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BOOK REVIEW

Anarchisme en Méditerranée orientale et occidentale (1860–1920). Dir. par Isabelle Felici et Costantino Paonessa. Atelier de création libertaire, Lyon 2024). 191 pp. Maps. € 12.00.

This book came out of the attempt by the two editors to organize a colloquium – doomed, in the event, by the COVID-19 pandemic – on the theme of "Internationalism, antiauthoritarianism and anarchism in the eastern and southern Mediterranean". It includes six papers presented in three pairs forming three sections: "Travels" (or "Displacements"), "Places", and "Points of view". The chronology covers the period from the *Risorgimento* through to the creation of the League of Nations' mandates system – a period that included the Scramble for Africa, the building of the Suez canal, the establishment of the French Protectorate of Tunisia, the British invasion of Egypt, and the 1884 Berlin Conference.

The purpose of the book is twofold: firstly, to help fill gaps in our knowledge regarding the presence of "internationalists, antiauthoritarians and anarchists" in the Mediterranean basin (though there are four chapters on Italian anarchists in Egypt and/or Tunisia, and one chapter on Spanish anarchists and syndicalists in Morocco); secondly, "to study, according to an approach to history which is informed by anarchist concepts, the ways in which social relations are articulated in terms of class and nationality" (Felici and Paonessa, p. 18). In other words, the aim is to examine the state of the now considerable literature on what is still a relatively new subject area, both with regard to the historiography of anarchism in the region and anarchist historiography. (The many multilingual footnotes will be a useful tool for further research.) The editors challenge the common Eurocentric supposition that the presence of anarchistic ideas and practices in the colonies necessarily represented the importation of "foreign" ideas and models (a claim also made by local ruling classes): "[I]l ne s'est pas agi de simples transferts de pratiques, de simple réception, mais bien d'appropriation, un phénomène qui s'inscrit dans le cadre de relations dialectiques présentes de longue date dans le contexte de la mondialisation" (p. 9). Instead, the research of the last two decades or so suggests the circulation of people, the exchange of ideas, and hybridization over many years.

In the first, largely biographical section, Serena Ganzarolli addresses certain episodes in the life of the Garibaldian and Communard Amilcare Cipriani, which, to a certain extent, are neglected by his biographers but which cast a new light on the legend of this Italian "knight errant". Ganzarolli emphasizes, first, the importance of adopting a less Eurocentric perspective: instead of concentrating on his exploits in Italy and France, Ganzarolli concludes from her investigation of Cipriani's travels in exile in Egypt, Greece, and Crete that the transnationalism of such "volunteers

in arms" who left their own country to fight for the liberation of others was funda-
mental to the creation and consolidation of networks of contacts, which would later
be of great importance for the spread of the First International, and very influential
in the nascent anarchist and socialist movements. Cipriani was an exemplary figure
of these informal networks in the Mediterranean. But Ganzarolli also highlights evi-
dence that undermines Cipriani's professed internationalism, namely, an "ethnocentric
mentality" (p. 25), an attitude of superiority with regard to Egyptians and Islam. The
attempts to "liberate" Crete from the Ottoman Empire were carried out in the name
of the supposed superiority of Greek civilization over that of the Ottomans. Malatesta
was a rare voice among anarchists and socialists in challenging what Ganzarolli argues
was Cipriani's essentially colonialist attitude: how was it in any sense anarchist to
fight the Ottomans in order that Crete might come under the rule of the Greek
monarchy?

Thomas Beugniet uses archival sources to reconstruct the biography of Florido
Matteuci, describing the network of radical internationalists to which Matteuci
belonged and which linked cities in North Africa, Europe, and the Americas – "un
monde interlope où se mêlent les militants anarchistes, la police italienne et les agents
secrets" (p. 47). Forced into exile by social and economic factors, as well as by police
provocations and repression, Matteuci, like other anarchist exiles, followed the same
routes as other migrants. Hence, in large part, the presence in the late nineteenth
century of Italian anarchist communities across Europe, the Americas, and North
Africa, where activists maintained transnational *exopolities* (or exile polities), with
newspapers and associations still oriented mostly towards Italy.[1] Indeed, Beugniet
raises the question of whether there was any significant interaction, during Matteuci's
time in Alexandria, between Italian anarchists and Egyptian workers – a seeming
contradiction to the Europeans' supposed internationalism.

The second part focuses on "place". Weil Bahri gives us a study of a community in
exile, tracing the little-known history of the anarchist movement in Tunisia from the
1880s up to 1921. Using archives in Paris, Rome, and Tunis, as well as the French- and
Italian-language press published at the time in Tunisia, Bahri shows the importance
of the role played by a second generation of Italian exiles in spreading anarchist ideas
in Tunisia, and supports existing work suggesting that anarchists significantly influ-
enced the development of class consciousness in the nascent labour movement. As
for interaction with the indigenous population, what little evidence Bahri has found –
concerning the Gruppo libertario in Tunis in 1902 – suggests that the group was
composed solely of Europeans, despite a stated desire to recruit indigenous Tunisians.

Rim Naguib writes about the "global city" of Alexandria, focusing on two particular
manifestations of internationalist solidarity, when, in 1907 and again in 1913, thou-
sands of Europeans of all nationalities, as well as some Egyptians, took to the streets
to protest in support of three Russian anarchists, merchant seamen from the Black Sea
fleet, arrested on a false charge at the request of the Russian Consulate in order to have
them deported back to Russia. This enables Naguib to explore the relationship between

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[1]The concept of *exopolitie* was created by Stéphane Dufoix in *Politiques d'exil. Hongrois, Polonais et
Tchécoslovaques en France après 1945* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2022), p.29.

the colonial powers and the Ottoman authorities and the legal situation of citizens of the colonial powers. She also examines the role played by Alexandria as a hub for the dissemination of syndicalist ideas among Russian seamen and internationally.

The third and final section is entitled "Points of View". In the first paper, Laura Galián begins with a brief reminder of anarchism's long-standing presence in Morocco, where, in the nineteenth century, anarchist ideas travelled with Spanish economic migrants. Galián goes on to focus on the 1930s and the Spanish anarchists' and syndicalists' ambivalent, changing, and sometimes contradictory positions with regard to Morocco and the struggle against fascism. Among Spanish immigrants, a racist attitude towards Moroccans and Rifians was widespread (as would be the case even towards those who fought in the International Brigades), and little interest was shown in collaboration. The CNT was for many years concerned solely with the social inequality built into the system of military service, and with the hardships suffered by working-class troops sent to Morocco, rather than with the evils of colonialism itself. Even during the civil war, the efforts of some within the CNT to link antifascism and anticolonialism, and build an alliance with Moroccan nationalists, were too little too late.

In the final paper, Giorgio Sacchetti provides a comparative study of the Italian anarchist "communities" in Egypt and Tunisia, and he does this partly by examining the life of the comparatively unknown Sardinian migrant and sometime anarchist Romolo Garbati. Sacchetti warns against accepting the "mythology" of the easy-going, unproblematic cosmopolitanism of cities such as Alexandria. Although Garbati had connections with other immigrant communities (Armenians, Russians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Lebanese, and Syrians), the system of "Capitulations" gave citizens of the colonial powers juridical protections that even anarchist exiles benefitted from, and contemporaries' accounts were often blind to the ethnic inequalities at the heart of many social conflicts and which divided indigenous and immigrant European workers. Garbati had links with "Islamophile" intellectuals and even a bilingual review, but this was unusual. Among the few other positive examples cited, it is interesting to note that it was a question of trade union organizations (in Cairo in the 1900s) bringing together Egyptians, Arabs, Greeks, Italians, and Germans. Overall, Sacchetti concludes that, in both the communities studied, "human and social relations were conditioned by situations and mentalities polluted by colonialism, even for anarchists" (p. 172). Sacchetti asks whether anarchism was a "European export product". He makes the case that the activities of immigrant European anarchists, their press, and their various campaigns were instrumental in fostering a widespread "culture of contestation" across the southern and eastern Mediterranean. At the same time, he emphasizes the need to "decolonize" anarchist historiography and points to research on anarchist precedents in African communalism, for instance.[2]

It is true that one might have wished for wider coverage – a paper on French or Portuguese anarchists and syndicalists in the Maghreb, perhaps – but such is the nature

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[2] See the forthcoming special issue of *Acronia (Studi di storia dell'anarchismo e dei movimenti radicali)* on "Decolonizing the History of the Anarchist Movement and Radical Movements".

of conference proceedings. This is, in any case, a fascinating and valuable contribution to the literature on decolonizing transnational anarchist historiography.

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