The Mexican Revolution sent shockwaves across the networks that anarchists had created in Latin America and beyond. It also created a vast scholarly corpus. Much has been written about the histories of the Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM) and the Magón brothers’ efforts to radicalize the early stages of the revolution. The recent publication of Kelly Lytle Hernández’s *Bad Mexicans: Race, Empire, and Revolution in the Borderlands* (2022) promises to spark interest in a new generation of scholars. While we have decades of historical scholarship on many aspects of the topic, not much attention has been given to the role that women had in the development and expansion of anarchism in the Mexican borderlands during the first half of the twentieth century. Sonia Hernández’s book, *For a Just and Better World*, grapples with this absence.

Hernández offers a meticulous history of the anarchist women in the Mexican borderlands. The book opens with a letter penned by Caritina Piña Montalvo, an anarchist organizer. Although sources to create a detailed biography of the organizer are scarce, Hernández centers Piña Montalvo to build the book’s narrative. She does so while employing a transnational lens that connects the histories of Tampico and the broader Gulf of Mexico.

The first chapter situates readers by detailing the geographies that guide the book’s narrative: Tampico, Villa Cecilia, and the Gulf of Mexico. By paying attention to the PLM’s development and the rise of rationalist schools based on the teachings of Francisco Ferrer Guardia, Hernández highlights the importance of anarchists before and after the Mexican Revolution. By decentralizing the Mexican Revolution, the book offers an expansive narrative that demonstrates how anarchists navigated their quickly changing realities during the first decades of the twentieth century.

But labor activists’ and anarchists’ identities were not fixed. Hernández brilliantly demonstrates in the first two chapters how labor leaders and anarchist women were portrayed as criminals and women of ill-repute as the state cracked down
on their movements. For anarcho-syndicalists, however, women were compañerías (comrades) in la lucha (the struggle). While the intellectual world of labor was highly masculine, women carved out a space within it. Hernández argues that through their actions these women created the conditions for people like Piña Montalvo to begin their activism.

The book’s third chapter centers the figure of Piña Montalvo and a handful of working-class women who actively participated in the hemispheric network that anarchists had created at the turn of the century. This is perhaps one of the most intriguing chapters of the book as it introduces several key women in these networks and the Liga Cultural de Mujeres Libertarias “La Idea,” an anarcho-communist group with connections to various labor organizations.

But, as Hernández demonstrates in chapters 4 and 5, discourse around gender was often limited by the hetero-patriarchal ethos of the times. Womanhood, for example, was not detached from motherhood, even if it was considered revolutionary or was detached from political parties. And while these ideas did not challenge the patriarchal order, women’s discourses did pose a threat to labor organizations and the state. Chapter 5 highlights the tensions that women experienced not only in the labor movement but also more broadly. In particular, Hernández looks at how the state regulated waitresses (meseras) and examines the limits of women’s political participation in the Clubes Femeniles Vasconselistas. Thus, this chapter demonstrates how women’s political repression was not limited to the anarchist movement.

In the late 1920s, state-sanctioned socialist parties, the Partido Socialista Fronterizo and the Socialist Border Party, articulated their programs in direct opposition to anarchist ideas. By then, the postrevolutionary state was already codifying how women were to be considered legitimate citizens “through patriotism and loyalty placed in the interest of the state before her own” (p. 134). And while the 1932 Civil Code, along with its 1934 amendments, proclaimed legal equality, this, of course, was not the reality that women lived.

While the book pushes us to recapture the experience of many women who have been erased from anarchist historiography, I was left wondering about their connections with broader anarchist networks. The letter that opens the book—sent by Piña Montalvo from Tampico to North Carolina—is a clear example of how these networks operated. But beyond US-based networks, were these anarchist women who populate the book’s narrative part of regional conversations about anarcho-feminism that might have been taking place in other Latin American countries or across the Atlantic?

One of the book’s major contributions is naming women who had been anonymous. Still, as the author makes clear on several occasions, there are severe limitations when looking for anarchists in the archives—and more so if they were women. This becomes clear in the last chapter, which serves as a conclusion pointing toward the book’s lessons and legacies. This book is an example of how historians can grapple with these silences and creatively build narratives against the logics of silencing, erasure, and gendered epistemic violence. The book offers invaluable insights for those of us who are interested in how anarchists created and sustained their movements beyond the Mexican borderlands. It is also a major contribution to anarchist historiography that allows us to get to know some of the movement’s women. And, perhaps more important, it shows how they navigated their era’s hetero-patriarchal norms. Lastly, it does so while decentralizing the Mexican Revolution, offering other scholars the possibility of temporarily expanding historiographical understanding of anarchism in the Mexican borderlands.