# Living Like Nomads

# Living Like Nomads:

## *The Milanese Anarchist Movement Before Fascism*

By

Fausto Buttà

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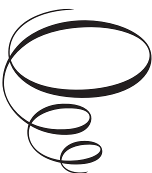

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Dedicated to Francesca

*"Anarchists live their lives like nomads. They do not follow a specific path, but their own path, according to their nature, to their way of thinking, and also to their temper."*
From *L'Eroe della Folla. Romanzo* by Leda Rafanelli (1920)

*"The errant knights are driven away to the North."*
From *Addio Lugano* by Pietro Gori (1895)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations ........ ix

Acknowledgments ........ x

Introduction ........ xii

Note on Translation ........ xxv

List of Abbreviations ........ xxvi

Chapter One ........ 1
Origins and Early Development (1870–1900)
  Milan at the End of the Nineteenth Century ........ 1
  Internationalism, Socialism, Workerism: Origins of Milanese Anarchism ........ 5
  Revolutionaries or Reformists? ........ 9
  1880s Milanese Anarchist Organisations ........ 15
  Arrests, Trials and Strikes (1889–1890) ........ 18
  The Capolago Congress and Pietro Gori in Milan (1891–1894) ........ 24
  Opposition and Repression: Anarchists, Socialists and the Italian State (1892–1894) ........ 30
  Individualist Responses: the Caserio Case (1894–1900) ........ 36
  Milanese Anarchism at the End of the Nineteenth Century ........ 41

Chapter Two ........ 66
Anarchist Theories in Milan at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century
  Italian Individualist Anarchism ........ 72
  *Il Grido della Folla* ........ 77
  *La Protesta Umana* ........ 82
  The Libreria Editrice Sociale: Monanni, Rafanelli and their Individualisms ........ 84

Chapter Three ... 99
A Social Portrait of the Milanese Anarchist Movement
The Milanese Anarchist Movement's Social Composition in 1900–1915 ... 101
Milieus, Journals, Persecutions: Stories of Unknown Anarchist Activists ... 106

Chapter Four ... 120
Anarchists and Libertarian Pedagogy
Milanese Anarchists and the Ferrer Case ... 120
Luigi Molinari's Milieu and the Scuola Moderna Francisco Ferrer of Milan ... 124

Chapter Five ... 136
Anarchists and the Labour Movement
Massacres and General Strike ... 137
Anarchist Critique to Syndicalism ... 139
Armando Borghi, Filippo Corridoni and the Unione Sindcale Milanese ... 141
Conclusion ... 145

Chapter Six ... 152
Anarchists and Anti-Militarism
Anti-militarism ... 154
Masetti and Moroni ... 161
Red Week ... 166
The First World War ... 171

Chapter Seven ... 186
From Dream of Revolution (1919–20) …
Carlo Molaschi's Anarchism ... 188
The Red Biennium ... 195

Chapter Eight ... 221
… To Anti-Fascist Resistance (1921–26)
The Beginning of the End: the Diana Explosion ... 221
"It's a Defeat, It's not Abdication!" ... 226

Conclusion ... 234
Bibliography ... 242
Index ... 267

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

## Pictures

1 - Pietro Gori ........................................................................ 27
2 - Giuseppe Monanni, 1915 ........................................................ 86
3 - Leda Rafanelli, 1916 .............................................................. 87
4 - Armando Borghi, from police file ........................................ 142
5 - Errico Malatesta .................................................................. 170
6 - Carlo Molaschi, 1924 ............................................................ 190
7 - Bruno Filippi ........................................................................ 201
8 - Armando Borghi, Eusebio Carbo, Virgilia D'Andrea and Errico Malatesta at the USI Congress, 1920 ................................................ 207

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Pictures 1,5 and 7: Archivio Storico della Federazione Anarchica Italiana, Imola, Italy
Pictures 2 and 3: Fondo "Leda Rafanelli – Marina Monanni – Maria Laura Filardi" of the Archivio Famiglia Berneri – Aurelio Chessa, Reggio Emilia, Italy
Pictures 4,6 and 8: Centro Studi Francesco Saverio Merlino, Castel Bolognese, Italy

## Maps

Fig. 1-1 - Central Milan around 1875 .......................................................... 2
Fig. 1-2 - Milanese anarchist clubs, 1889 ................................................ 17

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# INTRODUCTION

Milan, 1913: Leda Rafanelli is a 33-year-old woman who writes for the Milanese anarchist journal *La Libertà*. On 18 March, she goes to a conference for the commemoration of the 1871 Paris Commune. The keynote conference speaker is the young director of the socialist newspaper *Avanti!* This young man is a revolutionary socialist and, at the end of the night, he leaves a great impression on Leda. The day after, in the fourth issue of *La Libertà*, Leda publishes an article that speaks highly of this man. The man is Benito Mussolini. Always pleased to read positive comments about himself and cultivate his own public image, Mussolini accepts Leda's invitation to meet at her place in Viale Monza 77. Leda welcomes Benito with a Muslim blessing and they spend a lovely afternoon talking about everything. "Are you a Buddhist?" – asks a naive Benito during one of their next meetings. "No, I am a faithful Muslim," replies Leda. "In November, I finished fasting for Ramadan. I would be a dull Buddhist, not worthy of the great Asian religion. I prefer to be a faithful Muslim. This religion completely meets my soul." "Excuse me" – interrupts Benito – "but does this contradict your libertarian ideas?" Leda's response reflects the breadth of anarchist thought:

"Not for me. My comrades are atheist and they are free to be. I am a believer. For what concerns social issues, we are in harmony. I will never do religious propaganda. Islam does not preach to those who do not believe. Unlike European missionaries, who have introduced Catholicism to savages, idolaters and followers of other religions, and think that these people have been converted because they have exchanged their exotic names for those of Christian saints and now they hang a cross on their necklace … I do not care at all if other people are religious people: Buddhist or Muslim. I do love to be a religious person. After all, I am not a member of any club or lodge. I am an individualist anarchist."[1]

Thirteen years after these meetings, Mussolini had become a fascist dictator while Rafanelli was still an anarchist writer. In 1926, by putting a new press law into effect, journalism came under control of the fascist government and, by doing so, Mussolini was able to silence the last formal opposition to his regime. The banning of independent media meant the abolition of free speech, particularly for those who disagreed with and wished to speak out against the fascist dictatorship. Among the dissenting

voices were the anarchist journals. Publishing had represented an essential tool for the Italian anarchist movement since its origins. Over the previous fifty years, Italian anarchists had been publishing extensively. The main reason behind this industrious cultural production needs to be traced to the fact that anarchists have always had many things to say, as the definition of and struggle for an utopian society begins with a critique of the present.

The commitment to protest, to dissent, to sing out of tune, is just one of the many attitudes that can identify an anarchist. Finding a generic definition of anarchism which can be applied across time, lives and places has always been a difficult task. There is no single "one-size-fits-all" definition of anarchism. Despite some essential characteristics which can be used to frame an anarchist archetype – such as the principle of individual freedom and the rejection of authority – variations among anarchists in regards to society's organisation, purpose of life, property, law and the dichotomy between means and ends have inevitably affected the history of anarchism, both as an ideology and as a political movement. A clear definition of anarchism requires the analysis of several concepts, starting from a critique of the idea of utopia to the development of socialism, the rise of the labour movement, the philosophy of individualism, the idea of revolution, the ethical relationship between means and ends, and the rejection of God to mention just some. Several studies on these topics demonstrate that even within anarchism there are multiple shades of grey that essentially reflect different approaches to the meaning of life, and that implicitly confirm that "there are as many variations of Anarchism as there are Anarchists".[2] The complexity of defining and interpreting anarchism reveals the anti-dogmatic nature of anarchism. This contradictory and, at the same time, "benevolent" aspect of anarchism does not mean that any individual choice is worthy as long as the person that makes it labels it somehow as being anarchist. Yet the key principles of individual freedom and rejection of authority prevent anyone, especially a self-described anarchist, from imposing pre-set definitions, values or criteria to define anarchism and what an anarchist should be.

This book is based on the idea that anarchism's intrinsic lack of a clear definition and interpretation challenges dominant western theories based on alleged objectivity, and highlights the complexity of being an anti-conformist even within the anarchist movement. However, in order to identify the subject matter of this book, I have constructed an ideological framework around anarchism's differences with socialism. With this conflicted term, anarchism shares some political convictions, such as equality, social justice and solidarity. Moreover, the history of anarchism in modern Italy is entrenched within the development of socialist and

labour movements since their early stages. But only by interpreting their differences can we trace the evolution of anarchist identities and practices. Thus, a definition of anarchism needs its contexts and, for this purpose, it is best illuminated through its historical development and its dialectics with socialism, especially during the period between 1870 and 1892, when the two terms were still at an embryonic stage. Yet a definition of anarchism can only be fully explained in the context of the events described in the following chapters.

At the turn of the twentieth century, many Italian anarchists were workers with basic literacy skills yet with a strong desire for education. Anarchist literature was rich and provided anarchists with the means for self-education, knowledge and political consciousness. The acts of reading, writing and publishing were important processes in forming anarchist identities. Within this framework, the Milanese anarchist movement elucidates the historical development of Italian anarchism. From its origins in the early 1870s, the Milanese anarchist movement benefited from the entrepreneurial nature of Milan's industrial publishing sector. Despite state repression and financial problems, Milanese anarchists published a great number of journals, books and pamphlets. As is shown throughout the book, this material is an invaluable lens to magnify the contribution of Milanese anarchists to the development of the Italian anarchist movement. This book is a specific historically and geographically situated empirical study that examines anarchist thought and praxis within the broader contextualisation of Italian anarchism. It tells the story of the Milanese anarchist movement, exploring theories of anarchism and anarchist practices in Milan during a period of profound change in Italy.

This work looks in particular at the period between 1900 and 1921. These dates are marked by two significant episodes in the history of Italian anarchism. The killing of King Umberto I on 29 July 1900 by the anarchist Gaetano Bresci is seen as the event that closed the "heroic phase" of anarchism. Over the previous decade several examples of anarchist "propaganda of the deed" contributed to giving anarchism a bad name among the rest of society.[3] Bresci's act represented the apex and, at the same time, the end of a specific stream of anarchism. After Bresci, the use of radical violent means as an expression of the anarchist individualist stream gave way to new theories and new forms of political struggle and these intellectual and political activities constitute the focus of this book. Yet the second date, 1921, is also marked by a violent episode. The explosion at the Diana Theatre in Milan on 23 March 1921, for which three anarchists were convicted of manslaughter, had direct consequences

on the Milanese anarchist movement as well as on the rest of the country. The anarchist hunt that followed the explosion eliminated the forefront of the militant opposition to the rise of fascism in Italy. The repression of anarchist opposition went hand in hand with the construction of a fascist state.

In the preface of *For Anarchism: History, Theory and Practice*, David Goodway made the following observation:

> Anarchist historiography is a frustrating field, traditionally tending to be hagiographic or, still worse, antiquarian in approach. When it has come to their own past - or, indeed, the past in general - anarchists have not subjected it to radical analysis or acted as the innovators they have been in other disciplines. So, historical work has been untouched by the vital currents in recent Anglo-American anarchist thought.[4]

In Goodway's opinion, the previous thirty years of social history, which was pioneered by Marxist historians, had focused on popular movements, "yet anarchism has been largely overlooked by the new social historians".[5] If the ideal of anarchy, understood as a society without government, "has existed since time immemorial",[6] and anarchism, as a system of ideas, is a pervasive doctrine throughout modern European history, the historical study of anarchism is definitely a recent area of research. This book aims to fill a gap within the historiography of anarchism.

The few existing studies on Milanese anarchism tend to focus on particular episodes. *Living Like Nomads* will give a comprehensive picture of the anarchist movement including ideas advanced and initiatives carried out by leading intellectuals as well as unknown activists. *Living Like Nomads* examines all of this through a close reading of primary and secondary sources, such as anarchist publications, police files and literature on the topic. This book explores the ideas, the events and the people that shaped the development of anarchism in Milan.[7] The research focuses on ideas, practice, propaganda, state action, social change, the urban setting, cultural milieus of the time, lives of anarchists and their lifestyles. It also draws parallels between the local and the national movement, events and debates.

Milanese anarchism deserves an attentive analysis. In the pages that follow, I will both analyse the ideological debates that animated the pages of anarchist publications, as well as reconstruct crucial historical events and processes. The ideological debates between followers of different theories of anarchism found space in the pages of Milanese anarchist journals. The complexities of their arguments are best elucidated by

analysis. For instance, the dialectic between individualist and communist anarchists, as well as organisational versus anti-organisational views, necessitates a deep scrutiny in order to reveal how the Milanese anarchist movement was oriented at the beginning of the twentieth century. Conversely, story-telling best illuminates how Milanese anarchists responded to salient events. Narrative is also used for short biographies of some anarchists. For this purpose, the recently published Italian anarchists' biographical dictionary has been an invaluable source.[8] These stories had to make sense in terms of those local, national and international contexts. They thus had to be embodied in a solid analysis.

*Living Like Nomads* contends that some traits are specific to the Milanese anarchist scene, while other characteristics either have similarities with other local movements or are representative of the Italian anarchist movement in general. Some of the following aspects remained constant across the time studied. Firstly, Milanese anarchism developed through its relationship with other ideological paradigms and political movements. This process, which occurred on a national scale too, continued for over two decades, to the extent that a relatively clear anarchist identity emerged within the political arena only in the early 1890s, in opposition to the birth of the Italian Socialist Party. Another specific feature that marked the Milanese anarchist movement from its origins was its great dependence on external agents. Key figures coming from outside, trans-local ideas and events, played a crucial role in the development of anarchism in Milan. At the same time, state repression greatly influenced the development of both Italian and Milanese anarchist movements from their early stages. As a consequence, on a few occasions, in Milan as well as in the rest of Italy and abroad, anarchists engaged in isolated acts of violence inspired by "the propaganda of the deed." In terms of propaganda and ability to recruit new militants, anarchists' attempts to connect with the local working class of Milanese factories were rather unsuccessful, mainly due to some specific traits of both the movement and the city itself. Nonetheless, from its origins the Milanese anarchist movement has been a cross-class movement, made up of workers from different milieux and professions. Within the movement different streams of anarchism coexisted and constituted a workshop for theory and practice. Finally, thanks to this richness of anarchist thought, the Milanese anarchist movement's cultural production represents its main legacy and one of the most effective contribution to Italian anarchism. These are the main features of the early twentieth century Milanese anarchist movement. However, the starting questions the research investigates deals with the historiography of anarchism. What is the significance of Milanese

anarchism? Why are studies of Milanese anarchists needed? Why is Milan relevant?

Despite its considerable progress over the last three decades, the historiography of Italian anarchism remains incomplete. Histories of local anarchist movements constitute such historiographical gaps. What is not told, known and understood tends to generate misconceptions and stereotypes. Studies of regional realities of Italian anarchism contribute to a better understanding of the reasons why anarchism is still at the margins of the political arena. They help in understanding why and how an ideological paradigm such as anarchism has been relegated to oblivion. The significance of Milanese anarchism has thus fallen into the gaps of critical scholarship. The contribution of Milanese anarchists has been dismissed too easily as a "degeneration of anarchism".[9] Yet the Milanese anarchists' legacy is broader than a few published journals and the odd bomb explosion. This work is based on a research that explores the history of the Milanese anarchist movement in a comprehensive way, investigating new areas of research as well as the validity of some of the rhetoric, encompassing theories of anarchism and anarchist praxis.

A clear value and contribution of this book is that it examines with real specificity the lives and works of anarchists in their particular context, rather than as caricatures or abstractions. As such, social and intellectual history illustrates the lived experience of anarchism in an important location within Italian and international anarchist thought. The few existing studies of Milanese anarchism focus on the individualist milieu of the early twentieth century, the so-called "Giolitti's era", its cultural production and its main figures.[10] The massive research by Vincenzo Mantovani sheds light on the Diana episode but is limited in its focus to a single event.[11] It is not surprising, then, that Milanese anarchism has been denigrated. Yet the Milanese anarchist movement has a substantial story to tell. Its history is an emblematic case of anarchist experiments, both in theory and in practice.

Until now, the role of the local anarchist movement in this period has been overlooked and undervalued. As a consequence, a series of stereotypes still besets the subject. Historians have depicted Milan as the centre of Italian anti-organisational and individualist anarchism. This is due to the relative dominance of the individualist stream which took over at the beginning of the twentieth century. Milanese anarchists, their critics affirm, with their "schizophrenic behaviour"[12] used an "aristocratic" language and were "mob agitators".[13] The use of the term "aristocratic" in regards to the anarchist movement can be seen as derogatory since anarchists are commonly associated with the labour movement. Similarly,

the adjective "schizophrenic" belittles the initiatives of Milanese anarchists and, implicitly, qualifies them as the actions of the mentally unstable. The expression "mob agitator", on the other hand, highlights the riotous nature of the anarchist movement and, consequently, may be interpreted as a term of distinction between "true revolutionaries" and "one-off rebels". At this superficial level, Milanese anarchists were either innocent victims of state repression, petit-bourgeois intellectuals or, at worst, dynamite enthusiasts, or a combination of the three. This book pushes past easy suppositions to ask: who were these Milanese anarchists? Where did they come from? What were their main arguments? What were their main activities? These questions have never been explicitly asked. Answers to these and other questions illuminate the contribution and relevance of the Milanese anarchist movement to the development of both Italian anarchism and modern social justice movements.

Yet another question needs to be asked. Why Milan? The decision to study Milanese anarchism might seem unusual because the true capital of Italian anarchism is Carrara, and Milan was never a stronghold of the anarchist movement in comparison with cities such as Ancona, Rome and Florence. Nevertheless, the Lombard capital provides an important and fascinating case study in which to explore Italian anarchism. Throughout its modern history Milan has been a key city in all the major social, economic, cultural and political transformations that occurred in Italy. Milan has kept intact the illusion of being a "capital city": from the nineteenth century title of "moral capital city" to "capital city of anti-fascism"; from the beginning of the twentieth century "industrial capital city" to the contemporary "financial capital city".[14] Moreover, Milan has been the birthplace of many ideologies, political movements and organisations, such as the Italian Labour Party, fascism, anti-fascism, the workers and students' protests of 1968–77, terrorism, the Lega Nord (Northern League Party) and Berlusconi's Forza Italia (Go Italy Party). Milan is therefore central to understanding the role played by the Left in the events of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, including the First World War and the rise of fascism.

Milan was a melting pot, a crossroads, a cultural milieu and a place of discussion, debate and freedom, especially when compared with Rome or the Italian South. Undoubtedly, Milan's geographical position – close to the heart of Europe – contributed to the development of a dynamic city, influenced by ideas and cultural trends from other parts of the continent. Furthermore, Milan benefited from greater social and economic success in comparison with other Italian centres. This was due to its administrative role and its industrial development, which made Milan attractive to

migrants. Milan's strategic position allowed a certain degree of international relationships to develop between Milanese anarchists and those based outside Italy. Prominent figures within the European libertarian movement, such as Bakunin and Ferrer y Guardia, influenced the Milanese anarchist movement, its origins and its development. At the same time, the large numbers of people migrating to Milan or simply passing through meant, for the Milanese anarchist movement, that there was an inability to develop solid roots within the labour movement and the population. It was also difficult to establish permanent anarchist groups or local branches of national anarchist federations. Nonetheless, European influences and high levels of migration brought new ideas and protagonists. Ideas developed in a distinctive way, according to different historical contexts.

What do we mean by Milan? Is it the city, the centre, or the hinterland? Where were the anarchists? Research has focused on the city of Milan and has considered its historical development. In fact, in the second half of the nineteenth century, suburbs such as Greco and Turro in the north-eastern area were considered as hinterland, while nowadays they are part of the city itself. On the other hand, minor industrial centres such as Sesto San Giovanni at the northern gate of Milan, despite proximity, constitute independent areas of research and have not been included in this study. Peripheral suburbs developed as a conglomeration of industries and workers. The broader process of urbanisation was strictly linked to industrialisation and proletarianisation. As a result, over the years the working class gradually moved towards the edge of the city. A similar process of marginalisation affected Milanese anarchists. Hence there was a liminality that mirrored the anarchists' position on the fringes of the legal political arena. This relative marginality did not prevent anarchists from occupying spaces in the new urban periphery and the industrial suburbs. From time to time anarchists formed both groups in the factories and district-based groups in order to coordinate their activities. This strategy occurred particularly during the 1880s, when Milanese anarchists formed anarchist groups along the custom gates of the city. Nonetheless, the main anarchist publishing houses and printers were located in the city centre where the middle class and the bankers were. For example, the premises of *Umanità Nova* was in Via Carlo Goldoni no. 3, not far away from the Diana Theatre and the city centre. Within the development of a modern industrial metropolitan area, anarchists strove for a place within both the political arena and the city itself.

The history of the Milanese anarchist movement is a history of ideas and the various attempts to realise them. Milan, then, represented a fertile ground for the development of different currents of anarchism. This

cultural richness, with such a variety of positions – mainly due to different approaches to the means–end dichotomy – affected theoretical debates within anarchist journals, as well as the effectiveness of militants' actions. Yet, despite this wide-ranging feature of Milanese anarchism being able to explain failures and deficiencies, it also shows the eclecticism of the Italian Left, within which different patterns of thought coexisted. Within such a broad spectrum, it is possible to understand the particular contribution of Milanese anarchists to Italian anarchism. They represent a multitude of particular dimensions that can be used to understand the general picture of Milanese anarchism. Within this framework, as for other social, cultural and political phenomena, the history of the Milanese anarchist movement confirms Milan not only as significant case study, representative of what happened on a national scale, but also as a productive workshop for ideas and practices.

The book's organisation mirrors the complexity of Milanese anarchists' answers to those social, economic and political questions that affected Italian society at the beginning of the twentieth century. Chapter One focuses on the origins and early development of the Milanese anarchist movement. It aims at giving a background to what constitutes the core of this book. At the beginning, this chapter attempts to draw together, for the first time, sources used by historians of anarchism such as Max Nettlau, and historians of Italian socialist and labour movements such as Nello Rosselli and Giuseppe Del Bo.[15] Towards the end of the 1860s, socialist theories were spreading throughout Europe. Bakunin and Karl Marx competed for dominance within the first International Working Men Association (IWA). The chapter explores how the clash affected the Milanese branch of the IWA and the development of anarchism in the city. Moreover, with the rise of economic theories about factory workers' conditions (*operaismo*, workerism), a separate party emerged in Milan at the beginning of the 1880s – the first Italian Partito Operaio (Labour Party). This chapter explores how Milanese anarchism emerge from these dialectics and it highlights those features that characterised the anarchist movement. Chapter One also explicates the causes behind the merging of an anti-organisational and individualist current.

Chapter Two illustrates the ideological debates within the Milanese individualist anarchist milieus. The use of the plural is deliberate. Chapters Two and Three are based on qualitative research into the social composition of the Milanese anarchist movement. Through the reading of two important publications of the individualist stream, *Il Grido della Folla* and *La Protesta Umana*, as well as other journals and materials published by the anarchist publishing house Libreria Editrice Sociale, the chapter

identifies different milieus and their social points of reference. Within these networks of anarchist militants, the most influential figures have constituted the subject of those few existing studies of Milanese anarchism and their ideas are explored in Chapter Two. Yet a story of the Milanese anarchist movement cannot be told without the stories of many lesser known participants. Chapter Three tells the stories of those militants who have fallen into the oblivion of history. They were the backbones of the Milanese anarchist movement.

The following three chapters examine three crucial ideological struggles that Milanese anarchists waged. Chapter Four investigates the participation of anarchists in libertarian pedagogical projects and in particular their involvement with the Modern School, a project inspired by the teaching methods of Francisco Ferrer y Guardia. Luigi Molinari played a pivotal role and the project was, for a short time, successful. Milanese anarchists offered an anarchist alternative to traditional forms of education. They showed that anarchism could work. However, the Milan Modern School did not last long: with the outbreak of the First World War, authorities closed the school. Molinari passed away a few years later, in 1918.

Chapter Five focuses on the relationship between Milanese anarchists and the labour movement. It tells how they responded to the several massacres of workers that occurred at the beginning of the century and that led to the first general strike in 1904. Following the 1907 International Anarchist Congress of Amsterdam, many anarchists looked at revolutionary unionism as a means of economic and social redemption. In Milan, Armando Borghi and Filippo Corridoni were charismatic figures within the Unione Sindacale Milanese (USM), the revolutionary syndicalist union, joined by several anarchists. Their ideas and struggles constitute the topic of Chapter Five.

An important political campaign for Milanese anarchists was anti-militarism. It played a huge role for anarchist activists and it led them through the events of the Red Week in June 1914 to the outbreak of the First World War. Chapter Six narrates how Milanese anarchists responded to salient events such as the colonial war in Libya and dramatic acts of rebellion within the military. It also examines the effects that the anti-militarist campaign had on Milanese anarchists during the Red Week of June 1914. Finally, the anti-war protests that occurred at the outbreak of the First World War were the logical outcome of the anti-militarist campaign. How was the war seen by Milanese anarchists? How did they react? The defection of a few individualist anarchists helped to further

filter the movement and, in a way, better define anarchist identity and praxis.

Chapter Seven focuses on the post–First World War period. However, this chapter does not start with an analysis of the origins of fascism, but rather with the development of Carlo Molaschi's anarchism. Although Molaschi's anarchism is not representative of all Milanese anarchists, the evolution of his thought helps us better understand the complex geography of the social, cultural and ideological paradigms that marked the history and the decline of Italian anarchism after the Great War in parallel to the rise of fascism. To better comprehend this intricate geography, Milanese anarchism needs to be framed within the Italian historical background of the period between 1919 and 1922. Milanese anarchists responded to the outbreak of social unrest during the Red Biennium (1919–20) and violence played an important role. I will argue that Milanese anarchists misunderstood the events of the Red Biennium: like many other revolutionaries, Milanese anarchists believed that the revolution was imminent and inevitable. What they understood well, however, was the seriousness of an event such as the rise of fascism.

This work finds its logical end with the fascist laws on the press enacted in 1926. Through the lens of *Umanità Nova* – the first Italian anarchist daily newspaper, founded in Milan in 1920 – Chapter Eight illuminates the shift of focus of Milanese anarchists: they moved from the dream of a revolution to a civil war and finally to a war of resistance. Within this frame, the bombing at the Diana Theatre represented a turning point for Milanese and Italian anarchists. With that explosion, the state repression of Milanese and Italian anarchists reached its final stage. Thus, without the opposition of anarchists and other revolutionaries, fascist squads were finally free to occupy all the major centres. Yet Milanese anarchism survived fascism. What happened to the Milanese anarchist movement after fascism constitutes an area for future research.

*Living Like Nomads* is a historically and geographically situated examination of anarchist thought and practice. One of the main reasons behind Milan's centrality is the flourishing of the publishing sector. Since the Enlightenment, publishing and editorial activities greatly contributed to the development of social, cultural and political movements, including anarchism. The variety of newspapers that a Milanese citizen could read reflected the broad spectrum of ideas and positions that were dominating the Italian political arena. The booming publishing sector represents one of the reasons why so many anarchists passed through Milan. Indeed, few of Milan's most charismatic anarchists and militants were native to the city. Surely anarchists were drawn to Milan because of its inherent political and

economic importance as well as its proximity to the border. Furthermore, anarchists were generally nomadic creatures, "errant knights" moved by "the ideal of love", as Pietro Gori wrote when he and other Italian anarchists were expelled from Switzerland in 1895. Nineteenth and early twentieth-century anarchists "lived like nomads" mainly because of state repression but also because of an inner tendency to move around, emigrate, and then come back, hide and move again. Like nomads, anarchists kept moving, physically, to escape repression, and intellectually, to satisfy their curiosity and to fulfil their nature. Like nomads, anarchists lived trying to pursue their liberties and in particular the freedom to be and to affirm who they were. This is why many anarchists stayed in Milan for a time and then moved again. This sense of diaspora influenced the historical development of Milanese anarchism. However, it does not make the context itself less relevant than it might appear. The subject matter is located in Milan because it was here that anarchists published their journals. It was in Milan that they ran political campaigns and held other initiatives. The book's argument is embedded within this geographical framework, and conclusions of this study are specific to the Milanese anarchist movement. However, they may apply to different local groups in different regions as the framework for further investigations into the eclecticism of the Italian Left before the rise of fascism.

## Notes

[1] For this dialogue, see L. Rafanelli, *Una Donna e Mussolini*, Milan, Rizzoli, 1975, p. 42.

[2] J. Wakeman, *Anarchism and Democracy*, London, 1920, p. 10, cited in D. Novak, 'The Place of Anarchism in the History of Political Thought', *The Review of Politics*, vol. 20, no. 3, July 1958, p. 310.

[3] See M. Fleming, 'Propaganda by the Deed: Terrorism and Anarchist Theory in Late Nineteenth-century Europe', *Terrorism*, vol.4, no.1–4, 1980, pp. 1–23.

[4] D. Goodway, 'Introduction', in D. Goodway (ed.), *For Anarchism: History, Theory and Practice*, London and New York, Routledge, 1989, p. 6.

[5] Ibid., p. 7.

[6] R. Graham, 'Introduction', in R. Graham (ed.), *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, vol. 1, Montreal, Black Rose Books, 2005, p. xi.

[7] This work is based on a doctoral research conducted between 2007 and 2011 at The University of Western Australia. See F. Buttà, *Anarchist Theories and Practices in Milan: A History of the Milanese Anarchist Movement, 1870–1926*, Ph.D. diss., The University of Western Australia, 2011.

[8] M. Antonioli, G. Berti, S. Fedele & P. Iuso (eds), *Dizionario Biografico degli Anarchici Italiani*, (cited hereafter as DBAI), 2 vols, Pisa, BFS, 2003–2004.

[9] A. Dadà, *L'Anarchismo in Italia: fra Movimento e Partito*, Milan, Teti, 1984, p. 61. See also G. Cerrito, *Dall'Insurrezionalismo alla Settimana Rossa. Per Una Storia dell'Anarchismo in Italia (1881–1914)*, Florence, CP editrice, 1976, p. 131.
[10] M. Antonioli, 'Il Movimento Anarchico Milanese agli Inizi del Secolo', in VV.AA., *Anna Kuliscioff e l'Età del Riformismo (Atti del Convegno di Milano, Milano-Dicembre 1976)*, Rome, Ed. Avanti!, 1978, pp. 275–90; F. Schirone, 'La Casa Editrice Sociale', *Rivista Storica dell'Anarchismo,* vol. 1, no. 2, 1994, pp. 95–112. See also M. Granata, *Lettere d'Amore e d'Amicizia: la Corrispondenza di Leda Rafanelli, Carlo Molaschi, Maria Rossi (1913–1919): Per Una Lettura dell'Anarchismo Milanese*, Pisa, BFS, 2002, and D. Romeo, 'Il Movimento Anarchico a Milano nell'Età Giolittiana: l'Influenza di Francisco Ferrer y Guardia e della Sua Scuola Moderna Razionalista', *Storia in Lombardia,* vol. 15, no. 3, 1995, pp. 69–103; M. Granata, 'Ugo Fedeli a Milano (1898–1921). La Formazione Politica e la Militanza Attraverso le Carte del Suo Archivio', *Storia in Lombardia*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2000, pp. 61–107.
[11] V. Mantovani, *Mazurka Blu. La Strage del Diana*, Milan, Rusconi, 1979.
[12] G. Berti, *Errico Malatesta e il Movimento Anarchico Italiano e Internazionale 1872–1932*, Milan, Franco Angeli, 2003, p. 444.
[13] M. Antonioli & P.C. Masini, *Il Sol dell'Avvenire. L'Anarchismo in Italia dalle Origini alla Prima Guerra Mondiale*, Pisa, BFS, 1999, p. 70.
[14] See G. Rosa, *Il Mito della Capitale Morale: Letteratura e Pubblicistica a Milano fra Otto e Novecento*, Milan, Edizioni di comunità, 1982; M. Legnani, 'Il Mito della "Capitale Morale" tra Politica e Letteratura', *Italia Contemporanea*, vol.154, 1984, pp. 123–27; V. Spinazzola, 'La "Capitale Morale". Cultura Milanese e Mitologia Urbana', *Belfagor*, vol.36, 1981, pp. 317–27.
[15] M. Nettlau, *Bakunin e l'Internazionale in Italia*, Rome, Savelli, 1975; N. Rosselli, *Mazzini e Bakunin. Dodici Anni di Movimento Operaio in Italia (1860–1872)*, Turin, Einaudi, 1967; G. Del Bo, *La Corrispondenza di Marx e Engels con Italiani (1848–1895)*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1964.

# NOTE ON TRANSLATION

All the source material used in this book which was originally published in Italian only, has been translated by the author.

# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| AA.GG. e RR. | Affari Generali e Riservati (General and Secret Affairs, Rome) |
| ACS | Archivio Centrale dello Stato (Rome) |
| ASM | Archivio dello Stato di Milano (Milan) |
| b. | busta (envelope) |
| bb. | buste (envelopes) |
| cat. | categoria (category) |
| CdL | Camera del Lavoro (Chamber of Labour) |
| CGdL | Confederazione Generale del Lavoro (General Confederation of Labour) |
| COL | Confederazione Operaia Lombarda (Worker Confederation of Lombardy) |
| COM | Circolo Operaio Milanese (Milanese Worker Club) |
| CPC | Casellario Politico Centrale (personal files archive, Rome) |
| CPVP | Comitato Pro Vittime Politiche (Committee for Political Victims) |
| DBAI | Dizionario Biografico degli Anarchici Italiani (Biographical Dictionary of Italian Anarchists) |
| Dir. Gen. | Direzione Generale (General Office, Rome) |
| Div. | Divisione (Department, Rome) |
| fasc. | fascicolo (file) |
| FIOM | Federazione Italiana degli Operai Metallurgici (Italian Metalworkers' Union) |
| FLM | Fascio Libertario Milanese (Milanese Libertarian Group) |
| GC | General Council of IWA |
| IAMA | International Anti-militarist Association |
| IWA | International Working Men's Association |
| LES | Libreria Editrice Sociale publishing house |
| Min. Int. | Ministero dell'Interno (Ministry of the Interior) |
| MOIDB | Movimento Operaio Italiano Dizionario Biografico (Biographical Dictionary of Italian Worker Movement) |
| POI | Partito Operaio Italiano (Italian Labour Party) |
| P.S. | Pubblica Sicurezza (Public Safety) |

| | |
|---|---|
| PSAR | Partito Socialista Anarchico Rivoluzionario (Socialist Anarchist Revolutionary Party) |
| PSI | Partito Socialista Italiano (Italian Socialist Party) |
| PSRR | Partito Socialista Rivoluzionario di Romagna (Socialist Revolutionary Party of Romagna) |
| SMFFM | Scuola Moderna Francisco Ferrer di Milano ("Francisco Ferrer" Modern School of Milan) |
| UAI | Unione Anarchica Italiana (Italian Anarchist Union) |
| UCAI | Unione Comunista Anarchica Italiana (Italian Communist Anarchist Union) |
| USI | Unione Sindacale Italiana (Italian Syndicalist Union) |
| USM | Unione Sindacale Milanese (Milanese Syndicalist Union) |

# CHAPTER ONE

# ORIGINS AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT (1870–1900)

*"Milan, until now the capital city of the Mazzinian movement and as a large industrial city, is especially important for us, also because with Milan we shall get the Lombard industrial districts of silk in our hands. Therefore, what you and your friends will be able to do for the common cause will have a particular value."*
F. Engels, letter to Theodor Cuno, 13 November 1871, in G. Del Bo (ed.), *La Corrispondenza di Marx e Engels con Italiani 1848–1895*, p. 59

## Milan at the end of the nineteenth century

Between 1805 and 1814, during the Napoleonic occupation, Milan was the Kingdom of Italy's capital city. Visitors, migrants, workers, state officers, diplomats, landowners, artisans, people of every social class and origin were drawn to Milan, contributing to the development of the city and making of it one of the most dynamic and richest places in Italy. The cultural heritage of late eighteenth-century Enlightenment had found in Milan fertile ground: Cesare Beccaria, Pietro Verri and Carlo Cattaneo are just some of the names that introduced civil and political liberalism to the city. The five-day uprising of the Milanese in March 1848 showed the cultural and political gap that was increasingly separating the city from the Austrian regime.[1]

In the Piazza Duomo, the cathedral square and the heart of Milan, stands the statue of Victor Emmanuel II, the first king of Italy, who ruled from 1861 to 1878. Significantly the statue, a key symbol of the state, faces the cathedral with a drawn sword, challenging the church instead of protecting it. On the right-hand side of the square there is the Galleria, the gallery that links Piazza Duomo with the nearby Piazza della Scala, where the city hall and the opera house, political and cultural centres of power, are sited. At the end of the 1860s this nucleus was surrounded by an internal canal, the Naviglio Interno, which once was a moat for city walls. In the sixteenth century, during the Spanish occupation, another circle of walls with several Porte (customs gates) was built around the city. Three

other canals join the Naviglio Interno: the Naviglio Grande to the west, the Naviglio di Pavia to the south, and finally the Naviglio Piccolo to the north-east. These three canals were used for moving goods until the 1840s when the railways replaced them.

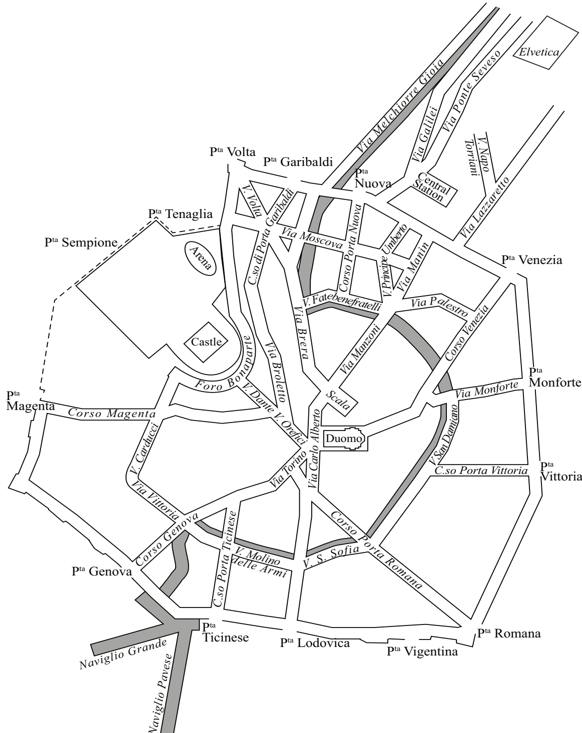


Fig. 1-1 - Central Milan around 1875

According to the 1861 census, the population of Milan within the Spanish walls was 196,109 inhabitants, with 47,000 outside the walls in an area named Corpi Santi, a suburban population incorporated into Milan in 1781.[2] By 1871, the population of the internal *circondario* (administrative district) had increased by 3,000 people and the Corpi Santi continued to offer housing solutions for newcomers and migrants from the countryside.[3] The majority of Milanese industrial plants were located in the Corpi Santi. Ambrogio Binda's paper mill was in the southern suburbs, outside the Porta Ticinese and was, at that time, one of the largest factories in Milan.