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Reading Reclus between Italy and South America: translations of geography and anarchism in the work of Luce and Luigi Fabbri

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Abstract: *This paper addresses how Élisée Reclus's geographical work was read and circulated by two important activists, intellectuals and exponents of 'transnational anarchism' in the twentieth century, the father and daughter Luigi and Luce Fabbri. Using both their published work and unpublished archival sources, the paper analyses the various translations, multilingual studies and interpretations of Reclus that the Fabbri undertook in Italy and later Latin America, and the role they played in the international circulation and reinterpretation of Reclus's ideas. This paper contributes to current studies of the circulation of geographical knowledge and historical geographies of science, as well as to the transnational turn in the social sciences and, in particular, its application to 'anarchist studies'. It draws on the recent international literature devoted to the historical and epistemological relations between geography and anarchism, stressing the intimate relationship between intellectual and political work among early anarchist geographers.*

Keywords: *circulation of geographical knowledge; historical geographies of science; transnational anarchism; anarchist geographies.*

The Italian-Uruguayan intellectual Luce Fabbri (1908-2000), the daughter of the celebrated Italian intellectual and anarchist Luigi Fabbri (1877-1935), was a sophisticated and important interpreter of the French anarchist geographer Élisée Reclus (1830-1905).¹ Her father, who took refuge with his family in Montevideo after the establishment of the fascist dictatorship in Italy, was the editor of the journal *Il Pensiero* and was among the first to translate the writings of Reclus into Italian, principally articles and pamphlets on social geography and the relationship between science and anarchism.

Inspired by Luigi, Luce was drawn to Reclus's work as a child. In 1928, in the middle of the fascist dictatorship, when she was only twenty years old, she defended her dissertation at the University of Bologna on Reclus's conception of geography.² She had been supervised by the philosopher Rodolfo Mondolfo, and her defence earned her the highest mark as well as the nickname '*signorina comunista*' (Miss Communist) from the dean, because Luce was the only candidate who refused to make the fascist salute before the examining committee. It is likely that she was also the only person in Italy at that time with the courage to speak openly about anarchism in the academy.

The original copy of Luce's dissertation can be found in the archives of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, where a large part of Luce and Luigi Fabbri's papers are held. The unpublished thesis, a typed text of 132 pages, is titled *L'opera geografica di Eliseo Reclus* [The geographical work of Élisée Reclus]. This text, along with the Fabbri's correspondence and publications, is my principal source. The argument I present here is that Luigi and Luce were well placed to interpret the geographical and political thought of Reclus because of their participation in international and multilingual anarchist networks, giving them direct access to Reclus's texts and to the best informed

¹ On Reclus, an early anti-colonialist and pioneer of social geography, see: J. Clark and C. Martin, *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity: Selected Writings of Élisée Reclus*, Oakland, 2013; G. Dunbar, *Élisée Reclus Historian of Nature*, Hamden, 1978; M. Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom: the Odyssey by Élisée Reclus*, Montreal, 1988.

² It is important to point out that in Italy the doctorate degree was instituted only in 1984, and that in the period discussed here a dissertation titled *Tesi di Laurea* conferred the highest academic degree possible, carrying the right to the title *Dottore* [Doctor].

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debates and secondary literature of the time, such as the works of Max Nettlau and Joseph Ishill, who were friends and correspondents of the Fabbris. Furthermore, on this basis the father and daughter offered an original reading of Reclus which contributed in a decisive way to the international circulation of his ideas. By tracing their influence over Reclus's reception in those contexts this case confirms the centrality of biography to understanding the history and geography of ideas. As Charles Withers observes, the biographical turn in the history and philosophy of geography allows us to follow scientific and personal trajectories outside institutional contexts, where 'individual achievements were often made in opposition to prevailing disciplinary trends'.³ Understanding the Fabbris involves what David Livingstone has called a located hermeneutics, 'the fundamental importance of the spaces where reading literally *takes place*'.⁴

Using these ideas this paper seeks to understand, in James Secord's words, 'how and why... knowledge circulate[s]', and what Simon Naylor calls the 'travels and travails' of texts, as they produce 'knowledge on the move'.⁵ Since the case studied here is strongly based on translation, I also draw on recent studies in the history of literature that regard 'every translation [as] a cultural activity, a performative negotiation of cultural differences'.⁶ More specifically, I use this historical example to consider the rich debate on the problems of translation and multilingualism in geographical academia as addressed by authors who argue that a multilingual and cosmopolitan sphere in international geography is far from being realized.⁷

³ C. Withers, History and philosophy of geography 2004–2005: biographies, practices, sites, *Progress in Human Geography* 31 (2007) 67.

⁴ D. Livingstone, Science, text and space: thoughts on the geography of reading, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30 (2005) 392.

⁵ J. Secord, Knowledge in Transit, *Isis* 95 (2004) 655; S. Naylor, Historical geography: knowledge, in place and on the move, *Progress in Human Geography* 29 (2005) 626.

⁶ F. Italiano, Translating geographies: The *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* and its Venetian translation, *Translation Studies* 5 (2012) 4.

⁷ C. Desbiens, Speaking in tongues, making geographies, *Society and Space* 20 (2002) 1–3; C. Desbiens and S. Ruddick, Speaking of geography: language, power, and the spaces of Anglo-Saxon 'hegemony', *Society and Space* 24 (2006) 1–8; J. Fall and C. Minca, Not a geography of what doesn't exist, but a counter-geography of what does: Rereading Giuseppe Dematteis' *Le Metafore della Terra*, *Progress in Human Geography* 37 (2012) 542–563.

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Thus, my main argument is that the work of the Fabbris shows that cultural and textual translations are more likely to occur, often necessarily so, in non-institutional contexts like the transnational anarchist networks they frequented, than in the national schools of geography established in the same period.⁸ The unpublished correspondence I draw on shows how international militant networks were committed to the multilingual circulation of knowledge, allowing an assessment of the importance of non-institutional networks for the internationalisation of knowledge in the context of the first Italian readings of Reclus's work.

This paper is also part of a reconsideration of anarchism as a transnational and cosmopolitan movement.⁹ Among the concepts highlighted by those engaged in this 'transnational turn', the most important here is that of transnational anarchist networks. According to Davide Turcato this represents a fundamental intellectual tool for replacing old commonplaces in the history of anarchism such as a historiography which depends on a 'cyclical pattern of advances and retreats'. Thinking through networks makes it possible to bypass what Turcato considers as false 'millenaristic' readings of anarchism that impede a clear understanding of how this movement really worked.¹⁰ According to Matthew Adams, 'the rhizomatic metaphor beloved by political theorists when discussing anarchism's ability to grow unperceived beneath the soil and then burst forth in unexpected ways, finds an echo in the inky tendrils that spread radical ideas around the globe'.¹¹ For Turcato, militants of Italian origin played a particularly important role in the formation of transnational anarchist networks since they, more than any others, circulated throughout the world as political exiles, economic migrants, or committed international propagandists. While the classic works by Pietro Di Paola focus on the exile networks of

⁸ H. Capel, *Filosofia y Ciencia en la Geografia Contemporanea*, Barcelona, 1981.

⁹ C. Bantman, B. Altena (Eds), *Reassessing the Transnational Turn: Scales of Analysis in Anarchist and Syndicalist Studies*, London, 2015; S. Hirsch, L. Van der Walt (Eds), *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870-1940: the Praxis of National Liberation, Internationalism, and Social Revolution*, Leiden/Boston, 2007.

¹⁰ D. Turcato, Italian anarchism as a transnational movement, 1885–1915, *International Review of Social History* 52 (2007) 408

¹¹ M. Adams, Memory, history, and homesteading: George Woodcock, Herbert Read, and intellectual networks, *Anarchist Studies* 23 (2015) 86.

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Italian anarchists in London, Kirwin Shaffer argues for the importance and complexity of Italian anarchist networks throughout the Americas, stressing an intense circulation of journals and militants between Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹² Nevertheless, I have taken to heart Adams's methodological warning not 'to fetishise the network as a means of analysis' by tracing every context and connection through the analysis of primary sources.¹³

In order to pursue this argument, in the first part of this article I analyse the spread of Reclus's ideas and writings in Italy thanks to Luigi Fabbri and his journal *Il Pensiero* and situate the Fabbri's readings of Reclus's work in their political and cultural context. In the second part, I examine Luce Fabbri's unpublished dissertation, focusing on its construction through Luce and Luigi's correspondence network, and discussing the originality of her research on Reclus. In the third part, I address Luce and Luigi's anarchist cultural production in Montevideo, stressing the importance of this city as a 'safe place' which allowed political exiles like the Fabbri to keep alive and spread their specific readings of Reclus and anarchist geographies.¹⁴

LUIGI FABBRI: TRANSLATING RECLUS AND NETWORKING

Within the history of anarchism, the constructive and social direction of the most famous Italian anarchist, Errico Malatesta (1853-1932), stands out for its voluntarism. This was often considered to be a strategy adopted in contrast to the more traditional anarchist communism of Pëtr Kropotkin and Élisée Reclus who acted especially in the fields of popular education and evolutionary science.¹⁵ Malatesta did not deny the importance of education, nor did he reject the evolutionary principle, yet he strongly defended the need

¹² P. Di Paola, *The Knights Errant of Anarchy, London and the Italian Anarchist Diaspora (1880-1917)*, Liverpool, 2013; K. Shaffer, Latin lines and dots: transnational anarchism, regional networks, and Italian libertarians in Latin America, *Zapruder World* 1 (2014) <http://www.zapruderworld.org/content/-r-shaffer-latin-lines-and-dots-transnational-anarchism-regional-networksand-italian>

¹³ Adams, Memory, history, and homesteading, 86.

¹⁴ See on this concept: S. Springer, A. Barker, G. Brown, A. Ince, J. Pickerill, Reanimating anarchist geographies: a new burst of colour, *Antipode* 44 (2012) 1591-1604; S. Springer, Anarchism and geography: a brief genealogy of anarchist geographies, *Geography Compass*, 7 (2013) 46-60.

¹⁵ G. Kearns, The political pivot of geography, *The Geographical Journal* 170 (2004) 337-346; E. Reclus, *Évolution, Révolution et l'Idéal Anarchique*, Paris, 1891.

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for anarchist organising in order to construct liberating social relations and actively pave the way for revolution, rather than relying on humankind's evolution.¹⁶ Luigi Fabbri met the great revolutionary in 1897 when the latter, clandestinely back in Italy, was hiding in the house of Cesare Agostinelli in Ancona, near Luigi's hometown of Fabriano. Luigi was then twenty years old and was so thoroughly versed in Reclus's and Kropotkin's texts that Malatesta affectionately called him 'our educationist'.¹⁷ Fabbri, the eminent protagonist of the twentieth-century Italian anarchist movement, is considered in some ways Malatesta's spiritual heir, and he always strove for a synthesis between Kropotkin's and Reclus's thought and the path Malatesta followed. This is evidenced in the pages of the journal *Il Pensiero*, produced by Fabbri (and Pietro Gori) in Rome between 1903 and 1911, and considered by historians 'the greatest and most prestigious Italian anarchist periodical of those years'.¹⁸

When *Il Pensiero* appeared, there already existed several Italian translations of Reclus's work. These had been produced from as early as 1884 and included a complete edition of the *New Universal Geography*, edited by Attilio Brunialti; translations of the famous books *History of a Stream* and *History of a Mountain*; and various editions of his principal political work, *Evolution, Revolution, and the Anarchist Ideal* (1891).¹⁹ Nonetheless, Fabbri, through *Il Pensiero*, was the first to attempt a series of systematic translations of Reclus's texts for the purposes of propaganda and education. He did so in collaboration with another Italian admirer of Reclus, Luigi Molinari, the Milanese publisher of the *Università Popolare*, and a correspondent and friend of Fabbri.²⁰

¹⁶ G. Berti, *Errico Malatesta e il Movimento Anarchico Italiano e Internazionale*, Milan, 2003.

¹⁷ Luce Fabbri, *Luigi Fabbri, Storia di un Uomo Libero*, Pisa, 1996, 37. All texts quoted from Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and French sources have been translated by the author.

¹⁸ G. Cerrito, *Dall'Insurrezionalismo alla Settimana Rossa: per una Storia dell'Anarchismo in Italia, 1881-1914*, Florence, 1977, 53.

¹⁹ F. Ferretti, Traduire Reclus: l'Italie écrite par Attilio Brunialti, *Cybergeo*, 2009, <http://www.cybergeo.eu/index22544.html>

²⁰ Amsterdam, International Institute of Social History (from here forward, IISH), Luigi Fabbri Papers, 128, letters from L. Molinari to L. Fabbri. L'*Università popolare* was an anarchist journal drawing on popular education and alphabetization as means to foster social revolution.

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Between 1903 and 1912, Fabbri published in Italian at least twenty-seven articles and pamphlets by Élisée Reclus, as well as an obituary, commentaries and some texts by his brother Élie Reclus. Massimo Ortalli notes that Reclus's *Evolution and Revolution* was 'already translated by Giovanni Domanico, but evidently in a way unsatisfactory to Fabbri, who would do a new translation himself'.²¹ Domanico wasn't a very popular figure among the anarchists, in fact he was suspected of being a police informer, however it is important to emphasize that Fabbri's dedication to producing his own translations should be seen not as the preoccupation of a meticulous philologist, but rather as an indication that he saw such translations as important to his political work.²² Each translation would, as the field of translation studies suggests, give a different 'sense' of the text.²³ This was strategic for Fabbri, whose periodical was published during the years when he stood at the centre of efforts to reorganise the anarchist movement after the end of the First International, a period which was characterised by individualist tendencies in the movement. Fabbri's translations of Reclus, who was one of the most prestigious international anarchists, were produced to reflect the concerns of the day.²⁴ For example, there is the article 'On disputes between comrades' in which Reclus adopted an 'ecumenical' tone, soliciting mutual tolerance among anarchists active in different fields of social struggle, and setting out how debate should proceed: 'Not a single angry diatribe; listen to the arguments of your adversaries; lay out along with yours those that seem serious, and for the rest keep quiet and reflect'.²⁵ Fabbri translated it on the occasion of the 1907 Rome Anarchist Congress, with the aim of creating an alliance of anarchists that could rise above divisions in the movement.²⁶ Another example is Reclus's text 'Report to the International Congress of the Jura Federation in Fribourg (3-5 August 1878)', given that this historical Swiss organization, the *Fédération jurassienne*, active from 1871 to 1880, was considered a model for a future federation of

²¹ M. Ortalli, *Il Pensiero e altre pagine: l'avventura editoriale di Luigi Fabbri*, in: M. Antonioli, R. Giulianelli (Eds), *Da Fabriano a Montevideo*, Pisa, 2006, 166.

²² M. Antonioli, G. Berti, S. Fedele, P. Iuso (Eds), *Dizionario Biografico degli Anarchici Italiani*. Pisa, 2003-2004.

²³ M. Lederer and S. Seleskovitch, *Interpréter pour Traduire*, Paris, 1993.

²⁴ Luigi Fabbri, *Influenze Borghesi sull'Anarchismo*, Milan, 1998.

²⁵ E. Reclus, A proposito delle polemiche fra compagni, *Il Pensiero* 12 (1907) 182.

²⁶ Cerrito, *Dall'Insurrezionalismo* This led in the end to the establishment of the first regional anarchist federation in Lazio.

anarchists.²⁷ Fabbri's intention was clearly to claim the legacy of Reclus's works for his camp against other trends like Marxism or individualism. Thus, Fabbri stated that 'Reclus established the solid bases of the anarchist-socialist idea. With Pëtr Kropotkin and Carlo Cafiero, he gave to anarchism a scientific and rational base more important than in the works of their instructor in common, Mikhail Bakunin. They were the first theorists of revolutionary and communist anarchism, as far from the authoritarian communism of Karl Marx as from Max Stirner's individualism'.²⁸

Fabbri also used his profound knowledge of Reclus's work to expose the Italian-speaking public to his specific readings of it for propaganda purposes. This was the case, in 1905, with his translation of the first pages of *L'Homme et la Terre* and an article on the 'Proposal for the abolition of the Christian era'.²⁹ Both of these concerned topics inserted within the rational templates of evolutionist science which anarchist geographers could use as a conceptual base for the construction of a non-dogmatic knowledge opposed to religious beliefs.³⁰

Indeed, a letter sent by Reclus to Fabbri in 1904 from Brussels, a year before Reclus's death, demonstrates that the two corresponded, and that the old geographer greatly appreciated *Il Pensiero*. As he wrote, 'I regularly receive *Il Pensiero* which you so kindly send to me; I am struck with the care with which it is written, and I thank you for this in the name of our shared ideas'.³¹ The other renowned anarchist geographer, Pëtr Kropotkin, also wrote to Fabbri to congratulate him on this publication.³²

²⁷ J. Guillaume, *L'Internationale, Documents et Souvenirs (1864-1878)*, Paris, 1905-1910; E. Reclus, Rapporto al Congresso internazionale della Federazione del Giura in Friburgo (3-5 agosto 1878), *Il Pensiero* 23 (1910) 343-344.

²⁸ Luigi Fabbri, Eliseo Reclus, *Il Pensiero* 14 (1905) 212.

²⁹ E. Reclus, Nuova proposta di sopprimere l'era cristiana, *Il Pensiero* 3 (1905) 162-163.

³⁰ F. Ferretti, *Élisée Reclus, pour une Géographie Nouvelle*, Paris, 2014.

³¹ IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 144, E. Reclus to L. Fabbri, 6 June 1904.

³² IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 103, P. Kropotkin to L. Fabbri, 30 July 1906.

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Mon cher Monsieur, conformément
à votre demande, j'ai écrit
au directeur de la Revue, que
je connais seulement de nom
et par correspondance, et sur
lequel je n'ai aucune
influence.

Je reçois très régulièrement
"Il Pensiero" que vous avez
l'obligeance de m'envoyer, et
je remarque avec quel soin
il est dirigé, ce dont je vous
remercie au nom de nos idées
communes.

Très cordialement
Eliade Reclus
26, rue Vilain XIV.
Bruxelles.

Fig. 1 Letter Reclus sent to Luigi Fabbri, IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 144, 6 June 1904. Only the signature is in Reclus's hand, since, in his final years, he frequently dictated his letters when he was too ill to write.

Fabbri kept in touch with Reclus's family after his death, endorsing the publication of Reclus's letters by Louise Dumesnil-Reclus and corresponding with others close to him such as the Belgian historian and anarchist Jacques Mesnil.³³ Following the demise of *Il*

³³ IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 4, L. Dumesnil to L. Fabbri, 25 July 1911.

"Reading Reclus between Italy and South America: translations of geography and anarchism in the work of Luce and Luigi Fabbri", *Journal of Historical Geography*, Volume 53, July 2016, Pages 75–85, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305748816300445> Page 9

Pensiero and the traumatic experience of the First World War, which interrupted the movement's publications, Fabbri continued to bring out works by Reclus, releasing in 1921 the Italian version of Kropotkin's *Words of a Rebel* with an introduction and notes by Reclus, and publishing in 1925, in the journal *Pensiero e Volontà* edited by Malatesta, commentaries on Reclus's letters and a translation of his early text *Le développement de la liberté dans le monde* [The development of liberty in the world] (1851), in which the French geographer wrote for the first time of anarchy as 'the highest expression of order'.³⁴ Fabbri also corresponded with the editor of the first large collected volume in English on Reclus, Joseph Ishill. Indeed, Ishill suggested that they collaborated, arguing that 'I think it is necessary to bolster the anarchist literature with the ideas of Élisée Reclus by way of a compact and comprehensive volume. If you like, please send me an article about this apostle of liberty, our friend Reclus'.³⁵ The relationship between Fabbri and Ishill continued during Luigi's stay in South America and their correspondence show that it was Ishill who suggested that Fabbri write his famous biography of Malatesta.³⁶ Nevertheless, the projected article on Reclus was never sent, since Fabbri had to leave Italy to go into exile in France.³⁷ As Ortalli points out, Fabbri was compelled to leave his extensive personal library in the house of an Italian friend, from where it was partially dispersed during the Second World War. Nevertheless, more than a thousand volumes from Fabbri's library have recently been discovered by Ortalli in a private archive. These, together with the collection of Fabbri's periodicals now held in the Archiginnasio Library in Bologna, confirm the international and multilingual nature of the Fabbri's intellectual interests.³⁸

Luigi Fabbri was, therefore, actively engaged in producing 'performative translations' as political activism. As a result, his multilingualism and his international concerns were

³⁴ Luigi Fabbri, A proposito di uno scritto giovanile di Élisée Reclus, *Pensiero e volontà* 2 (1925) 378-380; P. Kropotkin, *Parole di un Ribelle* [prefazione di Luigi Fabbri; introduzione e note di E. Reclus], Milan, 1921.

³⁵ IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 100, J. Ishill to L. Fabbri, 20 April 1924; J. Ishill (Ed), *Élisée and Élie Reclus: in Memoriam*, Berkeley Heights (N.J.), 1927.

³⁶ IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 100, L. Fabbri to J. Ishill [1930]; L. Fabbri, *Malatesta*, Naples, 1951.

³⁷ Manfredonia, *La Lutte Humaine*, Paris, 1994.

³⁸ L. Montanari, Il fondo Fabbri, *L'Archiginnasio* 13-14 (1968-1970) 1-48; M. Ortalli, *La Biblioteca Perduta di Luigi Fabbri, Mille Titoli di Editoria Sociale (1871-1926)*, Bologna, 2015.

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central to his production of anarchist propaganda. His work popularized in Italy the attempts of geographers like Reclus and Kropotkin towards the construction of anarchism on a scientific basis.³⁹ Through this intellectual and political work, Luigi came to his own synthesis between Reclus's work and Malatesta's voluntarist idea of anarchist organization. In the next section I explain how Luce followed the same path, going further in her analysis and interpretation of Reclus's geography.

LUCE FABBRI READING ELISEE RECLUS

Luigi's daughter Luce, who remained in Italy to complete her university studies when her parents left for exile, decided to undertake a dissertation on Reclus's geography. In Luigi's biography, which Luce wrote many years later, reading Reclus is presented as an activity she shared with her father: 'For several months, Reclus's collected letters remained on my and my father's desks. That literature left me with so much enthusiasm that I decided to do my thesis on the geographic work of Reclus'.⁴⁰ Luce Fabbri's subsequent work on Reclus is a particularly good example of David Livingstone's argument that 'knowledge usually does not move around the world as an immaterial entity' and helps stress the importance of reconstructing the materiality of knowledge in transit by drawing on what Robert Mayhew sees as the materialist hermeneutics of the spaces of the book.⁴¹ As I will demonstrate, the transnational frame of the printed word's circulation around Luce Fabbri's dissertation provides an important new example for the geographies of the book and their 'histories of active readers'.⁴²

In 1919 the Fabbri family had moved to Bologna, the seat of the oldest university in Italy, where Luce would spend her adolescence. After August 1926, when she was only eighteen, Luce found herself alone, knowing that it was likely that she would also have to go into exile once her studies were over. Here, another of Luigi Fabbri's friends and

³⁹ P. Pelletier, *Géographie et Anarchie*, Paris, 2013.

⁴⁰ Luce Fabbri, *Luigi Fabbri*, 151.

⁴¹ Livingstone, Science, text and space, 391; Secord, Knowledge in transit; R. Mayhew, Materialist hermeneutics, textuality and the history of geography: print spaces in British geography, c.1500-1900, *Journal of Historical Geography* 33 (2007) 466-488.

⁴² M. Ogborn, C. Withers (Eds), *Geographies of the Book*, Farnham/Burlington, 2010, 20.

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correspondents played a decisive role: Max Nettlau (1865-1944), the first great historian of anarchism, who was preparing his extensive biography of Reclus during those same years. Since the days of *Il Pensiero* Luigi Fabbri had sought out Nettlau as an advisor on the history of the movement. From that time forward, Nettlau helped Fabbri to remain up-to-date on international debates.⁴³ On 17 April 1926 Luigi Fabbri wrote to Nettlau requesting assistance for his daughter's dissertation.⁴⁴ The following month Fabbri thanked the Austrian historian for sending the first materials, and added that Luce 'will without doubt consult your book when it is published, and that will be useful as well for her studies of German'.⁴⁵

As is signalled here, as in Luigi's library, a fundamental aspect of the Fabbri family's readings, interpretations and publications of Reclus's work was that they happened in and through a variety of languages. Multilingualism characterised transnational anarchism, such as for the Italians who emigrated to the Southern Cone and to Brazil.⁴⁶ It was also the case for Luce Fabbri. Studying French and German at the same time, she gained access to a range of sources, particularly the work of Reclus and the most advanced secondary literature. Nettlau, known as 'the Herodotus of Anarchism', was the organiser of one part of the Reclus family archives and of the collections now held at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. His monograph on Reclus, quickly translated into Spanish, is still the most complete and erudite biography of the anarchist geographer, although Luce claimed not to have had time to obtain the published volume before defending her dissertation.⁴⁷ As we will see, Luce later also wrote in Spanish for the publications which contributed to the diffusion of Reclus's ideas, and her own, in Latin America. Owing to her life of exile and political persecution she experienced what Claudio Minca calls, for international migrants in present-day

⁴³ IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 17, 134, 257, letters of M. Nettlau to L. Fabbri.

⁴⁴ Luigi Fabbri, *Epistolario ai Corrispondenti Italiani e Esteri (1900-1935)*, Pisa, 2005, 132.

⁴⁵ Luigi Fabbri, *Epistolario*, 135.

⁴⁶ C. Romani, *Oreste Ristori: una Aventura Anarquista*, São Paulo, 2002.

⁴⁷ IISH, Luce Fabbri archives, 181, notes and clippings; M. Nettlau, *Élisée Reclus: Anarchist und Gelehrter (1830-1905)*, Berlin, 1928; M. Nettlau, *Eliseo Reclus: Vida de un Sabio Justo y Rebelde*, Barcelona, 1928-30.

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academia, ‘the condition of living in incessant and permanent translation between two or more cultural universes’.⁴⁸

Luce’s personal biography was very important in preparing her first scholarly work, and, beyond the text of the dissertation itself, the main sources for analysing the two years she spent on it are the autobiographical recollections collected by Margareth Rago and the letters Luce sent to Luigi, who was then in France.⁴⁹ The academic and activist dimensions were clearly related to the affective and intimate sides of the author, and thus the figure of Reclus, described as a scholar who dedicated his life to the struggle for ‘justice and love’, appears to be a kind of substitute for her absent father, just as the anarchist networks of solidarity constituted an adoptive family for Luce while she waited to be reunited with her own family outside fascist Italy.⁵⁰

Moreover, a key point for understanding Luce’s work is the difficult material circumstances that she faced as she tried to assemble her thesis on Reclus. The sources enable us to follow the movement of almost every item included in her bibliography and to appreciate that the assistance afforded her by the activist networks she was involved in was not trivial. These connections can be reconstructed thanks to the determination with which Luce sought research materials from her correspondents. Thus, from exile in France, Luigi continued to meet with descendants and relatives of the anarchist geographer, such as his nephew Paul Reclus, who was among Luigi’s ‘Paris friends’.⁵¹ Luce then asked her father to request new materials from those concerned, writing that ‘I would like you to ask Paul Reclus for the materials from the annals of Reclus’s life and work mentioned in that letter Nettlau wrote to me’.⁵² Here she was probably referring to the work put together by Ishill, which Luce at first confused with an article by Patrick

⁴⁸ C. Minca, Venetian geographical praxis, *Society and Space* 18 (2000) 287.

⁴⁹ Rago, *Entre a História e a Liberdade, Luce Fabbri e o Anarquismo Contemporâneo*, São Paulo, 2000.

⁵⁰ IHHG, Luce Fabbri Archives, 180, L. Fabbri, *L’Opera Geografica di Eliseo Reclus*, Bologna, 1928, R. Università di Bologna, Facoltà di lettere, Anno Accademico 1927-28, tesi discussa sotto la direzione del prof. R. Mondolfo [typed document], 99.

⁵¹ Fabbri, *Epistolario*, 172.

⁵² IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 6, Luce Fabbri to Luigi Fabbri, 25 January 1928.

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Geddes published in the *Scottish Geographical Magazine*.⁵³ She was interested as well in the talks given by Reclus at the *Université Nouvelle* in Brussels.⁵⁴ However, a letter from Luigi to the Swiss anarchist Carlo Frigerio is perhaps the clearest example of the circulation of materials that Luce used. From Vincennes (Paris), Luigi Fabbri wrote to Frigerio in Geneva urgently requesting that he locate in a Swiss library a copy of the article by Paul Girardin and Jean Brunhes about Reclus published in 1906 in the *Revue de Fribourg*, and that he ‘copy or summarise the article ... or if the journal is in the library, ask some friend to copy the text entirely and send it to me’.⁵⁵ This text arrived in Bologna from Switzerland via Paris, and some years later an unpublished Italian translation of it, probably by Luce, arrived in the archives in Amsterdam by way of Montevideo, with a hand-written note about a ‘text to be resent to the author’.⁵⁶ As well as demonstrating the Fabbri’s methods this suggests the intriguing possibility that Jean Brunhes, himself a rather original French geographer then residing in Paris, who felt a real sympathy with Reclus, was also involved in this exchange of materials.⁵⁷

The same archival folder of Luce’s materials also contains twenty-five typed pages of as yet unpublished letters from Reclus, mailed principally between 1877 and 1878 to the internationalist Rodolphe Kahn in Lausanne. Kahn was the editor of the magazine *Le Travailleur*, which proved to be a very important periodical for the formation of Reclus’s exile networks in Switzerland.⁵⁸ Now that these original letters are accessible in the Reclus archives that Max Nettlau left to the IISH, it is easy to deduce that they formed part of the materials that Nettlau himself sent to Luce from Vienna.⁵⁹ In this way, the young student could count on exceptional sources for her dissertation. This contrasted with the paucity of direction she received in her department from mediocre and

⁵³ P. Geddes, A great geographer: Élisée Reclus, *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 21 (1905) 490-496 548-555.

⁵⁴ IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 6, Luce Fabbri to Luigi Fabbri, 5 December 1927.

⁵⁵ J. Brunhes, P. Girardin, La vie et l’œuvre d’Élisée Reclus (1830-1905), *Revue de Fribourg* 37 (1906) 274-287 355-365; Fabbri, *Epistolario*, 210.

⁵⁶ IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 33, Manuscripts of and on Élisée Reclus.

⁵⁷ In the Brunhes archives there are letters from Reclus where he explains some principles of anarchism. I thank Florence Deprest (Univ. Paris 1) for this information.

⁵⁸ Ferretti, *Élisée Reclus*.

⁵⁹ IISH, Élisée Reclus Papers, letters from E. Reclus to R. Kahn, 1877-1878.

compromised professors involved with fascism, and whom Luce complained about to her father in her letters. One professor, who she doesn't name but who taught the 'History of the *Risorgimento*', advised her to read the *Elements of Sociology* by Herbert Spencer, 'so that I have an introduction to the political ideas of Reclus. I laughed at this and don't think I'll follow his advice'.⁶⁰ Advising a young anarchist to read a liberal thinker in order to learn about Reclus was practically an insult! Another example is a letter where Luce is ironic regarding an obituary of Reclus by 'an Italian geographer' (Filippo Porena) who praises Reclus's geography while wondering if 'those awful political tendencies of Reclus are the fruit of deficiencies of mind or character'.⁶¹ Luce mocked the conclusions of the conservative Italian geographer and stressed Porena's ignorance of Reclus's biography: 'According to the author (and I must acknowledge his great benevolence...) it can't be mental deficiency and therefore it is a matter of [Reclus's] weak character. He ends by restating that Reclus was present at the destruction of the Vendôme column!'⁶² The irony for the anarchist correspondents was clear. Given that that episode from the history of the Paris Commune occurred on 16 May 1871 when Reclus had already been imprisoned for several weeks by the people of Versailles.⁶³ In these letters between father and daughter, what clearly stands out is the compatibility between two scholars who, though holding no academic titles, were nonetheless refined intellectuals who could laugh at the ignorance of some established academics, following in the footsteps of the great anarchist geographers who had created knowledge through networks outside academia and its institutions.⁶⁴

Among the positive exceptions in the academic world Luce cited the Bolognese geographer Carlo Errera. As she put it, 'Every time I speak with him I get excited. He suggested books to accustom me to the sphere of geographic studies.... I also spoke with Errera about Metchnikoff ... he wrote to the Geographic Society [of Rome] for them to

⁶⁰ IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 6, Luce Fabbri to Luigi Fabbri, 19 November 1927; IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 6, Luce Fabbri to Luigi Fabbri, 5 December 1927.

⁶¹ IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 6, Luce Fabbri to Luigi Fabbri, 27 November 1927.

⁶² IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 6, Luce Fabbri to Luigi Fabbri, 27 November 1927.

⁶³ P. Lissagaray, *Histoire de la Commune de 1871*, Bruxelles, 1876.

⁶⁴ Ferretti, *Élisée Reclus*.

send a copy'.⁶⁵ She was referring to *La civilisation et les grands fleuves historiques*, a work which had great importance for the development of the ideas of the anarchist geographers.⁶⁶ Luce's interest in figures like Léon Metchnikoff (1838-1888) demonstrates the depth and sophistication of her research. Her search for information about this forgotten author engaged none other than the elderly Errico Malatesta, who answered Luigi that he knew nothing about Metchnikoff's biography. Nonetheless, he added that 'I read the book at the request of Kropotkin, later I read it again and still found it most interesting'.⁶⁷



⁶⁵ IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 6, Luce Fabbri to Luigi Fabbri, 19 November 1927.

⁶⁶ L. Metchnikoff, *La Civilisation et les Grands Fleuves Historiques*, Paris, 1889.

⁶⁷ IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 112, E. Malatesta to Luigi Fabbri, 7 November 1927.

Fig. 2 Luce Fabbri with Errico Malatesta in 1921 (Rago, 2000a, 259)

Luce Fabbri's working methods show, as Robert Mayhew has argued, that 'the author is not a lone figure making a book, but is enmeshed in a whole set of relations'.⁶⁸ This can be applied both to Nettlau and to the Fabbri and demonstrates that this is not just a matter of relations between authors and publishers, as has been studied by Mayhew, but, in this case, of networked collaborations between scholars for militant purposes. The exchanges between the Fabbri and the international authors addressing Reclus's geography and biography allow us to follow in some detail the social interactions lying behind their readings of Reclus's work. As Innes Keighren points out, an archaeology of reading practices needs 'careful excavation of archival sediment (readers' letters, diaries and marginalia) and the shifting of a hermeneutic matrix to reveal the fragile and fleeting echoes of the interaction of reader and text'.⁶⁹ As I explain in the next section, the material and situated conditions in which Luce Fabbri read Reclus can help explain the originality of her approach.

The first Italian dissertation on Reclus

Luce Fabbri's final thesis was a scholarly work based on abundant documentation. It had a range of strong arguments in spite of inevitable lacunas due to the youth and isolation of the author. Luce's strength in addressing Reclus's work came from being an anarchist militant from a family where anarchist theory and history were daily addressed. This profound knowledge of Reclus's historical and ideological contexts allowed her to avoid the limitations of later readings of the anarchist geographer. For example, some of the authors who rediscovered Reclus in France and Italy in the 1970s and 1980s, like the geographers of the *Hérodote* group, were less familiar with the history and concepts of anarchism and thus failed to acknowledge the consistency between Reclus's anarchism and Reclus's geography. They suggested a sort of schizophrenia between these two

⁶⁸ R. Mayhew, Denaturalising print, historicising text: historical geography and the history of the book, in: E. Gagen, H. Lorimer, A. Vasudevan (Eds), *Practising the Archive: Reflections on Method and Practice in Historical Geography*, London, 2007, 27.

⁶⁹ I. Keighren, Geographies of the Book: review and prospect, *Geography Compass* 7 (2013) 751.

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aspects of Reclus's work, a vision which has been vigorously challenged by a more recent literature.⁷⁰ In Luce's work, in contrast, these aspects are analysed together and it is even possible to consider her thesis as the first academic research addressing Reclus's geographical work in its political context.

In the first section of Luce's thesis she addressed Reclus's biography. In the second section she attempted to insert his ideas into the geographic thought of their time, arguing that 'the man, the thinker, the geographer, the artist of words, constituted in Reclus such an inseparable unity that no one aspect can be understood without the others'.⁷¹ In the opening pages she paid close attention to Reclus's early education and his first adventures, as in her reference to a trip that the brothers Élie and Élisée made when they were more or less the same age that Luce was then. This, she wrote, 'gives us a measure of their youthful freedom from worries: one day they set off walking to go see the Mediterranean.... This escape to the sea and freedom wasn't forgiven by the rector of the university'.⁷² Luce's strong empathy with Reclus, and even something like an identification with him, is clear and repeats the fascination that Reclus repeatedly brings out in those studying him.⁷³

An original element of Luce's analysis was her willingness to put Reclus' geography into its places, contexts and social networks. She was, for instance, interested in the relationship between Reclus and the nineteenth-century Italian *Risorgimento*, a movement that strongly mobilised geographers in the cause of national liberation, along with anarchists and socialists.⁷⁴ Reclus visited Italy during the years of unification, and Luce stresses the importance of the letters where he 'speaks with enthusiasm about this movement of an entire people for its liberation'.⁷⁵ In the same way, Luce analysed the

⁷⁰ F. Deprest, *Élisée Reclus et l'Algérie Colonisée*, Paris, 2012; Ferretti, *Élisée Reclus*; Pelletier, *Géographie et Anarchie*.

⁷¹ IISH, Archives Luce Fabbri, 180, L. Fabbri, *L'Opera Geografica di Eliseo Reclus*, 2.

⁷² IISH, Archives Luce Fabbri, 180, L. Fabbri, *L'Opera Geografica di Eliseo Reclus*, 23.

⁷³ C. Brun, Introduction, in: E. Reclus, *Les Grands Textes*, Paris, 2014, 19-52.

⁷⁴ F. Ferretti, Inventing Italy. Geography, Risorgimento and national imagination, *The Geographical Journal* 180 (2014) 402–413.

⁷⁵ IISH, Archives Luce Fabbri, 180, L. Fabbri, *L'Opera Geografica di Eliseo Reclus*, 23

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role of Reclus, together with figures such as Mikhail Bakunin, in the building of the international anarchist movement, and most significantly argued for the importance of anarchist networks in the construction of the *New Universal Geography*. Luce especially cites, beyond Kropotkin and Metchnikoff, the role of Charles Perron (1837-1909), a cartographer for the *New Universal Geography*, and of Reclus's editorial secretary Gustave Lefrançais (1926-1901), 'who took part in the Commune and authored a memoir that is very important for knowledge of French life under the second Empire'.⁷⁶

Despite her admiration for Reclus, the young Luce was neither naive about nor simply an apologist for the great man. She also made her own criticisms and personal interpretations of his work, as in the case of Reclus's critique of two-dimensional maps. Thus, while she observed that, for Reclus, 'maps, in the effort to stretch a curved surface onto a plane, establish reality in a way that falsifies it not only for the public, but also for specialists', his criticisms of such maps were 'exaggerations,' considering maps useful instruments under certain circumstances.⁷⁷ While she may have underestimated the importance of Reclus's critique of cartography, something stressed in more recent interpretations, it does reveal her independence of thinking about a figure of the highest prestige in her networks.⁷⁸

In the second part of the dissertation, dedicated to Reclus as a geographer, the importance of Luce's connection with Nettlau and her use of the German sources is evident. Contrary to various francophone interpretations of the following decades, Luce perceived clearly the fundamental importance of Carl Ritter (1779-1859) to the theoretical construction of Reclus's geography. Already in 1927 she was writing to Luigi about how marvellous it was to have discovered Ritter: 'I will have to occupy myself with Ritter a great deal, because he has enormous importance, more than Reclus, in the field of geographic

⁷⁶ IISH, Archives Luce Fabbri, 180, L. Fabbri, *L'Opera Geografica di Eliseo Reclus*, 23.

⁷⁷ IISH, Archives Luce Fabbri, 180, L. Fabbri, *L'Opera Geografica di Eliseo Reclus*, 47-48.

⁷⁸ F. Ferretti, Pioneers in the history of cartography: the Geneva map collection of Élisée Reclus and Charles Perron, *Journal of Historical Geography* 43 (2014) 85-95.

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thought'.⁷⁹ Luce began to ask herself what the theoretical foundations for Reclus's geography were, believing that if he didn't write large doctrinal geographical tracts 'this didn't mean that he didn't address these problems'.⁸⁰ As a first response, she pointed to the great theoretical and methodological importance that Reclus gave to the work of Ritter, to which she dedicated some dozen pages. In order to defend the coherence of the genealogical link between Ritter and Reclus, Luce emphasised Ritter's ties with Enlightenment thinkers, especially authors such as Rousseau and Pestalozzi who were also important references for Reclus.

It is important to understand that the context for writing this work — the University of Bologna in the 1920s — conditioned its content. One example of this is the disproportion between German geographers and representatives of French human geography in the bibliography of the dissertation. This derives essentially from the greater prestige of German geography, especially that of Friedrich Ratzel, in the Italian academy during this period.⁸¹ Many works by German authors, including various Italian translations of Ratzel, were available to Luce in the library of the Institute of Geography at the University of Bologna, whereas geographers such as Vidal de la Blache and his disciples were never translated, and their original editions were rarer in the libraries of Bologna. Thus the works of Ratzel are frequently cited in Luce's thesis as works of reference on Ritter and the theoretical concerns of geography. Another effect of place, a sign of the general disregard of Vidal de la Blache's geography in Italy at that time, is the reference to Jean Brunhes (and not Vidal) as the greatest representative of French *Géographie humaine*.⁸² This consequence of place is not politically neutral, in that Brunhes practiced a rather original form of 'social geography', compared to the other French geographers and his empathy with Reclus has already been signalled.⁸³

⁷⁹ IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 6, Luce Fabbri to Luigi Fabbri, 5 December 1927.

⁸⁰ IISH, Archives Luce Fabbri, 180, L. Fabbri, *L'Opera Geografica di Eliseo Reclus*, 54.

⁸¹ M. Proto, Giovanni and Olinto Marinelli, *Geographers, Biobibliographical Studies* 33 (2014) 69-105.

⁸² IISH, Archives Luce Fabbri, 180, L. Fabbri, *L'Opera Geografica di Eliseo Reclus*, 72.

⁸³ M.C. Robic, *Les petits mondes de l'eau: le fluide et le fixe dans la méthode de Jean Brunhes, L'Espace Géographique* 16 (1988) 31-42.

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Luce also points out in the work of Reclus what researchers today call ‘intersections and cross-fertilisation’ between history and geography, and their genealogies, on the one hand in Ritter and Ratzel, and on the other in French intellectual history.⁸⁴ What is important here is her comparison between Reclus and Jules Michelet (1798-1876), a historian who gave ‘the highest consideration’ to geographic factors, while ‘the last work of Reclus, on historical geography or even history as based in geography, is titled *L’Homme et la Terre*’.⁸⁵ The reconstruction of the links between geography and history in France was made following the work of Lucien Febvre, particularly *La terre et l’évolution humaine* (1922), which was highly valued by Luce. Her use of it was a continuation of the indirect dialogue which Reclus and Febvre maintained at a distance, as shown by recent research.⁸⁶

Luce Fabbri’s conclusion on the genealogy of Reclus’s geography was that the anarchist geographer added two fundamental elements to Ritter’s principles — evolutionism and anarchism — which allowed him to distance himself from Ritter’s original Christian inspiration, an interpretation which appears very close to current ones.⁸⁷ ‘Thus’ for Luce, ‘Reclus isn’t a disciple of Ritter in a strict sense, but it can be said that he was a true student and continuer of him, because he critiques and supersedes his master’.⁸⁸ What Luce emphasised in her conclusion was the humanistic value of Reclus’s geography. She often insists on the idea of love, a word that is repeated various times in her thesis, as it was in the propaganda of Malatestian anarchists as well. The anarchist and anticolonial ideas of Reclus are presented by Luce from the perspective of these elevated sentiments, and it is worth pointing out that this was a context — in 1928, in Italy — where all anarchist and socialist publishing was already prohibited under the *leggi fascistissime* of

⁸⁴ N. Verdier, Les relations entre histoire et géographie en France: tensions, controverses et accalmies, *Storica* 40 (2009) 64-114.

⁸⁵ IISH, Archives Luce Fabbri, 180, L. Fabbri, *L’Opera Geografica di Eliseo Reclus*, 77; IISH, Archives Luce Fabbri, 180, L. Fabbri, *L’Opera Geografica di Eliseo Reclus*, 82.

⁸⁶ F. Ferretti, Anarchism, Geo-History and the origins of the *Annales*: rethinking Élisée Reclus’s influence on Lucien Febvre, *Society and Space* 33 (2015) 347-365.

⁸⁷ Ferretti, *Élisée Reclus*; Pelletier, *Géographie et Anarchie*.

⁸⁸ IISH, Archives Luce Fabbri, 180, L. Fabbri, *L’Opera Geografica di Eliseo Reclus*, 83.

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1926-1927.⁸⁹ As Luce argued, ‘In all Reclus’s writings there vibrates a sympathy with oppressed peoples, with the black slaves, with the Amerindians destroyed by white barbarity in the name of civilisation, with the exploited Chinese migrants. This feeling of love, true and deep love, and not simply for show, which characterises every page of Reclus, is perhaps the salient character that distinguishes his work from other scientific works’.⁹⁰ Again, Luce anticipated some aspects of recent research on these topics.⁹¹

Rodolfo Mondolfo (1877-1976), an antifascist philosopher, was the only professor willing to be Luce’s advisor. He would also soon leave Italy for exile in Argentina, where many years later he would again meet his old student. Mondolfo was originally from Senigallia, in the same region as the Fabbri family. Indeed he was a friend of Luigi, as some of his letters make clear, and he understood the difficult position Luce was in at that moment.⁹² Luce recounted moments of complicity between Mondolfo and the handful of antifascist students, always disguised in order to shield themselves against the repression to which they could have been subject.⁹³ As she recollected to Rago, ‘he gave us classes in which he read, for example, I recall one time, a few pages about freedom in Spinoza which brought us to tears. The fascists didn’t notice fortunately, and this created a tacit line of communication between professors and students’.⁹⁴

Luce’s choice of thesis topic was, therefore, clearly a political act, a protest against the obligation to ‘pass many of my best years in an environment where one doesn’t breathe, where I feel all my intellectual abilities and all the force of my enthusiasm atrophy for lack of an object to which to apply them’.⁹⁵ As she commented years later when speaking with Margareth Rago, ‘I chose it also because I was under fascism and wanted to do

⁸⁹ L. Di Lembo, *Guerra di Classe e Lotta Umana. L’Anarchismo in Italia dal Biennio Rosso alla Guerra di Spagna (1919-1939)*, Pisa, 2001.

⁹⁰ IISH, Archives Luce Fabbri, 180, L. Fabbri, *L’Opera Geografica di Eliseo Reclus*, 98-99, 102.

⁹¹ F. Ferretti, They have the right to throw us out: the Élisée Reclus’ *Universal Geography*, *Antipode* 45 (2013) 1337-1355.

⁹² IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 130, R. Mondolfo to L. Fabbri, 20 September 1922.

⁹³ M. Rossi, *Arditi non Gendarmi! Dalle Trincee alle Barricate: Arditismo di Guerra e Arditi del Popolo (1917-1922)*, Pisa, 2011.

⁹⁴ Rago, *Entre a História e a Liberdade*, 71.

⁹⁵ IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 6, Luce Fabbri to Luigi Fabbri, 27 December 1927.

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something'.⁹⁶ As a result, dramatic moments from her thesis defence before a hostile committee, and the ridiculousness of academic power allied to fascism, stand out in her autobiographical account. Luce's defence took place in a climate of high tension. She wrote later that 'Mondolfo told me that when they closed the door to deliberate, there was unanimity among the professors, minus the dean: it was ten with honours and the dean said, "Oh no, with honours no: this young woman is a communist..." and afterwards they wanted to give honours to a much weaker student, but a fascist. They didn't give me honours, because I wasn't a fascist. I didn't worry about it, I wanted to pass'.⁹⁷ According to Rago, 'The dean was furious with her, since at the beginning of the ceremony, when everyone was to salute the fascist regime three times, extending one's arm in the form of the Roman salute, the young anarchist made only a slight movement of her head, clearly revealing her rejection of the regime, leading the dean to label her a "communist", while antifascist colleagues recognised a new ally'.⁹⁸ The anecdote about '*signorina comunista*' was proudly retold in a letter from Luigi Fabbri to Nettlau.⁹⁹

Thus, Luce, in spite of her youth and inexperience, not only furnished one of the first contextual readings of Reclus's work, but she also constructed a clever strategy for communicating political issues within a situation of censorship and repression. Like the exponents of the 'pure geography' of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries discussed by Franco Farinelli and Claudio Minca, Luce foresaw the possibility of using geography to circulate radical political ideas even in the face of political obstacles. As Rago observes, in Luce's thesis 'the political intent in studying an anarchist author is clear. It was certainly quite a strategic way, given that geography seemed to be a less politicised and compromising science. In this sense, [Luce] made use of the study of Reclus to diffuse her anarchist positions, at a time of extreme political censorship'.¹⁰⁰ As I explain in the next section, geography was also one of the first instruments Luce used once she

⁹⁶ Rago, *Entre a História e a Liberdade*, 72.

⁹⁷ Rago, *Entre a História e a Liberdade*, 75.

⁹⁸ Rago, *Entre a História e a Liberdade*, 75.

⁹⁹ Fabbri, *Epistolario*, 231.

¹⁰⁰ F. Farinelli, *I Segni del Mondo*, Florence, 1992, 100; C. Minca, Humboldt's compromise, or the forgotten geographies of landscape, *Progress in Human Geography* 31 (2007) 179-193; Rago, *Entre a História e a Liberdade*, 74.

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was free to express and publish her ideas in Latin America. The fact that the chapters of her thesis, in the original Italian version or translated into Spanish, became articles for anarchist journals in the Southern Cone, shows that her attempts to elude fascist censorship within Italian academia finally succeeded.

GEOGRAPHY, EXILE AND TRANSNATIONAL ANARCHISM

With her thesis behind her, it was again the international anarchist networks that helped Luce to clandestinely expatriate herself in order to be reunited with her parents in France. Having passed the Swiss frontier under a false name, she travelled to Geneva where the famous anarchist Luigi Bertoni (1872-1947), the editor of the bilingual journal *Il Risveglio / Le Réveil*, helped her to reach Paris. The Fabbri family, together with other Italian antifascist intellectuals such as Camillo Berneri (1897-1937), ‘the most expelled anarchist of Europe’, was continuously exposed to expulsions decreed by the various European governments under pressure from Mussolini’s Italy.¹⁰¹ Luigi was expelled from France in December of 1928 and, in April of 1929, after a few months in Belgium, the entire family departed for Uruguay, which seemed more tolerant. Cities such as Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and São Paulo were established destinations for Italian emigrants, among whom figures of transnational anarchism held significant roles. For several decades these cities had had a militant press publishing in Italian.¹⁰²

Luce nonetheless quickly learned to speak and write fluently in Spanish. 1930 was the centenary of the birth of Reclus, who already was a popular author for Spanish-speaking anarchists, and Luce published a series of articles about his life and geographical thought for the Uruguayan and Argentinian press, drawing from her thesis. These included both anarchist periodicals such as *La Protesta* of Buenos Aires, and less ideologically stamped journals such as *La Capital* of Rosario (Argentina) and *El Imparcial* of Montevideo.¹⁰³ During the same period she published extracts of the Italian text of her thesis in the first

¹⁰¹ V. Emiliani, Camillo Berneri: l’anarchico più espulso d’Europa, in: V. Emiliani (Ed), *Gli Anarchici. Vite di Cafiero, Costa, Malatesta, Cipriani, Gori, Berneri, Borghi*, Milan, 1973.

¹⁰² Romani, *Oreste Ristori*.

¹⁰³ M. Rago, Per una bibliografia di Luce Fabbri, *Rivista Storica dell’Anarchismo* 7 (2000) 21-32.

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issue of the journal that she founded with Luigi in Montevideo, *Studi Sociali*, which became the most important Italian-language anarchist journal in Latin America, and a point of reference for the entire milieu of exiled antifascists. These articles were praised, from ten thousand kilometres away, by Malatesta himself, who wrote to Luigi, ‘Give my congratulations to Luce Fabbri and “Luisa Ferrari” [one of her pseudonyms] for the articles about Reclus’.¹⁰⁴ It is worth stressing that, as Shaffer shows, these transnational journals ‘were primarily organisational tools that disseminated ideas and news with anarchist critiques for local and national readers’.¹⁰⁵

If, on the one hand, Luce distanced herself from geography as a discipline — in Uruguay she established herself as a professor of Italian literature at the University of Montevideo — on the other, her intellectual and political involvement with Reclus’s themes remained considerable and helps to explain the particularities of the cultural exchange being analysed here. Following the death of her father in 1935, Luce remained one of the major intellectual figures in world anarchism, and her influence was important in several ways. If in the hispanophone world of the early twentieth century Reclus was widely recognised and translated, the majority of works published about him came from Spain, and not from Latin America. Luce contributed to bolstering interest in the geographer and to filling the greatest bibliographical lacuna, taking on for a Buenos Aires publisher the task of editing a Spanish translation of Reclus’s correspondence, the work she so much loved. The decision to publish Reclus in Spanish marked a clear departure in relation to the publications in Italian destined for international circulation between exiles who spoke that language. Here the potential circulation included the entire popular public of Latin America.

Luce’s translation of the correspondence came out in 1943 without the preface that she had prepared.¹⁰⁶ Although it is not clear why this text wasn’t included when the work appeared (even if a part of it had already been published in 1936 in the Argentinian

¹⁰⁴ IISH, Luigi Fabbri Papers, 112, E. Malatesta to Luigi Fabbri, 6 June 1930.

¹⁰⁵ Shaffer, Latin lines and dots.

¹⁰⁶ E. Reclus, *Correspondencia (de 1850-1905)* [selección a cargo de Luce Fabbri], Buenos Aires, 1943.

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journal *Nervio*), a complete manuscript survives in Amsterdam. These notes in Spanish are fundamental to understanding Luce's interpretation of Reclus's work, to assessing its transit through Italy and Latin America and to understanding how these ideas were spread during Luce's stay in Uruguay. First, Luce's text includes the only explicit comparison between Reclus and her other great intellectual passion, the Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837), for whom she would become one of the principal specialists as a historian of literature.¹⁰⁷ As she said, 'It is good, even necessary, that before the total pessimism of a Leopardi, who considered nature to be like a cruel and indifferent stepmother and men powerless slaves, pawns to blind destiny, and suffering the supreme law of life and the cosmos, we have the sound illusion-free optimism of a Reclus, who in the immensity of the planet sees, reduced to their proper proportions, the rivalries and miseries of the human ant, and discerns for him inexhaustible possibilities of a free and dignified life'.¹⁰⁸ The Fabbri's original hometown of Fabriano was not far from Recanati, the city of Leopardi, who was a foundational intellectual in the formation of nineteenth-century Italian philosophy, and a point of reference for all Italian humanist culture. This was especially the case on the left, and in the circles tied to the *Risorgimento*, he being both a republican and an atheist. Comparing Reclus to Leopardi was a decisive moment in the translation of Reclus's ideas through Italy and on to South America.

Second, this text explicitly addressed the transition from the naturalism of the German tradition of *Naturphilosophie*, which strongly inspired Reclus, a passionate reader of the *Naturphilosophen* Friedrich Schelling and Lorenz Oken, to the voluntarist humanism of the Italian cultural tradition, a transition that also characterised a militant generation.¹⁰⁹ Luce declared all of this when she wrote that 'one may question his [Reclus's] tendency, very common in the culture of the last century permeated with scientism, to identify human phenomena with natural phenomena'.¹¹⁰ This was a step further on from her

¹⁰⁷ L. Fabbri, *La Poesia di Leopardi*, Montevideo, 1971.

¹⁰⁸ IISH, Archives Luce Fabbri, 181, Introducción a la correspondencia de Eliseo Reclus.

¹⁰⁹ Dunbar, *Élisée Reclus Historian of Nature*; F. Ferretti and P. Pelletier, *L'Homme et la Terre*, l'aboutissement d'une trilogie, in: E. Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre*, Lyons, 2015, <https://books.openedition.org/enseditions/5166#access>

¹¹⁰ IISH, Archives Luce Fabbri, 181, Introducción.

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father's work in seeking a synthesis of the naturalistic anarchist communism of Reclus and Kropotkin and the humanistic voluntarism of Errico Malatesta. In Luce's texts, this was aligned with her attempts to reach a synthesis between the anti-naturalist pessimism of Leopardi and the evolutionary optimism of Reclus, contributing to the anarchist movement's shift from a political perspective influenced by natural philosophy to a perspective that included nature in the wider frame of a humanist and voluntarist approach.¹¹¹

Third, this text also demonstrates Luce's feminism, which is still internationally influential among anarchist feminists.¹¹² We know that Reclus participated in the first associations for women's emancipation, and that he was sympathetic to the feminists of his time.¹¹³ Luce identified in Reclus a fundamental element of her feminism, the coherence between one's ideas and one's personal life.¹¹⁴ This inspired her to give the collection of his writings and letters she translated into Spanish the title 'The Intimate Élisée Reclus' (although the more traditional title of *Correspondencia* was finally used). She aimed to probe his personality and see just 'how much the man and the anarchist merged in him, forming a harmonious moral union'.¹¹⁵ This confirms once again how intimate Luce's relationship was with Reclus. As she put it, 'during two years of painful solitude in an environment of submission and servility, Reclus was for me the light that guides the way and the pure air that detoxifies'.¹¹⁶

If Bologna had been fundamental to Luce's interpretation of Reclus, then I would argue that Montevideo was equally important for the consolidation of these ideas and their use in building a militant and organisational dimension to anarchism. The Fabbri followed the classical road of Italian transnational anarchism towards the Americas. Once there, they continued there to engage with Reclus's work and to circulate in Latin America their

¹¹¹ Fabbri, *Storia di un Uomo Libero*, 31-38; Berti, *Malatesta*, 769-780.

¹¹² M. Rago, Luce Fabbri, o anarquismo e as mulheres, *Textos de História* 8 (2000) 219-244.

¹¹³ F. Ferretti, A Reclus feminist geography: an historical evaluation of the relationship between anarchism and feminism in later 19th century France, *Historical Geography* [forthcoming].

¹¹⁴ M. Rago, Luce Fabbri, o anarquismo e as mulheres, 239.

¹¹⁵ IISH, Archives Luce Fabbri, 181, Introducción.

¹¹⁶ IISH, Archives Luce Fabbri, 181, Introducción.

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own readings of it, in order to tackle political challenges of the moment. The importance of this place lays first in the possibilities it gave. In the 1930s and 1940s, in what she herself called ‘happy Uruguay’, Luce Fabbri remained safe from the storms of war and totalitarianism which devastated the European anarchist movements and left them little time for deeper analysis of contemporary realities.¹¹⁷ It was in Latin America that Luce developed her reflections on Reclus thanks to this situation of safety and her appointment at the University of Montevideo. Second, the Southern Cone was a traditional place of migration for international anarchists and a strong anarchist movement existed in Montevideo, as well as in Buenos Aires. Malatesta’s ideas were already widespread and the prestige of the Fabbri was fully acknowledged.¹¹⁸ This gave them the possibility of a broad audience and the chance to spread their ideas across Latin America. After publishing Reclus’s correspondence, Luce continued to cite him, but she no longer dedicated specific works to him. This may have been due to her lack of access to primary sources due to her peripheral position, the loss of the family's huge library and the war's fracturing of the international networks that had previously sustained her. Nonetheless it is worth noting that despite this Reclus’s ideas continued to be developed in Luce’s work in new ways throughout her militant and antifascist activism in Uruguay. She lived there from 1929 to 2000 and, in an extensive scholarly and activist bibliography, addressed the topics of education, decentralisation and the relationship between society and nature.¹¹⁹

CONCLUSION

According to current literature on geography and translation, an international, cosmopolitan and multilingual sphere is far from being realized in the discipline and it is not only textual, but also cultural, translation of concepts that still poses problems.¹²⁰ In

¹¹⁷ Rago, *Entre a História e a Liberdade*, 91.

¹¹⁸ Fabbri, *Storia di un Uomo Libero*.

¹¹⁹ Rago, *Entre a História e a Liberdade*, 318-340; Rago, Per una bibliografia di Luce Fabbri. It is worth noting that Luce’s legacy is still important in the Southern Cone and also in Brazil, thanks to Rago’s works and to the rediscovery of Reclus which characterized Brazilian geography in last years, as showed for instance by the international conference organized in 2011 at the University of São Paulo, <https://reclusmundusnovus.wordpress.com/>

¹²⁰ Desbiens, *Speaking in tongues*; Desbiens and Ruddick, *Speaking of geography*; Fall and Minca, *Not a geography of what doesn’t exist*; Minca, *Venetian geographical praxis*. Nevertheless, it is worth acknowledging important efforts in this sense like those witnessed by the recent 2015 International “Reading Reclus between Italy and South America: translations of geography and anarchism in the work of Luce and Luigi Fabbri”, **Journal of Historical Geography**, Volume 53, July 2016, Pages 75–85, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305748816300445> Page 28

this sense, Luce Fabbri's difficulty finding French books in the (then fascist) University of Bologna, which were eventually provided by militant circuits, is an example of how the establishment of national academic schools hampered the internationalisation of knowledge, a difficulty acknowledged by recent French research on early International Geographic Congresses.¹²¹ Instead, the multilingual circulation of 'knowledge in transit' produced by the Fabbri took place both at the level of reading and that of transmission. To borrow the definition advanced by Juliet Fall and Claudio Minca, Luce and Luigi Fabbri never missed the opportunity to promote 'dialogue and contamination' through the international circulation of knowledge in their political and intellectual field.¹²² The material conditions of their work show how transnational militant networks were a better vehicle for multilingual knowledge creation than the local academies, which were often cradles of narrow-minded nationalism.

If the Fabbri are an example of located and materialist hermeneutics, the lesson of their example lies in the non-institutional conditions in which they worked and in their specific constraints. As suggested by the pioneering work in the history of the book by Lucien Febvre and Henri Martin, political and religious repression is a motive for the circulation of texts, which also develop strategies for bypassing these constraints.¹²³ As I have argued, the material context of these militant networks and the texts that were circulated and produced within them, framed the cosmopolitan and multilingual ways in which anarchism and geography were brought into a rich and enduring dialogue, involving not only geographic thought, but also the connection between geography, social critique, progressive political movements, and the defence of civil and scientific liberty.

Conference of Historical Geographers, see: A. Reyes Novaes, Celebrations and challenges: the international at the 16th International Conference of Historical Geographers, London, July 2015, *Journal of Historical Geography* 50 (2015) 106–108

¹²¹ M.C. Robic, À propos de transferts culturels. Les congrès internationaux de géographie et leurs spatialités, *Revue germanique internationale* 12 (2013) 33-45.

¹²² Fall and Minca, Not a geography of what doesn't exist, 556.

¹²³ L. Febvre and H. Martin, *The Coming of the Book: the Impact of Printing 1450-1800*, London/New York, 1990.

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This research confirms the importance of networks, circulations, contexts and places in the production of geographic knowledge, and, in particular, the centrality of militant contexts to understanding the work of anarchist geographers. The importance of the biographical (and geographical) trajectories of these intellectuals and militants also stands out, confirming, as Withers puts it, ‘the double importance of geography for biography and of the geography of biography for determining the place of biography in geography’.¹²⁴ Luce Fabbri’s biography explains why she produced one of the first scholarly works which did not dissociate Reclus’s geographic work from his anarchist works, being herself both a scholar and a militant.

Finally, this paper has also shown the importance of places like Bologna and Montevideo in shaping one of the key contributions of the Fabbri’s reading, translating and writing about Reclus in Italy and Latin America. That is the production of a version of anarchist thought more based on voluntarism and humanism than on naturalism. This was produced in an encounter with Italian concerns and constraints (the thought of Leopardi and the restrictions of the fascist university) and realised thanks to the ‘safe place’ Montevideo provided, allowing Luce Fabbri to fully elaborate her ideas.

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