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# Multilingualism in Anarchist Periodicals: Language Politics within Anarchist Multilingual Communities in *El perseguido* (Buenos Aires, 1890–97)

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Multilingualism was an essential element of the anarchist culture that arose in the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century. Early and contemporary anarchist networks had to overcome linguistic distance, even though many anarchists were also polyglots. When, in 1868, Mikhail Bakunin, a French-speaking Russian, sent the Italian Giuseppe Fanelli to spread anarchist ideas among Catalan- and Spanish-speaking workers, Fanelli used his theatrical abilities to communicate with his audience in Italian and French. Anarchist leaders and militants also dealt with multilingualism by translating and circulating political and literary texts.

In the preface to his *Bibliographie de l'anarchie*, a detailed list, published in 1894, of core political anarchist texts and their translations, Austrian historian Max Nettlau explains how their diversity of language contributes to challenges of their survival and collection:

Most of these publications, written in more than twenty languages, scattered across more than thirty countries, throughout this entire century, disappear, literally absorbed, rendered useless by the huge circulation necessary for propaganda — when they have managed to escape ongoing persecution and police seizures. It is not to be expected that they will find a haven in public libraries, almost all of which approach them with indifference, and, as for the most active propagandists, they are less favourably positioned than anyone to form collections [...].<sup>1</sup>

As Nettlau suggests, end-of-century anarchists were often persecuted, and the same was true for their publications. However, anarchist periodicals at that time played a major role within the first and most expansive internationalist political movement. It is only logical in studying them to take into account the plurality of languages that constitute anarchist culture.

Indeed, anarchist studies have recently taken a 'transnational turn', which has allowed for new research regarding the circulation of print materials, the mobility of militants, and the existence of anarchist migrant communities in some cities (i.e.,

1 Max Nettlau, *Bibliographie de l'anarchie* (Bruxelles: Temps nouveaux; Paris: P.-V. Stock, 1897), pp. ix–x. All translations in the text are mine, unless indicated otherwise.

German anarchists in New York; Italian and French anarchists in London). Studies on anarchist print culture have confirmed the extent to which anarchist periodicals provided cohesion for a movement that avoided hierarchies and formal organizations. Yet scholarship has generally focused on particular periodicals, published in only one language, and has paid little attention to translations and multilingual practices.

The case of *El perseguido: Voz de los explotados* in Argentina provides an opportunity to explore the functions of multilingualism within these contexts. Historians have identified the first signs of anarchist activity in Argentina as taking place in 1872, with the appearance of three sections of the First International (1864–76), divided by language: the French, Italian, and Spanish sections.<sup>2</sup> This same decade also saw the first major wave of immigration to Argentina. Among the migrants who arrived in Buenos Aires, some were central to the creation of a ‘Kropotkinian anarcho-communist’ and ‘pro-terror’ anarchist network. Their existence had been promoted worldwide since 1880 in *Le Révolté*, published at first in Geneva by Piotr Kropotkin and Jean Grave and later in Paris by Grave, under the name *La Révolte* until 1894.<sup>3</sup> This period saw the circulation of what is generally known as the ‘first cycle’ of anarchist publications in Argentina, organized according to the languages of the different communities, such as *Lavoriamo* (1893), *Demoliamo* (1893) and its continuation *La Riscossa* (1893–94) in Italian, and *La Liberté* (1893–94) and its continuation *Le Cyclone* (1895–96) in French.<sup>4</sup>

While those periodicals did occasionally include articles in different languages, *El perseguido* established clearer multilingual practices. Published in Buenos Aires between May 1890 and January 1897, it was the first anarchist newspaper in Argentina to achieve stable circulation despite stiff competition: ninety-two specifically anarchist publications have been identified between 1879 and 1912 in the city of Buenos Aires alone.<sup>5</sup> Because of its long run (102 issues over seven years) and despite its aperiodicity, *El perseguido* played a major role in the anarchist scene, encouraging ‘initiatic connections’ and discussions between militants.<sup>6</sup>

In the early issues, the editorials and most of the articles were published in Spanish, French, and Italian, reflecting not only the editors’ backgrounds and internationalist ambitions but also their shared views on which tendencies within anarchism should be encouraged. French men such as Pierre Quiroule and Jean Raoux, Italians such as Orsini Bertani, and Spaniards such as Rafael Roca and Manuel Reguera met in the pages of a ‘furiously individualistic and rabidly anti-organizational newspaper’.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, *El perseguido* defended the illegal and violent propaganda-by-the-deed strategy, which explains its aperiodicity, the mostly unsigned articles, and the frequent changes within the editorial group.

On 18 May 1890, the first issue of *El perseguido* was published with the manifesto of the newspaper’s founding group, ‘los desheredados’ displayed on its front page. The text, titled ‘Who are we? What are we going to do?’, appeared in Spanish, French, and Italian, and concluded with the Latin sentence: ‘Destruam et aedificabo’. In later issues, however, linguistic diversity gradually disappeared from *El perseguido*, and by 1891 it

2 Iacov Oved, *El anarquismo y el movimiento obrero en Argentina* (Mexico DF: Siglo XXI, 1978), p. 19.

3 Ibid., p. 42.

4 Lucas Domínguez Rubio, ‘Un itinerario por los proyectos editoriales del anarquismo en Argentina: cambios, maniobras y permanencias’, *Izquierdas*, 33 (2017), 21–41 (p. 25).

5 Lucas Domínguez Rubio, ‘Las publicaciones periódicas libertarias argentinas en el acervo del CeDInCI: “una hemerografía local esmerada”’, *Políticas de la Memoria*, 13 (2012/2013), 23–48 (pp. 40–41); Juan Suriano, *Anarquistas: Cultura y política libertaria en Buenos Aires 1890–1910* (Buenos Aires: Manantial, 2001), p. 214.

6 Domínguez Rubio, ‘Un itinerario’, p. 27.

7 Christian Ferrer, ‘Folletos anarquistas en papel veneciano’, in *Folletos anarquistas en Buenos Aires: publicaciones de los grupos La Questione Sociale y La Expropiación, 1895–1896*, ed. by Christian Ferrer (Buenos Aires: Biblioteca Nacional, 2015), pp. 7–45 (p. 20).

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had become an almost fully Spanish-language periodical. While it is difficult to follow the changes to the editorial board that may have affected its linguistic politics, there are other possible explanations, including the gradual acquisition of Spanish as a second language for many migrants. The final year of publication of *El perseguido*, 1897, was the first for *La protesta humana* (later, *La protesta*). This Spanish-speaking periodical was the product of the joint efforts of anarchists from different backgrounds (its first director had been a member of *El perseguido*), and it defended a pro-organization tendency. It eventually became one of the world's longest-running anarchist periodicals, being published until 2015.

*El perseguido* shows how migratory flows entering a Spanish-speaking country such as Argentina brought politicized immigrants who joined the anarchist ranks with their own languages. Whilst lack of a common language hindered collaboration among anarchists, at least in the beginning, antinationalistic anarchist thought encouraged linguistic diversity. The anarchist movement they formed was a 'plurilingual community' that set up its own language policies, which included adopting its members' different languages of origin without nationalist connotations.<sup>8</sup> In this particular case, ideological agreement among the most radical anarchist militants led to the creation of a multilingual periodical.

The study of language diversity within workers' movements raises intellectual, social, and political questions, as Al-Matary and Jousse have recently pointed out.<sup>9</sup> Multilingualism needs therefore to be acknowledged as one of the major features of the anarchist movement and the anarchist press, and studied as such: 'the anarchist tradition cannot be understood outside its transnational, cosmopolitan and multilingual networks and concrete practices'.<sup>10</sup> Addressing these topics will allow for a better understanding of the material conditions of communication, the range of channels and filters that transmitted ideas, representations, and keywords from one language to another. Only then will this revolutionary polyglossia be included among the signature characteristics of anarchism, along with its internationalism.

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8 Mariana Di Stefano, 'Políticas del lenguaje del anarquismo argentino 1897–1917' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2009), p. 291.

9 Sarah Al-Matary and Emmanuel Jousse, 'Les langues de l'internationalisme ouvrier', *Mil neuf cent: Revue d'histoire intellectuelle*, 39.1 (2021), 5–10 (p. 7)

10 Federico Ferretti, 'Journeying through Utopia: Anarchism, Geographical Imagination and Performative Futures in Marie-Louise Berneri's Works', *Investigaciones Geográficas*, 100 (2019), 1–16 (p. 1).

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