson swath (Gamio 2016). Perhaps unknowingly invoking Cynthia Duncan’s book title ([1999] 2014), *Reuters* reported that “In Rural-Urban Divide, U.S. Voters Are Worlds Apart” (Carey 2016). Just earlier that year, Brexit evoked similar reactions abroad. One commentator with the European Council on Foreign Relations called the vote “[t]he revenge of the countryside” (de Gruyter 2016). A columnist featured in the *Guardian* speculated that “From Trump to Brexit, power has leaked from cities to countryside” (Beckett 2016).

The gap between urban prosperity and rural burden is largely old news for rural scholars. Consolidation of ownership over the means of production and the metabolic rift cultivated by rural resource extraction for largely urban consumption has left many rural communities depopulated and poor (Duncan [1999] 2014; Foster 1999; Gaventa 1980; Kelly-Reif and Wing 2016; Urry 1995). Even very poor: In the

United States, 85.3 percent of persistent poverty counties—those counties where 20 percent or more of the population have lived in poverty over the last 30 years—are rural (Economic Research Service 2017). The collapse of extractive industries that cultivated both paternalism and patriarchy has destabilized the traditional position of the male breadwinner (Bell 2013; Scott 2010; Sherman 2009). Simultaneously, those rural regions once known for vibrant towns built upon local ownership increasingly live under the expansive control of corporate agribusinesses and investment firms (Constance and Bonanno 1999; Desmarais et al. 2016; Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002). Immigrant workers, paid often by contract for difficult and sometimes dangerous work, can come to bear the brunt of the blame, rather than the vertical and horizontal integrators that have consolidated profits and control (Harrison and Lloyd 2012). In a democracy that enforces the rule of the most over the least, an expectation reigns that sparsely populated rural regions ought to bear the brunt of the most extractive and hazardous industries (Ashwood 2018).

Thus, while the presidential election results may have startled some, the result was of little surprise, at least if one is to take rural sociology literature seriously. Conditions were ripe for such an antiestablishment, “Make America great again” vote. Further, rural people had been voting at similarly high levels for presidential Republican candidates for some time (Monnat and Brown 2017). Yet the broader academic community and the media did not turn to rural sociology for answers. An autobiography, historical accounts, political science, and the general field of sociology have all achieved a humanization of the rural plight, making for eloquent explanations of rural conservatism (Cramer 2016; Hochschild 2016; Isenberg 2016; Vance 2016). While certainly compelling, these accounts understate the structural causes of exploitation in rural places by making the fixes seem simpler, like reforming the Democratic Party or breaking a culture of resentment and poverty, than rural scholars have repeatedly found.

Using rural sociology to understand rural politics requires a non-sense recognition of rampant inequality, something perhaps less palatable for popular media, and even sociology, than more exotic, stereotypical explanations, like rural primitivism. In part, this explains the favoring of nonrural sociological routes for political explanations in recent times. Still, I find that rural sociology is missing something that goes beyond the relationship between capitalism, exploitation, inequality, and rurality. That something is the role of the state in driving rural exploitation. By this, I do not mean a state co-opted by capitalist interests as part of the growth machine and resource extraction (Humphrey

et al. 1993; Molotch 1976). What I mean is a state whose developmental agenda explicitly assumes (and even relies on) rural exploitation. Accordingly, rural politics can be hastily labeled as conservative for lack of a more nuanced exploration of the interdependency of the elements of the corporate state. As in sociology more broadly, there is scant theory to understand why anyone would want less of the government, rather than more of the right kind of government (Nisbet 2002; Smith 2014). Debate fails to move beyond a working-within-the-state mantra, even though rural people and places have regularly found themselves victimized by state schemes, inspired by progressives and conservatives alike (Scott 1999; Wynne 1996).

To move beyond the liberal and conservative opposition that prevails in the news as well as in theory, I propose a three-part understanding of politics rooted in the state: pro-state, anti-state, and stateless positions. I use the pro-state position to capture political ideologies that call for state construction, regulation, and mediation of life according to issues of morality, social welfare, and the market economy. This captures rural support of traditional moral norms, resistance to social welfare, and outright support of corporate agribusiness. Often this is where political theory ends, as well as analyses of rural politics. I move forward, with the help of anarchist theory, to bring in the stateless and anti-state positions to complicate understandings of rural politics. The stateless position captures the rural centric pagan and agrarian ideologies that there is no need for a state of centralized authority, powers, and cities. This premise folds into what I call the anti-state position, the defensive version of the stateless position, which is held by those who have been wronged by the state, through, for example, natural resource extraction or industrial agricultural production.

The pro-state, anti-state, and stateless understandings of rural politics offer a chance to examine the manipulation of rural belief structures rhetorically and their actual enactment according to prevailing political theories—neoliberalism, conservatism, liberalism, radicalism, and anarchism. This approach helps reveal underlying tension between anti-statists: those who want to simply reduce the state at any cost, what I call retractors, and those who eventually want to reduce state power in favor of communities, but in the meantime advocate strong state support of the vulnerable—what I call reformers. Without recognition of their shared stateless ideal, it can seem that such anti-state advocates stand far apart, and have little, to no, equal footing, as their modern-day American political labels of conservative and liberal, respectively, suggest. I offer that the lack of genuine stateless representation on the political stage fosters a divide between reformers and retractors,

especially in rural contexts, that in some sense need not exist. In the meantime, the opportunity grows for the exploitation of the stateless position by self-titled populists who have elite, pro-state agendas, but are well versed in stateless rhetoric.

### **Pro-statism**

Sociology is implicitly biased, even a bit blinded, by a pro-state orientation that makes conservatism seem the best fit for understanding rural people (Smith 2014). There exists little theoretical basis to say otherwise. Much modern political theory is rooted in the classic, theoretical groupings of conservatism, radicalism, and liberalism, and more recently neoliberalism, which each assume the state as a starting point. Thus antiauthoritarianism and antigovernmentalism are largely considered spurious or ignorant (Shantz and Williams 2013). Political theories like republicanism, Americanism, and populism cross and mix tenets of radicalism with conservative and liberal motives, while sharing the same, statecentric underbelly (Smith 1993; Wood 1969). Four pillars of the sociological canon—DuBois, Durkheim, Marx, Weber—take overtly statecentric approaches in their research. The only exception, Tocqueville, dabbled slightly in anarchism, although he is hardly explicit, and this part of his work is largely marginalized in the academy (Scott 2014). In this section, I identify the ways in which pro-statism dominates political theory and understandings of rural politics. But I also point out how conservatism, radicalism, neoliberalism, and liberalism in action or rhetoric actually incorporate stateless and anti-state positions, which currently are largely overlooked. By “stateless,” I mean the standpoint from which life is seen as best lived free from a centralized, bureaucratic, and administrative apparatus of power. By anti-state, I mean the defensive version of the stateless position, whereby either the state is to be remade in defense of the people or reduced at all costs as the ultimate end of a free society. In reviewing the pro-state bias in political theory, I set the stage for exploring anti-statism and statelessness as anarchist elements of rural politics that help explain current tensions.

Conservatism combines pro-statist moral traditionalism and support of a market economy with stateless and anti-state rhetoric, and some anti-state action (Table 1). In practice, modern-day conservatism is anything but stateless, imposing, for example, the corporate agribusiness agenda and resource extraction that leads to rural social and economic decline (Buttel 2005). But it does, from time to time, reduce the scope of the state by retracting other kinds of nonmarket economy support,

**Table 1. Analysis of Classical Political Philosophies According to Three Different Positions on the State.**

	Rhetoric						Action											
	Pro-state			Anti-state			Stateless			Pro-state			Anti-state			Stateless		
	Social Welfare	Market Economy	Morality	Reform	Retract	Stateless	Social Welfare	Market Economy	Morality	Reform	Retract	Pro-state	Market Economy	Morality	Reform	Retract	Stateless	
Anarchism				X	X	X	X							X	X		X	
Conservatism			X	X	X	X	X					X	X	X	X		X	
Liberalism	X		X	X			X					X	X	X				
Neoliberalism					X	X						X	X	X				
Radicalism	X		X				X							X				

Xs denote U.S. specific enactments of such political philosophies.

like social welfare (Table 1). Sociological studies and theory have mostly focused only on the pro-statist imposition of morality and traditionalism as a facet of rural conservatism. This is, in part, indisputable, and well documented in the rural context. Advocating the broader preservation of tradition or one's religion requires the imposition of a certain kind of state. Rural people often self-describe as people of faith, especially in the American South's Black Belt (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; McNicol Stock 1996; Thurman [1949] 1976; Wilson 2017; Winter and Short 1993). Four of ten rural voters reside in the South, as the South disproportionately has more rural people, meaning more voting evangelicals (Monnat and Brown 2017). In addition to moral views, the notion that keeping out immigrants requires building a wall beckons a certain kind of state imposition, one of President Donald Trump's so-called populist platforms. In action, Trump's wall is anything but stateless, requiring ample tax money to implement it on the taxed backs of those it seemingly serves. But, simultaneously, the general exodus of jobs and youth from rural America has helped cultivate xenophobic attitudes, especially when immigrants take up low-paying, high-risk positions (Fennelly 2014). This, though, is not always the case, and some rural adolescents are especially resistant to such stereotypes (Gimpel and Lay 2008). Relatedly, state-imposed, even racist, traditionalism has been documented in England, where some rural people consider the white English countryside as indicative of the "real" Britain (Bell 1994; Cloke 2006; Holloway 2007).

Rural people can thus balk at urbanity, an attitude that can include nostalgia for community norms, feudal economy, and morality or disdain toward intellectualism. In one phrase, to borrow from Nisbet (2002), rural people fit into the classic theoretical label of conservatives as prophets of the past, opposed to the outcomes of the Industrial and French Revolutions. Conservatives are classically defined as those who defended medieval traditions, and the community and kinship structures borne by traditional forms of hierarchy and authority. That authority today can come through the state imposition of heteronormative, nuclear family at rural behest. Popular representations of the rural, along with much of everyday life, are fraught with dichotomous gender norms (Bell 2000; Little 2002), although manual work can help rural women transcend traditional roles (Kazyak 2012). Traditional hierarchy can also privilege a dedication to manual work, supported by community norms that valorize work ethics (Sherman 2009). Rural people, in line with conservatism today, consequently balk at state imposition of social welfare, and along those lines, typically have less union representation (Jacobs and Glass 2015). When such conservative anti-statism is

enacted, it often does so by reducing social welfare. But not the market economy.

All of this makes rural people appear advocates of conservatism, at least in the way politics are conceived of in the current sociological paradigm. Rural people also then appear patently opposed to radicalism, conceived of again in a pro-state view according to redistribution of wealth and morality (see Table 1). Classically, “radical” is defined as “faith in absolute power” typically enacted through the communist state (Nisbet 2002:11). The radical approach, mostly associated with Marx, has often taken an explicitly antirural stance that is overtly hostile to localism (Nisbet 2002). With the urban working-class takeover of governance, Marx ([1848 1972] suggests, industrial, agricultural armies in service of the state would displace peasants. He describes rural life as idiotic, and peasants as a sack of potatoes (Marx [1848] 1972). The view still persists today, with living in the country often considered a sign of failure by progressive statist, a fate suitable for the ignorant country bumpkin (Berry 2003).

The radical approach often carries a disdain for manual work, especially agrarian labor. DuBois, whose late-life alliance with communism also situates him among radicals, made his name writing about the rural. In contrast to Marx, DuBois ([1895] 1999) certainly appreciates the beauty and plight of those people and places he speaks of in the Black Belt of Georgia, and while a teacher in the hills of Tennessee. Yet in his sustained attempts to battle against the technocratic reconciliation approach advocated by Booker T. Washington, he regularly sees elite education as the ultimate venue for black liberation, in essence treating non-state-sanctioned skills as less valuable. My intention here is not to dig up an old, unconstructive, either-or debate over what is more important—getting technical jobs for the poor or higher education. But I do think it is critical to recognize that there is a tendency for intellectual superiority among radical state advocates predicated on an either implicit or explicit disdain for more physical and risky types of labor, those often found in rural communities (for example, farming, fishing, and mining). This, again, helps explain the rural turn to conservatism within the pro-state context, in opposition to radicalism. Rather than recognizing such labor as important, valid, and perhaps even equal in its own right to the highest of educated endeavors, the radicalism of industrialization and collectivization instead advocates a state whose power is predicated upon the expropriation of labor from self-subsistence, and the rise of a centralized state (Springer 2016). In doing so, radicals can disrespect the intellectualism that goes into doing good manual work, a belief found in Hochschild’s (2016)

account, despite her well-meaning attempt to tread carefully. Radicalism's entrenched attachment to big-state solutions works against stateless sentiments that hierarchy births inequality, and centralizes wealth in the cities—part of the growing rural consciousness focused against urban elites (Cramer 2016).

Accordingly, radicalism largely misses rural support and representation, leaving perhaps the more moderate, liberal pro-state position seemingly an option for rural people (Table 1). And, indeed, there are some who take the liberal position in rural America, who may be part of the 31.3 percent of rural people who voted for Hillary Clinton (Monnat and Brown 2017), but certainly are not limited to it, as my use of "liberal" is in the theoretical sense. Liberals, in contrast to radicals, advocate for a less powerful state, albeit one wedded to the ideas of enlightenment, progress, and property rights (Nisbet 2002). Classic republicanism long was a stronghold of liberalism, where the powerful state existed to defend the rights of all (Wood 1969). Current progressive politics related to morality consequently fall in line, for example in the support of transsexuality and religious pluralism. Indeed, this runs against the grain of Bible Belt views, paired more comfortably with conservatism.

Perhaps, though, differences in views of morality would not be so significant if liberalism, simultaneously with its enlightenment ideals, did not enact an industrial, corporate agenda. After all, its pro-statist views are more moderate than radicalism, in large part because its key supporters, like Weber and Durkheim, were opposed to socialism (Ritzer 2011). Yet liberalism has maintained an anti-peasant and often anti-agrarian view that favors industrialism. For example, Weber saw the elimination of agrarian, community ties as freeing, and necessary for progress. So did Durkheim ([1937] 2003), whose work is regrettably teleological. Durkheim labeled pagan ideologies and relationships as mechanical and less developed, belonging to agrarian or hunter-gather people that he unabashedly titles savages. Even today, agribusiness advocates, like the Farm Bureau, utilize liberalism in this sense to promote the exodus of farmers and consolidation of landholdings in the name of progress. While supporters of a liberal state skirt this interaction—pressing the belief that the state's main purpose is social welfare—it in action embraces the market economy (Table 1), largely to the detriment of rural society (Ashwood, Diamond, and Thu 2014). Rural people increasingly take note, and actively protest corporate farming, especially industrial animal production (DeLind 1995). In practice, the liberal state, with its close tie to corporate visions of progress, has responded weakly. Those who see themselves as explicitly

burdened by state-sanctioned policies, and holding anti-state proclivities, are further estranged from liberalism.

Liberalism has become uncomfortably intertwined with neoliberalism, making it vulnerable to criticism from two ends: saying it supports social welfare, but simultaneously imposing the market economy (Table 1). The neoliberal position has cleverly mastered the rhetoric of anti-statism and statelessness, an open embrace of the market economy that the liberal position dare not take, due to its enlightenment obligations. Neoliberalism advocates ideas like “private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade” that rhetorically seem free from statist intervention (Harvey 2007:22). In practice, though, enforcing neoliberalism requires intensive reconstruction of society and markets to achieve profit centralization, while reducing other parts of the state (Peck and Tickell 2002). The supposed deregulation associated with neoliberalism actually requires an ever more untold number of new bureaucratic apparatuses to achieve privatization (Bartley 2007; Castree 2008; Graeber 2015; Robbins and Luginbuhl 2007). Enforcing the prevalence of neoliberalism’s “competitive individualism” (Sutton 2005:175) often against more nuanced desires for reciprocity reconstructs society in the market’s image, the latest unfolding of Polanyi’s double movement ([1944] 1957). Nonetheless, the notion of reducing the scope of the state can sound good, and especially resonate with rural Americans who call for less government in an effort to escape the encroachment of corporations that take away land and local farm or economic viability. In fact, that is why neoliberalism in rhetoric, but not necessarily action, has bled into conservatism and liberalism. After all, animosity toward the state is widespread in an age of profiteering. For example, the Fortune 500 Southern Company can forcibly use eminent domain to take local land in proximity to its utilities. Those in rural Georgia living next to a Southern Company nuclear power plant respond with anti-statist views: white locals merge “government” with “corporations”; black residents call it the “system.” In either case, the corporate-state relationship is seen as corrupt and one calling for a reduction in state power (Ashwood 2018). By sounding like it is about individual rights and hard work, neoliberal politics rhetorically answers such animosity, while actually enacting, and even further empowering, the actual problem: corporate-state profiteering.

Altogether, conservatism’s *claim* to reduce the state, combined with its *actual* defense of traditional values, certainly seems the best match for rural people’s needs relative to neoliberalism, radicalism, or liberalism. But to stop here fails to take claim making to task. It fails to appreciate the stateless and anti-state possibilities for politics by assuming

that the only politics that matters are those that have some portion of pro-state interference. And it fails to appreciate that the stateless and anti-state positions are not tertiary, illogical, or irrelevant. In short, it fails to appreciate stateless and anti-statism as political, even practical views. They are permanent facets of politics, the elephant in the room that persistently shapes power struggles, while their significance remains largely unexplored.

### **Statelessness**

To begin to fully incorporate statelessness into political understandings of rural people requires engaging with an overlooked dimension of political theory in sociology: anarchism. The field of geography as of late has taken increasing note of anarchism as a way forward, and also a historical pillar of the discipline (Springer 2016). Sociology scholars, in contrast, have done little, if anything, with anarchism, and the same goes largely for those studying rural sociology (Shantz and Williams 2013; Stock 2007). And this is a shame, as anarchism plays a major role in precipitating social movements and revolutions. Rural rebels, who poach and trespass in response to corporate and state land takings, are one case in point (Ashwood 2018). Another includes groups that choose passivity, or nonviolent forms of protest, such as living a life separate from the state or refusing to move from a space. Diggers in seventeenth-century England, for example, tried to establish egalitarian agrarian communities based on ideals of self-sufficiency. These ideas continue to attract some support in San Francisco and elsewhere, and through happenings like Rainbow Gatherings and intentional communities, like Dancing Rabbit (Schelly 2014, 2017). Some anarchists, though, are more explicitly destructive, like those who participated in the 2017 Berkeley protests. Deliberate destruction nearly precipitated a revolution when Luddites formed secret organizations to smash machines in defense of their jobs against owners looking to decrease their costs in mid-seventeenth-century England (Harvey 2010). At first glance, such targeted destruction and, conversely, intentional or egalitarian communities may sound fairly insignificant. But they are political acts that can precipitate revolutions or eliminate the need for the state.

The Greek root of “anarchy” means something along the lines of the absence of authority or government (Guérin 1970). A central premise of anarchism is that “the state *means* coercion, domination by means of coercion, camouflaged if possible but unceremonious and overt if need be” (Bakunin [1873] 2005:24). Anarchists, in the words of Bakunin (136), “believe that the people can be happy and free only when they

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Figure 1. The stateless and anti-state positions are two sides of the same coin, for in today's world of states, one cannot have a stateless vision without some version of an anti-state position.

create their own life, organizing themselves from below upward by means of independent and completely free associations, subject to no official tutelage but open to the free and diverse influences of individuals and parties." Further, anarchy recognizes the interdependency of means and ends, making recent anarchist theorists resistant to the use of violence in any form (Springer 2016; Stock 2007).

I see anarchism as encompassing two distinct, but interrelated elements, what I have been referring to as the stateless and anti-state positions. Anarchism is stateless, in that it envisions a society free from the coercion of a central state; and second, it is anti-statist because it seeks to work against centralized powers of exploitation and control. Anti-statism and statelessness are two sides of the same coin. What is crucial to understand is that the stateless position never goes away in anarchism (see Figure 1), but is simply articulated in different ways by those who live in state-dominated societies. What I call reformers temporarily advocate a pro-statist view as a just means to a stateless end; while retractors, like libertarians, seek to reduce the power of the state without attention to intermediate issues of justice. I take up the contradictions within anti-statism in the next section, but first, I explore how widespread the stateless position is in rural places domestically and abroad. Statelessness is in part an ideal, but it was also once a reality in much of the world. Pinpointing statelessness recognizes the history and ideals shared, despite now prominent anti-state positions.

The ideal of statelessness is relatively timeless and has a long history in rural places, a fact overlooked by political labels of conservatism. Albeit difficult for those of us living thousands of years since the

formation of city-states to imagine, centralized systems of governance were not always the rule. Beginning in 1200 BCE, improvements in writing, tools, and coinage enabled the enforcement of a taxation system—the lifeblood of the state—while tools forged of iron and steel enabled the defense of centralized wealth (Bell 2018). Urban interests used such tools to exploit rural resources while defending their consequent wealth in city centers. During this period of transition, power in rural areas rooted itself locally, in kinship and diverse and easily accessible pagan gods reflective of the many challenges of farming and gathering. Defeating this decentralized way of believing took a thousand years of imposed rule and violence, as the 435 CE decree by Roman emperors demonstrated: They called those of pagan faith “criminal” and subject to “death” if found practicing (Bell 2018:43). Certainly, state making was not an either-or process, as the centralized states of 1600s Europe are not the same as those of the Roman Empire (Kropotkin [1909] 2002). Indeed, industrialization prompted an especially dramatic exodus from the countryside that continues to this day. Yet the marked attack on paganism, the once dominant faith structure of rural cultures, is a landmark in the making of the Christian state, which struggled to speak to “the ecological and local concerns of an agrarian majority, while also struggling to bind them into a unified state, capable of collecting taxes and supporting a small urban elite, and marshaling an army in times of need and imperial ambition” (Bell 2018:104). Paganism is not exclusive to anarchism, nor is anarchism exclusive of Christianity. But creating a centralized rule of religion (one God) alongside a centralized rule of state is crucial to understanding the rise of states and the decline of self-autonomous societies with self-autonomous beliefs.

While living a stateless life has largely become difficult, if not impossible, in much of the Western world, the processes of state making against those of a stateless position are still ongoing. James C. Scott, in a series of books (1976, 1999) that vary between state critiques and documentations of nonsedentary ways of life, demonstrates that the stateless position is alive today and even enacted in some parts of east Asia and elsewhere. He critiques what he calls the God’s-eye view imposed by state-based, high modernist episodes that target stateless people. He warns that acts such as gridding of the land and imposing credentials at birth can be used for authoritarian and imperialistic ends. Such practices, like dispossessing thousands for the creation of a dam, run roughshod over “local knowledge and know-how” (1999:6). He is careful to explain how stateless societies become of the state, through the implementation of uniform property regimes for taxation and concentrating

people to monitor them more easily and extract commodities for urban consumption.

The state's breaking down and persecution of those who hold a stateless position is rarely a kind one. Moore (1966) famously titled it the violence of gradualism, that slow process of enduring persecution practiced against peasants who did not fit into the state's centralized plan. Such peasants, with little other choice, manned the dangerous London factory floors of the eighteenth century. Scott (1999) details how the state in Russia struggled to break community power over the household and replace it with taxes on individual landholders. Estimates vary, as Scott documents, but somewhere between 3 to 20 million peasants were killed in Stalin's creation of collective farms. In France, rural people too resisted bourgeois property rights. More generally, small farms under any state modernist project were the first on the chopping block, because while they could undercut plantation costs, they were harder to tax, so the state preferred schemes that perpetuated plantations (Scott 1999).

Such torrid events practiced against stateless people are not only of the past but very much alive today in rural America in three main regards: agricultural industrialization, environmental injustice, and natural resource extraction. The bulk of agrifood studies document a troubling relationship between state making as we know it and the prosperity of rural communities and small farms. Historically, Goldschmidt (1978:xxxii) documents corporate agribusinesses as the recipient of a series of special government advantages: "(1) the agricultural support programs, (2) tax policies, (3) agricultural labor policies, and (4) the research-orientation of the USDA and of the land grant colleges." All this, he concludes, contributes to rural demise. The corporation is, namely, a fictitious legal creation dreamed up by early economic developers that extended special rights of state sovereignty to early barons of private capital (Horwitz 1977). The news is not getting any better. In fact, it's arguably worse. Corporate reconstruction of agriculture replaces farmers with investors, and local responsibility with regulatory frameworks that enforce the market economy (Ashwood et al. 2014). Neoliberalism leads to environmental degradation and further industrialization and corporatization of agriculture (Stock et al. 2014). In terms of water pollution, there's phosphorus, nitrogen, fecal, and even arsenic by-products from industrial animal facilities (Bullers 2005; Cole, Todd, and Wing 2000; Graham et al. 2009; Merchant et al. 2005). Countless community chronicles attest to the internal division, declining property values, low-wage jobs, and sickness that accompany such operations (Imhoff 2010). Then there's the pesticide drift for

communities of laborers and residents who may be near vegetable and fruit fields or pine plantations, to name a few locations (Harrison 2011). A scaled-up and capital-outsourced way of farming is rarely good for the farmers themselves, who can become serfs on their own land (Constance 2008; Wolf, Hueth, and Ligon 2001). Those of middle agriculture in the United States, who engage in “production largely outside of the corporate complexes that dominate the agri-food system,” are in trouble (Guptill and Welsh 2014:36). They “are not just losing ground numerically; they are also losing market power and government support” (40). Certainly, there are some state programs, such as those associated with the New Deal, that, according to Gilbert (2015), have dealt rural communities and farmers a fairer hand. Still, on the aggregate, the state regularly has a stake in the game of running farmers and peasants out of business, often to the detriment of rural communities (Scott 1999). Global land grabs are the most recent example of the state’s role in facilitating the transfer of land from peasants and indigenous people into the hands of global capitalists (Borras et al. 2011).

Agriculture, by extracting from the rural and expropriating for urban use, folds into broader processes of natural resource extraction and related environmental injustices (Freudenburg and Gramling 1994). In a sense, it is the same state-sanctioned pillaging of rural places for urban good that has unfolded for millennia, but with new dangerous risks of exposure and toxicity. Typically, where the extraction is the greatest, so too is the size of the industry, and so too is the rural poverty (Humphrey et al. 1993; Peluso, Humphrey, and Fortmann 1994). When identifying processes that contribute to poverty, Humphrey et al. (1993:142) list natural resource bureaucracies co-opted by their most powerful clients, as well as rural restructuring where monopolies and oligopolies drive entrenched poverty. Where communities are poor and resources are rich, both “state officials as well as private capital” are typically complicit in the plight of the many and profit of the few (Humphrey et al. 1993:165). The state, though, is not explicitly identified by the authors as an agent of this decline, but rather an ambivalent entity subject to co-optation. This is similar to the idea of problematic economic development—but not a problematic state—especially in the context of disasters, which leads to the “removal of money from the many for the benefit of the few” (Freudenburg et al. 2008:1015). Bringing the ideal of statelessness into an understanding of rural politics requires realizing that the state has agency, and then holding it responsible for its role in rural poverty and resource extraction, rather than being only a pawn of the people or profit.

In the aggregate, rural spaces often find themselves treated as internal colonies, even peripheries within core countries. Uranium mining, hydraulic fracturing, toxic waste sites, waste incinerators, rubber production, coal mining, and most energy production are cases in point (Bailey, Faupel, and Holland 1992; Bell and York 2010; Ellis et al. 2016; Malin and DeMaster 2016; Schafft, Borlu, and Glenna 2013). Rural communities of color, minorities in space and race, are most burdened of all (Lerner 2005). Underneath the umbrella of the utilitarian democratic context, the targeting of rural minorities is not only sanctioned by the state but encouraged. With less money and fewer in number, they meet the state and the market economy's criteria for hosting the most dangerous and worst of industries (Ashwood 2018). When it comes to bringing waste facilities into rural places, community leaders in governmental positions play a key role, and often are more supportive than other residents (Spies et al. 1998). It is no coincidence that in such a context, rural people seek statelessness as public distrust of the government and decision makers grows (Krannich and Albrecht 1995). Statelessness and localism, in such a context, seem a much better end.

Rural sociologists have responded by trying to combat the utilitarian, top-down vision imposed by the state with bottom-up strategies. While not explicitly of a stateless position, this line of research supports strategies that work against the centralization of power, authority, and wealth familiar to state schemes. Bell (2013) provides a rich firsthand account of protest against mountaintop coal mining, and the possibilities for reform through the stories of female activists. Kloppenburg's (1991) piece documents the failure of expert-based paradigms in agriculture, and calls for the empowerment of alternative ways of knowing, especially local knowledge. Kloppenburg sees locality as an intimate relationship between worker, material, and product of labor; but such relationships are estranged and ignored by the "undisputed intellectual hegemony" of the oft white, and male, expert elite (529). He calls simply to bring the farmer back in and accept situated knowledges—two accessible, yet difficult to enact recommendations in light of the power of high modernist ideologies. Participatory schemes arguably are part anarchist in nature, as they seek to challenge top-down development regimes with decentralized, spontaneous processes that work through direct action (Wald 2014). Relatedly, much rural sociological scholarship calls for the redistribution of power and wealth in light of the damaging repercussions of extractive industries and agriculture. Sometimes calling its subject civic agriculture (Lyson 2004), sometimes alternative agriculture (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2012), and other times distinguishing it as organic farming (Vos 2000) or agroecology (Warner

2007), such literature takes on the tenor of the stateless position. Take, for example, Hendrickson and Heffernan (2002), who seek to relocalize food to resist “commodification of our personal, private relationships by the same logic that rules our political and economic lives” (348). They suggest alternatives can work by decentralizing power, connecting back to the seasons, and cultivating personal and community relationships through food. Perhaps these ends are not quite pagan, but they certainly work against the high modernist ideologies of state making that sought to subsume the variability and unpredictability of seasonality and human relationships relative to communities.

In light of these two influences—the stateless position as a distant memory of life in the countryside combined with ample evidence of state-perpetuated violence against rural communities—why has the stateless position not gained standing in rural sociology literature as a legitimate political view? One answer is that rural sociologists straddle dual roles as creatures of the state (Buttel 1985) and creatures seeking to better humanity (Burawoy 2004). In part, they advocate for disintegrating the power of the state, and this scholarly position may help explain the decline of so-named rural sociologists in recent years as institutions withdraw their support (Ashwood and Bell 2016). Yet simultaneously, such scholars regularly seek state funding and design state policies that advocate for a particular manifestation of government power and authority. Here is where the trickiness of the stateless position comes into play, and consequently it has remained largely unnamed by rural sociologists or sociologists more generally. Advocating for the vitality of rural society works against the state we currently live in, one that is largely motivated to depopulate rural places, turn them into explicit sites of extraction, and further centralize wealth in urban centers. Simultaneously, the tools at our disposal, and in some cases the money that sustains our livelihoods, are explicitly of the state. Rural sociologists, or further almost anyone living in society today, seem caught between two dictums: living outside a state completely or doing one’s best within it.

Perhaps the most prevalent rural sociological example of the challenges of articulating a stateless position within a state society belongs to agrarianism, a popular ideology that runs through rural communities and the academy. It was initially known as Jeffersonian agrarian democracy, and proponents argued that to have equality and sustainable democracy, landownership must remain widely distributed, with emphasis on the family farm. Certainly, the state was necessary to define and award land rights (Locke [1689] 1824). But the idea was somewhat stateless: People could live out their own subsistence and productive

lifestyles as they chose, because they were not under the foot of feudal lords (Guérin 1970). Calling Thomas Jefferson's vision one of "strident agrarianism," Danbom (2006:67) writes that "property ownership also presumably contributed to rural superiority." The ideal society was one of self-reliant, family farms, embedded in the traditional ideas of *gemeinschaft*, but one, as Naples (1994:115) points out, oft riddled with racist, xenophobic, and sexist notions that assumed a "rugged individualism" belonging only to white males. This naturalization of agrarianism made such farming an implicit norm. More recently, Wendell Berry (2002), in making his case for restoring rural communities, calls for a series of stateless suggestions: lengthening memory of place, reducing the need to buy or overwork the land, loving land out of love for your children, cultivating more local skills like masonry and carpentry, realizing plentitude, and revitalizing local culture. In much of his work, he identifies as the main antagonist the state, most especially embodied in so-titled free-market economists who have the security of government-subsidized tenure, as do colleges of agriculture more generally, which he sees as agents of rural destruction.

On the one hand, agrarianism provides a compelling way to articulate rights of self-actualization for farmers seeking standing against the rising power of corporate, industrial interests (Sklar 1988). On the other hand, naturalization precluded agrarianists from understanding that they actually were asking for a certain kind of state, while also imagining a stateless society. Settlers scarcely could have deeds to the land without the ambitions of foreign states motivated to kill and dispossess American Indians to bring more commodities back home. Agrarianism was, and remains, caught in a bit of a contradiction: It calls for a particular kind of state that provides just land distribution, while simultaneously holding dear the idea that there simply is no need for a state to achieve such an end. Indeed, the full realization of agrarianism as part statist has yet to happen, giving rise to militias like that in Oregon of a particularly libertarian bent. Their idea is to push back against a bloated government to protect property rights when, in fact, it would be difficult for their property to exist without the state. Such ideology, without full recognition of its actual dependency upon the state, can become especially vulnerable to neoliberal rhetoric. Framed differently, with a stateless perspective, militia men are actually asking for a different kind of state that helps them reach a stateless end, where not even their guns are necessary for their political defense. But to get there, they need a state.

The internal agrarian contradiction centered around property is not limited to its own ideological confines. It folds into a broader conflict

in sociology. Those who believe in the preeminence of the state, and classic Marxism, nod their head to Kautsky, and lament: How can we stop the inevitable decline of family farmers and peasants? The very question overlooks the stateless position, begetting a nameless conflict that continues to ripen between those who abhor the state and those who worship at its alter. That conflict materializes in very real ways between three ideological splits: Anarchists call for the elimination of the state, Marxists want more of it, and those stuck somewhere in between (perhaps many rural sociologists) struggle to articulate what about statism is good and bad. And here is where anti-statism, from the view of reformers and retractors, can help make sense of the internal conflict over how to achieve a stateless end, both disciplinarily and politically.

### **Anti-statism**

Living within a state, but dreaming of a life without it, culminates in distinct forms of anti-statism. And consequently, much conflict develops. The stateless position, albeit little recognized or studied, enjoys more of a celebrity status as daring or idealistic, while the anti-state position can lead to dividing and conquering of its proponents.

While anarchists largely agree on a stateless position, how to achieve that end is up for debate. Noam Chomsky, who alongside David Graber (2011, 2015) is arguably the most famous of modern anarchists, captures the inner anti-state debate between anarchists aptly. As an anarchosyndicalist, heavily influenced by Marxism, Chomsky agrees that living without a state is an ideal end. But he disagrees with other anarchists on how to achieve that end. Cutting the state at any cost, like reducing social benefits for the poor, is folly, in his view ([1976] 2005). Chomsky thus supports state policies that help liberate the most oppressed people, and disagrees with the more libertarian philosophy that cutting the state at any cost is the main end of anarchism. The more extreme libertarian end of anarchism contrasts with those like Kropotkin ([1909] 2002) who sought alliances between socialists and anarchists. Kropotkin even pointed out that the most successful revolts happened through parties, not individuals. Those who take a more distinctively libertarian and individualist approach to anarchism shy away from the spontaneity of the social mass (Guérin 1970:27). This internal debate among anarchists over individualism and collectivism provides a helpful guide to understanding the popularity of the stateless position in rural places, but it brings marked divergence over how to achieve the

stateless ideal: for should one temporarily advocate more of a better kind of state or rather slash the state in any way possible?

Arguably the most pivotal feature of the anti-statist position is that it has some point(s) of antagonism. For retractors or reformers, each has experienced an injustice at the hands of the state. Reformers of the anarchist or liberal position are celebrated in the environmental justice literature as playing a predominant role in the rise of the movement (Cole and Foster 2001). Cole and Foster (2001) identify the American Indian Movement, and the occupation of Wounded Knee at the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, as marking a formative moment in the defense of the environment. There, American Indians asserted their rights of sovereignty over their mineral rights, which had been leased to private companies. They protested the violation of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty that recognized Sioux sovereignty over much of the Dakotas, Montana, Wyoming, and Nebraska (Cornell 1988). The First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, held in 1991, asserted such rights, for example, “to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples” (Environmental Justice Network 2017). The Keystone Pipeline is a more recent case in which the stateless beliefs of indigenous peoples inspired a reformatory framework for broader social change. Collectivization serves as a key point of maneuvering to work against what is seen as a coercive state. But while the end of the state’s reign may be the ultimate goal, in the meantime, reformers work to change its interworking for the better.

Still, reformers have in some cases confounded researchers because of their stateless positions. Take, for example, black environmental justice advocates who see the government as an agent of oppression, while simultaneously advocating for change through state agencies (Ashwood 2018). What can initially appear as a contradiction—one of a stateless ideology simultaneously advocating for more of a state in a certain case—actually makes sense because there are no mainstream stateless political options *in action* (see Table 1). The stateless position in today’s world requires some articulation of an anti-state response. The belief that a better life can exist outside the state does not necessarily mean for reformers that they do not work within the power structures that exist currently to make change. Pellow (2014) documents as much through his work on what he calls “total liberation,” whereby he studies groups that advocate for the end of oppression for people, alongside nonhuman animals and ecosystems. Such actors, he cautions, believe in “direct action for justice in a world not bound by the rules of

government or market” (61). Such actors are constantly affronted with the challenges of compromising to make change through the state, or to simply reduce its scope at any cost. And the divisions splinter accordingly, even within shared political orientations like anarchism and liberalism.

Conflict also arises between different political versions of what anti-statist reformism means, rhetorically and in action. Conservatives may largely find themselves wanting a stateless society, but in the meantime think refining it for the better means supporting the military and veterans (see Table 1). Neoliberalism, while clearly advocating a stateless position rhetorically, never achieves it in action, but does go so far as to retract some key parts of the state, like social welfare, while reforming it in other ways, like providing a bureaucratic apparatus damaging to people, but beneficial to corporate prosperity (Graeber 2015). Neoliberal advocates do not admit to this reformation, but their action embodies it.

Retractors, ranging from ecoterrorists to libertarians to Tea Party advocates, typically receive a less favorable reception than reformers in scholarship. The former are more radical and the latter more moderate, whether conservative, anarchist, liberal, or neoliberal. For anarchists, retractors capture those who advocate a less-at-whatever-cost approach, with a range between those who commit illegal activities and those who are simply more sympathetic to fewer government policies. But that does not mean their politics does not exist, nor that they have not also experienced a point of antagonism. Hobsbawm, who stood against the current of mid-twentieth-century historians by recognizing the importance of anti-statist action, chided scholars for ignoring such protest. He said conservative movements are “undetermined” or treated as “ambiguous . . . partly because historians, being mainly educated and townsmen, have until recently simply not made sufficient effort to understand people who are unlike themselves” (1959:2). He is at pains to show the ways in which the state regularly exploits rural people, especially peasants, inspiring the formation of gangs, rebels, and bandits who take the law into their own hands against “the oppressors and the State” (16). While Hobsbawm takes seriously the action that he documents, and even chides other academics for ignoring such activities, he nonetheless writes off the efficacy and basis of reasoning for retractors. He describes individual rebelliousness as socially neutral, and social bandits as “modest and unrevolutionary” (24). He writes that such actors are “inchoate” and “pre-historic” (10), and he liberally uses “primitive” and “archaic” to describe them (both terms appear in his 1959 book). Overall, it’s a contradiction: If such activities have substantial impact on broader forms of resistance—Hobsbawm says as much

himself and, more to the point, Scott (1976) calls them the dynamite for broader movements—surely such protests must not be as backward and ineffective as he suggests. In fact, they are as much a part of resistance in the modern age as they were any other time, making them far from pre-political or primitive.

The individualist, more retractor version of anarchism that rebels and bandits belong to is of the older Bakunin variety and is often associated with rural places (Guérin 1970). Rural favoring of acts of resistance, like Trump’s stand-alone-man populist campaign or the rural rebel who stands up against land grabbers (Ashwood 2018), may in part aim to spur urban progressives, even anarchist ones, who label rural lifestyles and natural-resource-intensive labor as backward. Chomsky ([1976] 2005), for example, assumes a bit of a teleological approach, saying that “highly advanced industrial society” (136) contrasts with “primitive” peasant agriculture (135). Anarchism, then, is not immune from the same problems of God’s-eye imperialism that plague radicalism and can overlook the pagan and agrarian facets of the stateless society.

This capacity to document, but simultaneously to write off, the reasoning behind the rural retractor version of anti-statism continues to be endemic to more recent accounts. Retractors tend to be labeled along a fairly narrow spectrum, beginning with “radical” and ending with “ignorant.” In either case, the descriptors are not flattering. On the ignorant end of the spectrum, Vance (2016), in a well-received popular autobiography, laments the very real poverty he faced as a child growing up in the Appalachian Mountains. He, though, explicitly talks about the laziness of his neighbors and what “saved” him: an escape to a high-paying job in Silicon Valley (60). He refers to rural Appalachian people as “pessimistic” (4), “socially isolated” (4), and wedded to “resentment” in his own case (173). He places the blame for white poverty on the situation at home (245). He finds optimism by getting out and going to school, and, in the end, not coming back. Implicitly, in his account, the rural is backward by virtue of its cultural norms, and the urban forward as a site of progress. The broader, paternalistic political economy of the Appalachian region, which scholars have documented as a site of extraction and land grabbing going back well over a century, receives scant attention (Bell 2013; Duncan [1999] 2014; Gaventa 1980; House and Howard 2009; Scott 2010). And neither does the incestuous relationships between corporate barons of capital and local, state, and even federal governments. Thus while white residents of rural Appalachia arguably desperately need outside help from the government through forms of support, one can hardly blame them for pointing a finger at

the government for having a good bit to do with their plight in the first place.

Yet the most popular of accounts still repeat the tired, yet recurring, adage that rural people are, at the end of the day, big on muscle, but short on intellect. This collapses the potential for reformers to participate meaningfully in revising state policy, and enlivens the retractor base. Hochschild (2016:102) seeks to understand what she calls “the Great Paradox”: why members of the Tea Party want a clean and safe environment, but simultaneously want to diminish the federal government. Hochschild, thus, overlooks the stateless position as a point of ideological reason, assuming its illegitimacy through the label of paradox. Hochschild is careful to warn the reader that she came from Berkeley, California, and traveled to Louisiana to try to understand those behind the Tea Party movement—a group she could scarcely understand when she began her study. In the end, she suggests a mutual dependence between the red and the blue: the urban blue supplying the skill and the red providing the energy to run it (233). Even amid this well-meaning attempt to bridge (with a letter from the liberal about twice as long as the letter from the imagined conservative), there remains an assumption that what is conservative is lowbrow horsepower and what is liberal is highbrow talent. The point of explanation, then, is to sympathize with conservatives’ plight, but lament—and in effect—judge, the political responses documented. For if in every situation, the creatures of the state are deemed the most respectable and reputable, then those with lifestyles and political choices outside or against it will forever stand in their shadow. And so will our capacity to understand retractor anti-statism.

On the opposite end from so-titled ignorant retractors in anarchism can be found the terrorist. Catherine McNicol Stock (1996), a year after the Oklahoma City bombing, identified what she calls the new rural radicalism. She focuses on convicted and executed terrorist Timothy McVeigh and counterpart Terry Nichols, and presses their rural experiences (rather than both being veterans, for example) as the most important factor cultivating their extremism and eventual bombing of a federal building, where 168 were killed, including 19 children. One critic accuses McNicol Stock of too many leaps of logic, extending the extremism of the few to the culture of the whole, pointing out that many of the recent white radicals she mentioned were urban transplants (Friedberger 1997). But she argues that the frontier experience, class, race, gender, and evangelical Christianity make the countryside especially good fodder for a rural form of radicalism. This sort of labeling, like rural conservatism, can lead to rural essentialism. Her study, if

repositioned to include the stateless and anti-state perspectives, can begin to help answer how and when the image of the stateless society intersects with anti-state violence. That question is most important to not just understand why boot-camp buddies Terry Nichols and Timothy McVeigh became radicalized, but to know how to stop violent radicalization in the future. The rural—certainly a place in which these activities can play out—is an important point to consider. But the stateless and anti-state positions I propose in this article also are not limited to it. Urban experiences, which Nichols and McVeigh also had, can also fall into the stateless and anti-state positions. Avoiding the turn of anti-statism into violence requires coming to terms with the facets of state domination most likely to incite those on the margins, like Nichols and McVeigh.

Considering the stateless position when encountering retractor politics can help scholars understand perhaps the most critical question for those living in the current political moment: Why is it that some who experience injustices call for more of a particular type of governance, while others simply want less of the government altogether? At this critical fork-in-the-road moment (Dewey [1927] 1954), a dire mistake is to assume that people *should* believe that reforming the state, rather than reducing its power, is the best way to grapple with an injustice. Such a view produces a partial understanding of rural politics, and eventually a paltry pathway to empowering those disempowered. But much sociological work separates the accumulation of private capital through the vehicle of corporations from the government itself. The state is thus received as an agent of good, while its very real role in creating the situation (corporations are, after all, a fictitious legal entity) is overlooked. The evolution in Gaventa's (1980) earlier thought to more recent thinking is a case in point. Gaventa documented spaces where the traditional culture of Appalachian people provided the temporary impetus to stand up to corporate absentee landowners and moneyed elites. Gaventa proposed three dimensions of power centered on the idea of the powerful and the powerless, with the intention of learning why some people did, and other people did not, participate in public protests centered on governmental reform. He, thus, presumed either an explicit pro-state or at least a reformist position. In doing so, Gaventa saw capitalist corporate coal interests as somewhat separate from the state, rather than the two interacting, as sociohistorical accounts of corporations document (Horwitz 1977; Roy 1997; Sklar 1988). In part, this was a product of the time, as Gaventa wrote in the shadow of the War on Poverty. While he once favored collectivization and government advocacy as a means to affront power, Gaventa now largely focuses on

localized, community-based, and participatory work, where power is in the hands of the people, often at smaller and anti-statist scales (Mathie and Gaventa 2015). This is not to say that the gathering of anti-statist positions for reformist ends is not a noble endeavor, as Gaventa's earlier work suggests. It most certainly can be. But presuming it as a starting place excludes retractors, and perhaps even the most meaningful of change that his later work has so markedly achieved by treating communities, rather than the state, as the key point of power.

If the ultimate goals for rural sociologists include reducing inequality and promoting justice and fairness, viewing the state as an agent of unilateral good cripples our capacity to do so. Further, it prevents us from seeing the state as regulatory in many capacities: regulating the market society into existence while simultaneously regulating its deleterious consequences (and doing a much better job at the former than latter). The end point is that both activities are articulations of states, just different types of states. By presuming the state to only be the one that regulates corporations and not a state that also regulates corporations into being, sociologists can play into the free market rhetoric that enables massive wealth extraction from the many in favor of the few. In short, there is a danger in assuming reformist politics that favor a rose-colored view of the state: one that remembers only its capacity to do good, but not also real harm. In the case of environmental injustice, Pellow (2016:385) warns that "it makes sense to proceed cautiously whenever and wherever state-centric approaches are proposed as a solution." Such caution is also necessary to understand the politics of the rural in all its complexity, a complexity often stereotyped today as conservative because of a failure to incorporate anarchism. Finding a language to incorporate both the reformist and reductionist views of anti-statism into sociological investigations of rural and urban politics is paramount.

The overall history of anarchism suggests that retractor and reformer, urban and rural alliances are possible. Bakukin ([1873] 2005:58), for example, called for an alliance of factory and agrarian worker associations to achieve liberation from the state. And such alliances have been achieved, as demonstrated by the 1936 Spanish revolution that joined together industry and agriculture (Chomsky [1976] 2005). The fact that spontaneous groupings of rural and urban people across different situations were possible at one time, but seem oppositional today, only further presses the point that rural retractors are not an inevitability. Rather, urban judgment rendered against the rural may be a major barrier toward achieving anarchist goals of reformism in the movement toward a stateless society. Bakukin ([1873] 2005:133)

defines the anarchist revolution as arising “spontaneously within the people and destroy[ing] everything that opposes the broad flow of popular life so as to create new forms of free social organization out of the very depths of the people’s existence.” Teleological judgment dampens the capacity for a contagious or “leaderless direct democracy” based upon “consensus” and “synthesis” that “everyone can accept” (Graeber 2013:52). By labeling the rural as of the past, not of the present, and as of the muscle, not of the intellect, anarchists, like radical urban progressives, counteract their own vision for the proliferation of local knowledge, freedom, respect, and dignity.

### **Conclusion**

The anarchist basis of thought helps separate the pro-state, anti-state, and stateless positions from the thick mix of social values also associated with rural conservatism. We need a better vocabulary to capture rural politics that is not confined to “conservative” and “liberal.” Practically, the language of pro-state, stateless, anti-state, retractor, and reformer helps clarify the different bases of thought that shape current politics, in which sometimes the desire for less of a state overwhelms other competing social values.

More importantly, anarchism provides a different theoretical starting place that begins to erase the deeply held presumption that the rural is backward, ignorant, untalented, and stymied by its own culture of complacency. At least questioning the presumption that the state is the starting point for political views—if not even throwing out the presumption altogether—creates a new point of understanding for scholars, and further, change making. Regrettably, anarchist theory is largely absent in rural sociology, and further, in sociology as a whole. By understanding ourselves as creatures of the state, we have had a tendency to overlook ways of being and acting that imagine a life completely outside it. The question of whether a stateless society can be enacted is less to the point. More to the point is recognizing that a chunk of people believe in life outside the state. And further that such people blame the state for preventing the unfolding of a better life for themselves and their families.

Coming to terms with the ideal of a stateless society, and recognizing anti-statist responses, requires that scholars identify the interdependency of today’s state and market society. Karl Polanyi ([1944] 1957:60) explicitly speaks of the state administration of “highly artificial stimulants administered to the body social,” which enforces the market society in the image of the market economy. When scholars treat the

market as self-operating, independently of state administration, a society versus market approach can come to reign, masking the role of political elites and entities in shaping both (Peck 2008). The state is intertwined with markets. Capitalism does not operate by an invisible hand. Rather, the law enforces capitalism every day. In light of this view, it makes much sense that people form anti-statist views. By pulling apart pro-statist implementation of market economy in this article, I hope that scholars can also begin to see market economy as a facet of statism.

The question for rural sociologists and sociologists more generally is to think through the ways in which those anti-statist views can be used to reinforce the consolidation of wealth for the few, or to promote a more just, equal, and fair society. Reformists like Noam Chomsky and the American Indian Movement take a stateless stance ideologically, but simultaneously work to reform the apparatus of power that exists. Retractors, like the Tea Party, simply seek to reduce the authority of the government, regardless of who or what gets slashed in the process. Neo-liberal advocates claim a stateless and anti-state retractor end, while in practice, they increase state support of for-profit entities while providing less for humanity at large. Free market rhetoric alongside rural stereotypes plays into the hands of a bigger state that is better for a few, rather than a more modest state good for the many.

Scholars, as a first step, would do well to strip their work of rural stereotypes as well as free market rhetoric to bring retractors into their fold. There seems to be an unfair expectation that rural people embrace politics that largely exclude them. And as scholarship has aptly noted, rural people have points of intolerance for these types of politics. Being honest about the state's role in the market economy and rural people's exploitation is an important place to start. There are also incestuous, ideological processes at work practiced through catchy phrases like brain drain and white trash. Rural people can come to teach their children and encourage each other to either get big or get out, or simply to get out. This symbolic violence does little for the betterment of rural places or society more generally, when regions or people of the world are written off as desolate, lesser, and of the past. Such erasures of rural people masks the violence of gradualism practiced against them in order to achieve statist ends that otherwise would clearly emerge as morally compromised.

Thus a call to incorporate anarchist theory into rural sociology and sociology is more than of practical service of doing a better job gauging the political pulse of the countryside. Anarchist theory properly acknowledges the burdens borne by people who are domestically and

globally marginalized by the state. It begins with the fork in the road, rather than assuming a paradox born of ignorance. It keeps clear the points of antagonism, without presuming the greatest power is just to begin with. In short, anarchism gives rural sociology the theoretical teeth it needs to bear down on injustices in the rural across the globe.

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