1871 in Spain

Transnational and Local History in the Formation of the FRE-IWMA

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In May, 1871, during the final days of the Paris Commune, the Spanish parliament held the first great debate concerning the International Working Men's Association (IWMA), which had recently arrived in the country. The debate was opened when a representative from the Republican opposition, Baldomero Lostau, accused the civil governor of the province of Barcelona of "violating the constitutional articles that acknowledged citizens' rights to assemble and to organize".¹ Lostau declared himself a member of IWMA's Spanish Regional Federation (*Federación Regional Española*, FRE), whose foundational congress had taken place in Barcelona (Lostau's electoral district) during the summer of 1870. In the parliamentary session of May 22, the Minister of Government (and Security), Práxedes M. Sagasta, strongman of the first administration organized under the new monarchy of Amadeo of Savoy, told Lostau that the tension that afflicted Barcelona had a lot to do with the presence of Communards connected with the International in the city. He insisted that "representatives of the International" had "crossed the frontiers and spread out across the Spanish territory", and moreover, "where the disease has presented itself with more intensity is in the Catalan provinces, especially in Barcelona".²

In the days that followed the defeat of the Paris Commune, the pro-government media published the names of three Frenchmen deported because of their supposed connection with Paris, London, or Geneva: Adolphe Royannez (a Blanquist who had been defeated in the Marseille Commune),

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- 1 *Diario de las Sesiones de Cortes/Congreso* [hereafter, DSC/C], 1871 Legislature, Session of 22 May 1871, pp. 994–999, p. 994.
- 2 DSC/C, 1871 Legislature, Session of 22 May 1871, pp. 994–999 and 999–1.003. See also José Álvarez Junco, *La Comuna en España* (Madrid, 1971), pp. 39–49 and 85–99.

André Michel and Edmond Nodot.³ According to Sagasta, these men had been deported following the Barcelona governor's recommendation because they held "credentials from the Paris Commune" and were the "main agents of the International". This was an endorsement of the governor's politics of vigilance, and a warning of the persecution that was soon to come. In early June, Sagasta granted all governors "unlimited powers in the repression of the International", and the FRE's Federal Council left Madrid and sought refuge in Lisbon.⁴

1871 in Spain and the Historiography of the IWMA's Spanish Regional Federation

Two different, albeit overlapping historiographical narratives consider 1871 as a key episode in the genesis of the IWMA's Spanish section (FRE), not only because of the actors and causes behind the formation of the FRE between 1869 and the congress of The Hague in 1872, but also of the long-term organizational and doctrinal consequences of those three foundational years. Both narratives are rooted in the late twentieth-century historiographical debate about the peculiarities of the liberal revolution in mid nineteenth-century Spain. A never-ending debate that, since then, has shed new light on the subject and especially on the Spanish *Sexenio Democrático* (or *Revolucionario*) between 1868 and 1874. These were years of unrest: a military coup and a civil revolution; a change of dynasty – the House of Savoy replaced the House of Bourbon in the short term –; a short-lived Republic; a Carlist civil war in the Peninsula and a very different civil war in Cuba. It is important here to have in mind what Jesús Millán and María C. Romeo have pointed out about the social and political nature of the two revolutionary blocks that clashed in Spain after 1868. "On one side stood the Progressives ('*Progresistas*') who favoured improving conditions for the majority through reforms from above, which were to be carried out under the protective guidance of the virtuous 'middle classes'; on the other – Millán and Romeo continue – stood those associated with Spain's Democratic-Republican political culture, which insisted on instituting national sovereignty in order to rebuild the state 'from below' via local power groups backed by the national militia. [...] Democratic sovereignty, the Progressives believed, was to be evoked as a legitimizing principle only as a last resort, and

3 *La Iberia* (Madrid), 24 May 1871, p. 2; 23 May 1871, p. 1.

4 Casimiro Martí, *Orígenes del Anarquismo en Barcelona* (Barcelona, 1959), pp. 107–108 (n.54); Josep Termes, *Anarquismo y sindicalismo en España (1864–1881)* (Barcelona, 2000 [1977]), pp. 140–141.

civil rights could be regulated according to the needs of the social order. On the Republican hand, the dogma of national sovereignty encouraged an interpretation of 'the liberal nation' as an entity capable of acting immediately and locally in order to ensure that its demands were met."⁵

In the historiographical narrative launched by Max Nettlau, the government's repression against the newborn FRE-IWMA generated by the Commune's impact laid the ground for the definitive hold of Bakuninism and its clandestine Alliance for a Socialist Democracy across the country. Thus, what was started by "Bakuninist" Giuseppe Fanelli's visit to Madrid and Barcelona in 1869 and the intensified contacts with Geneva (as opposed to London) of the small Barcelonan nucleus during 1870, would be completed with the political atmosphere of 1871, which propitiated the leadership of the few highly ideological groups that were sheltered by key international connections, and which were willing and prepared for covert action. The FRE Federal Council's temporary exile in Lisbon of June 1871, would in fact trigger the historical sequence that would end in the crystallization of a revolutionary syndicalism whose insurrectional as opposed to institutional horizon made it "anti-political". This sequence would soon be strengthened by the formal banning of the FRE-IWMA in the 1871–72 winter and the failed "Cantonalist" uprisings in the brief First Republic of 1873.⁶ For historian Clara E. Lida, "the months between the end of the Commune and the uprising of Alcoy [in July 1873] show that the FRE consciously and carefully developed a strategy that allowed it to veer towards clandestine operations [...] following the model designed by the Bakuninist Alliance".⁷

This strategy to shield a vanguard that operated in the shadows favored, for instance, the election of FRE delegates to the IWMA's September 1872 congress in The Hague who were faithful to Bakunin and his Alliance, even though the "political" candidates with powerful local roots, such as aforementioned Baldomero Lostau, obtained practically the same number of votes (albeit in less circumscriptions, and these "rigged" according to the latter). The Spanish

5 Jesús Millán and María C. Romeo, "Was the liberal revolution important to modern Spain? Political cultures and citizenship in Spanish history", *Social History*, 29/3 (August 2004), pp. 284–300, 294–295 (quotation).

6 Max Nettlau, *Miguel Bakunin, la Internacional y la Alianza en España (1868–1873)* (Buenos Aires, 1928), p. 63; Clara E. Lida, *Antecedentes y desarrollo del movimiento obrero español (1835–1888): textos y documentos* (Madrid, 1973), pp. 20–34.

7 Clara E. Lida, "Hacia la clandestinidad anarquista. De la Comuna de París a Alcoy, 1871–1874", *Historia Social*, 46 (2003), pp. 49–64, 57 (quotation); Clara E. Lida, "La Comuna de París y sus repercusiones: el caso español", in Guillermo Palacios and Erika Pani (eds.), *El poder y la sangre: guerra, estado y nación en la década de 1860* (México D.F., 2014), pp. 183–195, 192–195.

section's four Bakuninist delegates moved rapidly from The Hague to Saint-Imier (Switzerland), where an extraordinary congress that supported Bakunin's "anti-authoritarian" authority repudiated the "political" path set by Marx and London, thus participating in the schism within the IWMA. This move was itself repudiated by local chapters, particularly from Catalonia.⁸ This early strategy of "secret reorganization" (1871–73), which underpinned the Anarchist and Bakuninist leadership at the heart of the FRE-IWMA, contributed to lay the foundation for future peasant insurrectionism, fed by the dilated persecution of the 1874–81 period in a framework of growing agrarian crisis.⁹ In brief: transnational networks centered on the Geneva and French-Swiss IWMA and government intransigence fed off each other since the Communard spring and during the following eventful year, partially fulfilling *a posteriori* the self-interested diagnosis made by Minister Sagasta in parliament on May 1871.

In the historiographical narrative that focuses on Spain's agitated political life after the fall of the Bourbons in 1868, however, a fundamental actor in 1871 – and therefore, in the IWMA's advent – was interclass and federalist republicanism, embodied in the Federal Democratic Republican Party (*Partido Republicano Democrático Federal*, PRDF). Notwithstanding and in fact partly because of its own internal divisions, the PRDF became the principal opposition and democratizing force in the interior of the new parliamentary monarchy after the conflictive constitutional debates of 1869 were resolved with the contested election in 1870 of a new King in the person of Prince Amadeo of Savoy. The democratic and federal legitimacy of French Communard municipalism became an emblematic issue for the relevant sectors of Spanish Federal Republicanism in the months between the summers of 1870 and 1871. In his classic book on the Commune in Spain, José Álvarez Junco rescued the Federal defense of Communard democratic radicalism (as opposed to the more subdued social radicalism), especially that of the ideological brains of the party, Catalan Francesc Pi i Margall.¹⁰ The pro-Communard literature published in Barcelona in 1871 constitutes another example of this, for the city was the main bastion of Federal Republicanism.¹¹ Historian Marie-Angèle Orobon sees

8 Antonio López Estudillo, "El anarquismo español decimonónico", *Ayer*, 45 (2002), pp. 73–104, 89–90 (and n.27); Termes, *Anarquismo y sindicalismo*, pp. 165–169.

9 Lida, "Hacia la clandestinidad", p. 62.

10 Álvarez Junco, *La Comuna en España*, pp. 3–5 and 125–154.

11 *Proceso de la Commune de París: relación completa y detallada de todas las causas que se están siguiendo en el consejo de guerra instalado en Versalles ...* (Barcelona, 1871); *Fusilamientos en Francia en el campo de Satory del sargento Bougeois y los ciudadanos Ferre y Rossell, miembros de la Commune de París ...* (Barcelona, 1871); "Celebridades de la Commune de París", in *La Campana de Gràcia* (Barcelona), 4 June 1871.

evidence of the centrality of “the people” (*“el Pueblo”*) in the Federal mythical rhetoric on the Commune. This was a key concept in the language of the Spanish Democratic and Republican tradition, a “people” that incorporated its first classist nuances – in the sense of being anti-bourgeoisie – quite slowly and after much contestation.¹²

This second narrative has encouraged a reconsideration of 1871 by highlighting the role of Federal Republicanism in the FRE’s early expansion, thus qualifying the importance of the early Bakuninist groups and their continental networks. In the words of Antonio López Estudillo, “the Commune contributed to the radicalization of broad segments of Federalism, a good part of which would take the International as a referent, entering its ranks without abandoning their political stance”. Such a thesis seems to be validated by chronology and numbers: the 2,000 plus members of FRE in early 1871 (“four fifths from the Barcelona federation”) had become 10,000 in April of 1872, despite the repression unleashed against leaders connected with Geneva, the intermittent legal prohibition, and the gestation of the traumatic schism between the Bakuninist majority and the Marxist minority (encouraged by Lafargue in Madrid) in the reduced Federal Council of the Spanish federation.¹³

This chapter engages both narratives as the starting point of a brief social history of the year 1871 in urban Spain that reevaluates the weight of the transnational (and national) factors – which have so far received most of the attention – in light of an episode of apparently a local scale. This episode, however, will prove to be anything but merely local, and its analysis is doubly revealing. Its local character is belied first by the significance of the locale where it happened – Barcelona in the spring of 1871, the province which held four out of every five members subscribed to the burgeoning FRE-IWMA. And second, because it motivated the parliamentary tussle between Lostau and Sagasta and, I argue, the repression unleashed against the organization’s first Federal Council. Indeed, my argument is that the first repressive wave used the Commune and its global reach in a long-term internal battle that had begun before 1869, and which is at the heart of the genesis of the FRE. That is, it was not the influence of the Commune and the birth of the FRE what led

12 Marie-Angèle Orobon, “Años 1870 y 1871 en Francia y en España: a vueltas con el Pueblo”, *Historia Contemporánea*, 28 (2004), pp. 147–156, 154–156; Marie-Angèle Orobon, *La Commune de Paris en Espagne: de la presse au roman populaire* (Ph.D., Université Paris III, 1995).

13 López Estudillo, “El anarquismo español”, pp. 86–89 (also source of quotation). See also Pere Gabriel, “Visibilitats polítiques i vertebració social del món obrer i popular de Barcelona, 1868–1874”, *Barcelona Quaderns d’Història*, 15 (2009), pp. 53–77, 75.

to repression. And this episode is doubly revealing because trade unionism, organized around “classes” as defined by trades, and plebeian and municipalist republicanism, converged in it, as they had already done much before 1870.¹⁴

But this link was obscured by the anti-IWMA propaganda. The cotton sector unions were the engine of the strike that alarmed the Barcelona (and Madrid) elites during the days of the Commune; the FRE would take root on the groundwork laid by this mobilization and its globalized repression. Simultaneously, that is, during the same days in March of 1871, the Federal Democratic Republican Party (PRDF) obtained in Barcelona its major (and almost only) electoral triumph in post-1868 Spain. It constituted an evident challenge to the new monarchical government, not only because of the federalist and municipalist programs supported by the party, but because of its popular and working-class tone. The Commune also served to mask the repression against the local Federalist movement, as the government invoked its complicity with the French Communards. It was these concrete experiences of workers’ protest and plebeian democracy that rendered meaningful the words and images that came from Paris and Geneva.

Barcelona, Spring of 1871: Labor Strike and Trade Unions

Minister Sagasta began his parliamentary address on May 1871 by reading a telegram written “at two thirty this afternoon”, in which the governor of

14 I borrow the adjective “plebeian” from E.P. Thompson’s well-known works on eighteenth-century England (see, for example, his “Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class?” *Social History*, 3/2 (May 1978)). And I have to stress two of Thompson’s motives for using it when I move “plebeian” to the mid nineteenth-century Spanish context. First, the very dynamic coexistence of “vertical identities” (such as “class” meaning “trade”) and newborn “horizontal identities” (such as “the working classes”) in mid nineteenth-century urban Spain, mainly in industrial Catalonia. The contingent overlapping of both fed the leading role of very open collective subjects, such as “*el Pueblo*” (“the People”), in the making of the radical languages of the time (see Albert Garcia Balaña, “El verdadero productor: lenguaje y experiencia en la formación de las culturas políticas obreras”, in María C. Romeo and María Sierra (eds.), *Las culturas políticas de la España liberal, 1833–1874* (Madrid [etc.], 2014), pp. 217–251). And second, the strong cultural dimension of manual workers approach to the nascent Democratic-Republican political culture in mid nineteenth-century Spain. The very episodic existence of formal mechanisms of wide political inclusion in 1833–1868 Spain, made social experiences of cultural dissent – ranging from work practices to community and leisure networks – a key realm for “the People’s protest” before 1868.

Barcelona, Bernardo Iglesias, declared that he had “the satisfaction of writing to Y[our] E[xcellency] from the great factory of the Batlló Brothers, which today has opened its doors to work after three months of shutdown ...” In his speech, Sagasta proceeded to justify Iglesias’ recommended deportation of three French Communards, who were supposedly the “principal agitators of the International” and who (also supposedly) had contributed to the strike that had paralyzed the Batlló factory in Barcelona precisely during the seventy days of the Paris Commune, and even before.¹⁵ Governor Iglesias had also ordered the detention of Gaspar Sentiñón, a surgeon who had moved recently to Barcelona from Vienna, and who had been one of the Spanish delegates to the Basle Congress in 1869, and who, moreover, was close to Bakunin. Sentiñón and the workers’ newspaper that he had recently begun editing in Barcelona, *La Federación*, were accused of directing the strike as well as distributing across the city the *Manifiesto de Algunos Partidarios de la Commune a los Poderosos de la Tierra* (Manifesto of Some Supporters of the Commune to the Powerful of the Earth).¹⁶ The government blamed the Internationalist actors and networks, whose main nodes were far from Barcelona (and Spain), for the local strike. And the pro-government press in Madrid represented the forceful end of the strike as part of a transnational landscape of the defeat of the Commune.¹⁷

The notable impact of the Batlló factory strike in Barcelona daily life and its representation as something triggered by Internationalist and international factors is well established in the documentary record. This is especially true of documents produced after the clashes between tens of strikers and policemen during the last days of March, during which one of the overseers of the cotton factory was, according to the pro-government press, mortally wounded.¹⁸ End of March: that means a few days after the *Communard* proclamation in Paris. For one of the Barcelona informants of monarchical Progressive Catalan Víctor Balaguer, a member of Sagasta’s government and soon to be the Minister of Overseas, “the Batlló Factory affair, the presence of the International, which is sure to bring much vexation and cause many tears to fall, has completed the picture for the conservatives to distance themselves from

15 DSC/C, 1871 Legislature, Session of 22 May 1871, pp. 999–1.000 and 1.002–1.003; see also *La Iberia* (Madrid), 24 May 1871, p. 2.

16 Martí, *Orígenes del Anarquismo*, p. 83 (n.39). Sentiñón and the birth of the Barcelona Bakuninist group in 1869–70: Gabriel, “Visibilitats polítiques”, pp. 73–74.

17 *La Iberia* (Madrid), 7 June 1871, p. 2.

18 *La Iberia* (Madrid), 28 March 1871, p. 1; *La Esperanza* (Madrid), 4 April 1871, p. 1; *La Iberia* (Madrid), 17 May 1871, p. 1.

the government [of King Amadeo I]".¹⁹ On March 30th, the Italian consul in Barcelona wrote to Rome that "in the unrest provoked at the Batlló Factory one could see the socialist propaganda of the International".²⁰ Even recently arrived Sentiñón shared this opinion, in his case, borne out of optimism, as a letter that he sent to Nikolay Zhukovsky on April revealed. According to Nettlau, Sentiñón spoke of "the fear of the bourgeoisie that the Commune would have a repercussion in Spain, and the fact that the governor of Barcelona had been replaced by another [Bernardo Iglesias] more willing to use force to suppress the strikes".²¹

Two factors seem to explain at first sight the patrician perception that external influences were decisive in the Batlló strike, inseparable from the IWMA-Commune couple. First, the emblematic character of the Batlló factory. The factory began operations in 1870 as the largest textile factory in Spain, and the largest private building in a Barcelona that was expanding beyond the recently torn down city walls. Built to employ more than 1,500 workers in a unique block in the Barcelona Enlargement ("unique" in the sense that it joined four of the conventional blocks designed by Ildefons Cerdà, Barcelona's very own Haussmann), its more than 50,000 spindles and more than 1,300 mechanical looms were unmatched in the Spanish industry of the time.²² The factory's physical distance from old Barcelona and *El Raval*, the city's traditional cotton district, was in fact part of its character as a new industrial model, all of which aroused suspicion and wariness among the organized labor of the cotton sector.

And second, the fact that it was precisely during the strike – and the first days of the Commune – in March 1871, that the union that had called for the strike at the end of February, the cotton trade federation *Tres Clases de Vapor* (Three Steam Classes), joined the IWMA (although many of its local sections joined later, or never joined at all).²³ It is worth noting that the FRE had some 2,000 subscribed members in early 1871, while the *Tres Clases de Vapor* (or *Unión de Hiladores, Tejedores Mecánicos y Jornaleros* – spinners, mechanical weavers and journeymen) had 9,000 members in December 1870, all of them residents in the province of Barcelona.²⁴ Arrested in May of 1871, Gaspar Sentiñón was

19 Quoted in Albert Garcia Balañà, *La fabricació de la fàbrica. Treball i política a la Catalunya cotonera (1784–1874)* (Barcelona, 2004), pp. 516–517 (n.14).

20 Quoted in Martí, *Orígenes del Anarquismo*, p. 107 (n.53).

21 Nettlau, *Miguel Bakunin, la Internacional y la Alianza*, p. 63.

22 Garcia Balañà, *La fabricació de la fàbrica*, p. 516; Carles Enrech, *Indústria i ofici. Conflicte social i jerarquies obreres en la Catalunya tèxtil (1881–1923)* (Bellaterra, 2005), pp. 36–37.

23 According to *La Federación* (Barcelona), 26 March 1871, p. 2; Miguel Izard, *Industrialización y obrerismo: las Tres Clases de Vapor, 1869–1913* (Barcelona, 1973), pp. 114–115.

24 López Estudillo, "El anarquismo español", p. 86; Termes, *Anarquismo y sindicalismo*, p. 183.

not going to suffer alone in the military castle of Montjuïc: he was soon joined by Climent Bové, “director” of the *Tres Clases de Vapor*, who was also detained by Governor Iglesias in the last days of the Commune.²⁵ However, Bové’s public life as the union leader of the local cotton spinner had started before the consolidation of the Barcelona Bakuninist group.

Bové had already led a general cotton strike in Barcelona, in 1869, a few months after the fall of the Bourbon monarchy. The issues behind that strike were a prelude to the more intense strike at Batlló two years later. In 1871 the workers were opposed to the reduction of the piecework tariffs caused by the introduction of more productive self-acting mules that had a greater number of spindles. They also condemned the attempts to hire women for textile jobs that were traditionally masculine, such as operating the spinning mules and mechanical looms, a feminization that was inseparable from the capitalist transformation of the relationship between workload and workers’ remuneration.²⁶ Spinning teams consisted of a “minder” (“*hilador*”), who manned the machine itself, and two or three “piecers” (“*ayudantes anudadores*”) who assisted the operation. According to the cotton union, if Batlló accepted the piecework tariff that Bové offered on 1st March 1871, “there would be no other manufacturer of Barcelona willing to pay less than the Batlló Brothers”. Indeed, Batlló’s self-acting mules could spin 1,000 spindles or more per machine, twice as many as the standard in the Catalan textile industry of the period, which led Bové to deduce that “[Batlló] could very well pay higher prices for labor and still make more profits”.²⁷ Despite their capacity to pay more than the smaller factories, Batlló paid its employees less. And the reason had also to do with the fact that, according to a contemporary newspaper, in February of 1871, only about fifty of the 600 to 700 workers at Batlló were male.²⁸ From the very first day, piecework teams had been partially feminized. Bové and the *Tres Clases* had already condemned the new labor model in the spring of 1870, when the factory opened its doors, lamenting the practical absence of male weavers and asking “workers from outside not to move to Las Corts” [the new neighborhood where the factory was located].²⁹

25 *La Federación* (Barcelona), 28 May 1871, p. 3 (“*Nuestro compañero Clemente Bobé continúa preso ...*”).

26 On the 1869 strike see Albert Garcia Balaña, “Ya no existe Partido Progresista en Barcelona’ Experiencia social y protesta obrera en la insurrección republicana de 1869”, *Hispania Revista Española de Historia*, 230 (2008), pp. 735–760, 742–756.

27 *La Federación* (Barcelona), 5 March 1871, pp. 2–3.

28 *La Federación* (Barcelona), 26 February 1871, pp. 2–3.

29 *La Federación* (Barcelona), 29 May 1870, p. 2; 5 June 1870, pp. 2–3; also *La Federación. Actas del Congreso Obrero* (Barcelona), 23 June 1870, p. 7 (Climent Bové’s speech).

Both trade-unionist complaints – against the reduction in the remuneration per output and against the substitution of men by women in the spinning and weaving teams – had been around the Catalan cotton industry since at least the second half of the 1850s. In the foundational congress of the FRE-IWMA in 1870, Climent Bové had reminded participants of the decisive leadership of the spinners' union (*Sociedad de Hiladores*) in the organization of Spain's first general strike, which took place in the summer of 1855, and also of the repression that had befallen the said union following the strike.³⁰ From the 1860s on, spinners' reluctance to mind more spinning mules was a constant source of tension in the Catalan textile industry. Textile mill spinners' defense of the piece rate system, by which their teams were paid a set price for each pound of thread that they produced, was the tip of the iceberg of mill labor culture. Insofar as minders recruited, organized and benefited from the labor of their piecers, they were sort of "internal subcontractors" as William Lazonick showed for Lancashire cotton spinning.³¹ William M. Reddy found that spinners in Rouen, 1848, described themselves to the mill owner as "thread salesmen".³² For "minders", maintaining the "traditional" correlation between workload and remuneration was essential, because increases in productivity and income obtained by decreasing their organizational capacity and autonomy, and intensifying their own manual labor, reduced their authority inside and outside the factory.³³ The hiring of women compounded the devaluation of their trade and further altered gender relations in the textile industry. The roots of this culture, in Catalonia as well as in Lancashire, stretched back into a world of small shops and mills that did not yet incorporate steam-power, an early and atomized, extended-family, industry. The first generation of male spinners in Catalonia's mechanized cotton mills came from this cottage industry.³⁴

In brief: textile mill labor culture was characterized by interconnected elements of autonomy and hierarchy that were independent from – and would eventually become opposed to – the efficiency of capital. A trade culture that,

30 *La Federación. Actas del Congreso Obrero* (Barcelona), 26 June 1870, p. 10; quoted in Garcia Balañà, *La fabricació de la fàbrica*, p. 513.

31 William Lazonick, *Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor* (Cambridge Mass., 1990), pp. 78–107.

32 William M. Reddy, *The rise of market culture. The textile trade and French society, 1750–1900* (Cambridge UK, and Paris, 1984), pp. 204–218.

33 My argument and evidences for cotton spinning in Catalonia: Garcia Balañà, *La fabricació de la fàbrica*, pp. 24–31 for the comparative approach based on Lazonick's and Reddy's works; Garcia Balañà, "Ya no existe Partido Progresista en Barcelona", pp. 751–756; Garcia Balañà, "El verdadero productor: lenguaje y experiencia", pp. 229–232.

34 Garcia Balañà, *La fabricació de la fàbrica*, pp. 377–451.

having grown in the decades of 1835–1855, was very much alive in Barcelona when the IWMA arrived. During the 1869 strike, mill owners accused Bové and his unionized spinners of wanting to “fix the number of operators that each machine required and intervene in the employment of these operators”, as well as of meddling “in the organization of the mills and their personnel”, no less.³⁵

Barcelona, Spring of 1871: Federal Republicanism and Plebeian Democracy

In his parliamentary response of May 22, Minister Sagasta alerted Republican representative Lostau against “that cloud of foreigners who come [...] under orders of what has become the Paris Commune”, adding that “there is no doubt that it is [the Paris Commune] in touch with others, which, despite going by a different name, are well-known to everyone”. But what “other” Communes or municipal powers was Sagasta alluding to? His veiled accusations were leveled against one of the few voices that represented workers in the Spanish parliament, Federal Republican Baldomero Lostau from Catalonia, who had declared in the same session some minutes earlier: “I am a member of the IWMA”.³⁶

Indeed, the *Diputación Provincial de Barcelona* was the highest public institution governed by the Federal Democratic Republican Party (PRDF) since the Anti-Bourbon revolution of 1868. PRDF candidates had won a (simple) majority in the *Diputación* – which gathered municipalities and the elected provincial government – in the March 1871 elections, the first held by universal male suffrage. And the tensions between the *Diputación* and the monarchical government in Madrid had not ceased since, what with the double shadow cast by the strike and workers’ mobilization in Barcelona and the Paris Commune. During the repression unleashed against the *Tres Clases* in Barcelona between the 19 and 27 of May, which coincided exactly with final attack of Versailles against the Commune, the Spanish government carried out the military occupation of the *Palacio de la Diputación*, harassing its Republican officials, and orchestrating the collective destitution and legal proceedings against almost all of them.³⁷

35 Quoted in García Balaña, “Ya no existe Partido Progresista en Barcelona”, p. 748.

36 DSC/C, 1871 Legislature, Session of 22 May 1871, pp. 999 and 1.002.

37 A chronicle of the conflict between the Republican *Diputación* and the Serrano-Sagasta government in Borja de Riquer, “La Diputació revolucionària: 1868–1874”, in Borja de Riquer (ed.), *Història de la Diputació de Barcelona*, 3 vols (Barcelona, 1987), I, pp. 214–217.

In other words: in the spring of 1871, the Spanish government used the Commune's image as a plebeian insurrection that was finally (and happily) defeated to legitimize its simultaneous political and police offensive against trade unions and Barcelona's democratic and popular Republicanism. The presence of the IWMA and its Internationalist networks in Communard Paris and post-1868 Barcelona provided the best alibi for justifying repression. But the real objective of the government was to discredit and weaken the link between trade unionism and democratic republicanism, formed well before 1869, even though the latter had very little to do with the anti-political syndicalism of the early Bakuninist nucleus in Barcelona. It was in fact the combination of the radicalization of the Batlló strike and the republican electoral victory in Barcelona that sounded the alarm in the halls of power and pro-government circles (certainly, compounded by Paris as a potential mirror to avoid). Early in April, the monarchical press let its imagination run, "expecting great disturbances from the Barcelona republicans",³⁸ and thus contributing to the sense that the new governor Iglesias had to forcefully end all sources of disorder. This new governor arrived in the city a few days after the Republican victory, with the support of the local elites that were aligned with Amadeo's monarchy, and who, in the epistolary words of one of its members, "had always thought that once the King was sitting at the throne, there would be no more tolerance for all these meetings and clubs and centers and directories and Republicans, nor for threatening proclamations in the street corners and all this antisocial preaching".³⁹ That such things were still happening explained the vigor of the labor strike and the massive popular vote for the Republicans, two sides of the same coin according to the same source. It also explained, in the words of a letter received by Víctor Balaguer in Madrid, how "a *Diputación* such as that of Barcelona is composed of the worst of society and presided by a two-bit singer (*"cantador de caf"*)".⁴⁰

The links between manual workers and political republicanism were varied and very visible in Barcelona and outside it. PRDF candidates won by a landslide in the main Catalan cities in the March elections. Thanks to the new electoral law born from the 1869 Constitution, the electorate included all men aged over 25 – who in the province of Barcelona at that time were more than 180,000 individuals – of whom almost 70,000 voted. Republicans won a clear victory

38 *La Iberia* (Madrid), 11 April 1871, p. 3; *La Flaca* (Barcelona), 2 April 1871, p. 322.

39 Unsigned letter to Víctor Balaguer, Barcelona June 1871, Biblioteca Museu Balaguer (Vilanova i la Geltr, Barcelona) [hereafter BMB], Letters to Víctor Balaguer (1871).

40 Unsigned letter to Víctor Balaguer, Barcelona June 1871, BMB, Letters to Víctor Balaguer (1871).

in the city, taking 9 of its 14 districts.⁴¹ Starting early in April, the *Diputación Provincial* was to be presided by Josep A. Clavé, a long-time republican who had worked as a lathe operator years earlier, and who was now the “two-bit singer” that led “the worst of society”, according to the alarmed monarchist witness. Clavé’s enormously popular reputation indeed came from his condition as “artist-worker”, for since the 1840s he had been founding and promoting workers’ choirs across Catalonia (“*Cors de Clavé*”), and he had been the first in Spain to adapt *La Marseillaise*. Repeatedly arrested and harassed by the monarchical governments, Clavé conceived his choirs as spaces of worker sociability and education at the service of an inter-class politics with plebeian protagonists (like himself).⁴² During the first days of the 1868 Revolution, Clavé had exhorted the trade unions of Barcelona to publicly support the infant PRDF, and to reject all anti-political arguments.⁴³ It is therefore not strange, then, that the *Diputación* presided by Clavé publicly condemned Governor Iglesias in its May 13th session of “abuse of power [for] persecuting worker societies”.⁴⁴ The standoff between a new local power that was produced by the universalization of the suffrage and the mobilization of municipalist federalism, and the reconstituted central power, had begun. And it was inseparable from the workers’ protest.

In early May, the central government’s pressure on the republican *Diputación*, which included the stationing of troops in *Diputación* buildings,⁴⁵ seemed to bring the Barcelona experience closer to that of Paris (although the Spanish government never lost control of the situation). The numerous instances of appropriation of the Commune on the part of Spanish Federal Republicanism (including those of the PRDF’s members who had joined IWMA, such as Lostau) must be read in light of this episode of doubly plebeian, syndicalist, and democratic republican affirmation, and of its swift repression. The language of Federalist ideologue Francesc Pi i Margall when he celebrated the “beautiful spectacle” of “a city [Paris] that has for centuries been the queen and lady of France, advocating and fighting for the autonomy of all of the Republic’s provinces and peoples” remits us to that of Barcelona’s republican

41 Riquer, “La Diputació revolucionària”, pp. 214–215.

42 See Albert Garcia Balañà, “Ordre industrial i transformació cultural a la Catalunya de mitjan segle XIX: a propòsit de Josep A. Clavé i l’associacionisme coral”, *Recerques*, 33 (1996), pp. 103–134.

43 *La Vanguardia. Periódico Republicano Federalista* (Barcelona), 18 December 1868, pp. 2–3.

44 Arxiu Històric de la Diputació de Barcelona [hereafter AHDB], Minutes: Session of 13 May 1871; and *Legajo* 1.594.

45 Riquer, “La Diputació revolucionària”, pp. 215–216.

representatives' condemnation of the obstructionism and harassment suffered at the hands of Governor Iglesias, "a representative of central power".⁴⁶ And also to that of the defense of Commune Gustave Courbet's pictorial realism in the Republican press, which contested the critiques of the monarchical and conservative *Diario de Barcelona* that had called Courbet's "stonecutter", "ugly, ignoble and dirty", and his portrait of Proudhon "repugnant". This debate had a lot to do with local politics, no less than with transnational circulation of social aesthetics.⁴⁷

Equally, FRE-IWMA's prominence and visibility in 1871, stimulated by its leaders with international connections, but also by the Spanish government, should not cloud our historiographical judgment and lead us away from actually tracing the concrete experiences that encouraged local actors (unionized workers and plebeian republican militants) to identify with the Communards and their Internationalist vindications. When we do, we find that despite its indisputable global resonance, the myth of a "people" capable of insurrection in Barcelona was not born from the words of Bakunin, or the actions in Paris, but from a specifically Spanish nineteenth-century historical process and actor.

I am referring to the *Milicia Nacional* (National Militia), a sort of *Garde Nationale* that, during most periods of its intermittent existence since the 1830s was densely plebeian, and which had seen its last action in the fall of 1869 in Barcelona. Its units, which were at that time composed of workers and commanded by Republican militants or sympathizers, had been defeated and disarmed by the army after two days of street combat. This episode in which the civil militias, renamed *Voluntarios de la Libertad* (Volunteers for Liberty), were crushed by the military, replicated similar situations lived in the city in 1842–43 and 1855–56. What is most relevant here is that the National Militia had crystallized as a space of confluence for trade unionism and political republicanism, as an experience of politicization of urban workers and social hybridization of a republicanism that had clearly mesocratic roots. In 1855–56, for instance, the National Militia of Barcelona had been purged of its Democratic Republican leadership and its plebeian battalions after having disobeyed an order from Catalonia's military governor to use force to break the first general strike, which had been called by workers to defend the right to unionize.⁴⁸ The 1869

46 Pi i Margall quotation in Álvarez Junco, *La Comuna en España*, pp. 136–139; *Diputación* claims against Iglesias in AHDB, *Legajo* 1.594.

47 *La Campana de Gràcia* (Barcelona), 11 June 1871, pp. 1–2 ("Courbet"); *Diario de Barcelona*, 21 May 1871, pp. 5.374–5.376; details in Reyero, "La crítica de Courbet en España", notes 22 and 30–31.

48 García Balaña, "El verdadero productor": lenguaje y experiencia", pp. 245–248.

military attack against the Militia of the workers' district of Raval had been produced in the midst of the cotton strike led by Climent Bové. Their defeat preceded that of the strikers (many of whom were the same men), and led to the exile of many Republican leaders – such as Clavé himself – who were accused of instigating a “republican insurrection” for the most part fabricated by the government.⁴⁹

The dirges for the fate of the Communard *Garde Nationale* in the spring of 1871 in Barcelona were thus intimately tied to something much closer and local than to a general sense of transnational solidarity.⁵⁰ They were tied to the brief but influential autochthonous experiences of plebeian-supported Republican power. Experiences of worker inclusion in institutions like the National Militia, the trials of mixed labor juries, the revolutionary municipalities of 1869, or the very *Diputación* of 1871 (which was receptive to workers' demands in the labor strike).⁵¹ Therefore, the debates that divided Federal Republicanism in 1871 – and through it, the burgeoning FRE-IWMA – regarding how to respond to the pressures of the central government, regarding the pros and cons of insurrectionary methods, should not be read only in relation to the Commune and the rupture between Marx and Bakunin. They must be read, also, as the culmination in the sequence of political and military defeats of a local alliance between republicanism and trade unions whose origin dated back to the 1850s. This sequence of defeats, as a shared experience, contributed to the alliance itself, while fabricating the conditions for the dissent and divisions that would assail it. Josep A. Clavé, the “two-bit singer” who presided the new Republican *Diputación* and had already renounced the politics of popular insurrection, strongly rejected them as means to confront the repression and judicial proceedings of May and June of 1871. He had paid with prison or exile the defeats of the 1856, 1866 and 1869 militia uprisings, and his last exile had taken him to Marseille and Lyon in 1870, where he met the circles who would be leading the Communes starting that summer through April of 1871, and whose collapse he no doubt read in the light of his long and decisive Spanish experience.⁵²

49 Garcia Balaña, “Ya no existe Partido Progresista en Barcelona”, pp. 740–747.

50 *La Campana de Gràcia* (Barcelona), 4 June 1871, p. 2 (“*La Milicia de París ...*”); 11 June 1871, pp. 2–4 (“*L'ordre regna en Varsòvia*”).

51 Cotton workers and Republican municipalities in 1869: Albert Garcia Balaña, “Significados de República. Insurrecciones federales, redes milicianas y conflictos laborales en la Cataluña de 1869”, *Ayer*, 71 (2008), pp. 213–243, 218–224.

52 Josep A. Clavé to Isabel and Aurea, Lyon 11 January 1870, Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya (Sant Cugat del Vallès, Barcelona), Josep A. Clavé Papers, ANC1-700-T-64.

Conclusions

Three conclusions derived from the double episode of labor strike and Federal Republicanism's show of force in Barcelona in the spring of 1871 suggest ways of revisiting the historiographical approaches to the early years of the IWMA in Spain.

First, that the existence and strength of trade unionism and the continued defense of trades' political and moral economy, since at least mid-century in industrialized Catalonia, provided the main local network through which the IWMA entered Spain between 1870 and 1872. Government repression, which hid its very local or regional motives in transnational threats, favored the identification (and integration, in many cases) of the former with the latter. During the foundational congress of the FRE-IWMA, held in Barcelona in 1870, Bakuninist Francisco Mora reproached the majority of the delegates, who represented trade associations, for "talking here of [there] classes or trades, abstracting from the working class in general; this is bad, because we will never think internationally [if we think] like this".⁵³ In its 1869 edition, the *Dictionary of the Real Academia de la Lengua Española* (still) defined "class" as "order or number of people of the same degree, quality, or trade".⁵⁴

Second, that it was precisely through its long-term imbrication with trade unionism that Spanish Federal Republicanism "internationalized" in 1870–72, integrating its own discussions (and experiences) of plebeian politics and popular insurrection with those that came from Paris, London, and Geneva. Various authors have addressed the swift division between "political" and "anti-political" circles at the heart of the FRE-IWMA, but very few have ventured to look at the local factors and reasons behind such division, as if it could be entirely attributed to the various circles' (haphazard) embrace of Bakunin's or Marx's positions. The synchrony between a defiant trade unionism that (with its own means) was experimenting with trade federations, and a local republican power based on its potential to mobilize workers, and the simultaneous repression of both during the Commune spring, reveals the significance and depth of the local experiences on which the global debates were projected. In the summer of 1873, despite nearly two years of official prohibition and Bakuninist leadership, the link between cotton trade unionism and political Republicanism was still very much alive in Barcelona. Then, during the critical days of the First Spanish Republic, the direction of the union *Tres Clases de Vapor* ignored the call to join the "Cantonal" insurrection against the central

53 Quoted in Termes, *Anarquismo y sindicalismo*, pp. 98–99.

54 García Balaña, "El verdadero productor": lenguaje y experiencia", p. 223.

Republican government issued by Bakuninists, “*intransigentes*” (intransigent Federalists) and “some French exiles”.⁵⁵

Finally, the crisis of 1871 offers new evidence on the weight of local and regional dynamics in the genesis and development of an Internationalist culture in Spain. The centrality of actions delimited by union, sector, and territory that would characterize a significant faction of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism, before and after 1881, was constructed upon experiences such as the one analyzed here.⁵⁶ After all, these experiences alerted trade-centered syndicalism to the uncertainties and dangers of going down the road of politics, notwithstanding massive plebeian participation, while simultaneously steering it away from an insurrectional path that had been repeatedly tried and defeated by 1871.

CONGRESO DE OBREROS EN BARCELONA.

FIGURE 14.1 *First Congress of the FRE, Barcelona, 1870.*

SOURCE: *ILUSTRACIÓN ESPAÑOLA Y AMERICANA*, AÑO XIV, N^o14, 13 JUILLET 1870, P. 11: “CONGRÈS D’OUVRIERS À BARCELONE” (WORKERS’ CONGRESS IN BARCELONA). BIBLIOTECA NACIONAL DE ESPAÑA.

55 Termes, *Anarquismo y sindicalismo*, pp. 207–217; Gabriel, “Visibilitats polítiques”, pp. 75–76.

56 See José Álvarez Junco, *La ideología política del anarquismo español, 1868–1910* (Madrid, 1976).