Review of Constance Bantman and Ana Claudia Suriani da Silva, eds, *The Foreign Periodical Press in Nineteenth-Century London: Politics from a Distance* (2018)

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Reviews

Constance Bantman and Ana Claudia Suriani da Silva, eds, *The Foreign Periodical Press in Nineteenth-Century London: Politics from a Distance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018). 232 pp. ISBN 9781474258494

Constance Bantman and Ana Claudia Suriani da Silva have cracked open a door to an overlooked source of material: the periodic publication of works on exile and transnational political activism. The result is an exciting synopsis of the fragmented yet widespread foreign political press, to which they give a locus: London, and a perspective tied within a time frame: oppositional politics, 'framed by two era-defining international conflicts: the Napoleonic Wars and the First World War' (p. 2). The contributions of this edited volume on the foreign political press include articles on leading European powers of the period — Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Germany and Russia, but also Latin America and India as they served to focalize European and English interests. A coherent political progression underpins the succession of contributions, from the early developments of liberalism to various manifestations of anarchism, socialism, and communism. We can observe how the foreign based oppositional press stirred the masses, empowered the people as opposed to the rulers, and evolved, throughout the nineteenth century, towards an increasingly moral debate surrounding acts of open rebellion. This guiding thread enables us to appreciate different political contexts and cultural responses united in a similar opposition to centralized forms of oppression, while indulging in financial and ideological internal struggles, and exile histories. In doing so it also highlights, through these cases, the role and responsibility of the press in the wider context of international conflict and peace processes.

This collective work illuminates the role and function of London as a host and hub of political activism, while Bantman cautions us against an ideological vision of London as a platform of free expression for print cultures, by referring to Alves and Fernandes's tempered definition of a 'reasonably free' (p. 3) press. In contrast to the picture of British print culture which has historically zoomed in on Fleet Street, orbited around the Murray establishment of Albermarle Street (1768–2002), or closed in on Dickens, Reynolds, and Mayhew on Wellington Street, Bantman and Suriani da Silva flash their lights on the city of London, yet disperse their multiple lenses on kaleidoscopic localities. For example, we learn how an office on Duke Street served, among others, for the French and the Spanish press (*L'Ambigu* and *El Español*). We observe how the headquarters of the Freedom Press in Ossulston Street housed Italian anarchist interests (the *Torch*) before serving for a host of English anarchist newspapers, and how four different German press offices sprang between Covent Garden and Fitzrovia. Finally, we follow the rallying of the Russian exile community at diverse print shops and private homes across the city, as well as the establishment of India House, 'the most dangerous organization outside of India' (p. 184), on Cromwell Avenue. These movements of national convergences, first at the scale of the world, then at the scale of the city, disclose an interesting symbiosis of foreign national constellations charted across the City of London.

Although the association works, and has confirmed the repeatedly expressed status of London as a haven of freedom for the press, it also conveys a tension, reflected in each chapter of the

book at different degrees, that although the English were traditionally impartial hosts to foreign political papers, they often saw in their development either a concern, or an opening for their own interests. The most fascinating illustration of this tension is the Indian Nationalist Press, which moved to London, the emblematic heart of their oppression, in 1865, to map out the Indian nationalist movement through their organizations and publications (Chapter 9). This is where the notion of a 'reasonably free press' takes on a wider meaning than the one expressed in Chapter 4, where Alves and Fernandes describe the ties and constraints that the Portuguese government imposed on the exiled Portuguese press between 1808 and 1832. Pressure from the homeland was at stake, but there was also the parallel involvement of British interests: Munoz Sempere describes the influence of Lord and Lady Holland with the Spanish periodical *El Español* (1810–14) (Chapter 2), Spanish liberalism being of mutual interest to the English at the time because of their common enmity to France.

Finally, multi-linguicism is another remarkable development of the foreign press in London. Louis Leblanc's *Monthly Review* (1848–51) and Joseph-Charles Collet's periodicals, written in English, initiated a rapprochement between French and English concerns (Chapter 5), while the well-established Rossetti family's founding of the *Torch* (1891–96), an English language Italian artistic and anarchist periodical illustrated the seeping of foreign political concerns through the English artistic and literary world.

In this edited volume, the genesis of liberal thinking in the political press is tied to Napoleon's influence in Europe. To the conquered nations, Napoleon I represented absolute power in its most blatant form of hostile oppression, and as such he embodied the evil to fight back against. Munoz Sempere describes (Chapter 2) how Spain's new liberal age was born from the ashes of Napoleon's invasions of 1808. Czarism, colonialism, and centralism are also explored, in this study, as examples of authoritarianism.

The volume engages with European liberalism as a school of thought, developed by a new generation of thinkers inspired by the Enlightenment. Liberalism propagated transnationally through such means as freemasonry (Chapter 3), public meetings (Chapter 9), and the periodical press. Alves and Fernandes (Chapter 4) describe the 'field of liberal ideas' (p. 80) defended by the periodicals the *Correio*, the *Investigador*, the *Portuguez*, and the *Campeao Portuguez* between 1808 and 1820 until the Liberal Revolution of 1820 initiated a constitutional period hailed by the periodical press in exile. This example illustrates how the first wave of liberals sought to achieve individual freedom through the help of government. Bantman and Suriani da Silva's subtitle *Politics from a Distance* emphasizes how the exiled press could 'weigh in on national discussion' (p. 103), acting as a medium between the power and the people.

Jones's and Bantman's survey of French exile papers, strategically placed in the middle of the book, shelves Napoleon I, and embraces the progression of political thought along the bumpy (and bloody) path of France's abrasive politics. The traditional faith placed in systems of government faded, as it was shaken, among others, by the devastating Commune de Paris in 1871. The propagation of socialist and communist periodicals ideologically levelled the power with the people. As Jones and Bantman suggest, these ideas were echoed in the rest of Europe as their own revolutions subsided, and London proved a fertile ground for international cooperation, with, for example, the multi-national editorial board of *La Voix du Proscrit* (1850–51). Laqua and Alston (Chapter 8) also describe the rise of socialism and communism in Germany and Russia, along with their specific modes of organization and coalescence, transcribed in the development of the opposition press in London.

As announced in the subtitles of two chapters: 'From Republicanism to Anarchism' (Chapter 5) and 'Socialist and Anarchist German newspapers' (Chapter 7), the political press nurtured a libertarian consciousness which evolved into anarchism (Anarchism is broadly described as the rejection of any kind of authority). Bantman and Suriani da Silva delve deeper into this notion by shedding light on the complexities of the anarchist movement, its conception of strikes and revolutions, and especially on the moral debates surrounding the performance of individual acts of terrorism. Introducing political vision within a movement driven by the rejection of any form of control portends explosive epilogues. For example, as periodical editors Joseph Peukert (*Der Rebell*) and Johann Most (*Freiheit*) challenged each other and their differing conceptions (anarchist communism versus collectivist anarchism), their adherents divided into 'warring cliques' during the 'fateful fraternal war' (p. 142) of London-based German anarchists. Errico Malatesta's analysis of strikes in the *Associazione* (1889–90) illuminated new paths of action for discontent workers and informed revolutionary thinking (Chapter 6). Malatesta's promotion of violence, however, in the single issue of his periodical *Cause ed Effetti* (1900), articulated around the assassinations of French President Sadi Carnot in 1894 and Umberto I of Italy in 1900 by Italian anarchists, caused deep moral disturbances within the movement. On 28 June 1914, the Serbian anarchist Gavrilo Princip assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife, a single act, famous for having cast the spark that collapsed a precarious balance of powers and set into motion the hostile mechanism of political alliances.

In this fascinating book, we observe the peoples of Europe churn their dreams of liberty through the ideas and political choices of London based foreign periodical editors. The compelling exploration of common interests (and shared historical backgrounds), international cooperation, and cultural differences of Bantman and Suriani da Silva's selections are an open invitation to include further work across the European continent: Scandinavia or the Austrian Empire, for example. Ultimately, the reader is impressed with the volume's overall sense of topicality, not only, as Bantman suggests, concerning London and multiculturalism, nor with the wider concept of transnational print culture, but with a more radical questioning of the role and responsibility of the press in the development of extremist international politics. As the pieces show, the anarchist ideal encouraged by the extremist press drove to the assassination of people in power. These acts were justified by their authors and their supporters as revenge for the evils of authoritarian regimes. The central thesis resonates today as much so as in the Nineteenth Century. The past twenty years have seen increased international terrorism, acts of destruction aimed at people, as opposed to those in power. Bantman and Suriani da Silva's selection of articles emphasizes that although the targets and objectives of terrorism today are different from those of the attacks led over a century ago, the press still motivates their execution.

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