



European Research Council
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**ÉCOLE FRANÇAISE
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PREWARAS
• THE DARK SIDE OF THE BELLE ÉPOQUE •
PRE-WWI ARMED ASSOCIATIONS

Armed groups, organized violence and the Euro-Mediterranean spaces (1870-1914)

Introduction

Within the framework of the European Research Council (ERC) project “The Dark Side of the Belle Époque. Political Violence and Armed Associations in Europe before the First World War” (<http://www.dissgea.unipd.it/erc-prewaras>, PI prof. Matteo Millan), the Università degli Studi di Padova – Department of Historical and Geographic Sciences and the Ancient World – and the École Française de Rome (EFR) will be holding an international workshop in Rome (EFR) on 23 January 2019. This scientific event aims to create an original dialogue, both comparative and transnational, around a topic that is relatively new for the period 1870-1914, namely armed groups. This subject will be considered in relation to political violence and with a relatively flexible geography: Euro-Mediterranean spaces, understood in a broad sense. By focusing on armed groups and their forms of legitimization, action and organization, the study of political violence can empirically deepen our knowledge of the so-called “State monopoly of legitimate violence”. Armed groups and their forms of legitimacy were not unrelated to the power of the State, even though these groups were not integrated into national armies (at least, not directly). The main question to be addressed is the relationship between armed groups and the legitimate use of violence, by analyzing similarities, differences, transfers and their influences on the social world at large (associations, coteries, clans, the nation, etc.), throughout the Euro-Mediterranean region between 1870 and 1914.

Chronology

The period under examination extends from the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Strong industrial and commercial developments led to these two major conflicts, and sprung from them. The period 1870-1914 is also marked by an expansion of mass participation in political, social and cultural processes. Within this context, the tensions and contradictions inherent in industrial, imperialist and nationalist growth are linked to those affecting the legal framework. The notion of the “Belle Époque” lends this period a positive connotation of peace and progress. Actually, forms of organized violence were widespread and the use of weapons became a major transnational phenomenon.

Furthermore, armed groups were often marked by tensions between public and private spheres, within social constellations that should be analyzed in all of their diversity.

Geography

The Euro-Mediterranean spaces are situated at the crossroads of various national and imperial constructions. In addition to the Italian, Iberian and Balkan peninsulas, these spaces include North Africa and the Near East, where the First World War put an end to the power of the Ottoman Empire. In addition, empires or political entities which were not directly located in the Euro-Mediterranean region often sought to affirm their interests there through armed groups and political violence. Projections, overlaps and transfers could occur, linking external (colonial) and internal (metropole) spaces via armed groups. Again, the geography of Euro-Mediterranean spaces was a flexible and plural one.

Typology

Among the various types of armed groups operating in the Euro-Mediterranean spaces between 1870 and 1914, we can mention: the civic guards or militias, the colonial militias or police, and nationalist armed groups. The distinction between these various types of groups were not necessarily rigid, nor is the above list an exhaustive one. One element that helps define these armed groups is their degree of institutionalization between official and officious powers. The guards and civic militias include, for example, the guards or urban patrols (“pattuglie / guardie cittadine”) of the Paduan Plain or the henchmen (“mazzieri”) of the *mezzogiorno* who operated in the Kingdom of Italy, but also the armed Somatén of Catalonia in the Kingdom of Spain. Various militias and the first “Goums” of the French Empire, or the Hamidiyes of the Ottoman Empire, are examples of colonial police forces and militias. Possible examples of nationalist armed groups include the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), the Comitadjis of Bulgaria and Macedonia, and the strikebreakers linked to the National Federation of the Jaunes of France, who were particularly active in harbor cities like Marseille.

Topics

The key topics to be analysed and discussed will be the relationship between public and private dimensions, the legal framework (gun licenses, self-defence, etc.) and political violence. Forms of militarization and para-militarism will be also examined, as will forms of mobilization and association. Furthermore, attention will be paid to the fears and emotions related to the dominant conceptions of social order, to the emergence of forms of organized violence and to the metamorphosis of the uses of the monopoly of legal violence. When examined in relation to armed groups, the Euro-Mediterranean spaces will allow us to better understand how the legal approach laid at the heart of imperial dynamics interacting with various forms of nationalism in arms. These questions can be addressed through an analysis of specific case studies corresponding to particular armed groups, but also through studies based on related topics. For example, thematic analyses might concern the arms trade in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The list is open, the key point being to explain how the proposed papers can shed light on the political violence perpetrated by armed groups, on their actors

and practices, forms of sociability and rituals, symbols and languages, which will help us to better understand the complexity of the phenomenon.

Practical information

Applications (an abstract of 500 words indicating the research question, case-study and/or topic, sources and methodology, plus 200 words introducing the author) must be submitted by 10 September 2018 to the following address: romain.bonnet@unipd.it. At the beginning of October 2018, the organizers will inform the applicants of their choice. Toward the end of 2018, papers of around 8,000 characters (including spaces) will be circulated among the participants. English, French and Italian will be the languages used. Accommodation for the participants on the nights before and after the workshop (22-23 and 23-24 January 2019) will be provided by the organizers, along with a contribution to cover travel expenses.

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