



## Theories of Antifascism in the Interwar Mediterranean Part II<sup>123</sup> Autonomous Workers Movements and the Café Culture in Italy & Tunisia, 1922–1945

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### Abstract

*The current proliferation of authoritarianism across both core and periphery is one political articulation of the current crisis of the capitalist world-system. Authoritarianism similarly proliferated in previous periods of crisis, in the 1970s and 1980s in the peripheries, and in the 1930s and 1940s in the core. In Part I of this essay, I detail how world-systems analysts have long been attuned to describing and analyzing chaotic moments in between systemic cycles of hegemony, but less attention has been given to the rise of authoritarianism in these chaotic phases. The multiple crises of hegemonic transition engenders an ideological contestation between Fascism and Communism revealing the limitations of Liberalism, the foundational ideology of the world-system. In such periods of hegemonic breakdown, anarchists developed autonomous strategies of resisting authoritarian rule at both the point of production (the worker-occupied and self-managed workplace) and at the point of leisure (the autonomous zone of the infoshop or café as resources and interventions in the joint struggle against capitalism and authoritarianism. These theories are important to recover for the contemporary fight against a resurgent authoritarianism across the world-system in the current conjuncture.*

**Keywords:** World-Systems Analysis; Anti-Fascism; Mediterranean; Workers Self-Management; Café Culture; Anarchist theory; Postcolonial theory

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<sup>3</sup> Note on translations: When using quotations from untranslated texts, the author’s translation to English is quoted in the text of the essay. The original Italian or French can be found in the footnotes for those with French or Italian proficiency who would prefer to consult the original language.



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*After so much anguish and so much mourning,  
so many tears and so many tricks,  
so much hate and injustice and despair,  
what are we to do?*

Ignazio Silone, *Fontamara* (1933)

The following is the companion piece to the essay “Theories of Antifascism in the Interwar Mediterranean: Fascism in the Longue Durée, Part I,” featured in a previous issue of *Journal of World-Systems Research*. That contribution theorized the relationship between fascism and the current crisis of the capitalist world-system. While Part I focused on the nature of the problem of fascism, detailing the invention of fascism in the early twentieth century and mapping the three historical waves of fascism in the capitalist world-system, this contribution focuses instead on solutions. In this Part II, I recover and analyze anarchist theory and praxis of the 1920s–1940s Mediterranean, drawing on historical examples of praxis along with anarchist theories from Fascist Italy and colonial Tunisia to further develop a world-systems anarchist theory of antifascism that links the worker cooperative and café culture as resources and interventions in the joint struggle against capitalism and authoritarian politics. These theories are important to recover for the contemporary fight against a resurgent authoritarianism across the world-system in the current conjuncture.

### **Workers’ Self-Management and the Café Culture as Antifascist Strategy**

Worker-occupied and self-managed workplaces strike at the heart of capitalist political-economy. By occupying, workers reclaim space and time, and through this act of appropriation, they create a space in which liberation—both political and ontological—can occur. Worker occupied and self-managed workplaces are not only a spatial intervention in the capitalist world-system, but also a direct intervention into the organization of the workplace in which ownership of the means of production is transferred from capital to labor. Worker self-management re-organizes production horizontally, and by so doing, eliminates the wage relation, thereby providing labor with higher earnings. But rather than refusing to labor, worker self-management withholds labor (and therefore surplus value) from capital, and workers continue working while reaping the total value of their efforts. As workers increasingly forfeit control of the labor process (Braverman 1998), worker self-management promises pushback in that workers can determine the pace, design, quality, quantity, and organization of their work (Bayat 1991). This holds, even more so, for the peripheries and semi-peripheries of the capitalist world-system. While the combination of the demands of the working class in the core, Wallerstein notes that “for relatively few people, but quite a lot per person,” and the demands of the peripheral working class, “relatively little per person but for a lot of people,” is more than the capitalist world-economy can provide (Wallerstein 1995: 25), worker self-management has the potential to provide for the demands of peripheral working classes by

removing capital and the managerial classes from the production process in places where surplus value is scarce.

While worker occupied and self-managed firms have been a cornerstone of workers' self-management from the 1917 Russian Revolution to the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, antifascists in interwar Europe soon came to see traditional expressions of trade unionism and other forms of contentious politics as ill-suited to everyday life under fascism. This frustration pushed intellectuals from spheres of traditional leftist politics such as trade unions into the café culture, where a modernist avant garde offered a potent form of intellectual expression that could and did coexist with life under fascism (Adamson 1990; Bronner and Kellner 1982). In Berlin, "the café remained, to protest against the cruelty, the loneliness, the vacuity of the city of Berlin" (Bronner and Kellner 1982: 97), and even though Nazi repression initially energized the café culture, it ultimately decimated the movement that was launched from the German coffee houses (Bronner and Kellner 1982). In attempts to repress café culture, the fascist regime in Italy banned the installation of new espresso machines in cafés, and restricted imports of coffee (Morris 2008). Instead, Fascist Italy was so threatened by the coffee houses as sites of protest and left organizing against the state that Mussolini subsidized private firms who were competing to create the first espresso machine for home use (Morris 2008), which promised to lure men away from the coffee houses and back into the supposedly tranquil arena of the home (Schnapp 2001). In 1933, Bialetti invented the first stove top espresso maker, the moka, as a result of these state subsidies to help private firms develop technology to make espresso at home that was good enough to rival that of a café. Bialetti claimed in its advertisements "*in casa un espresso come al bar*," which promised that "the home would become a café, instead of the café becoming a home away from home" (Schnapp 2001: 264). This fascist achievement of the stovetop espresso machine was a state-funded technology directed at solving the "problem" of antifascist organizing in the space of the café.

In addition to worker self-management and other workerist solutions at the point of production, interventions at what I call the point of leisure—spaces like the café—became important for antifascist organizing. "Semipublic spaces," like coffee houses, salons, and analogous spaces, "allow for people to come together in places that are insulated from state surveillance and control" (Kohn 2003: 16). These political spaces are sites of "dislocation, rupture, contradiction, and contingency" in the context of the "contradictions and contrasts" of urban space (Kohn 2003: 22). For example, for Italian socialist, Antonio Vergananini, a workers' cooperative café was the ideal space for social movement organization. Margaret Kohn writes that

Vergananini saw the cooperative primarily as a sociopolitical space rather than an economic tactic. The cooperative provided a location that served as an informal social centre, a nodal point of communication, and a link between different associations. It condensed dispersed individuals' inchoate needs and transformed them into a political force. (Kohn 2003: 71)

Vergananini was not alone in this assessment. As Walter Benjamin observed in *The Arcades Project* (1982), it was at the Café de la Régence in the 1840s that Karl Marx first discussed with Friedrich Engels “the economic determinism of his materialist theory of history” (Benjamin 1982: 108). Without this important exchange through which Marx worked out one of his foundational concepts at the site of this historic café best known for its role in fomenting France’s 1789 revolution, where would theory (leftist or otherwise) be today? Workerist and other antifascist strategies coalesced in the space of the café facilitating the types of praxis that are key to organizing against fascism. In the following subsections, I examine antifascist theories in Italy and Tunisia produced at the point of production and the point of leisure.

### **Italy: Errico Malatesta/Arditi del Popolo**

In 1864, Mikhail Bakunin moved to Florence, then Naples, and Sicily, helping to build the anarchist movement in Italy (see Ravindranathan 1988). The contingent of Italian anarchists in attendance at the First International, including Errico Malatesta and Carlo Caifero, helped to found the International Workingmen’s Association and subsequently developed a national federation of the International Workingmen’s Association in Italy with chapters in Milan, Bologna, Florence, Rome, and Naples (Pernicone 2009). The Italian federation sided with Bakunin in his debates with Marx during the First International (Pernicone 2009). Bakunin, Malatesta, and Caifero then attempted anarchist insurrections in Florence in 1869 and in Bologna in 1874. Italian anarchism flourished throughout the later part of the nineteenth century. In 1912, the *Unione Sindacale Italiana* was founded in Modena as an attempt to institutionalize the Italian anarchist legacy of the First International.

This proliferation of left organizations and small uprisings culminated in the *Biennio Rosso*, a period of revolutionary insurrection from 1919 to 1921, during which workers occupied and self-managed their factories and other workplaces (Di Lembo 2001; Spriano 1964). Worker self-management was a strategy that was generally advocated by anarcho-syndicalists during the *Biennio Rosso*, but there were active debates mirroring those of the First International, mainly in Antonio Gramsci’s Journal, *L’Ordine Nuovo*, and Errico Malatesta’s newspaper, *Umanità Nova*, on how to build an enduring workers’ revolution on the basis of factory councils (Gramsci 1919; Malatesta 1964). Gramsci argued that self-management would succeed only if workers were to take over the state thus implementing structural conditions favorable to worker self-management and other ideals of the *Biennio Rosso*. He writes,

The proletarian dictatorship is therefore embodied in the factory organization, and the communist state that destroys class domination in the political superstructure and in its general mechanisms. The trade and industrial syndicates are the solid vertebrae of the great proletarian body. They begin from individual and local experiences, but become more than that, implementing the national equalization of working and production conditions on which communist equality is concretely based. But for it to be possible to impress this positively class-based and communist direction on trade unions, it is necessary that workers turn all their will and faith to the consolidation and diffusion of the councils, to the organic unification of the

working class. On this homogeneous and solid foundation, all the superior structures of the communist dictatorship and economy will flourish and develop.<sup>4</sup> (Gramsci 1919: 159–160)

Gramsci supported worker self-management but as a means to harness workers' power towards the ends of securing state power and transforming the state into a "Communist dictatorship." In these debates, Errico Malatesta, (perhaps misleadingly) nicknamed "the Lenin of Italy" (Levy 1998: 209), opposed the implementation of a dictatorship of the proletariat and was confident that through a robust union movement, workers' self-defense, and workers' control of the means of production, the state (bourgeois or otherwise) would be powerless to suppress worker-occupied factories. Most Italian collectives chose this anarchist route, only to see the state repress their workplaces after the fascists assumed state power.

Errico Malatesta was born in 1853 in Santa Maria Capua Vetere, Campania. He moved to Naples to study medicine, and then in 1872 met Bakunin at the St. Imier Congress (Malatesta 2014). Soon thereafter, he left the medical profession and devoted his time to revolutionary action, selling sorbetto on the street to support himself while writing anarchist political theory. His pamphlets, *Fra Contadini* (1884), *L'Anarchia* (1891), and *Al Caffè* (1897), are among the best selling anarchist pamphlets of all time and have been translated into many languages (Malatesta 2014). In addition to his theory writing, he also edited various newsmagazines and newspapers across the globe including: *La Questione Sociale* (Florence, Buenos Aires, and Paterson, New Jersey editions), *L'Associazione* (London), *L'Agitazione* (Ancona), as well as *Umanità Nova* and *Pensiero e Volontà* (both based in Rome). Malatesta was persecuted by the fascist government for his role as editor of *Pensiero e Volontà* and died in Rome in 1932 while under house arrest.

In circles where Malatesta's theory is still remembered, he remains best known for his writings on labor, violence, and revolution, but his later writings have much to offer by way of a theory of antifascism. Reflecting on the *Bienno Rosso* in 1923, Malatesta assessed his contemporary political situation in which fascism had defeated the left. While it appeared during the *Bienno Rosso* that "revolution was immanent," because of "the reaction's triumph thanks to fascism, we found ourselves in a peculiar situation" (Malatesta 2014: 436). This unexpected development of a new political ideology, fascism, compelled Malatesta to rethink anarchist strategies and praxis. Of top priority, he wrote:

We need to get into the unions, because from the outside we look hostile to them  
... I am talking plainly of real trade unions made up of workers freely associated

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<sup>4</sup> *Nell'organizzazione per fabbrica si incarna dunque la dittatura proletaria, lo Stato Comunista che distrugge il dominio di classe nelle superstrutture politiche e nei suoi ingranaggi generali. I Sindacati di mestiere e di industria sono le solide vertebre del gran corpo proletario. Essi elaborano le esperienze individuali e locali, e le accumulano, attuando quel conguagliamento nazionale delle condizioni di lavoro e di produzione sul quale concretamente si basa l'uguaglianza comunista. Ma perché sia possibile imprimere ai Sindacati questa direzione positivamente classista e comunista è necessario che gli operai rivolgano tutta la loro volontà e la loro fede al consolidamento e alla diffusione dei Consigli, all'unificazione organica della classe lavoratrice. Su questo fondamento omogeneo e solido fioriranno e si svilupperanno tutte le superiori strutture della dittatura e dell'economia comunista.*

for the purpose of defending their interests against the bosses and the government; and not about the fascist syndicates, which are often recruited at the point of the cudgel and the threat of starvation; they are an arm of the government and an attempt to make the workers more deferential towards the demands of the bosses. (Malatesta 2014: 437)

As this assessment reveals, the biggest advantage of the fascists stemmed from their influence with the unionized working class and the ability of the fascists to portray the left as hostile to the interests of the unionized working class.

Writing a few years later, Malatesta came to see demilitarization and the dissolution of the police<sup>5</sup> as similarly important components of antifascist strategy. Because “the police act as fascists just as the fascists act as police,”<sup>6</sup> (Malatesta 1999) he wrote, “demobilization of the army, the dissolution of the police and the magistrature,” are essential to combatting fascism. In their stead he proposed “willing hands to undertake the organization of public services and to provide, with concepts of just distribution, for the most urgent needs” (Malatesta 2014: 505–506). This proposal reads as remarkably prescient to the contemporary reader who is likely well aware of movements for Black liberation’s calls to defund the police and to replace police services with better and more equitable social services rooted in mutual aid. For Malatesta, fascism resolved the contradictions of policing. Police disproportionately target the working class, while the bourgeoisie and the Camorra face little reprisal for their crimes. In the democratic context, the police retain legitimacy as acting in the public interest, but the fascist moment reveals the class character of the police. He writes, “with fascism, every hypocrisy, every prevarication is eliminated: the good fascist strikes, sets fire to, blackmails, kills openly, and he boasts and finds support from the government. There is no more misunderstanding”<sup>7</sup> (Malatesta 1999). The fascist moment reveals that the police are an organ of the state and capital because they not only fail to intervene when fascists commit violence against the people, but encourage fascist violence against the people.

Though Malatesta asserted the urgency of removing fascists from the ranks of the police and military, he was aware of the tensions involved in taking this position, acknowledging that “while it seems natural for anarchists to oppose anything that gives authority, prestige, and strength to the state, and find the good in anything that discredits or weakens the state, even if this is done with the intention of defending the state”<sup>8</sup> (Malatesta 1999). Fighting to remove fascists from the ranks of the police and the military is likely, in Malatesta’s calculation, to further legitimate the state,

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<sup>5</sup> During this same conjuncture, Japanese Marxist theorist, Tosaka Jun, similarly theorized the relationship among liberalism, fascism, and the police (See Kawashima 2014).

<sup>6</sup> *i carabinieri fanno da fascisti come i fascisti fanno da carabinieri*

<sup>7</sup> *Col fascismo ogni ipocrisia, ogni tergiversazione è bandita: il buon fascista bastona, incendia, ricatta, ammazza apertamente, e si vanta ed è organo e sostegno del governo. Non v’è più equivoco.*

<sup>8</sup> *E ci pare naturale per degli anarchici l’avversare principalmente tutto ciò che serve a dare autorità, prestigio, forza allo Stato, e trovare del buono in ciò che discredita ed indebolisce lo Stato, anche se è fatto con l’intenzione di difenderlo*

and while anarchists would like to see the withering away of the state, in the fascist moment, what is called for is exposing and removing fascists from the police and military even if it means temporarily “defending” the state by creating a more legitimate police force if fascists are successfully expunged from the ranks. He explained,

We understand those comrades who see as the most urgent need of the moment the destruction of fascism and the return to “normality”... we who live in relative safety can’t judge those whose dignity, person, household, and family are threatened and disparaged everyday.<sup>9</sup> (Malatesta 1999)

The existential threat fascism poses to targeted groups “does not leave any room for general or future considerations”<sup>10</sup> (Malatesta 1999), Malatesta asserted. But he believed that anarchists could both protect the groups who are most vulnerable in the fascist moment, and still keep in mind the longer goal of eradicating the state and capital, claiming that

We must therefore kill fascism, but kill it directly by the force of the people, without the aid of the state so that the state is not strengthened in the process but discredited and weakened. Furthermore, it’s ridiculous to ask the state to suppress fascism when we know that fascism is a creation of the bourgeoisie and the government, which could not come into being and be sustained without the protection and help of the police.<sup>11</sup> (Malatesta 1999)

He believed in a carefully strategized revolutionary movement, writing, “the revolution must be made in the name of justice, freedom, human solidarity and proceed with methods that are inspired by justice, freedom and solidarity. Otherwise, it will only fall from one tyranny to another.”<sup>12</sup> (Malatesta 1999).

While Malatesta advocated his own 1920s version of abolition,<sup>13</sup> the trade union movement remained a cornerstone of his antifascism. “Push the workers to take possession of the factories,” he wrote, “to federate among themselves and work for the community, and similarly the peasants

<sup>9</sup> *noi comprendiamo lo stato d’animo di quei compagni che considerano come il bisogno più urgente del momento la distruzione del fascismo ed il ritorno alla «normalità» ... noi che viviamo in condizioni di relativa sicurezza, farci giudici di chi è tutti i giorni minacciato ed offeso nella dignità, nella persona, nella casa, nella famiglia*

<sup>10</sup> *non lascia luogo e tempo a considerazioni d’ordine generale ed avveniristiche*

<sup>11</sup> *Bisogna dunque uccidere il fascismo, ma ucciderlo direttamente, per forza di popolo, senza invocare l’aiuto dello Stato, in modo che lo Stato ne riesca non già rafforzato, ma maggiormente discredito ed indebolito. Del resto, mi pare ridicolo domandare allo Stato la soppressione del fascismo, quando è notorio che il fascismo è stato una creazione della borghesia e del governo, che non avrebbe potuto nascere e vivere un giorno senza la protezione e l’aiuto dei carabinieri*

<sup>12</sup> *La rivoluzione dovrà esser fatta in nome della giustizia, della libertà, della solidarietà umana e procedere con metodi che s’ispirano alla giustizia, alla libertà ed alla solidarietà. Altrimenti non si farà che cadere da una tirannia in un’altra*

<sup>13</sup> It would be incredibly interesting to put Malatesta in conversation with contemporary theorists of abolition such as Joy James (2005), Angela Davis et. al. (2022), Derecka Purnell (2021), Mariane Kaba (2021), Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2022) and others. I encourage theorists of abolition to explore potential synergies and tensions.

should take over the land and produce usurped by the landlords, and come to an agreement with the industrial workers on the necessary exchange of goods” (Malatesta 2014: 506). Organizing at the point of production was essential to Malatesta’s antifascist resistance.

But organizing an anarchist trade union movement necessitated an understanding of the attraction of fascism for the working classes. In 1923, Malatesta’s assessment of fascism’s appeal was:

*Il fascismo...ha vinto perché ha avuto l'appoggio finanziario della borghesia grassa e l'aiuto materiale dei vari governi che se ne vollero servire contro l'incalzante minaccia proletaria; ha vinto perché ha trovato contro di sé una massa stanca, disillusa e fatta imbelle da una cinquantenaria propaganda parlamentaristica; ma soprattutto ha vinto perché le sue violenze e i suoi delitti hanno bensì provocato l'odio e lo spirito di vendetta degli offesi ma non hanno suscitato quella generale riprovazione, quella indignazione, quell'orrore morale che ci sembrava dovesse nascere spontaneamente in ogni animo gentile.... Diciamolo francamente, per quanto sia doloroso il constatarlo. Fascisti ve ne sono anche fuori del partito fascista, ve ne sono in tutte le classi ed in tutti i partiti: vi sono cioè dappertutto delle persone che pur non essendo fascisti, pur essendo antifascisti, hanno però l'anima fascista, lo stesso desiderio di sopraffazione che distingue i fascisti.*

Fascism won because it had the support of the fat bourgeoisie and the help of various parts of the state who wanted to use it against the pressing proletarian threat; it won because it found the tired masses, disillusioned and made helpless by fifty years of parliamentary propaganda; but above all it has won because its violence and crimes have provoked hatred and the spirit of revenge in the aggrieved but they [the fascists] have not aroused a general disapproval [of fascism], an indignation for the moral horror that seemingly has arisen spontaneously in every kind soul.... Let’s say it frankly, however painful it is to confront it. There are fascists outside the Fascist Party, they are in all classes and parties: that is, there are people everywhere who, although not fascists, despite being antifascists, however, they have a fascist soul, the same desire for oppression that distinguishes the fascists. (Malatesta 1999)

In 1924 he wrote,

Today there is no shortage of those who back fascism because it is a fact and they cover up or think they can justify their defection and treachery by arguing, as they once did of the war, that its aims are revolutionary. (Malatesta 2014: 450)

Mass support for fascism, in Malatesta’s view, is primarily the result of insufficient moral outrage, “It was lacking—and not just among those who call themselves Communists—the moral revolt against the abuse of brute force, against the contempt for freedom and human dignity, which are characteristic of the fascist movement.”<sup>14</sup> (Malatesta 1999). In the absence of a generalized moral outrage against fascist violence, Malatesta believed that many Italians accepted fascism as an

<sup>14</sup> È mancata—e non solamente fra quelli che si dicono comunisti—la rivolta morale contro l’abuso della forza brutale, contro il disprezzo della libertà e la dignità umana, che sono la caratteristica del movimento fascista

inevitable reality and tried to make the best of it through various rhetorical strategies. But he also believed in the beauty of the human spirit, writing:

Unhappiness with what is, and the constant craving for something better, the aspiration to greater freedom, to more power, more beauty is a peculiarly human characteristic. The man who finds everything fine, who reckons that everything there is, is as it ought to be, and should not and cannot change, and who blithely accommodates himself, without a murmur, without any objection, without a gesture of rebelliousness, to the position and circumstances thrust upon him, would be less than human. He would be a vegetable if such a thing could be said without offending vegetables. (Malatesta 2014: 449)

While Malatesta understood the appeal of fascism, he also believed that accepting things as they are was an alienation of the self. Instead, he asserted the spirit of rebellion as central to what makes us human. From these assertions of rebellion as central to one's humanity he contended that this spirit can be channeled through first asking questions that push us to think beyond the status quo. These questions also provoke moral revolt, which Malatesta believed was a first step in grounding antifascist action. He wrote that what is needed is "those who can provoke moral revolt, a sense of disgust that will kill fascism"<sup>15</sup> (Malatesta 1999). Asking questions such as "What if the peasants were to refuse to keep the towns provisioned?...What if folk refuse to work?...and so on and so on" (Malatesta 2014: 451).

Malatesta's imagination was not solely geared towards asking these "what if" questions, but he also wrote his theory books through inventive and unconventional strategies. His first book, *Fra Contadini* (1884), a treatise on the peasant question, is written as a conversation between two peasants, Giorgio and Beppe, closing with Beppe saying to Giorgio, "If then the landlord wants to call me a rascal and a criminal, I'll tell him to come work and suffer as I do, and then he can talk,"<sup>16</sup> which sounds like a line from a hypothetical Martin Scorsese film about peasants' struggle. Malatesta's last book, *Al Caffè* (1897), was written in a similarly creative style. He aimed to place the reader in the midst of conversations among anarchists and other regulars of Malatesta's favorite café in Ancona by structuring the book as a dialogue among café regulars of different class positions and political viewpoints. In so doing, he captured the theory-making that happened through everyday conversations in the space of the café, recorded them in writing, and made them widely accessible beyond the typical theory readership. Each character in *Al Caffè* (1897) is an ideal type of a certain class or political position. For example, Prospero represents the bourgeoisie, Michele a student with socialist and anarchist leanings, Cesare a small shopkeeper, Gino a worker, Pippo a disabled war veteran, Vincenzo a young republican, Luigi a socialist, and Giorgio an anarchist who is most likely the voice of Malatesta himself. These different characters and their positions come together and debate their viewpoints in the café as an incubator of theory.

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<sup>15</sup> *quelli che potranno provocare la rivolta morale, il senso di schifo che ucciderà il fascismo*

<sup>16</sup> *se poi i signori chiameranno anche me birbante e malfattore, dirò loro che vengano a lavorare e a soffrire come faccio io, e poi avranno diritto di parlare*

The space of the café was not only important to Italian anarchists as a conversation among different positions and viewpoints as a means of theory building, but was also a strategy for establishing antifascist socio-political spaces in various cities. In the 1920s, the *Arditi del Popolo* emerged as a significant anarchist paramilitary movement against fascism (Balsamini 2002; Francescangeli 2000; Rossi 2011; Staid 2015; Testa 2015) though it also included support from socialist and communist groups (Arditi del Popolo 2004). Primarily known as a left paramilitary group (Sonessa 2003), older historiography saw *Arditi del Popolo* as a branch of the autonomous workers' movement (Spriano 1964; Palazzolo 1966) while newer historical research focuses on *Arditi del Popolo* as emergent from anarchist political culture rooted in the neighborhood (Francescangeli 2000; Sonessa 2003). *Arditi del Popolo's* strongholds were in cities with strong anarchist traditions such as Bari, Livorno, Parma, and Rome (Sonessa 2003). While *Arditi del Popolo's* primary goal was working class defense against fascism which included protecting the left workers' movement, it was rooted in the point of leisure, by which I mean through mechanisms of sociability such as bars, cafés, the bocce court, music and dancing venues, and other spaces of leisure (Sonessa 2003). Autonomous spaces (pubs, anarchist union offices, anarchist newspaper offices including Malatesta's *Umanità Nova*, and the *Casa del Popolo* in Milan [Rivista 1973]) established by the anarchist left were significant resources in confrontations between leftists and the fascist state in Sarzana, Imola, Pisa, Parma, Carrara, Milan, and other cities (Rivista 1973) though its stronghold was in Lazio and Tuscany (Arditi del Popolo 2004). The café was not only where anarchist ideas cohered, but where anarchists and other leftists met to organize against the fascist state.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> After the defeat of the antifascist movement in Italy, many members of *Unione Sindacale Italiana*, outlawed by Mussolini, moved to Spain to resume their activities in exile and to aid the FAI (*Federación Anarquista Ibérica*) - CNT (*Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*) in their struggle against Franco (Bookchin 1998; Peirats 1998, 2011; Di Lembo 2001; Christie 2008; Paz 2011). Mediterranean anarchists saw the Spanish Guerra Civil as connected to the broader struggle against European fascism. Said Italian Jewish antifascist, Carlo Rosselli who travelled to Spain to lead the Matteotti Battalion, also known as the Italian Column, "Struggle for the freedom of other peoples, show to the world that Italians are worthy of living freely...Italians, help the Spanish revolution. Prevent fascism." (Rosselli, 224–226). Rosselli similarly coined the slogan, "*Oggi in Spagna, domani in Italia*" (today in Spain, tomorrow in Italy), demonstrating that while the Mediterranean left fought fascism in one particular state context after another, they saw these struggles as part of a larger fight against fascist forces. While the Italian anarchist movement during the rise of Mussolini innovated new tactics and developed new theories in order to better strategize against the new invention of fascism, during the Spanish Guerra Civil, the anarchist struggle against fascism was perhaps the best organized of any anarchist movement in European history (Porter 2012). What made anarchists in the Guerra Civil so effective, according to Chris Ealham (2005), was not the better known anarcho-syndicalist strategies of the CNT-FAI and anarcha-feminist strategies of *Mujeres Libres* that anarchists innovated, but the use of anti-fascist autonomous zones, especially in the CNT stronghold of Barcelona. Affinity groups met in theatres, bookshops, cafes, and bars across the city to discuss current events, anarchist theory, and strategies of resistance (Ealham 2005, 2010). Anarchist strategies at both the point of production and at the point of leisure were decisive in securing anarchist victories during the Guerra Civil.

**Tunisia: Confédération Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens/Jamaat Taht al Sur**

Anarchist and workerist<sup>18</sup> theories and movements that sprung forth from the Bienno Rosso not only contributed to revolutionary antifascist theories and movements (Di Lembo 2001), but also linked the antifascist struggle to opposing Italian colonialism in Africa. The autonomous workers' antifascist alliance contended that autonomist workers and anarchists must demonstrate a consistent position against authoritarianism in all forms, and wherever across the globe it emerged (Di Lembo 2001). This position necessitated that antifascists take an anti-colonial position on Italy's aggression in North and Eastern Africa. While this position seems an obvious one for anarchists to take, other leftist groups in fascist Europe failed to link antifascism to the anti-colonial struggle.

Colonies were a central part of the fascist project, whether for Italy, Germany, Vichy France, or Portugal. The states that succumbed to fascism in this first wave were also those who were the poorest countries within the core of the world-system and therefore deployed fascism and colonialism as strategies to catch up to richer countries within the core. Colonial war campaigns were not only useful for economic extraction, obtaining access to cheaper labor, and for fascist propaganda as a show of strength, but also training grounds for blackshirts. Mussolini's *Corpo di Truppe Volontarie*, an expeditionary force sent by Mussolini to aid Francisco Franco during the Spanish Guerra Civil, for example, was comprised mostly of veterans of the Ethiopian War (Pugliese 2004). Mussolini revived the ancient Roman concept of *mare nostrum* (our sea)<sup>19</sup> contending that the Roman Empire's influence over the Mediterranean would be revived in the fascist period (Agbamu 2019). In a speech given by Mussolini at Perugia, he contended that Italy's maritime supremacy would be restored through colonizing the southern shore of the Mediterranean, and was particularly interested in Carthage, as Carthage was the first territory in Africa to be incorporated into ancient Rome (Choate 2010; Agbamu 2019). A 1937 U.S. intelligence report

noted that a fair portion of the Fascist militia were being trained as naval reserve corps and many units in the youthful "Ballial" and "Avantgardisti" were also receiving their training for sea life. This change in instruction was considered a part of the Fascist campaign for greater naval strength. (NAUS File no. 865C.30)

These concepts of *mare nostrum* and "Roman Africa" made the colonization of Tunisia and Libya, in particular, central to Italian fascist objectives, strategy, and rhetoric. Mussolini's ambitions in

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<sup>18</sup> I use the term "workerist" (a translation of the Italian, *operaismo*) instead of syndicalism to describe Italian antifascist workers' politics because Malatesta was notoriously critical of the term "syndicalism." He contended "syndicalism" implies reformism rather than a revolutionary workers' politics (See Malatesta 2014: 463–467).

<sup>19</sup> The Mediterranean has once again become a front line of postmodern fascism in Europe as a graveyard for those trying to gain access to a relatively safer life in Europe. The Italian Navy's military-humanitarian operation to rescue migrants traversing the Mediterranean has peculiarly been named "*mare nostrum*" evoking both Mussolini's fascist project to conquer the Mediterranean and ancient Rome's expansionary designs.

the Southern Mediterranean were noted by British Intelligence officials who, in a confidential report to the U.S. State Department, relayed that

There is no doubt that he [Mussolini] is considerably encouraged by his success in Abyssinia, in Spain and possibly his recent reception in Germany. Probably the most important reason for the increased vigour of his activities, however, is his realization that if he is to force such primacy in the Mediterranean area, he must do so before British rearmament is achieved, that is to say by 1940 or thereabouts. (NAUS File no. 865C.20)

The British were particularly concerned about Italian advances in the Mediterranean, wanting to prevent the fascist Italian state from establishing “a decisive chokehold at the center of the Mediterranean” (Choate 2010: 4).

In advance of Mussolini’s March 1937 trip to Libya, colonial officials popularized the slogan “Duce is the protector of Islam. Shout aloud his name and invoke the light and glory on his path” (NAUS File no. 865C.00). While Libya officially became an Italian colony in 1911, Tunisia’s colonial relationship to Italy is more complicated. According to Perkins,

The Italian premier, Francesco Crispi, described Tunisia as “an Italian colony occupied by France,” while *L’Unione*, the leading Italian-language newspaper in Tunis, insisted that the situation in North Africa remained “unsettled, that it could not last, and that the rights of Italy in Tunisia were equal to those of France.” (Perkins 2005: 49; see also Lewis 2014: 127).

Italy acknowledged the French Protectorate of Tunisia, but France allowed Italy to retain certain privileges and to maintain its social and cultural influence in Tunisia. Mary Dewhurst Lewis (2014) describes colonial “Tunisia as a pivot for ‘inter imperialist politics’ (between European powers) as well as intracolonial exchange (with neighbouring Libya and French Algeria)” (Lewis 2014: 4). By way of example, labor, internment, and penal camps in Tunisia that interred Jews and Communists after the implementation of the Jewish Statutes in the early 1940s, were exceptional among France’s African colonies as they were administered, not just by Vichy France as was the case in Algeria, but also directly administered by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy (Laskier 1994).

Writing in the 1970s, Mozambican-Goan anti-colonial theorist, Aquino de Bragança, hypothesized that Salazar’s only viable opposition within Portugal was from Portuguese anarcho-syndicalist groups who supported the anti-colonial struggle across Lusophone Africa (Bragança 1980). But in the 1930s Mediterranean, instead of enlisting anarchist groups in Italy and France to support anti-colonial efforts in Tunisia<sup>20</sup>, local resistance against colonialism took on similar characteristics of the anarchist and workerist Italian antifascist movement, but was not without its own unique facets. Autonomous workers movements and the café culture were central strategies

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<sup>20</sup> However, Malatesta was involved in the 1882 revolt against British colonial rule in Egypt and the Algerian and Moroccan anarchist movements of the early 20th century were greatly influenced by Malatesta’s writings (Galián 2020; van der Walt and Schmidt).

for the Tunisian anti-colonial left, just as they were for Italian antifascists. The independent trade union movement, *Confédération Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens*<sup>21</sup> and the literary movement *Jamaat Tahat al Sur*<sup>22</sup> which sprung forth from Tunis' vibrant café culture both articulated autonomous visions of colonial independence and antifascism.

During the August 17th, 1924 dock workers' strike (Benin 2016), Mohammad Ali El Hammi founded Tunisia's first independent trade union, the *Confédération Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens*. It was important to El Hammi that this union be independent from the *Parti Communiste Français*, and, he said, "My work endeavors to organize and defend the interests of the Tunisian proletariat exploited by global capitalism" (Haddad 2013: 211).<sup>23</sup> In February 1925, Hammi was arrested by French colonial officials, convicted of being a threat to internal security for his communist affiliations, and sentenced to ten years of banishment from the French Empire. His comrade, Tahar Haddad, recounts that during three days of intense interrogation by French colonial officials, El Hammi deftly laid out his vision for workerism in Tunisia (Haddad 2013). While El Hammi's writings and speeches are believed to be lost to history, some excerpts of his speeches remain available in archives and secondary sources (Ahmad and Scharr 1979). Most of El Hammi's thought is preserved through an account of his life and work written by his comrade, friend, and fellow trade unionist, Tahar Haddad. In *La naissance du mouvement syndical tunisien*<sup>24</sup> (1927) Haddad recounts El Hammi's influence on his own prolific writings on class and gender, along with El Hammi's personality, biography, and quotes that reveal El Hammi's views on political economy. However, it is unclear in the text from where these quotes are drawn.

While Haddad is similarly remembered as one of the greatest Tunisian workerists of his generation (Haddad 2013), he credits his contemporary, El Hammi, with teaching him the general principles of political economy and colonialism through the many conversations they had in Tunis following El Hammi's return from studies in Berlin (Haddad 2013). These exchanges between El Hammi and Haddad led to a new school of revolutionary anti-colonial workerist thought in Tunisia, one that fused a European intellectual tradition with Maghrebi<sup>25</sup> and Ottoman traditions, thereby creating a Pan-Mediterranean thought on the political economy of Tunisia (Haddad 2013).

Haddad later wrote that the goal for creating a trade union organization independent from the PCF was two fold. Firstly, the CGTT asserted, "the right of Tunisian workers not to organize in French unions."<sup>26</sup> (Amri 2019: 13). It was critically important for Hammi and Haddad that trade unions be independent from France and saw little distinction between the PCF and agents of colonial rule. Secondly, trade unions were

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<sup>21</sup> General Confederation of Tunisian Workers

<sup>22</sup> Under the Wall Group

<sup>23</sup> *mon travail cherche à organiser et défendre les intérêts du prolétariat tunisien exploité par le capitalisme mondial*

<sup>24</sup> The Birth of the Tunisian Syndicalist Movement

<sup>25</sup> Haddad draws extensively from Ibn Khaldun, for example.

<sup>26</sup> *la volonté des travailleurs tunisiens de ne pas s'organiser dans les syndicats français.*

also a framework of solidarity and organization of the production and distribution of the goods produced, in the form of cooperative societies, coupled with mutual aid societies and social funds that can support the working class in its struggle for subsistence and dignity.<sup>27</sup> (Amri 2019: 13)

But more important than decolonizing the trade union movement was to reshape the Tunisian economy around worker cooperatives that not only reorganized production to put a stop to the appropriation of surplus value from the working class, but also created mutual aid societies that could provide beyond subsistence and help to recover working class dignity.

However, Haddad also observed that the GCTT's theories of worker cooperatives failed to take root in a meaningful way, "his initial ideas were too ambitious for the country...particularly the workers, the main component of enterprise, in that they suffer the high cost of living, while agriculture and industry require greater capital"<sup>28</sup> (Haddad 2013: 57). While El Hammi was keen to reorganize the Tunisian economy around worker cooperatives (Haddad 2013), he soon realized that this was perhaps too ambitious a plan given the level of economic development in Tunisia. So instead of his initial goal of creating a cooperative economy, El Hammi, with the aid of his comrades, founded the first anti-colonial independent trade union in a French colony (Haddad 2013: 66). Haddad provides several reasons for why Tunisia was able to foster this kind of innovation. He claims that firstly, the *kuttab* made education more widely accessible compared to other French colonies, and thereby created an intellectual avant garde for the burgeoning labor movement. Secondly, Tunis has been an important trading center both for European countries, such as France and Italy, but also for the Ottoman Empire. The openness and religious and ethnic diversity that comes with being a trading entrepôt, claimed Haddad, fostered "the rapid penetration of different ideologies and methods of workers' struggle"<sup>29</sup> (Haddad 2013: 67).

While this first anti-imperialist trade union organization in the French Empire was only in existence for a few months before its founders were either imprisoned or exiled, El Hammi remained concerned with the question of class struggle and the national independence movement. He was particularly consumed with the question of whether anti-imperialist workerist organizations should postpone the class struggle for the goal of national independence and form a broad class coalition, or to fight for both at once and thereby exclude bourgeois sympathizers of the nationalist movement? El Hammi's surviving writings fail to provide an answer for this question, but he thought that colonialism had transformed the consciousness of the Tunisian working class. In close contact with the colonial official, he believed, ethnically and religiously

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<sup>27</sup> *aussi un cadre de solidarité et d'organisation de la production et de la distribution des biens produits, sous le forme de sociétés coopératives doublées de mutuelles et de caisses sociales pouvant épauler la classe ouvrière dans sa lutte pour sa subsistance et sa dignité*

<sup>28</sup> *ses idées au départ étaient trop ambitieuses pour le pays...particulièrement les travailleurs, composante principale de l'entreprise, en ce qu'ils souffrent de la cherté de la vie, tandis que l'agriculture et l'industrie nécessitent de plus grands capitaux*

<sup>29</sup> *la pénétration rapide des différentes ideologies et méthodes de lutte ouvrières*

diverse Tunisian workers became racialized colonial subjects. This transformation, El Hammi theorized, revealed to the Tunisian worker just how necessary the anti-colonial trade union movement was to bring about meaningful emancipation from colonial rule along with economic justice. But El Hammi was also leery of a return to an imagined social past after independence. Key to bringing about an independent communist Tunisia, he believed, was overcoming certain “traditions” as an obstacle to communism, particularly, regressive gender norms, by way of example.

In the early 1920s, creating an anti-colonial workerist movement was a revolutionary idea. It was a step away from the European trade union model that was singularly focused on labor internationalism. And while the trade union organization that El Hammi and his comrades created was short lived, in this move to combine workerist ideas with anti-colonialism, El Hammi was a visionary. He thought that the working class in Tunisia was different from the European worker in that Tunisian workers’ sense of exploitation came not from their class position but from their colonial status and experience of racialization. In this case, El Hammi concluded, a labor internationalism that put all the workers of the world on equal footing was not appropriate as not *all* the world’s workers faced the triple threat of capitalism, colonialism, and racism.<sup>30</sup> While not explicitly framed as such, because colonialism in this period was inextricable from the fascist project, Hammi and Hadad’s anti-colonial workerism was also an antifascism. The principles of autonomy that they espoused through theory and praxis have had long echoes through history in shaping a deep legacy of autonomy in Tunisia’s labor movement.

In addition to his work as a labor organizer and political theorist, Tahar Haddad also frequented Tunis’ cafés as a poet and member of the literary group, *Jamaat Taht al Sur* (The Under the Wall Group) (Amri 2019), founded by the father of the Tunisian short story, Ali al-Du’aji<sup>31</sup> (Granara 2010). In the 1930s, a vibrant café culture in Tunis fostered an avant-garde anti-colonial arts movement, *Jamaat Taht al-Sur*, which produced anti-colonial poetry, prose, painting, sculpture, film, and music.<sup>32</sup> Tahar Haddad contended that a pan-Mediterranean avant garde

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<sup>30</sup> El Hammi’s thinking about capitalism, colonialism, race, and class was before its time. And even though his writings may be lost, his legacy lives on. Several scholars credit the influences of El Hammi with shaping Tunisia’s vibrant contemporary labor movement and with certain tactical successes of the left during the Jasmine Revolution in 2011, especially as compared to the Egyptian Revolution (Omri 2015).

<sup>31</sup> Ali al-Du’aji’s fiction, like other art created by *Jamaat Taht al Sur*, critiqued colonial culture by writing short stories about the colonizer through the perspective of a Tunisian mocking their condescension and patronizing characteristics (Mamelouk 2016). “By unveiling the banality of the Other,” contends Douja Mariem Mamelouk, “al-Du’aji questioned the superiority of colonial knowledge and culture and invited his reader to do the same” (Mamelouk 2016: 802). Another artistic strategy of Ali al-Du’aji and *Jamaat Taht al Sur* was, “reverse Orientalism, appropriating the tools of the Orientalists to use against them” (Mamelouk 2016: 807). Artists would romanticize the South of France and Southern Italy as spaces of exotic natural beauty, thereby subverting the meaning of “the exotic” and reversing the gaze of the colonizer.

<sup>32</sup> During Tunisia’s 2011 revolution, art once again became a powerful form of expression against the state. Public art installation, performance, and graffiti communicated the message of revolution and debated its trajectory (Machgoul 2013). While many argued that social media played the most important role in disseminating information and encouraging participation in the Tunisian Revolution, Aurélie Machgoul contends that while certainly, “*Les réseaux*

cultural movement was the key synthesis that could overcome on the one hand, the perceived particularity of Arab-Islamic cultural expression and on the other, the false universalist culture associated with European capitalism (Amri 2019). Fixtures of this avant-garde café culture included Abdelhadidh Belkhoja, Ali Jendoubi, Ahmed Dora'i, Khemais Zahar, Ezzedine Belhaj, Hédi Labidi, and Zinelabidine Snoussi.

Artists and intellectuals associated with this movement gathered nightly in *Maqha al-banka al-'iryana*, a café in the Bab Souika neighborhood in the medina of Tunis to discuss both politics and art (Granara 2010; Mamelouk 2016). *Taht al Sur*'s politics were not only anti-colonial but also anti-capitalist and feminist with Pan-Mediterranean orientations that united the Southern and Northern shores as a single socio-cultural ecumene (Granara 2010; Mamelouk 2016; Masri 2017). Artists of *Jamaat Taht al Sur* worked in French, Italian, and Arabic, creating art designed to resonate both with Tunisia's poor, convincing them to take up the fight against colonialism and capitalism (Amri 2019), but also accessible to French and Italian colonizers as a "cosmopolitan literary debate" (Mamelouk 2016: 797). Even though the group was exclusively male, feminism and gender equality was a central theme of their art and political program because of Tahar Haddad's influence on the politics of the group (Granara 2010; Mamelouk 2016).

Through an autonomous anti-colonial workers' movement that made a radical break with the *Parti Communiste Français*, and advocated for worker self-management, along with a café culture that politicized art and created new avant garde forms of artistic expression Tunisian artists and workers developed an antifascist praxis distinct from Northern Mediterranean anarchism. While Laura Galián (2020) notes several Italian language anarchist newspapers based in Tunisia from 1888–1935, identifies a robust migration of Italian anarchists and other leftists to Tunisia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and hypothesizes that Italian speaking anarchists in Tunisia likely had some influence on the development of the CGTT, antifascist politics in Tunisia cannot be solely attributed to the migration of Italian anarchists.<sup>33</sup> Even though members of the short lived initial CGTT and members of *Jamaat Taht al-Sur* did not use the label "anarchism" to describe their political philosophy, I read a deeply autonomous character in the left thought and

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*sociaux mondiaux ont également joué et continue de jouer un rôle très important pour les artistes tunisiens,* more importantly for political organizing, through the vibrant contemporary art scene, *"l'espace public est un ensemble de personnes privées rassemblées pour discuter des questions d'intérêt commun. C'est devenu en Tunisie un lieu de création, de mobilisation mais également de propagande artistique"* (Machgoul 2013: 31). Public art brought people away from their screens and into public spaces where they were able to have face to face conversations about Tunisia's future.

<sup>33</sup> Laura Galián's *Colonialism, Transnationalism and Anarchism in the South of the Mediterranean* (2020) contains exciting and welcome new information about North African anarchism, but when it comes to her account of the Tunisian anarchist movement, in particular, I take issue with her exclusive focus on the diffusion of anarchism from northern to southern shores of the Mediterranean, neglecting autonomous leftist thought indigenous to North Africa. As she herself details in the book, autonomous left thought has been a part of Islamicate societies for centuries through Sufi thought and other more ancient indigenous mystical practices that fuze theology with left politics (See Galián 2020). I also take issue with her narrow focus on leftists that explicitly identify themselves as anarchist and instead wish to open up our view of what is "anarchist" based not on how folks self-identify but instead based on whether a theory and political praxis is anti-authoritarian, autonomous, and horizontal.

praxis in the workers' movement of the mid-1920s and the café culture of early 1930s Tunis. Tunisian autonomous leftists, though they may not have called themselves anarchists, resisted colonialism at the point of production and the point of leisure fomenting opposition to colonialism and capitalism, which was how European fascism was articulated in North Africa. Seeing autonomous workers' movements and antifascist café culture from opposite shores of the Mediterranean gives us greater insights into articulations of fascism through an understanding of how antifascist theory and praxis on the Northern shores of the Mediterranean and anti-colonial theory and praxis on the Southern shores were different forms of resistance against a singular fascist threat articulated as authoritarian rule in Italy and colonialism in Tunisia.

### Conclusions

This pan-Mediterranean approach to theorizing antifascism is a decolonized antifascism in the spirit of calls to decolonize anarchism (Grubačić 2013; Ramnath 2019; Galián 2020). While these theories generated by Mediterranean anarchists are a reaction against fascism's first wave, they also anticipate waves of fascism to come. The postcolonial wave reverberates through Tunisian resistance to colonialism and through Italian antifascists solidarity with anti-colonial movements in Libya, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and elsewhere. Revisiting antifascist theories of the interwar Mediterranean can also better equip us to fight postmodern fascism. This is true not just for contemporary Italy and Tunisia where the Lega Nord and Ennahda (which is also notably pro-West and pro-Capitalist) have made significant inroads in reintroducing fascism in these territories, but for the entire world which is affected by the contemporary resurgence of fascist politics. The theories of antifascism developed by anarchists in interwar Italy and Tunisia are useful in developing praxis for antifascist movements in any context. These theories suggest we focus our efforts on building autonomous trade unions to support workers at the point of production (thereby undermining fascists' ability to capture the citizen male working class), expose fascists in the ranks of the police and reveal the class contradictions of policing, develop antifascist theory and praxis at the point of leisure making antifascism a fun everyday activity that brings people together and provides community in difficult times, and perhaps inspires artistic movements that give different articulations to antifascist expressions.

But these theories also foreclose some strategies that have been proposed by contemporary antifascists. For example, Chantal Mouffe (2018b) has advocated fighting the far-right with a "left populism" that draws on the political strategies that have made fascism effective. The contemporary European far-right is not interested in subverting liberal democracy to install fascist dictatorships, Mouffe contends, and is therefore a genre of politics distinct from classic fascism of the early twentieth century (Mouffe 2018a). Surely, there are different articulations of fascism today compared to the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, but it's still fascism; and creating a left analog of fascism is not the way forward. Firstly, populism as a term is meaningless because it has "too many signifieds for one signifier" (Revelli 2019: 5). But more importantly, left and right "populism" are distinct in that left populism posits a "people" versus an establishment, while right populism

juxtaposes a “people” against elites who are favoring a “third group” such as immigrants, religious minorities, or targeted racialized groups (Revelli 2019). These distinctions in how left and right “populism” operate muddies any possible call for a left analogue to contemporary right populism. Perhaps Malatesta himself put it best when he wrote,

There are subversives who tell us that “the fascists really know how to do revolution”. No, the fascists have not taught us anything. They made revolution, if you want to call it a revolution, with the permission of the dominant and in the service of the dominant.<sup>34</sup> (Malatesta 1999)

Instead of a “left populism” that endeavors to create a leftist replica of fascist movements, we should situate antifascist strategies at the point of production and at the point of leisure to build autonomous resources against fascism. While interventions at the point of production have seen a recent resurgence in, for example, Rojava, and throughout the MENA region during the so-called “Arab Spring” of the early 2010s, intervention at the point of production on its own is not sufficient. To combat fascism, we also need to build the feelings of community connection that fascism seeks to destroy. According to The Invisible Committee,

Without at least the occasional experience of community, we die inside, we dry out, become cynical, harsh, desert-like. Life becomes that ghost city peopled by smiling mannequins, which functions. Our need for community is so pressing that after having ravaged all the existing bonds, capitalism is running on nothing but the promise of “community.” What are the social networks, the dating apps, if not that promise perpetually disappointed? What are all the modes, all the technologies of communication, all the love songs, if not a way to maintain the dream of a continuity between beings where in the end every contact melts away? (The Invisible Committee 2017: 133)

The café culture gave antifascists of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s community, and helped them to devise alternatives to fascism and capitalism. In the current moment, it is particularly difficult to imagine face-to-face spaces of interaction with strangers that beget deep meaningful connections and thereby offer moments of joy. But a radical imagination of a future beyond fascism is what is called for in such times and it’s not sufficient to solely reimagine this at the point of production but also must be carried through to the point of leisure. Establishing autonomous spaces of leisure is critically important to an antifascist movement because one of the most difficult facets for antifascism to overcome is the isolation and loneliness fascism engenders in people—a loneliness that keeps us from forming meaningful human connections that give us happiness, and help us to overcome the despair of everyday life under fascism. The strategies of Mediterranean workerists and other antifascists help us to conceive of ways to overcome despair through revolutionary community and imagine other ways of being in the world, not just during our workday, but also in

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<sup>34</sup> *vi sono anche dei sovversivi i quali dicono che «i fascisti ci hanno insegnato come si fa la rivoluzione». No, i fascisti non ci hanno insegnato proprio nulla. Essi hanno fatto la rivoluzione, se rivoluzione si vuol chiamare, col permesso dei superiori ed in servizio dei superiori.*

our leisure time. Resisting the temptation to nihilism, and thinking the unthinkable is the first step. And this was at the core of interwar Mediterranean anarchist strategies in envisioning alternate relations of production and less alienated spaces for leisure.

In the context of the global depression of 1929, communism and fascism emerged as two competing alternatives to capitalism. Both were seemingly defeated with the rise of U.S. hegemony and the establishment of new global social compacts. But in the midst of the current crisis, once again we face a similar politico-economic landscape. Capitalism and liberalism have proven incapable of addressing contemporary social and political problems and so once again those affected by increasing inequality have turned to communism or fascism as possible alternatives. Viewing these contemporary alternatives through the perspective of the *longue durée*, we can now think of the 1920s through the 1940s as a preview of a possible world-system to come as historical capitalism and liberalism, as its constituting political ideology, reaches geographic and other limits. Marxism never quite recovered from its defeat by classical European Fascism of the 1930s and 1940s, and overcoming these historic defeats continues to pose a challenge for contemporary antifascist politics (Balibar 1994). While fascism may be among the set of political options for the world-system to come, the fascists haven't won yet, and the future remains an open question. As Juan Linz writes, "Mussolini and Hitler [were] not inevitable...it was one of the possible fruits of modernity...an inevitable struggle between fascism and communism" (Linz 2000: 13). Whether communism, fascism, or some other as yet unthinkable ideology will emerge as the new constituting ideology of the next systemic cycle of accumulation, or of the world-system to come after historical capitalism has reached its limits, is, as yet, unknowable.

To fight fascism in the present we must understand how contemporary fascism is a continuity of the longer trajectory of fascist politics starting in 1922. This fascist past of the early twentieth century coexists in the present conjuncture with contemporary fascism. As Gilles Deleuze (1991) points out:

We are too accustomed to thinking in terms of the "present." We believe that a present is only past when it is replaced by another present. Nevertheless, let us stop and reflect for a moment: How would a new present come about if the old present did not pass at the same time that it *is* present? How would any present whatsoever pass, if it were not past *at the same time* as present? The past would be constituted if it *had not been* constituted first of all, at the same time that it were present. There is here, as it were, a fundamental position of time and also the paradox of memory: The past is "contemporaneous" with the present that it *has been*.... The past and the present do not denote two successive moments, but two elements which coexist: One is the present, which does not cease to pass, and the other is the past, which does not cease to be but through which all presents pass.... The past does not follow from the present, but on the contrary is presupposed by it as the pure condition without which it would not pass. In other words, each present goes back to itself as past. (Deleuze 1991: 58–59)

In the coexistent past and present lie the seeds of the future to come. In the *18th Brumaire* (1852), Marx describes a cyclical return where each new phase of the cycle is borrowed from the previous phase but different than its previous incarnation because of our desire for newness coupled with

an inability to conjure it without the old surviving within the new. In *Spectres of Marx* (1994), Derrida describes an expected return that never happens, but nonetheless clears the way for newness because there cannot be a return, only a new beginning in the guise of the old. While postmodern fascism might well be the seeds of a possible future world-system, the possible is only a first step. There are infinite possibilities of the future and the goal of political action is to begin with a workable possible and then transform that possible into the future real. In this endeavor to imagine possible futures, theory is crucial. Futures are not “waiting for us ready-made like heavenly bodies... They must be invented, fabricated, or rather created” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 5). Through theory building, we can begin to imagine beautiful new possibilities outside of historical capitalism and postmodern fascism. As Bifo Berardi (2019) puts it, “Capitalism is made insurmountable by our inability to imagine. We can’t imagine Communism, only because our imagination is trapped by cynicism. You can’t imagine how beautiful life can be.” (Berardi 2019: 140).

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