This chapter seeks to explore a phenomenon within Uruguayan culture through the lens of soft power, as defined by Joseph Nye (1990, 2021). Orsini Bertani and Benito Milla were anarchist cultural agents who operated in Uruguay’s literary field at two key moments in the twentieth century. Both men were foreign to Uruguay, and both exerted their influence over local culture for a certain time period after having engaged with politics and culture in other countries. As anarchists, they participated in politics through their actions and words. In Uruguay, where they were not involved in direct military action, they took on plenty of critical work as agents, booksellers, publishers, printers, and magazine editors. This cultural work is what I’m interested in investigating through the notion of soft power. By analysing archive materials that allow us to address two specific life episodes in which the oscillation between hard and soft power is especially evident, I conclude that the latter concept is befitting when considering anarchist cultural internationalism, as embodied through these two agents who transited the local cultural field.

1 Two Anarchists in the Uruguayan Cultural Field

Orsini Bertani (Cavriago, 1869–Montevideo, 1939) was born in Italy, and after several stays in Argentina and France, he settled in Montevideo around 1902, where he published many authors of the “Generación del 900.” Meanwhile, the Spanish Benito Milla (Villena, 1918 – Barcelona, 1987) arrived in Montevideo in 1951, and through his magazines as well as his publishing house, Alfa, he ultimately shaped the “Generación crítica,” also known as the “Generación del ’45,” following his painful exile in France and Argentina. Both anarchists (Milla being a lifelong one while Bertani’s case was more complex, as we will see later on), were internationalists, multilingual, boasted transnational projects and

1 Here, I am following Karina Jannello (2018, 202), who acknowledges the lack of certainty around Milla’s birth date but nonetheless choses the year 1918, as, in an interview, he claimed to have been born that year.
contacts, and were on the frontlines of the anarchist battles of their times: Bertani during the so-called “anarchist terror” of the late nineteenth century in France, and Milla in the Spanish Revolution. Orsini Bertani was involved with illegalising French groups from 1892 to 1894, facing trial and condemnation in one of the world’s most paradigmatic cases against anarchists. Benito Milla actively participated in the anarchist bloc during the Spanish revolution, as a combatant and as secretary of Juventudes Libertarias (The Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth) within Durruti’s column from 1936 to 1937 (Peirats 2009, 345; Jannello 2018, 202), until his exile in Toulouse, where he continued his propagandist work. Both of these men’s publishing work in Montevideo was relatively short-lived, for about fifteen years each. In Bertani’s case, it spanned from 1902 to 1917, when his publishing house closed (though he participated in publishing work elsewhere, editing the magazine La Pluma, for instance). Meanwhile, Milla’s publishing work in the city unfolded from 1951 to 1967, when he moved to Venezuela. In these short years, their influence over vernacular culture and the ties they established with key foreign actors were quite notable.

However, studies focusing on the two’s roles as editors and actors in the Uruguayan cultural field (Torres Torres 2014, 2015; Rocca 2012, 2018) do not consider their “anarchist sympathies” in depth, and, in Bertani’s case, some of these studies even include serious mistakes regarding his anarchist affiliation. Recently, Karina Jannello’s research on Milla (2013, 2014, 2018) has repositioned his work within a well-defined ideological framework, while certain findings from my research on Bertani’s transit through France would allow us to reconsider his political position and transnational connections. In both cases, certain archival work\(^2\) can help reconstruct a significant portion of both their trajectories in order to consider how politics unfolded in their publishing work. The expansive Orsini Bertani, named after the Italian revolutionary who

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\(^2\) During a research stay financed by CSIC – Udelar en la Université Rennes 2, hosted by Joël Delhom, the following dossiers were reviewed: “Révolutionnaires et anarchistes italiens à Paris, jusqu’à 1911” (BA 913); “État nominatif des anarchistes italiens en fuite 1897” (BA 913); and “Procès intenté pour affiliation à une association de malfaiteurs dit Procès des Trente” (BA 1505), among others (Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris); as well as “Bertani, Orsini” (19940434/279) (Archives de la Sûreté Fonds Moscou – Archives Nationales, Paris) and “Bertani, Orsini” (4 M 493) and “Affaire relative au Cercle de la Méditerranée” (4 M 1246) (Archives Départementales des Alpes-Maritimes). More recently, regarding Benito Milla, I consulted the International Association for Cultural Freedom Records 1941–1978 – Hanna Holbron Gray Special Collections Research Centre in University of Chicago Library, specifically several boxes labelled “Series VI: Latin American Institute of International Relations (ILARI), 1954–1972.”
attempted to murder Napoleon III in 1858 with what would come to be known as the “Orsini bomb,” and the discrete Milla, whose past as a militia member was unknown to many of his clients and acquaintances in Montevideo, incarnated two forms of anarchist militancy through their work in the cultural field. While their paths never crossed in the city where they both lived (Bertani died a few years before Milla arrived in Uruguay) they both made their mark in terms of the cultural tradition they generated, which we may understand in terms of anarchist soft power.

2 The Orsini Bomb

Beyond a few isolated mentions of Bertani in the histories of anarchism (Suriano 2001; Zaragoza 1996) and in the anecdotal narrations of militants (Fabbri 2005; Camba 2015), the Italian printer and bookseller Orsini Bertani has also piqued the interest of several biographical researchers (Rocca 2012, 2018; Tarcus 2007) who have described him as a major actor in Uruguay’s turn-of-the-twentieth-century culture (known as the ’900) ever since he settled in Montevideo in the early twentieth century. Alongside his family, which became politicised in Italy, Bertani moved to Buenos Aires, where he took on militant activities in the anarchist realm from 1886 (Rocca 2018) to 1902. According to Diego Abad de Santillán (Tarcus 2007, 68), it was in that city that Bertani embodied “the soul of El Perseguido,” a multilingual individualist anarchist newspaper published from 1890 to 1897. The period he spent in France from 1892 to 1894, which has been briefly mentioned in the literature (by Ferrer 2017 and Rocca 2018, though the latter’s description of the dates and features are presumably erroneous), cannot be overlooked when reconstructing Bertani’s ties to transnational anarchism and his relationship to major actors in anarchist culture.

Understanding what motivated Bertani to return to Europe is no easy task, but police records – first in Nice and then in Paris – suggest that he took part in illicit activities in order to contribute to the anarchist cause. Notwithstanding the care with which such sources must be handled, these records, when combined with the press of the time, provide details on Bertani’s singular trajectory, which was nonetheless typical of the Italian anarchists who were in France at the time. This trajectory culminated with Bertani being tried in one of the French state’s most salient prosecutions of anarchists of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the Procès des Trente trial that unfolded in Paris in August of 1894 – in which the French judiciary attacked the anarchists’ top brass through
the *loi scélérately* — jointly processed some thirty anarchists. Thus, as France deployed a new judicial construct, namely, criminal association, Bertani was tied to the likes of Jean Grave, Sébastien Faure, and Félix Fénéon. He was accused of stealing and possessing stolen goods but was ultimately condemned for arms possession. Bertani was one of the only three people who were condemned in the process, and he was thus expelled from France.

By examining the French intelligence’s dossier on Orsini Bertani, we may note that the authorities already considered Bertani a person of interest in 1892. One report by Commissioner Court (1st Division, Maritime Alps region), presents him as “a militant anarchist who was very well known in Nice.”

The report provides dates and exact addresses regarding Bertani’s stays in Nice as well as details on the places and people he frequented, even though Bertani used a fake identity. This high level of surveillance must be understood within a broader framework. Italian immigration to the Maritime Alps had intensified for economic reasons, especially given the shared land border between the two countries. While most of the Italians who settled in the region were perceived as illiterate workers and artisans looking to survive, a few individuals who were identified as anarchists drew immense attention from the authorities. According to Gastaut (2007), this interest can be explained by the generalisation of attacks on French soil starting in 1890, especially with the bomb set off by François-Claudius Koe ningstein, also known as “Ravachol,” at the Véry restaurant in Paris on March 30, 1892, as well as the involvement of Italian anarchists in violent, high-impact events that marked French society: in 1894, the Italian anarchist Sante Caserio assassinated the president of France, Marie-François Sadi Carnot. The stereotype of the Italian, anarchist terrorist drew interest from the authorities, who coordinated several surveillance measures, some in cooperation with other countries. Bertani’s dossier in *Fonds Moscou* includes information on the communications between the French, Italian and Monacan authorities of the time regarding Bertani’s alleged illegal activities. Specifically, the accusation that Bertani forged currency — a claim that was printed in numerous reports but never proved — originated in the Italian Consulate, as Commissioner Court describes in the previously cited report. These

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3 This is what detractors of the law called it (*scélère* means scoundrel). It comprised three separate laws: that of December 12, 1893, which modified the prior press law, that of December 18 of the same year, on criminal association, and that of July 28, 1894, on the repression of anarchist associations.

records of police surveillance were key to Bertani’s arrest in March of 1984, in Paris, where he had moved the year prior.

It is possible that the reason Bertani moved to Paris had to do with his militant activities. In 1893, during a sweep at the offices of *La Révolte*, the police seized a letter in which Bertani was introduced to Jean Grave, dated December 23, 1893 (Davranche and Campanella 2021). Ten years before, the Russian anarchist Pyotr Kropotkin and the French anarchist Élisée Reclus had designated Jean Grave, a former shoemaker, as the director of the most widely read anarchist weekly in the world at that time, *La Révolte*, and Grave thus took the helm of its incredibly important literary supplement. Grave stood at the epitome of “immobile transnationalism” (Bantman 2017) and was a central node in a global network of militants that was structured through the exchange of writing, especially letters and the press. Even though, during the trial, Bertani claimed to know nothing of the letter (which, incidentally, cannot be found among the letters of Jean Grave that had been saved to date), its existence, and the consequent relationship among the two men, seems plausible. In fact, a few months before it was seized, in September of 1893, a brief article in *La Révolte* mentioned the newspaper that Bertani published in Buenos Aires, *El Perseguido*, noting how after its inauguration in 1890 it had increased its print run from 500 to 3,500.

In March of 1894, Bertani was arrested in his home in Paris, where the police found the plunder of a band of thieves under another anarchist, Léon Ortiz, who had also been arrested, as well as a woman who introduced herself as Bertani’s lover, the Italian Maria Zanini. These arrests took place amid a judicial process that was made possible by a series of laws that the French Parliament had just recently passed. As Joan Halperin recalls, the second *loi scélérate* grouped two different classes of anarchists affiliated to two separate modes of militancy – that is, the “ideologues” and the “de facto propagandists” (1991, 297–298) – under the same umbrella given their shared anarchist goals. These massive arrests (with more than 400 accused in 1894) led to the famous trial of August of 1894, demonstrating the State’s intention to legally establish a certain continuity between “bomb anarchists” and “idea anarchists” (Bantman 2014). In so doing, the difference between the exercise of hard and soft power crumbled, as the press, debates, and even anarchist songs were criminalised. Thus, the accused adopted the judicial strategy of attempting to reestablish the historic difference between the pen and the sword, and between the exercise of hard and soft power. With his acute sense of language, it was none other than Stéphane Mallarmé who, through a declaration at the trial in support of the art critic Félix Fénéon, questioned this

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5 Formerly, *Le Revolté*. 
umbrella grouping by appealing to a metaphor: “On parle, dites-vous, de détonateurs. Certes il n’y aurait pas pour Fénéon, de meilleurs détonateurs que ses articles” [“You are speaking, as you say, of detonators [explosives and detonators had been found in Fénéon’s office in the Ministry of War]. Of course, regarding Fénéon, there would be no better detonator than his articles”]. Féneon then reinforced this idea by pointing out that he only set off literary bombs (Halperin 1991, 418).

The side of “de facto propagandists,” the group composed of Ortiz and Bertani, among others, followed a parallel and opposite strategy, distancing themselves from anarchist thought as the origin of their actions: it was better to be seen as common delinquents than as illegalist anarchists. The press’s descriptions of Bertani’s interrogation show this. To the question of whether Bertani had already been involved in anarchist activity in Buenos Aires (the prosecutor bases this interrogation on the aforementioned letter to Jean Grave), Bertani replied that he did not know of the letter and alleged that he was part of an association for the study of social issues, nothing more. He called himself a wine seller and when asked, “Are you an anarchist?” he replied, “Si j’ai des convictions anarchistes je ne les ai jamais manifestées en France, et la loi française ne peut me condamner. Je n’ai jamais fait la moindre propagande, je suis un commerçant et voilà tout” [“Even if I were to have anarchist convictions, I never manifested them in France, and French law cannot condemn me. I never made the least bit of propaganda. I’m a merchant, and that is all”]. The strategy paid off, at least for the “ideologues,” who were absolved. The “delinquents” bore the brunt (several decades of forced labour for Ortiz and another accomplice, Chericotti), while Bertani was only sentenced to a few months in prison, which he had already completed while awaiting trial. In September of 1894, he was expelled from France and taken to the border with Belgium. This apparent judicial triumph did not imply that the “delinquents” eschewed political activity – quite the contrary. In fact, Ortiz published an anarchist newspaper in London, La Tribune libre, with a print run of 3,000 (Bantman 2013, 75) between 1890 and 1891, while also selling the goods he had stolen in France in the English capital. Ortiz’s activities in London, in which Bertani may have taken part, were directly related to financing the anarchist cause. Even Jean Grave,

6 “Interrogatoire de Bertani.” Gazette des tribunaux, August 8, 1894, year 69, n° 20890.
7 Constance Bantman traced Bertani’s presence in London to certain police sources that I have been unable to personally consult to date (Bantman 2007, 678).
who insisted that he did not know the delinquents at the trial, admitted, in his memoirs, that his actions may have financed anarchist propaganda (Grave 2009, 402). The division between action-taking and idea-based anarchists was thus quite blurry, even though the anarchists themselves attempted to draw the line at the trial. With this in mind, I would propose observing Bertani’s work as a cultural agent just a few years later, in Montevideo, in a different light. My goal is to understand the extent to which Bertani’s anarchism and the time he spent in France, in direct relation to the artifices of end-of-century anarchist culture, may have influenced his operation as an agent in Uruguay.

In 1902, Bertani was already living in Montevideo, where he owned the bookstore Librería Moderna and the press El Arte, while serving as the editor of O. M. Bertani ediciones from 1904 to 1917. His publishing work has been rightly described in terms of its three “facets” (Rocca 2018), among which his work as “editor of the 900,” publishing Delmira Agustini, Julio Herrera y Reissig, and Florencio Sánchez, among others, stands out. I would like to layer on another grid, spanning all of his activities as an agent, in which we might glean the mark of anarchism. For starters, as an editor, he published authors who identified with anarchism, either temporarily or permanently, such as Florencio Sánchez and Ángel Falco. Indeed, the influential Spanish-Paraguayan anarchist thinker Rafael Barrett published seven books at Bertani’s press. In 1911, Bertani also published a book by the Uruguayan Enrique Erserguer La anarquía ante la civilización: sociologías muy amargas. Second, while most of the foreign books in his catalogue aim to entertain (with four titles by Gastón Leroux and one by Maurice Le Blanc), Anatole France, who was much admired by anarchists, also featured one title, and, very notably, two of the libertarian French philosopher Jean-Marie Guyau’s works from 1889 were published in Spanish translation in 1912: Les Problèmes de l’esthétique contemporaine and L’Art du point de vue sociologique. The absence of other foreign books by anarchist thinkers can perhaps be explained by the abundance with which books published under the Valencian Sempere imprint circulated in Uruguay. As of 1900, Sempere published an astonishing amount of revolutionary and politically committed writers. At cheap prices and with haphazard translations, books by Bakunin, Kropotkin, Stirner, Proudhon, Nietzsche, and others “were in everyone’s hands, they’d reach the most humble homes, share the darkest little rooms, and would have a seat at the tables of all the bohemian cafés,” Zum Felde notes in his Proceso intelectual del Uruguay (Pérez de la Dehesa 1969, 251). This leads us to a third element: Bertani, a bookseller, would organise special sales at low prices (Zum Felde especially recalls a “famous sale” of Sempere books at 15 cents), with frequent book clearance sales (Rocca 2018). As a bookseller, he also promoted his bookstore and his publications in the
anarchist press; for instance, he paid for publicity in the social and literary magazine *Futuro*, published from 1904 to 1905.

In a movement he shared with many other anarchists (Virginia Bolten and Domingo Arena, for instance), after 1910, Bertani committed to the political-party movement behind José Batlle y Ordóñez, who would become the president and founder of modern Uruguay. This turn from anarchism to following Batlle (“batllismo”) was so pronounced and generalised that the phenomenon came to be known as *anarcobatllismo* (Peterson 2015). In the testimonies of two Italian-Uruguayan anarchist thinkers, Luigi and Luce Fabbri (cited in Rocca 2012), we may read that, in the 1930s, Bertani was already a public servant, having left militancy behind. However, he still considered himself an anarchist. In a letter to a well-known anarchist thinker and revolutionary, Errico Malatesta, Luigi Fabbri refers to Bertani’s past, in the 1890s, saying that “un tempo era molto cattivo (como individualista)” (“for a time he was very bad (as an individualist)”). Bertani’s trajectory from illegalist anarchy to following Batlle’s social politics (all while considering himself an anarchist at heart – even Luce Fabbri referred to him as a “quasi-compagno” or “quasi comrade”) no doubt has caused his contributions to the Uruguayan literary field to rarely be considered in political terms. However, by leaning into the concept of soft power, we may note that Bertani adopted this exercise of persuasion after having participated many other forms of exercising power that might not have been violent, but were definitely illegal. Though drawing conclusions on the political effects of cultural practices is always a risky endeavour, we may argue that, as an agent, Bertani exerted specifically anarchist influence through the publication and circulation of key volumes for the dissemination of such ideas.

3 The Discrete Don Benito

Benito Milla (Villena, 1918–Barcelona, 1987) has recently garnered attention from critics. Alejandra Torres Torres (2014, 2015) has mostly studied him in terms of his editorial work, rarely touching upon his political facet. However, Karina Jannello’s studies (2013, 2014, 2018) have contributed to reconceiving Milla’s role as a politicised “cultural organiser” (Jannello 2014, 99) while underscoring his relationship to anarchist networks as a decisive element of his trajectory (Jannello 2018, 80). Having committed to the Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth at a very young age by serving as its secretary within Durrutti’s column during the Spanish Civil War, he participated in various militant publications on the front, continuing such activities throughout his exile in
Toulouse. When the war ended, he went down the same path as many other Spanish people who had fled to France and taken shelter at refugee camps, in terrible conditions. He first went to Argentina and then, in the early 1950s, to Uruguay, where he launched a humble book-selling venture at one of the street plazas in downtown Montevideo. Slowly, Milla grew his business and opened a bookshop that would become a social and cultural centre, while staying involved with anarchist-leaning periodical publications. His first short-lived publication ran from 1951 to 1952, namely, *Cuadernos Internacionales*, with writers like Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Herbert Read, Max Nettlau, and “his personal friend Albert Camus, whom he’d met in Paris and with whom he frequently exchanged letters” (Fontana 2022). He subsequently published *Deslinde* (1956–1961), a magazine with even more intellectual Latin American and Uruguayan writers, like Ernesto Sábato, Octavio Paz, Mario Benedetti, and Emir Rodríguez Monegal. Among other publication ventures and collaborations with further magazines – for instance, in 1954, he collaborated with *Cénit*, a Spanish anarchist magazine published in France by Federica Montseny – from 1965 to 1968 he published the magazine *Temas*, with writers like Luce Fabbri, Günter Grass, Umberto Eco, Arnold Toynbee, and Susan Sontag (Fontana 2022). As of 1958, his publishing house, Alfa, with its nine collections (Torres Torres 2014) would become the main hub for Uruguayan writers belonging to Generation ‘45, such as Mario Benedetti, Idea Vilariño, and the generation’s “teachers,” such as Felisberto Hernández and Juan Carlos Onetti. It was at Alfa that Ángel Rama consolidated himself as an editor, at the helm of the “Letras de hoy” collection. This experience was key to his subsequent labour as editor in chief of another major Uruguayan publishing house of the time, Arca.

As with the latter case, I will focus my analysis on a specific time of this agent’s trajectory, allowing us to consider his actions in terms of soft power. This moment was key to cultural and political history, but the influence of anarchists therein has only begun to be taken into account. This period has been referred to as the Cultural Cold War, and in it, from Montevideo, Benito Milla proved a decisive actor, though he was often in the shadows. The notion of soft power has been used to describe the Cultural Cold War’s dynamics (Rodríguez Jiménez 2012), efficiently capturing not only the absence of military confrontation, but also and especially the production of cultural hegemony as a desired result. The setting of an agenda, positive attraction, and persuasion (Nye 2021) were key goals for the U.S. government at the time, and the country pursued them by adopting various strategies. One of these was the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), which was active for 18 years. The CCF has captivated researchers for three decades (Coleman 1989 and Stonor Saunders 1999), with more recent work focusing on its role in Latin America (Iber 2015). Indeed, over the last
few years, the literature has considered multidirectional flows in the circulation of transnational ideas, the overlap between these flows and the progress and setbacks in the spread of imperialist ideas in Latin America, and the roles of agents (Celentano 2021). A recent debate between the historians Marcelo Casals and Gilbert Joseph on the place that the study of this Latin American perspective and agency should have shown the extent to which the Cultural Cold War remains controversial (Celentano 2021).

Without a doubt, Benito Milla’s transnational and anarchist facet led him to approach the CCF, which was founded in 1950 with the goal of influencing the intellectual class in the post-war era in order to keep it from sympathising with the communist bloc. Born of a group of intellectuals who saw themselves as opposed to both Soviet and capitalist authoritarianism (with the likes of Karl Jaspers, John Dewey, Ignazio Silone, Bertrand Russell, Raymond Aron, Benedetto Croce, and Arthur Koestler, and more, among its ranks), its secretariat was in the hands of CIA agent Michael Josselson. Though rumours about the CIA’s control over the CCF’s programs and funds circulated from the beginning, it was not until Josselson resigned in 1967 that this affiliation was made clear. That same year saw attempts to salvage the organisation with funds from the Ford Foundation, as well as efforts to rebrand it as the International Association for Cultural Freedom (IACF), but the organisation only faltered until it ultimately dissolved. In its apogee, however, this was a global organisation with headquarters in Paris and dozens of offices around the entire world. It basically operated by financing cultural magazines, events, seminars, and scholarships.

Latin America gained special importance for the CCF after the Cuban Revolution of 1959. The sympathy that the revolution drew from hordes of cultural actors all across Latin America led the CCF to modernise its structures throughout the region. The Belgian Luis Mercier Vega (né Charles Cortvrint, 1914–1977) was assigned this task, as his relationship to the CCF dated back to the early 1950s. An anarchist and combatant, Mercier Vega was part of the Sébastien Faure Century contingent of the Durruti Column during the Spanish Civil War and was then briefly exiled to Latin America in the 1940s, thus coming to know the area well while cultivating his contacts in the region. This would make him the ideal director of the Congress’s Latin American department, which was technically but not practically separated from the CCF as of 1966, when it was rebranded as the Latin American Institute for International Relations (ILARI). Given their common experience in the Durruti Column, Mercier Vega and Milla cultivated a close friendship, leading the latter to join the CCF’s activities. Milla, who had disseminated the CCF’s publications as of the 1950s (Jannello 2018, 78), stood at the helm of the Comité Uruguayo de Promoción Social (CUPC), the CCF’s headquarters in Uruguay, as of 1965. Montevideo, where
Mercier had already opened a CCF office in 1962 (Iber 2015, 179), thus became a centre of operations, hosting a seminar on Latin American elites in 1965, and serving as a platform for the distribution of printed materials.

Though Milla’s relationship to the CCF spans from the 1950s to the late 1960s, I will focus on the 1966–1968 period, in which he became directly involved in the publication of the cultural magazine Mundo Nuevo. This magazine, considered by José Donoso as the founder and the voice of the “Latin American boom” (Albuquerque 2011, 21), was directed by the Uruguayan critic Emir Rodríguez Monegal and published in Paris with support from ILARI (that is, the CCF). The association between these two anarchists (Milla and Mercier Vega) as well as Rodríguez Monegal, who considered himself an independent intellectual, has been widely documented in the correspondence of the period preserved by IACF Records (Chicago University, Special Collections), as well as among the Emir Rodríguez Monegal Papers (Princeton University, Firestone Library). As of 1966, more information on the relationship between the CCF and the CIA emerged, and a general period of unease began for the CCF’s collaborators, who may or may not have known about their certain ties to the CIA. The actors’ degree of awareness of the fact, especially that of the three we are discussing here, is still the subject of debate. Mudrovic’s book on Mundo Nuevo (1997) suggests that the matter was altogether clear, which is also the case in Markarian’s work (2020, 175–176). Meanwhile, Iber (2015, 214) alleges that Mercier Vega (and consequently Milla and Rodríguez Monegal) had no idea that the CCF’s funds were tied to the CIA.

The debacle unfolded in two acts. First, in April of 1966, the New York Times published a series of articles denouncing the CIA’s ties to the CCF. The articles were translated and published around the world, and Montevideo was no exception. Ángel Rama, who harboured little sympathy for Rodríguez Monegal, published them alongside “an article loaded with venom” (letter from Benito Milla to Mercier Vega, May 9, 1966, IACF Records) in the weekly Marcha. From their respective posts, Mercier Vega, Benito Milla, and Rodríguez Monegal rushed to assure their colleagues and the outside public of the ILARI’s, CUPC’s, and Mundo Nuevo magazine’s independence. In a letter sent the following month (Benito Milla to Luis Mercier Vega, June 28, 1966, IACF Records), we may glean that this strategy paid off: “Today our activities are [being carried out] as usual,” Milla says, despite “the immense pressure that Ángel Rama is putting on Marcha.” He optimistically states that, “with that whole mess from the NYT [New York Times], we’ve ultimately lost a month’s work.” But a lot more work would be lost in the months that followed.

In its March 1967 issue, the US magazine Ramparts published a report on the CIA’s secret financing of civil associations, mainly including the National
Student Association (NSA), but also alluding to the CCF (Sol Stern, “A Short Account of International Student Politics & the Cold War with Particular Reference to the NSA, CIA, Etc”). The way this news was received in Montevideo, as Milla describes in a letter to Mercier Vega dated May 2, 1967 (IACF Records), was diametrically opposed to how it was taken the year before. The CUPC’s friends and collaborators hesitated to continue their activities, or at least considered taking a pause. “My sense is that, beyond the people we can confront directly, we shouldn’t be counting on anybody,” Milla writes. Meanwhile, Mercier Vega wrote to his collaborators to say that the information in Ramparts seemed “serious and well founded” and that he’d try to save ILARI (Iber 2015, 214). In the meantime, Rodríguez Monegal wrote a cautionary letter to Pierre Emmanuel, one of the CCF’s directors (July 2, 1967, IACF Records), asking the Ford Foundation to publicly fund Mundo Nuevo, so that the magazine could cut ties with the CCF. That same month, Mundo Nuevo published a letter from the editors that noted that the financial ties between ILARI and the CIA had been “fully admitted,” while continuing to highlight the autonomy of its intellectual work: “they can pay independent intellectuals without them knowing. But they can’t buy them” (Rodríguez Monegal 1967). Mundo Nuevo was ultimately published under Rodríguez Monegal’s direction for another year, up until July of 1968, while the disenchanted Milla packed his bags and moved to Venezuela in late 1967 (Jannello 2018, 79). Mercier Vega cut ties with the CCF in the early 1970s (Markarian 2020, 278).

All in all, these people’s knowledge of the truth about the funds’ origins seems to me less important than their intent to use such funds according to their own convictions. That they appropriated this tool of soft power for their own purposes does not seem to have been unusual, following Iber (2015, 7). Such ends were not expressed in terms of anarchist militancy, but rather in terms of intellectual autonomy. In another letter, Milla expresses his faith that “the seriousness of our labour, its continuity, and continental scope, which few other activities have, will ultimately prevail” (Milla to Mercier Vega, letter from May 2, 1967, IACF Records). We may find a similar sentiment in a letter from Mercier to Horacio Daniel Rodríguez from early March of 1967: “I remain convinced that what we did, what we do, and what we plan to do has nothing to do with, either directly or indirectly, the politics – or any one policy – of the CIA” (cited in Iber 2015, 215). Similarly, Rodríguez Monegal wrote the following to Homero Alsina Thevenet: “My position is that if the CIA is surreptitiously paying Mundo Nuevo, then God bless the CIA, because this magazine doesn’t play by the CIA’s rules, but reflects an authentically Latin American position” (March 21, 1967, IACF Records). In a previous letter, Alsina Thevenet provided examples of this independence by citing articles published in Mundo Nuevo
that were critical of US policy. In agreement with Rodríguez Monegal’s aforementioned sentiment, he wrote that the money had to come from somewhere, and that if the CIA allowed them free rein in using those funds, then it was better to get the money from them than from China or the USSR, which did not give free rein. Mercier Vega similarly noted that, through its obscure paths, the CIA had funded “activities that were liberal, democratic, and sometimes against US policy” (cited in Iber 2015, 215).

These agents held in common the independence of their work, as they exerted a counter-power of sorts within the framework of an enormous operation of soft power. The reason I have delved into this moment in Milla’s activity – Milla being a key actor in Uruguay’s CCF and the mastermind behind the ILA-RI’s internationalisation through Mundo Nuevo – is that it was through these revelations of the CIA’s funding that all of these cultural activities were transferred from the terrain of soft power to that of hard power. When the CCF came to be internationally perceived as the CIA’s secret weapon, it was necessarily dismantled, because its presence told of an open front of hard power in which none of the rival powers were interested. Throughout its years of operation, the CCF and the intellectuals affiliated to it contributed to the creation of the United States’ global hegemony, cultural domination, and imperialism (Iber 2015, 10).

However, we must bear in mind that the CCF’s network was marked by Milla and Mercier Vega’s anarchist militancy, which was somewhat atypical at the time. To them, operating within an openly anticommunist organisation did not mean that they subscribed to the United States’ imperialist values. Quite the contrary, anarchists’ experiences in the Russian and Spanish revolutions made them especially wary of Bolshevik authoritarianism. Plus, we may even trace certain (ultimately failed) CCF-funded projects in which anarchism was directly involved. For instance, we may note the idea of creating a work group comprised of several anarchist doctors with ties to the historic Comunidad del Sur, an anarchist commune in Montevideo that Milla was a part of (Jannello 2018, 83), or that of establishing an archive of social movements in Montevideo, perhaps akin to Biblioteca Archivo Internacional Anarquista (BAIA), which actually operated in Montevideo from the 1950s until it was destroyed by the military dictatorship of the 1970s. According to Iber, the CCF’s Uruguayan office was the most open to authors of diverse ideologies in all of Latin America (2015, 179).

As for Milla, he paired his work as an editor of critical-thought magazines with heading a publishing house, Alfa. Though the latter was not distinctly anarchist, it stood out for its collection of works by Spanish exiles, “Carabela.” The publishing house benefited from the CCF’s patronage for years, as the latter provided funds and bought up a certain percentage of the books (Markarian 2020, 225–226). In turn, the CCF was able to access Milla’s extensive network of
writers and essayists, but also of authors in the social sciences. The CCF especially sought to promote the latter, as gleaned from the collections “Documentos” and “Mundo actual.” It was precisely the 1966–1968 period that saw the highest rate of publication (Torres Torres 2015). Alfa had stood among the main publication spaces for Generation ’45, but as its authors started aligning with the Cuban Revolution and Milla’s ties to the CCF grew more evident, that relationship was inevitably frayed.

4 Returning to the Field: A Few Conclusions

The trajectories we have studied have another element in common that had been taken for granted until now: they all unfolded in the same city, where these agents developed activities in which their transnational ties proved relevant. Montevideo, the peripheral cultural capital of a traditionally immigrant-receiving country, Uruguay, was configured as a space of refuge for undesirable foreigners, especially anarchists, across various moments of the twentieth century. This was the case for many anarchists who were expelled from Argentina through the Extranjería Law (also known also as the Cané Law) of 1902: rather than returning to their countries of origin, they successfully settled in Montevideo. One such trajectory probably led Bertani to establish himself in Uruguay (Rocca 2018). A few decades later, a significant contingent of Republican Spaniards started arriving in the country in waves. However, this was not the main reason why Benito Milla went to Uruguay. Milla arrived in Buenos Aires with another Spanish exile, but the two found it impossible to survive under Juan Domingo Perón’s authoritarian regime, which theoretically welcomed Spanish immigrants but in fact especially surveilled Spanish Republicans, with the goal of maintaining friendly ties with Franco’s de facto government in Spain (De Cristóforis 2012, 21). Two years later, just like many other dissidents living under Perón’s regime, Milla moved to Montevideo (Torres Torres 2014).

Establishing Montevideo as a centre for the distribution of propaganda for all of Latin America, via the CCF, is also related to one of Uruguay’s key features, which Mercier Vega highlighted in one of his first reports: the existence of a tercerista (third-party) intellectual movement, that is, of a movement that was neither aligned with the United States nor with the USSR. Mercier Vega thus deemed this space promising for the development of the Congress’s activities (Mercier Vega, “Rapport sur l’Uruguay,” June 2, 1962, IACF Records). As Christian Ferrer notes, twentieth-century Uruguay, at least up until the dictatorship of the 1970s, conceded a recognised and respected space to anarchism in the public scene,
albeit a minority one (Ferrer 2011, 19). The aforementioned Biblioteca Archivo Internacional Anarquista was conceived at a conference of European anarchists right after the Second World War. These anarchists chose to open the library in Montevideo, due to the country’s institutional stability as well as to the historic presence of anarchists therein. The secularism, stance against nationalism, and openness toward the foreign that characterised Uruguay, and especially its capital, Montevideo, were key to these agents choosing to settle there.

While, as Frigerio (2008) notes, historic studies on anarchism haven’t given the phenomenon of literary production among anarchists in France the attention it deserves, such studies came early on in the Spanish-speaking world, especially in the Rio de la Plata region. For instance, we may cite Lily Litvak (1981) and Golluscio de Montoya (1986), as well as more recent studies by Pablo Ansolabehere (2011) and Daniel Vidal (2021). However, these studies tend to make assumptions that should be questioned – namely, they assume that literature and cultural practices in general in the anarchist realm are an unproblematic extension of political action. While often understood in opposition to official circuits (through the notion of “counter-culture” in Golluscio’s study), they are often attributed categorical, explicit communicative intentionality, that is, the alleged goal of creating awareness by painting the plights of capitalism or describing ideal futures that might be secured through battle, thus disseminating their anarchist ideals.

In a prior specific case study (Campanella 2021), I showed that this is not necessarily the case, and that the function of literature published in the anarchist press (especially regarding translations and texts already published outside of the anarchist circuit) goes beyond simple communication and persuasive effects and in fact explores the ambivalence of the literary creation.

By analysing the work of two anarchist cultural agents, I’m taking a step further, as I am not aiming to understand literature that was created and published in the anarchist context, or literature created among other circuits and appropriated by anarchist publications, but the decisions of two anarchists who managed magazines and publishing houses that did not present themselves as organs of anarchist propaganda. Bertani and Milla’s choices were no doubt influenced by factors beyond the ideological (economic factors, for instance), but they did not align with the propaganda spirit per se. Instead, we must understand their decision making as a behaviour that sought to influence the public’s thinking while creating a reading public, thus reorganising the nation’s literary system. Indeed, this form of persuasion is similar to what we call soft power, which was especially visible among these agents who, in other circumstances, had chosen direct and military action.

At the same time and more generally, anarchist internationalism and its aim to transcend borders can be effectively considered from the international
relations perspective that provides the foundation for the concept of soft power. In fact, the one element that has remained stable among the three that define said concept is its ability to influence audiences in other countries (Nye 2021). The recent transnational turn in contemporary anarchist studies would push us to broaden our perspective and consider transnational networks as anarchism’s privileged spaces of action (Bantman and Altena, 2015). In this framework, we may glean the existence of “intellectual cooperation” boosted by high mobility (be it forced or voluntary) among agents, the multilingualism that marked their discursive communities, and the intense circulation of the political and literary texts that characterise anarchism, “the world’s first and most widespread transnational movement organised from below and without formal political parties” (Moya 2009, 39). The way in which Orsini Bertani and Benito Milla exerted political influence in and from the peripheral Montevideo would be overlooked if we considered the national scale alone. However, the notion of soft power underscores and casts light on their ideological tenor, which would otherwise appear incidental.

Reference List


Rocca, Pablo. “Editar en el Novecientos (Orsini Bertani y algunos problemas de las culturas material y simbólica).” Orbis Tertius 17.18 (2012).


