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Quentin Deluermoz, *Commune(s) 1870-1871: une traversée des mondes au XIXe siècle*. Paris: Seuil, 2020. 431 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, and indexes. €25.00 (pb). ISBN 9782021393729.

Review by Pamela Pilbeam, Royal Holloway, University of London.

The global significance of the Paris Commune is the focus of this volume, the three parts of this new study interrogating its worldwide impact. Part one asks whether the Commune, July 1870 to May 1871, had global repercussions. Part two investigates what the Paris Commune itself signified. The final part considers to what extent the meaning of the Commune had been transformed by 1880.

The introduction defends the publication of yet another study of the Commune, 5000 accounts having already appeared by 2006. After the collapse of the USSR, the Commune ceased to be interesting as the antecedent of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. It became part of conventional history. In 2016, the National Assembly rehabilitated the Commune, discussing moving the remains of Louise Michel to the Panthéon: her name was bestowed on 409 roads and 190 schools. The introduction also lays out the main historical events. In the late 1860s, there was a notable escalation of public gatherings and talk of revolution. In September 1870, the Prussian invasion, the collapse of the Second Empire, the declaration of a republic and the siege of Paris by the Prussian army, led to a rapid expansion of the Parisian National Guard. Some districts of Paris experimented with auto-administration. Other people simply tried to keep going and adopted a wait-and-see approach. After four months of a dreadful siege and capitulation, elections produced an Assembly with a monarchist majority. The Assembly met in Versailles. Parisians felt humiliated, even more so when on 18 March the former monarchist minister Thiers, now head of state, sent in troops to the capital to remove National Guard cannons. The attempt was spontaneously rejected. On 28 March the Central Committee of the National Guard organised the election of a Commune, echoing assemblies already convened in Lyon, Marseille, Toulouse and Le Creusot. The seventy-nine members of the Paris Commune, declared “une révolution victorieuse.” The assembly included famous radical names such as François Jourde, Jules Vallès, Eugène Varlin and Raoul Rigault. For the first time ever, an elected body included thirty-three (41%), skilled workers. Every shade of radical opinion was represented, Blanquist, Proudhonist, Jacobin and especially radical and socialist republicanism. In the seventy-two days of its existence, the Commune met fifty-seven times. It abolished conscription, declared the separation of Church and State and the creation of lay, free, and compulsory primary schools. These were big changes. In addition, night work for bakers was banned. In their institutions and language, the Communards recalled the 1789 Revolution. People were “citizens.” The National Guard, officers elected by members, took a lead in running their districts. There was some auto-organisation, especially by vigilance committees. “Enemies of the people” were identified as *Versillais*, Prussians, big

landowners, clerics, and gendarmes (p. 11). In early May, despite objections, a Comité de salut public was declared.

Historians have varied in defining the significance of the Commune. Jacques Rougerie said it represented socialism and internationalist Marxism.[1] American historians spoke of the crisis of capitalism and modernity, although Gould rather emphasised the variety of urban conflict.[2] This study emphasises the contributions of Rougerie and Robert Tombs to the debate. Tombs noted the impact of military defeat, Rougerie the contributions of the democratic-socialist ideas of 1848-51 and of the Internationale.[3] In the 1990s, writers like Kristen Ross stressed the role of women.[4] Space became an issue, with focus on communes elsewhere, for instance Lyon and Thiers. Then came comparisons with colonial revolution in Algeria, insurrection in Martinique and transnational links.

Part one is concerned with global communes. Unlike 1848, the 1871 Commune did not directly inspire revolution elsewhere, but there were connections. Garibaldi led over 30,000 volunteers (1% of the total), some from Algeria, to fight the Prussians, a strategy of more symbolic than practical importance. There were transnationals like general Cluseret, who had fought the June 1848 rebels, some Arab Bureau officers like Dombrowski. But most foreign-born Communards were long-term Paris residents, such as the Hungarian, Leo Frankel. Members of the Internationale played a part. Originating in London in 1864 among Chartists and trade unionists, this small workers' movement was one of a number of contemporary movements focussing on international law, including the Red Cross (1863). International finance was emerging, with France and Great Britain controlling 90% of investments. The Franco-Prussian war and the Commune briefly interrupted international finance and trade, to the concern of Roman Catholic merchants beginning to trade with the Chinese in Tientsin, a port recently opened to western trade. Napoleon III used Algerian troops in the war of 1870-71. The Kabyles seized on this temporary weakness to revolt, but not in sympathy with the Commune.

A notable aspect of global issues was the expansion in these years of the press and press agencies, such as Havas (France 1831) and Reuters (Great Britain), steam navigation, and the telegraph. The completion of the Atlantic underground cable (1851) carried news in hours rather than weeks. There are fascinating maps (pp. 82-3) showing the speed and scale of international communication. The Commune was the first event that newspapers in distant Mexico, or the USA, were able to comment on hours rather than weeks later. The foreign press was concerned that the Commune represented the dissolution of the nation state. The Communards were aware that they had a world audience but were far too busy with their own affairs to try to connect globally. Part one makes no big claims for the universalism of the Commune.

Part two, "La Commune Vive", describes contemporary revolts elsewhere: Martinique, Algiers, Thiers, and Lyon. In September 1870, crowds in Martinique attacked a number of large estates and demanded that the republic be declared. In 1848, slavery had been abolished and the power of the governor increased. Mulattoes gained the vote, but the dominance of the white settlers remained. From 1855 to 1862, 10,000 labourers were brought in from India (p. 127) although some former slaves were obliged to continue to work on the estates. In December 1870, these former slaves rebelled. Rebel leaders were shot. The Martinique rebels had no links to the Paris Commune although they had similar aspirations. This is the first account of the Commune to touch on events in Martinique. In Algeria, *colons* declared a commune after news of the defeat of the French army in January 1871. In March, came a revolt by Kabyles. In France in March a festive revolt of the cutlery

workers in Thiers, encouraged by colleagues from Clermont, offered to help the Paris Commune (p. 136). A commune was declared in Lyon in September 1870 with support from the Internationale and, in March 1871, the municipal council offered help to their Parisian brethren.

Deluermoz, relying on Tombs and Rougerie, considers "Paris from below." Authorities in Versailles ordered officials in Paris to down tools, and several thousand left the capital. Their replacements were skilled workers, married and mainly in their thirties. Their political views varied. Place names changed. Saint-Denis lost its sacred status. Communards were keen to obey the law. Taxes were collected, post was delivered, *inventaires après décès* were compiled. But some priests were arrested and the homes of some wealthy citizens "pillaged." The bureaucracy was democratised, and hierarchical official titles abolished; "agent replaced 'brigadier.'" National Guard service was made obligatory for all males aged 19 to 40, some 180,000 men or 10% of the Paris population. A war culture developed. There was opposition to speculators. Goods such as carriages and horses were requisitioned, and owners were compensated. People recalled the lessons of democratic socialism in 1848.

Part two goes on to consider time and space. Symbols were changed, crosses taken down. Corridors in the Hôtel-de-Ville were given the names of revolutionaries such as Blanqui. The Communards accepted that these changes would be temporary. As in 1789, the city was taken over by its citizens. Communards believed they were represented the future, science and progress, holding ceremonies to renew revolutionary enthusiasm. There were no big massacres, Terror was shunned, and two guillotines were burned down. The Commune was hostile to religion, in opposition to Second Empire policy when twenty-two new churches had been opened. A similar number of church buildings were taken over, sometimes as meeting places, sometimes for storage, and some statues were destroyed. The Commune was neither twilight nor dawn, but constant movement. Paris was seen as the leading world-revolutionary city. Many people ignored the Commune and tried to live their lives as before.

Part three considers how the meaning of the Commune changed in the years to 1880. On 23 May hostages including archbishop Darboy were shot as a reprisal to the killing of the suspects by *Versillais* troops as they launched the invasion of Paris. The Commune ordered homes to be burned to hold back the invading troops. Tombs estimated a total of 238 buildings were set on fire. The Commune Assembly and the Central National Guard lost control and people defended their own streets. There was a notion that fire would purify and leave nothing for the troops. The soldiers were not rural hordes, but regular troops led by conservative officers, some of whom had served in Algeria, moved by social hatred. Men, women, and children were summarily shot or executed in improvised military tribunals. Perhaps 10,000 (not 30,000) were massacred by 100,000 troops in a very confined area within the ramparts. Paris was held in siege until 1876: the National Guard was abolished. In Marseille, three hundred were killed. In Thiers, in contrast, three leaders were voted onto the municipal council and another elected to the National Assembly. The trials of those arrested in Paris lasted for four years, and 93 were condemned to death, 251 to forced labour, nearly 5000 were deported, nearly 7000 imprisoned. Foreigners were most likely to be executed. Women and known criminals received the heaviest sentences; family men the lightest. By 1880, most prisoners had been amnestied (pp. 250-1). Paradoxically, one of the main effects of the Commune was to reinforce the liberal state which had survived an attempt to create a revolutionary government. In France, republicans and revolutionary practice were separated. The loi Dufaure declare the Internationale illegal. About 6000 Communards went into exile and the British refused extradition. The Parisian economy

recovered rapidly. By 1872, the *octroi* was back to the 1868 levels. Although the war had cost 2.5 billion francs, the French paid the 5 billion indemnity rapidly and recovered their position as second in world economic and colonial ranking.

What was the global perspective of the Commune? Most journalists reported on events from a Versailles angle. In June 1871, the Commune and the Internationale were seen as a barbaric menace to the civilised world. Reuters and the *Times* condemned the lack of respect for the law in the barbarism of the fires and the brutality of the massacres committed by the *Versaillais*. Journalists noted the fragility of civilisation, the attack on the Church and the plots of the Internationale. Among the plotters they included foreigners, criminals, and Communists in the Internationale. Marx's *Civil War in France* was widely read; three editions appeared in two months (p. 274). It was translated into Spanish and Italian. The French police blocked publication; a French version was published in Belgium. The Commune may not have been Marxist, but it made Marx's name. The debate on the Commune was conducted in English, in Great Britain and in the USA. The Russian anarchist Bakunin described the Commune as "la négation audacieuse bien prononcée de l'État" (p. 301). Speaking in the Reichstag the German social democratic August Bebel spoke of "le cri de guerre du prolétariat parisien" (p. 303). Exiles carried the news of the Commune to Bolivia, Argentina, Panama, Haiti, Chile, Mexico. Exiles also had some impact in the 1873 Spanish revolution which briefly made Spain republican. In 1869, a major insurrection in Cuba against Spanish rule led to a republic and the end of slavery.

In conclusion, the Commune was brief, expressed a variety of hopes, showed what might have been possible. It had transnational and global perspectives, less for the impact of the actual events than the new fast methods of spreading news. What did the spectre of the Commune signify? Above all the hope of changing the world. University students will benefit from this lucid and well-researched study that, in modest terms, sets the Paris Commune in a French, colonial and world context.

NOTES

[1] Jacques Rougerie, *La Commune de 1871* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2021).

[2] Roger Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[3] Robert Tombs, *The Paris Commune of 1871* (London: Longman, 1999).

[4] Kristin Ross, *Rimbaud, la Commune de Paris et l'invention de l'histoire spaciale* (Paris: Prairies Ordinaires, 2013).

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