

# Reencountering *The French Anarchists in London, 1880-1914*: Archival and Historiographic Reassessments

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**Abstract:** This article follows up on the book *The French Anarchists in London, 1880-1914* (2013), by exploring some primary material uncovered since this publication, and considering the ways in which research into the history of anarchism as a transnational movement has evolved. In the years since the publication of this book, a great deal of research has furthered or challenged its findings, especially in relation to print culture and the study of global anarchist networks. The mass digitisation of periodicals (both anarchist and mainstream) and archives in the last ten years offers new tools to find detailed information about the personal and political lives of these elusive anarchists in London – and further afield, thus rectifying the original study's London-centric focus. These sources are also crucial in documenting the ways in which anarchists were perceived and portrayed in Britain, France and internationally, and constructed into a major public threat through media discourse.

**Keywords:** Anarchism; transnational history; historiography.

**T**HIS ARTICLE explores a historiographic reencounter with the French-speaking anarchists in London between 1880 and 1914, a topic on which I published a monograph in 2013, *The French Anarchists in London, 1880-1914. Exile and Transnationalism in the First Globalisation* (Liverpool University Press (LUP), 2013).<sup>1</sup> This book is a study of political exile and transnational activism in the three decades before the First World War, a period commonly regarded as a golden age of Western anarchism, albeit one blighted by political violence and intense repression. It explores the history of about 500 French-speaking anarchists mainly associated with anarchist communism (as opposed to other strands of anarchism,

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1 I would like to thank the participants of the Society for the Study of French History 2022 conference, and in particular Jessica Wardhaugh and Andrew Smith, for their comments and suggestions on an early version of this article.

in particular individualist anarchism), who went into exile in London, with a close focus on the early 1890s, when their presence peaked. Three major lines of questioning inform the study: first, from the perspective of social history from below, an effort to piece back together the individual and collective lives and trajectories of these mostly unknown and often highly secretive individuals. Among the 500 or so anarchists whose names have been identified, with further biographic information being retrieved for many, about 100 are now known in some detail. Secondly, mobilising the concepts and questionings of transnational political history, this study examines exile politics, highlighting the complex functioning of anarchist internationalism in London's cosmopolitan milieu. The importance of cross-partisan and international exchanges in the development of proto-syndicalist ideas is emphasised, and contrasted with the limited appeal of political violence in exile circles – even though the London groups were widely regarded as the epicenter of the alleged international anarchist terrorist conspiracy which so preoccupied contemporaries. Lastly, reflecting on the real and imagined terrorist pursuits of these activists, the book charts how and why this relatively small group of French anarchist exiles in London came to play a major role in a historic redefinition of Britain's hitherto exceptionally liberal asylum legislation, resulting in the landmark 1905 Aliens Act.

My reencounter with a research project which, until recently, I regarded as completed is the result of a French updated translation of the book being in progress and, secondly, of having been invited to write the present follow-up article discussing the themes of the book. However, this quickly turned out to be a valuable methodological exercise since, in the near-decade since the publication of this monograph, a great deal of research has furthered and sometimes challenged its findings. New empirical and theoretical insights have arisen, from a range of paradigms, in particular the ongoing transnational turn in history and the history of policing and surveillance, new questionings regarding the anarchists' positions towards women and anticolonial activism, as well as decolonial perspectives challenging the very definition of anarchism.<sup>2</sup> Pietro Di Paola's study, *The Knights Errant of Anarchy: London and the Italian Anarchist Diaspora (1880-1917)*, examining Italian anarchist exiles in London in the same period, appeared just after mine in the same LUP 'Studies in Labour History' series, which meant that crucial new material was available in a published monograph to take in almost as soon as my own book was published – a fine example of the sub-field's productivity.

There have also been many small and often striking archival discoveries over the years, for instance a bundle of leaflets advertising a series of 'Discussions on Unsettled Questions in Socialism & Anarchism', held at the short-lived International School founded by Louise Michel on Fitzroy Square in the heart of the anarchist quarter, and about which so little remains

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2 To avoid repetition and a long literature review, readers might usefully refer to BANTMAN, Constance, 'Anarchist Transnationalism'. In VAN DER LINDEN, Marcel (ed.), **Cambridge History of Socialism**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. To the many works referenced in this synthesis chapter, one might add SOLOMON, Vlad. **State Surveillance, Political Policing and Counter-Terrorism in Britain. 1880-1914**. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2021.

known; the topics ranged from 'Tendencies of the Present Social economy' to 'The Theory and Laws of Politics' and 'The Doctrine of Hedonism'. These leaflets had been used as scrap paper to write a translation of Edmund Burke from English into French on their back, and were archived in a file bearing no connection at all to the London French, so this was an entirely chance discovery which revealed the role of the School as a meeting place where debates were organised by the British anarchist Agnes Henry.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, a later research project on the French journalist Jean Grave was intended to examine him as an 'immobile transnationalist' who remained in Paris while the anarchist movement underwent a great deal of international mobility; in fact, this showed that he did travel to Britain on a regular basis from the 1890s and lived there during the war. Beyond the delightful realisation that Grave had spent some time at his brother-in-law's house in the affluent London suburb of Guildford, just two streets away from my own house,<sup>4</sup> documenting Grave's alternative mobilities revealed an unexplored set of engagements with British life and politics by this important figure in the anarchist communist movement, following a very different chronology and geographic itinerary.<sup>5</sup>

Above all, the mass digitisation of archives and periodicals (both anarchist and mainstream) in the last ten years have opened new prospects to find detailed information regarding the personal and political lives of these anarchists in London and their reception, in Britain and globally. A photo of Martial Bourdin, the perpetrator of the notorious 1894 Greenwich explosion, the main terrorist scare associated with the French anarchists in London, can be found in a relatively old academic article,<sup>6</sup> but I discovered it only last year, during a simple Google search – this epitomises the depth of information still to be unearthed regarding the history of French anarchists in London. Less anecdotally, digitised periodicals (rather than academic journals) are crucial in documenting the existence of anarchists in London and the ways in which they were perceived, portrayed and constructed into a major public threat through media discourse in Britain, France and internationally. These sources open the possibility of questioning my study's London-centric focus and examining the history of these exiles in a much wider context. Due to the sheer volume and virality of this material, this exploration could not be carried out systematically at the time I wrote my PhD and then its book adaptation, when most of this material was not available electronically, or withdrawn from consultation for conservation or digitisation purposes. This new availability of vast quantities of global and grassroots information is a significant development, given that virality and inaccuracy, but also secrecy, archival dispersion, displacement and disappearance are fundamental characteristics of the material available on anarchists.

3 Archives Nationales, Paris.

4 Archives Nationales, Paris. Fonds Jean Grave, 14AS01.

5 BANTMAN, Constance. **Jean Grave and the Networks of French Anarchism, 1857-1939**. Cham: Palgrave, 2021.

6 BURGOYNE, Mary. Conrad among the Anarchists: Documents on Martial Bourdin and the Greenwich Bombing. **The Conradian**, v. 32, n. 1, p. 147-ii (photo on the final page), 2007. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20873587>.

To what extent is the rapid evolution of the historiography of transnational anarchism unusual and of special historiographic note? While sustained theoretical innovation and, consequently, obsolescence are inherent in any lively area of research, I would argue that the broad interdisciplinary field of anarchist studies and the sub-field of studies on transnational anarchism have been especially dynamic in the last twenty years, due to ongoing scholarly and public interest. In academic terms, this has mainly been part of a long-term academic reassessment of anarchism, long overlooked or derided as the ill-judged creed of ‘primitive rebels’, to use Eric Hobsbawm’s damning phrase. The relatively recent scholarly interest in anarchism has also greatly benefitted from and contributed to the transnational turn in the humanities and social sciences, with a wealth of studies revisiting histories of anarchism so far written from a national perspective, often spurred on by questionings on gender and decolonial perspectives. The historian of transnationalism Pierre-Yves Saunier has highlighted the exemplary ‘recasting of the history of anarchism’<sup>7</sup> from this perspective since the early 2000s – a pleasing recognition from a leading historian of transnationalism. In terms of intersections with current events which have piqued the public interest, the terrorist theme has remained acutely prominent, especially with a focus on transnational networks, conspiracies, police surveillance and immigration control; in addition to the frequent journalistic pieces elaborating on these themes, the sense that the history of pre-1914 international anarchism is acutely relevant to the present can be observed, most recently, in the 2018 BBC adaptation of Joseph Conrad’s novel *The Secret Agent*, a fictionalisation of the 1894 Greenwich explosion foregrounding French anarchist exiles alongside Russian provocateurs.<sup>8</sup> Contemporary social movements also ensure the continued resonance of the anti-parliamentarian, horizontal and prefigurative message of anarchism, through alterglobalisation and global justice activism, pervaded with an anarchist spirit,<sup>9</sup> leading to sustained interest in its history from academic as well as wider audiences. These are key factors in explaining the specificities and dynamic historiography of anarchism.

Alongside these theoretical developments, the article discusses the impact of mass digitisation and digital humanities approaches, the evolution of historiographic paradigms, as well as subjective factors informing research. These analyses are presented here under two main headings: Reinterpretations and Factual Retrieval.

## Reinterpretations

IT HAS BECOME clear in the past decade that the London exile of the French anarchists, while being a relatively brief and short-distance exile, should be understood in the context

7 SAUNIER, Pierre-Yves Saunier. **Transnational History**. Basingstoke: Palgrave McMillan, 2013. p. 73.

8 THE SECRET AGENT. 2016. Video (3 episodes). <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07ltxsr>, last accessed 30 May 2022.

9 LEVY, Carl, and ADAMS, Matthew S.. Introduction. In: LEVY, Carl and ADAMS, Matthew S. (eds), **Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism**. Cham: Palgrave, 2019, p. 1-5.

of a much broader history, in terms of space, chronology and significance. The transnational turn in anarchist historiography was well under way when *The French Anarchists in London* was published, but it was in its early stages when the doctoral thesis on which it is based was defended, in 2007. That year saw the publication of what might be regarded as the manifesto for the study of the history of the anarchist movement beyond borders, focused on individuals and practices rather than top-down ideological developments: Davide Turcato's article 'Italian anarchism as a transnational movement, 1885-1915'.<sup>10</sup> Turcato articulates the analysis of cross-border perspectives and the anarchist press's transnational functioning with a broad revisionist angle, showing how a transnational approach counters narratives 'that identify discontinuity, spontaneism, and lack of organization as features of anarchism, and ultimately support[t] charges of ineffectiveness and irrationalism'.<sup>11</sup> Another foundational study for historians of transnational anarchism appeared in 2007: Benedict Anderson's *Under Three Flags. Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination*, charting the travels and 'intellectual interactions of two great Filipino writers – the political novelist Jose Rizal and the pioneering folklorist Isabelo de los Reyes – with avant-garde European literature and politics, connecting nationalist movements of the era,<sup>12</sup> thus considering national independence movements through the prism of global interactions and informal networks. These themes were taken up, expanded and theorised powerfully in Steven Hirsch and Lucian van der Walt's reference volume *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870-1940. The Praxis of National Liberation, Internationalism, and Social Revolution* (Brill, 2010). The *Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History* was published in 2009, with a pithy entry on anarchism by Jose Moya acknowledging anarchism's status as 'the world's first and most widespread transnational movement organized from below',<sup>13</sup> and sketching out the key channels of this transnational functioning, as well as its socioeconomic and ideological contexts.

Research along these lines has accelerated greatly over the last decade, yielding important empirical and theoretical findings. A significant collective effort to map out local, national, regional, and global anarchist movements and their network-based activism has evidenced their near-global presence and the defining importance of cross-border interactions at every level, with different chronologies and modalities: analysing this wide range of local political contexts and, ultimately, meanings is a focal point of transnational studies. For instance, Laura Galián has recently argued that the urgent task of 'decolonising anarchism' not only means taking local, chronological and political variations into account, but also questioning

10 TURCATO, Davide. Italian Anarchism as a Transnational Movement, 1885–1915. *International Review of Social History*, v. 52, n. 3, p. 407-444, 2007.

11 Ibidem.

12 ANDERSON, Benedict. *Under three Flags. Anarchism and the anti-colonial imagination*. London; New York: Verso, 2005.

13 MOYA, Jose. Anarchism. In IRIYE, Akira and SAUNIER, Pierre-Yves (eds.), *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History*. New York: Palgrave, 2009, p. 39-40.

the very meaning and formulation of anarchism across locations, to include ‘non-Western anti-authoritarian and anarchist narratives, which are not always and not only enunciated as a self-declared ideology’.<sup>14</sup> My own study was not anchored in these broad perspectives: it acknowledged that London was a node in the broader anarchist diaspora created by fierce anti-anarchist repression, anti-immigration laws, labour migration and voluntary travel. Numerous international and cross-partisan sociabilities and solidarities were formed in London’s anarchist hub: French anarchists chiefly frequented Italian and British anarchists, and also others from a range of nationalities and political affiliations. Anarchists lived and socialised in the same broad areas of London (Soho and Fitzrovia), sometimes shared houses, frequented the same clubs (not least the notorious Autonomie Club), attended the same political meetings, sometimes sharing a platform and writing in the same periodicals - to cite just key examples. Internationalism, both professed and practiced, was a central theme in *The French Anarchists in London*, although my focus was primarily on Anglo-French and Franco-Italian connections, and on transnational contacts within London – rather than other forms of interaction, beyond London, spanning longer distances and mediated by print and private correspondences rather than direct personal encounters.

With the hindsight of the last decade’s collective work, there is now a solid case for an approach emphasising more complex affiliations and interactions, across a wide range of interlocking scales, with different chronologies and shifting sociopolitical contexts – even if this makes for a less neat narrative. A revealing example is that of anarchist campaigns, which have recently become a significant research direction, with a dual focus on their transnational and cross-partisan dimensions, illustrating the sophistication of anarchist networks. One of the most important set of campaigns, spanning three decades and many borders, both physical and political, was the ‘Spanish Atrocities’ protests, against the brutal repression of all progressive opposition – and especially anarchists – in Spain and the Hispanic world, culminating with the execution of Catalan anarchist educator Francisco Ferrer in 1909. Both France and London were important sites in this agitation. However, these protests unfolded globally and across the progressive left, with historic street mobilisations, such as the 17 October 1909 mass demonstrations against Ferrer’s execution, as well as effective campaigning through periodicals, pamphlets, testimonies and illustrated special issues. It is also essential to highlight the centrality of Latin American anarchist movements in this wave of campaigns, due to their own mobilisations but also to the fierce repression which they endured. Many European campaigners regarded their own fight against repression in Argentina as closely connected, both ideologically and organisationally, with the long struggle against ‘Spanish atrocities’.<sup>15</sup> This example

14 GALIÁN, Laura. **Colonialism, Transnationalism, and Anarchism in the South of the Mediterranean**. Cham: Palgrave, 2020, p. 4.

15 GRAVE, Jean. Appel à la solidarité de tous les hommes de cœur. *Les Temps Nouveaux*, Paris, p. 1, 18 December 1909.



points to more transnational engagements, well beyond the scale of the city or indeed beyond Europe, restoring the importance of cross-partisan alliances and the very close links between the French and Hispanic movements (including in diaspora), as well as the essential role of print activism.<sup>16</sup>

Another area requiring scrutiny, consequently, is that of exile publications and anarchist print culture. The central importance of anarchist print propaganda has long been recognised, and has indeed been one of the main strands in the study of the French movement since its beginning. The ‘founding father’ of the historiography of French anarchism, Jean Maitron, stressed that reading anarchist literature was a defining feature of and sign of belonging in the movement; he also showed that from the 1880s, the anarchist press functioned as the ‘party’ of the movement.<sup>17</sup> Another landmark in the early historiography of the French movement was René Bianco’s monumental inventory of the anarchist periodical press.<sup>18</sup> However, the shift to thinking about anarchist print culture as a complex site of organisation and debate, including transnationally, and to positing this as the premise of research into anarchism, is relatively recent. This line of research has developed greatly in recent years, in individual studies<sup>19</sup> as well as digital humanities and mapping exercises providing striking visualisations of transnational and multilingual press landscapes.<sup>20</sup> This research complicates thinking on the nature of transnationalism and the relationship between place, language and ideology, as well as the networks connecting them; it argues in favour of extending our focus from physical encounters (typically in London and other global capitals) as the main sites of transnationalism, to foreground print networks as key vectors of cross-border, cross-language and cross-partisan activism.

When first analysing the main anarchist periodicals published solely by French-speaking anarchists in London, as well as their considerable placard output, my approach was based on the historiographic assumption that they were almost exclusively preoccupied with French politics and France; however, this is challenged by systematic data collection and visualisation approaches which have gained ground with the ongoing mainstreaming of digital humanities. Thus, closer analysis of the ‘London series’ of the *Père Peinard* (October 1894 – February 1895) shows that its international networks expanded with each of its eight issues. One especially interesting connection is with Louis Goaziou and his periodicals in

16 LAQUA, Daniel. Freethinkers, Anarchists and Francisco Ferrer: The Making of a Transnational Solidarity Campaign. *European Review of History*, v. 21, n. 4, p. 467-484, 2014; BRAY, Mark. **The Anarchist Inquisition. Assassins, Activists, and Martyrs in Spain and France**. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022.

17 MAITRON, Jean, and DROGUET, Alain. *La Presse Anarchiste Française de Ses Origines à Nos Jours*. **Le Mouvement Social**, n. 83, p. 9–22, 1973.

18 BIANCO, René. ‘Bianco: Presse anarchiste’, available at: <https://bianco.ficedl.info/>, last accessed 25 May 2022.

19 YEOMAN, James Michael. **Print Culture and the Formation of the Anarchist Movement in Spain, 1890-1915**. London: Routledge, 2019; HOYT, Andrew. **And They Called Them “Galleanisti”: The Rise of the Cronaca Sovversiva and the Formation of America’s Most Infamous Anarchist Faction (1895-1912)**. Dissertation - University of Minnesota, 2018; CASTAÑEDA, Christopher J. and FEU, Montse (eds.). **Writing Revolution. Hispanic Anarchism in the United States**. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2019.

20 See for instance ZIMMER, Kenyon. *Anarchist Newspapers and Periodicals, 1872-1940*. [https://depts.washington.edu/moves/anarchist\\_map-newspapers.shtml](https://depts.washington.edu/moves/anarchist_map-newspapers.shtml), last accessed 9 June 2022.

Pennsylvania. Goaziou, a Brittany-born miner who emigrated to the United States in 1880, aged 16, and became politicised within a few years, including by reading Jean Grave's *Le Révolté* (Paris) and corresponding with it. Goaziou went on to set up his own papers and become a labour organiser.<sup>21</sup> This meant that Pouget's exchanges with Goaziou had a wider impact, because they were integrated in Goaziou's own lively international networks of militancy, press production and dissemination. This stands in striking contrast with the *Père Peinard's* apparent French focus, in contents and in tone. Even a basic visualisation of all the international interactions of the *Père Peinard*, including all the 'weak links' contained in the paper's seemingly paratextual elements (subscriptions, donations, article contributions, mentions in the paper, correspondence...) evidences a cluster of links in the broad area where Goaziou was based, along and north of the axis between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, and further west, around Cincinnati.<sup>22</sup> This constituted a productive network, and other global links must also be taken into account to evidence the global dimension of this brief but highly influential exile paper.

This emphasis on the exiles' French tropism was an interpretative bias induced by a reliance on exile studies as my main theoretical framework. This led me to foreground the prevalence of national affiliations among exiles, as had been the case among previous generations of French exiles in London (especially Republicans after 1851 and Communards), even though the anarchists' own exile politics were very different, in particular due to their conscious rejection of exclusionary nationalism. This bias has been extensively revised by the historiography of exile of the last two decades, now offering far more complexity and nuance in thinking about activism and political allegiances.<sup>23</sup> This shift points to the way in which new interpretations both stem from and generate paradigm shifts, or at least changes in conceptualisation. When I started researching French anarchists in London, in the early 2000's, transnational approaches from below remained marginal in French academia, where I was based as a master's and then as a doctoral student. My research project was developed primarily with the aim of recovering the lived experience of relatively unknown individuals in the Victorian imperial metropolis, with specific reference to Franco-British exchanges. Such a study of grassroots interactions and reassessment of the importance of the activism of lesser-known actors was well-established in the anarchist and labour historiographic tradition, particularly in France, where the Maitron biographic dictionary champions these very aims and methods.<sup>24</sup> Transposing them to a transnational setting was less familiar territory, however, although several emerging paradigms to

21 CORDILLOT, Michel. Goaziou, Louis. Maitron: <https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article159672>, last accessed 23 May 2022.

22 Google map - international contacts of Pere Peinard, London Series, last accessed 25 May 2022.

23 See for instance DIAZ, Delphine and APRILE, Sylvie (eds.). **The Banished: Traveling the Roads of Exile in Nineteenth-Century Europe**. Oldenburg: De Gruyter, 2021; HARTNETT, Lynne Ann. Relief and revolution: Russian émigrés' political remittances and the building of political transnationalism. **Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies**, v. 46, n. 6, p. 1040-1056, 2020.

24 **Dictionnaire biographique Le Maitron**, <https://maitron.fr/>, last accessed 30 May 2022.



conduct this kind of research were available in the early 2000's, and were a much-debated historiographical topic.

The terminology of transnational history has now become dominant to capture the processes described above, alongside 'global history'. In the field of labour and socialist history, it has produced its own masterpieces focusing on France, such as Nicolas Delalande's *La Lutte et l'Entraide* and Quentin Deluermoz's *Commune(s)*.<sup>25</sup> However, in the early 2000s, several related paradigms were in competition: intercultural studies and *histoire croisée*,<sup>26</sup> the study of cultural transfers,<sup>27</sup> the history of exile<sup>28</sup> and entangled/ connected history.<sup>29</sup> While groundbreaking in their approaches, these were early stages in thinking creatively and comprehensively about the experience of mobility. In 2007, French historians Caroline Douki and Philippe Minard noted that French academia was not really engaging with research into hybridity and circulations, when global history was so dynamic in the English-speaking world and across Europe, especially in Germany and the Netherlands.<sup>30</sup> Noting the different terminologies in use, both authors remarked that this testified to an ongoing process of conceptual 'oscillation' and 'clarification'. In 2011 still, the historian Jean-Francois Sirinelli pointed out that the transnational turn was a 'necessary' and 'desirable' emerging trend in the study of French political history.<sup>31</sup> As pointed out by Douki and Minard, the terminology and methodologies of transnational history were far more prevalent in the UK and in English-language scholarship; these theorisations opened a broader scope in space and research questions, moving away from the binary approach often implicit in competing frameworks. Engaging with English-language scholarship due to my own research interests, command of English (which was not a given at the time for many French historians) and the fact that I had relocated to Britain during my doctoral research offered different methodological perspectives.

This points to contingency and serendipity in how research projects are conceived and executed, and to the influence of the historian's intellectual but also personal trajectory.<sup>32</sup>

25 DELALANDE, Nicolas. *La Lutte et l'entraide. L'âge des solidarités ouvrières*. Paris: Seuil, L'Univers historique, 2019; DELUERMOZ, Quentin. *Commune(s), 1870-1871. Une traversée des mondes au XIXe siècle*. Paris: Seuil, L'Univers historique, 2020.

26 WERNER, Michel and ZIMMERMANN, Bénédicte. *De la comparaison à l'histoire croisée*. Paris: Seuil, Le Genre Humain, 2004.

27 ESPAGNE, Michel. *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands*. Paris: PUF, 1999; JOYEUX-PRUNEL, Béatrice. Les transferts culturels. Un discours de la méthode. *Hypothèses*, v. 6, n. 1, p. 149-162, 2003.

28 MARTINEZ, P.K.. *Paris Communard Refugees in Britain, 1871-1880*. Dissertation - University of Sussex, 1981; GODINEAU, Laure. *Retour d'exil : les anciens communards au début de la Troisième République*. Dissertation - Paris I University, 2000.

29 MINARD, Philippe and DOUKI, Caroline. Histoire globale, histoires connectées : un changement d'échelle historiographique ? Introduction. *Revue d'histoire moderne & contemporaine*, v. 54-4, n. 5, p. 7-21, 2007, p. 19.

30 Ibidem, p. 8; similar observations were still made very recently in DELUERMOZ, Quentin (ed.). *D'ici et d'ailleurs. Histoires globales de la France contemporaine*. Paris: La Découverte, 2021, p. 19-27.

31 SIRINELLI, Jean-François. L'histoire politique à l'heure du transnational turn : l'agora, la cité, le monde ...et le temps. *Revue historique*, n. 658, 2011, p. 391- 408, 394.

32 MCCLELLAN III, James E. Accident, Luck, and Serendipity in Historical Research. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*. V. 149, N. 1, p. 1-21, Mar. 2005; LEAKE, Elisabeth, (In)accessible Stories and the Contingency of History Writing. *History Workshop Journal*, 'Histories of the Present', 27 May 2022.

## New findings: factual retrieval

EQUALLY IMPORTANT is the wealth of new archival material uncovered since this project was concluded. This is due, firstly, to the fact that the history of these French exiles was relatively uncharted before this initial research, and too vast and scattered to be fully covered through a PhD – even a French one, over 700 page long – and a book incorporating further research.

Other colleagues' archival findings and arguments have qualified some of my claims. For instance, French historian Vivien Bouhey's work on the Belgian anarchist Désiré Pauwels, the suspected perpetrator of an attack on Paris's Eglise de la Madeleine in Paris in 1894, sheds new light on the role of London as a temporary haven for some propagandists by the deed:<sup>33</sup> mine was a city-focused, partly translocal approach, whereas Bouhey's approach incorporates other border countries (Switzerland) and other locales in France (such as the suburb of Saint-Denis), thus allowing different insights, de-centering London and showing new networks, evidencing the presence of a significant network from the suburban town of Saint-Denis, with terrorist and criminal connections. This converges with the above-mentioned idea of examining London as part of a wider set of exchanges, emphasising multi-directionality and international links within and *beyond* London; even the extensively researched history of anarchist political violence and its policing, from the very local to the global, still has many findings to offer.

My own subsequent archival research has not changed substantially the initial claims of *The French Anarchists...*, but it has enriched them with a great deal of further detail, bringing new information on the protagonists, their activities, ideas and mindsets. Specifically, the abundance of material relating to anarchists made accessible by periodical digitisation has brought new information on exiled anarchist women in London, moving beyond the initial paradox whereby their presence in significant numbers was known, yet almost invisible in archives. Without yielding large amounts of detailed information, periodicals teem with anecdotes and incidental mentions of women. Thus, while Ernest Delebecque, whose house on Soho's Charlotte Street lodged many French anarchists over the years, is well-known, his wife and child can be discovered in a journal article.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in 1903, the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* reported on a maintenance pay dispute between the Italian anarchist Jean Battola (sentenced in the 1892 'Walsall' bomb-making scandal) and his French wife Josephine Eugenie, as Battola now lived with another woman, with whom he ran boarding houses set up with a fund collected for him during his detention - a rare clue to the material and conjugal

33 BOUHEY, Vivien. De Saint-Denis à l'église de la Madeleine. Pauwels: itinéraire d'un anarchiste belge (1883-1894). Conference at the Petit Palais, Paris, 14 December 2018; available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rt-ySM5mr3M>, last accessed 30 May 2022.

34 **L'Intransigeant**, 1st July 1892: 'Madame Delebecque. Her husband is a well-respected woodworker, who has been in England for 14 years. French police have invaded their house without permission, and brutalised her, when she was carrying her child.'

lives of anarchists.<sup>35</sup> A reporter from France's *Le Mot d'Ordre* claimed to have visited 'Madame Kropotkine', who allegedly declared to him that 'Kropotkin is not accountable to anyone, and too bad if his revolutionary ideas still frighten idiots!'.<sup>36</sup> As these examples suggest, these sources must be read with the customary caution relating to anarchism; another caveat is that these women remain largely defined as spouses rather than individuals and activists in their own right. One exception is that of Jean Grave's second wife, Wales-born Mabel Holland Thomas, about whom so little was known until recently, and who now emerges from various sources (including Grave's correspondence, held at the State Archive of the Russian Federation GARF, with significant access issues) as an accomplished artist who contributed to anarchist activism in many different ways, far beyond the financial support which her well-off background allowed her to bring to the cause. In return, the clear influence of Mabel, her family and connections on Grave's own ideological evolution, as well as their militant and creative partnership over several decades point to the crucial importance of taking into account conjugal and emotional bonds when studying activism.<sup>37</sup>

Understanding the nature of anarchist networks and trying to document the relationships – both personal and political – between various actors have remained key focuses. For instance, consulting the relatively small Zo d'Axa papers at Amsterdam's International Institute of Social History (IISH) could not be done within the timeframe of the initial project but has since proven enlightening. The fascinating D'Axa (1864-1930) – aka Alphonse Gallaud – was the editor of the iconic French periodical *L'En Dehors* (1891-93). His eventful personal and militant career added so much to the anarchist and avant-garde milieu of the 1880-1890s. D'Axa, as recounted in *The French anarchists...*, was supremely put off by London, its population and politics, and spent just a few months there, but the few letters written to him by other London exiles are very informative. They flesh out our understanding of personal connections between then-prominent anarchists and exiles. Chief among these is the journalist, theorist, activist and campaigner Charles Malato, one of the best-known figures of the London exile. Both men collaborated at *L'En Dehors* in the early 1890s, and the few letters available at the IISH reveal a humorous friendship, through a letter from Malato from London telling D'Axa (in Brussels at the time): 'I have just received unpleasant news for you... You no longer live in Hampstead [the North London suburb where Malato lived and appears to have hosted D'Axa] but in Venice. These two days of torrential rain appear to have turned your room into a lagoon'.<sup>38</sup> More significantly, the letters point to networks of professional support between the two writers and journalists, with Malato asking D'Axa to help him find a book publisher for his memoir, a theatre owner who might be interested in producing a play of his, and, later, asking him to help him earn some money by contributing to the nationalist paper *La Cocarde* ('If, without carrying

35 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 8 January 1903.

36 *Le Mot d'ordre*, 25 February 1894.

37 BANTMAN, op. cit. 2021. See chapters 5 and 6 in particular.

38 Malato to D'Axa, D'Axa Papers, International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam, 30 October 1894.

a flag in my pocket, I could send a few lines to *La Cocarde*, it would be a great help<sup>39</sup>). These few lines indicate the material difficulties experienced by anarchists – even a prolific and influential writer like Malato - and can be read in light of the research on networks of mutual aid among anarchist writers and intellectuals acutely studied by Federico Ferretti with reference to Elisée Reclus and anarchist geographers.<sup>40</sup> Disappointingly, references to publishing activities in London involving some very active but secretive individuals are very vague ('Nikitine had looked for Capt, went to his place but did not find him and did not hear from you'<sup>41</sup>). This, however, is a clue in itself: anarchists exiled in London knew that their correspondences were often intercepted by the police, and this cautious mention testifies to this awareness and the strategies put in place to detract surveillance.

D'Axa also corresponded with the controversial Lucien Pemjean (1861-1945), who became an anarchist in the early 1880s and was in London on-and-off from the mid-1880s and after 1894, when he escaped from prison in France to avoid the anti-anarchist 'Trial of the Thirty'. By the late 1890s, Pemjean had joined the nationalistic and antisemitic camp during the Dreyfus Affair.<sup>42</sup> As early as 1887, he wrote several contributions on 'the London French' for the Paris-based *La Révolution cosmopolite*. These were grimly poetic, philosophical and political musings on London and the diverse French groups it harboured, clearly placing the author in a tradition of political exile: 'London, this queen among merchant cities, this gigantic industrial, commercial and financial city, whose name is enough to give birth to the idea of a formidable labouring stomach. How many have sunk there before me, coming from all over the globe and for the most diverse motives?'<sup>43</sup> Pemjean evoked the complete destitution of these immigrants who could not find any employment.<sup>44</sup> These texts written from a social revolutionary perspective locate Pemjean as one of the very few anarchist chroniclers of this period of exile.

His letters to D'Axa are another testimony of a personal connection that has gone unrecorded in police sources and secondary studies. Since anarchist exiles in London were overwhelmingly discreet and secretive and rarely discussed their lives in Britain, the letters offer precious comments from one exile on his host country. Pemjean, who in 1894 had moved to Alton, in the county of Hampshire (South of England), praised 'the countryside, the fresh air, these peaceful animals' and also, more ambiguously, British workers: 'They are not cerebral, intellectuals, they are males. They have no interest in socialism or anarchism, but you can rely on their spirit of tolerance, their moral rectitude'.<sup>45</sup> The British Newspapers database locates Pemjean several years later, at a time when most of the French exiles

39 Malato to D'Axa, 25 March 1895.

40 FERRETTI, Federico. **Elisée Reclus: Pour une géographie nouvelle**. Paris: Editions du CTHS, 2014.

41 Malato to D'Axa, 10 April 1895

42 DAVRANCHE, Guillaume. Pemjean, Lucien, Pierre. **Maitron**. [Dictionnaire des anarchistes]. <https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article155946>.

43 'Les Français de Londres', **La Révolution Cosmopolite**, Paris, II, 2, n.d., p. 13-14.

44 Ibidem, 2, 4, n.d.

45 Pemjean to D'Axa, 23 September 1894.

had returned home, writing an opinionated letter in French to the *Saint James's Gazette*, protesting against the stance of the English press in the context of the Dreyfus Affair, with an antisemitic rant against 'big Jewish banks'.<sup>46</sup> This new information demonstrates Pemjean's atypical geographic and ideological trajectory compared with the majority of anarchist exiles in Britain, as well as his reflexive stance on his status as a French immigrant in Britain, and it is therefore crucial in restoring the contours and experiences of these individuals as part of a group biography.

The vast quantities of information now readily available and often word-searchable thanks to the digitisation of periodicals also allow a reassessment of the centrality of the London groups for French, British and international observers, and of the near-global hold of the moral panic triggered by anarchists. The terror of the 'anarchist plague'<sup>47</sup> represents a quintessential example of press virality, to use another fairly recent historiographic concept, which has gained currency with the development of mass periodical digitisation.<sup>48</sup> Any incident with terrorist undertones was reported at length and often with direct textual citations from one source to another, including in translation. This was the case for the main anarchist attacks in France and for the repressive events which drove the growth of London exile groups: 'Anarchists who have been expelled from Paris and other continental cities are flocking to London. Anarchists have written to the authorities, threatening to dynamite the Eastern Railway line,' the *Lyttelton Times* (Christchurch, New Zealand) reported in 1893,<sup>49</sup> while as late as 1899 the *Saint Christopher Advertiser and Weekly Intelligencer* (St Kitts) reported that 'the London anarchists claim the credit of having caused the Toulon [Southern France] explosion'.<sup>50</sup> All the terrorist incidents in Britain involving French anarchist exiles triggered similar outpourings of speculation, downright error and lurid detail, for instance the 1892 failed bomb plot of Walsall,<sup>51</sup> the death of Martial Bourdin in the explosion of the bomb he was carrying at London's Greenwich Observatory,<sup>52</sup> the extradition of the suspected terrorist François Meunier,<sup>53</sup> in addition to mentions of the general activities of the London anarchist groups.<sup>54</sup> In a fine illustration of the constant translocal circulation of information and rumours about anarchists, in 1899, the *Dépêche Tunisienne* relayed a notification from Rome that Britain's *Daily Telegraph* had announced that a police

46 PEMJEAN, Lucien. A French protest against the English view. *St James's Gazette*, London, 25 January 1898.

47 *La Politique coloniale*, 20 February 1894

48 PINSON, Guillaume; SCHUH, Julien and LANGLAIS, Pierre-Carl. La réimpression dans la presse francophone du 19e siècle: outils numériques et enjeux de mesure de viralité. available at: <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01485991/document>, last accessed 20 May 2022; PINKER, Roy. *Fake News et viralité avant internet*. Paris: CNRS Editions, 2020.

49 *Lyttelton Times*, Christchurch, v. LXXX, n. 10,228, 28 December 1893.

50 *Saint Christopher Advertiser and Weekly Intelligencer*, 14 March 1899; similar claims are made in *Antigua Observer*, 16 March 1899.

51 Anarchists in England. *Bangalore Spectator*, Bangalore, v. XXVI, n. 96, 24 April 1894, p. 2.

52 Anarchists in London. *Bangalore Spectator*, Bangalore, v. XXVI, n. 47, p. 2; 24 February 1894; *Lyttelton Times*, 24 February 1894; *Antigua Observer*, 22 February 1894.

53 Arrest of a noted anarchist. *Bangalore Spectator*, Bangalore, v. XXIV, n. 244, p. 2, 15 October 1892; see also 29 November 1892, 3 December 1892.

54 *Dominica Dial*, Roseau, vol. 8, n. 49, 7 June 1890, p. 2: 'The anarchists and agitators are arranging for the perpetration of more explosions in London'.



agent had been assassinated by anarchists.<sup>55</sup> Tensions over Britain's contentious hospitality towards anarchists were reported and scrutinised globally, presumably because many countries contended with the problem of controlling anarchism and its potential impact on their own immigration and asylum laws: as early as 1886, the *Bangalore Spectator* commented that 'If England were to expel some of the French anarchists who make London their headquarters, and who are hand-in-glove with the Irish dynamiters, what lava streams of journalistic wrath would be poured out by the Paris Republican press!'.<sup>56</sup> The vast quantities of information thus easily discoverable through the mass digitisation of the nineteenth-century press also correct any Paris- and London-centric bias, since the provincial and imperial press in both countries reported extensively on these events. In contrast, these insights into the scale of and countless participants in the anarchist moral panic are underplayed if one relies exclusively on the most famous dailies.

However, the same press sources could also manifest a great deal of distance and humour in handling the anarchist theme. For instance, a reporter sent to London by Parisian paper *Le Mot d'ordre* derided the collective paranoia over London-based anarchists: 'Finally, I have seen them, these terrible London anarchists who are now discussed everywhere with mysterious and frightened airs. Had I given credence to the gossip going around about them, I would have brought an arsenal in my pockets: pistols, daggers, revolvers, [...] everything it takes to fight them. [...] Well, I can guarantee you that in order to pay a visit to English anarchists, it is not necessary to take so many precautions. One can come here as a tourist, frequent the darkest dens of the revolution, attend the most threatening conferences, hear speeches which, in Paris, would make people's skin crawl – all of this without risking the slightest scratch'.<sup>57</sup> Access to a wide range of periodicals thus resurrects the reception of anarchists in all its complexity – and stylistic delights. As the French conservative daily *Le Figaro* once observed, 'People are talking a lot about the London anarchists at the moment.'<sup>58</sup> Indeed, they were, and digital tools have transformed our knowledge of just how much, where, and with what nuances.

Anarchist periodicals from many countries have also been digitised by various institutions; the portal Lidiap (List of Digitized Anarchist Periodicals, <https://lidiap.ficedl.info/>) centralises the links to these periodicals, with frequent updates. This invaluable resource partly resolves the thorny issue of accessing international anarchist periodicals from as many countries as possible, and enables researchers to piece back global connections between individuals, groups and periodicals. In France, the digitisation of a host of smaller and non-Paris based publications provides a much finer picture of the press landscape and information available to readers at the time. For instance, *Le Droit Social* (1882-85, with interruptions), one of the

55 *La Dépêche Tunisienne*, Tunis, v. XI, n. 3137, 3 February 1899, p. 1.

56 *Continental News. The Civil and Military Gazette*, Lahore, v. XI, n. 3,021, 23 September 188, p. 2.

57 *Le Mot d'Ordre*, Paris, v. 18, n. 52, 25 February 1894, p. 2.

58 SWEET. Les anarchistes à Londres. *Libre Parole*, Paris, v. 3, n. 683, 3 March 1894, p. 1-2.



earliest French anarchist periodicals, published in Lyon and then Marseille, brings interesting details about a poorly-documented period, especially when it comes to the recruitment and grassroots activities of the movement: it contains two long reports on French and international anarchist groups in London, which are really enlightening given the dearth of first-hand information for these very early years in the formation of the London anarchist groups. The first report, from 1882, recounts the commemorations of both the assassination of Czar Alexander II (13 March) and the Commune (18 March): it mentions the anarchist clubs involved in these events, the speakers (Malatesta, Kropotkin, as well as German and English militants) and the languages they used (an important but rarely mentioned practical aspect of internationalism). The contribution also emphasises the popularity of violence as a strategy discussed in those meetings, which took place within a year of the London Social Revolutionary Congress where the theory of ‘propaganda by the deed’ was adopted, but its grassroots currency remains a problematic point: ‘London’s revolutionary socialists have thrown away the legal and pacific way, and [...] outside violent revolution they see no salvation’.<sup>59</sup> The second article, from the same year, reports the British police’s crackdown on the German revolutionary club and several German activists in London, as well as the paper *Freiheit*.<sup>60</sup>

Lastly, digitisation also makes idle browsing and hence chance discoveries much easier. A good example is provided by the *Journal des Commissaires de police*, available on Gallica, the online platform of France’s Bibliothèque Nationale (National Library). This source contains a great deal of information from the French authorities’ perspective on banned publications and sentences of anarchists, providing a more comprehensive and systematic source than the reports written by agents and spies. This source shows how the seizure of anarchist print propaganda from London functioned, and what information police authorities were given and relayed to agents, booksellers, newspaper vendors and hawkers known for selling anarchist literature, especially in industrial areas.<sup>61</sup> The authorities also circulated information about the tricks used by anarchists to smuggle their banned publications into France using seemingly respectable titles. Thus, in 1891, the incendiary bomb-making manual *L’Indicateur anarchiste* circulated from London with the title ‘Conseils hygiéniques’ (Hygiene advice).<sup>62</sup> Police sources also attest to the prominence of London as the main place of publication of this seditious material, as shown in illustration 1. This is a precious complement to the insights given by infiltrated agents’ reports and publication announcements in the anarchist press.

59 *Le Droit Social*, Lyon, v. I, n. 8, 2 April 1882, n.p.

60 *Le Droit Social*, Lyon, v. I, n. 16, 28 May 1882, n.p.

61 Interdiction en France du journal L’Anarchiste. *Journal des commissaires de police*, Paris, n. 37, 1891, p. 14-5; Interdiction en France du journal anarchiste Le Tocsin. *Ibidem*, 1893, p. 97-8.

62 *Ibidem*.

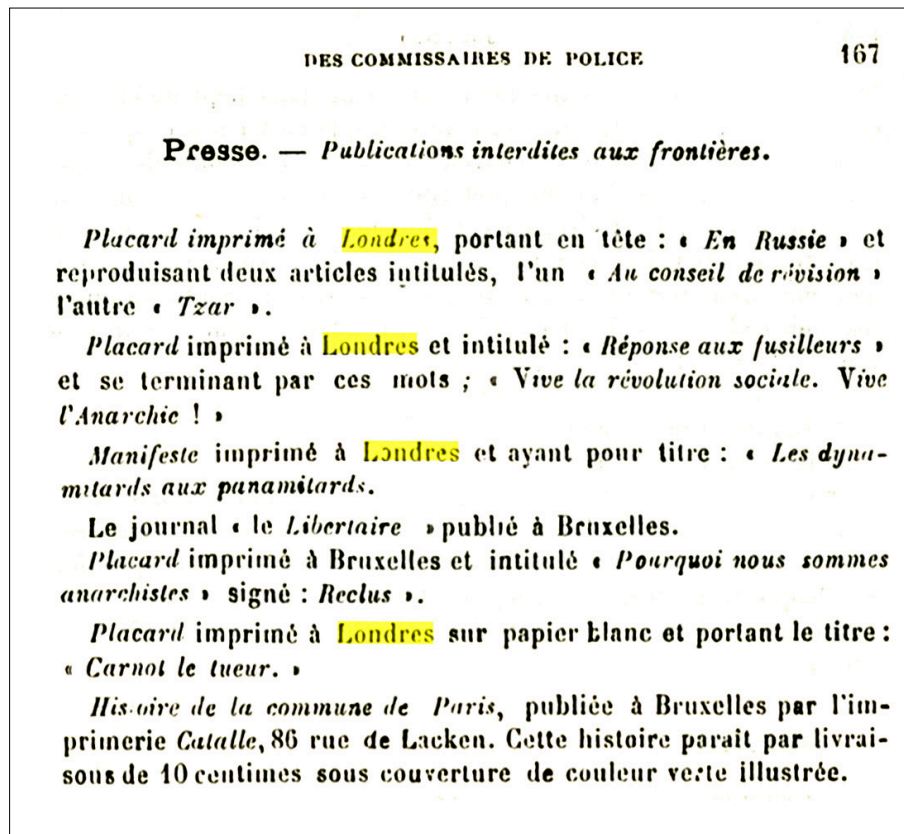


Illustration 1, Journal des Commissaires de Police. Bulletin de police générale, 1894, p. 167 @Gallica.

Even vaster prospects arise from specialised digital platforms such as France’s ‘Bibliothèque numérique diplomatique’ (Digital diplomatic library) and its hundreds of entries relating to anarchists in England. This bodes well for future research.

## Conclusion: the researcher’s perspective

THERE WERE errors and debatable claims in *The French Anarchists in London*, which reviewers have rightly pointed out and challenged. This too is integral to scholarly research, and the present piece is not intended to respond to these valuable insights. One comment, however, resonated quite strongly, because it stated that focusing on anarchist communism without sufficient caveats and mentions of other essential strands of anarchism led me to “*mutiler [m] on objet d’étude*” (mutilate my object of study)<sup>63</sup> – which, retrospectively, I do agree with, for reasons which both include and exceed those which this reviewer had in mind. As indicated throughout this article, the primary material documenting the history of the French anarchists in Britain was extensive and very dispersed, which meant that truncating this history was unavoidable, even within the anarchist-communist remit of the book. As explained here, when

63 MANFREDONIA, Gaetano. Review of *The French Anarchists in London, 1880-1914*. *Le Mouvement social*, n. 251, p. 168-70, Apr.-June 2015.

reflecting on the book's shortcomings, my own emphasis would be on the depth of factual information actually available and, secondly, on the more significant issue of fully situating the London French anarchists within the global anarchist diaspora in all its complexity. Whether such depth and scope could have been attained in what was effectively a monograph adaptation of a doctoral thesis is another matter.

On this point, I would also like to reflect on my personal reencounter with my initial object of study and on the way in which this monograph is inscribed in my academic career, but also in my personal life. This book was partly written during a relatively short period of maternity leave, and then with a very young family. Some choices had to be made, especially because frequent travel to conduct further primary research was not an easy possibility – transnational approaches require a great deal of mobility (and hence funding) for researchers, and this is often problematic, even when working on the apparently simple Franco-British dyad. At a time when academia has become ever-more precarious and long-established gender gaps reinforced by the pandemic remain largely unaddressed, it should be remembered that while striving for scholarly excellence is a given, as the French say, '*A l'impossible, nul n'est tenu*'.<sup>64</sup>

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64 This can be translated as 'No one is obliged to do the impossible' or as 'There is only so much one person can do'.