
A World without Empire?

Encounters and connections
between African, European,
and Soviet Communists,
1920s to 1970s



EDIZIONI
DELLA
NORMALE

70

SEMINARI
E CONVEGNI

*International Conference
Pisa, Scuola Normale Superiore
October 25-27, 2023*

N’Goran Gédéon Bangali
Université Jean Lourougnon
Guédé - Daloa

Andrea Brazzoduro
Università degli studi di Napoli
“l’Orientale” - Maison française
d’Oxford, University of Oxford

Arlena Buelli
University of Lausanne

Paolo Capuzzo
Università di Bologna

Marco Di Maggio
Sapienza Università di Roma

Allison Drew
York University

Alessio Gagliardi
Università di Bologna

Giovanni Gozzini
Università degli studi di Siena

Immanuel R. Harisch
University of Vienna

Jean-Michael Mabeko-Tali
Howard University Washington

Silvio Pons
Scuola Normale Superiore

Anna Shapovalova
Sciences Po Lyon

Gabriele Siracusano
Università di Trento

Gregorio Sorgonà
Scuola Normale Superiore

Giulia Strippoli
Universidade Nova de Lisboa

Marica Tolomelli
Università di Bologna

Dora Tot
Università degli studi di Firenze

Bogdan Zivkovic
Institute for Balkan Studies -
Serbian Academy of Sciences and
Arts

A World without Empire?

Encounters and connections
between African, European,
and Soviet Communists,
1920s to 1970s

edited by
Silvio Pons



EDIZIONI
DELLA
NORMALE

This volume represents the outcome of the PRIN 2017 Project *How Communism went global. Building connections between Soviet, European, and African communists, 1920s to 1960s.*

© 2025 Authors for the texts

© 2025 Edizioni della Normale | Scuola Normale Superiore for the present edition



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

Pdf available at <https://edizioni.sns.it/>

First edition December 2025

ISBN 978-88-7642-820-3 (online)

ISBN 978-88-7642-819-7 (print)

DOI <https://doi.org/10.2422/978-88-7642-820-3>

In memory of Andreas Hilger

Content

A World Without Empire? Introduction
SILVIO PONS 11

COMMUNIST INTERNATIONALISM AND ANTICOLONIAL CULTURES: THE PLACE OF AFRICA

Anti-Racism and the Racial Question
in Comintern Debates of the 1920s
PAOLO CAPUZZO 17

Nationality Policies and Land Reforms in African Communism
GIOVANNI GOZZINI 43

Gender and Communist Agendas in the Union
of South Africa (1920s-1930s)
ANNA SHAPOVALOVA 67

The Comintern and Pan-Africanism. Policy Networks and Cultural
Connections between Europe and French Possessions in Tropical
West Africa
GABRIELE SIRACUSANO 85

The Other Shore of the Spanish Civil War: African Anticolonialists
and the Republican Cause (1936-1939)
ARLENA BUELLI 115

THE SOCIALIST CAMP, ANTI-IMPERIALIST PLAYERS AND DECOLONIZATION IN AFRICA

Reflections on Twentieth-Century Communism in Africa
ALLISON DREW 145

Challenging Socialist Solidarity: Yugoslav Perspective on Intra-Socialist Competition in Colonial and Post-Colonial Algeria (1959-1965)
DORA TOT 165

EUROPEAN COMMUNISTS AND THE REDISCOVERY
OF THE THIRD WORLD

African Lessons for a European Alliance. The Role of Africa
in the Relations Between the Yugoslav and Italian Communists*
BOGDAN ZIVKOVIC 193

An Impossible Symmetry? Anti-Colonialism and Anti-Imperialism
in the Italian Communist Party (1956-1968)
GREGORIO SORGONÀ 225

Between Marxism-Leninism and Gallocentrism. The French
Communist Party and the Anticolonial Revolutions (1950-1968)
MARCO DI MAGGIO 255

Antifascism, Anticolonialism and Internationalism
in the Portuguese Communist Party
ALESSIO GAGLIARDI 277

LABOUR, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL NETWORKS IN THE 1960S

Pan-Africanism, National Cause and Socialism. The Transnational
Path of Deolinda Rodrigues, Leader of the Popular Movement for the
Liberation of Angola (MPLA)
GIULIA STRIPPOLI 307

Les relations entre l'Union syndicale panafricaine et la Fédération
syndicale mondiale (1961-1973) / Relations between the All-African
Trade Union Federation and the World Federation of Trade Unions
(1961-1973)
N'GORAN GÉDÉON BANGALI 327

Overcoming Eurocentrism in the Classroom? Trade Union Education
for Africans within the Communist-Led World Federation of Trade
Unions (WFTU), 1959-1968
IMMANUEL R. HARISCH 339

Memories of the Future. Decolonisation, the Algerian War of Independence, and the Italian New Radical Left
ANDREA BRAZZODURO 361

THE GLOBAL SIXTY-EIGHT AND ITS AFTERMATH

Cold War in Africa, Détente in Europe, and the Antinomies of Revolutionary Internationalism in the Aftermath of 1968
SILVIO PONS 385

Anti-Imperialism, the New Left and 1968
MARICA TOLOMELLI 415

Le mouvement populaire de libération de l'Angola (MPLA) et les partis communistes occidentaux pendant la lutte armée anticoloniale (1960-1977)
JEAN-MICHEL MABEKO-TALI 443

A World Without Empire?

Introduction

The history of communism has in recent years become part of the intellectual rethinking of the past century as global history, especially conceived as an emphasis on cross-national flows and interactions rather than inward-looking national narratives. Such a perspective contributed to remove the teleological narratives and the views of an “anomaly” or a “parenthesis” in history’s course – both widely diffused after the end of the Cold War. Communism’s history has been instead increasingly reconstructed as a web of planet-wide connections that acted according to a logic of their own, interacted with various actors, and generated sometimes enduring consequences that helped shaping the globalised world. This vision shows significant conceptual implications, in that it demands that we analyse the ambivalent influence of state and political factors in creating or destroying transnational connections. This, in turn, may help us to capture global phenomena in their full complexity, beyond their mere economic aspect.

The encounter between global history and the history of communism has above all taken place at the level of narratives. Numerous scholars have approached the subject of communism in its global extensions, in terms of multifold transnational, social, economic and cultural aspects, with the objective of overcoming the national and “internalist” visions that have largely dominated past historiographical traditions, especially as regards the Soviet Union. Significant contributions have analyzed the connections between the Soviet Union, the “socialist camp”, and the Global South, employing the notion of transnationalism in various ways. At the same time, it is obvious that we are still in an initial phase of studying the global history of communism, as it demands a refinement of our methodological and conceptual tools, and a much wider development of our explorative and research work. We know that communism had a global dimension, but we must better understand how it took on such a dimension over a relatively brief time, what were its points of strength and weakness, and the deeper factors behind its dissolution in the second half of the century. A better analytical understanding of

the communist project's genesis, endurance, and decline can make an important contribution to the global history of the 20th century.

Between 1919 and 1943, the Comintern promoted the formation of ruling classes, the organisation of parties, and the constitution of networks of political and trade-union cooperation in every part of the world. While the results that the Comintern achieved during its own existence were modest as compared to the ambitious project of promoting a world revolution, it developed encounters and contacts with socialist, anti-imperialist, nationalist, anti-racist and indigenous movements, and also helped to activate and mobilise them. Communist networks made use of material, cultural and symbolic resources directed at building their own hegemony over a vast world of revolutionary movements. The Leninist principle of peoples' self-determination revived in the anti-colonial struggles which took place in Asia and Africa during the entire interwar period. An interdependence developed between the pattern of state-led industrialization in revolutionary Russia and the idea of an "alternative modernity", that sustained the legitimacy of communism as a global project. Notwithstanding the strongly hierarchical discipline of the communist movement, such intensive and tumultuous activity did not only play out in terms of the relations between centre and periphery. It also involved a criss-crossing of transversal links and a combination of different logics, able to give rise to various conflicts and forms of influence that did not necessarily reflect the actors' own intentions. In this sense, the focus of our historical reconstruction tends to shift away from the classic theme of the subordination/insubordination of national parties with regard to Moscow's strategy, and concentrate more on the multiple implications, meanings and practices that the communists' activity promoted on a global scale.

The ambition of the Comintern to build revolutionary networks against the Western colonial empires was constantly constrained and even contradicted by the imperatives of Soviet security and foreign policy interests. The destructive consequences of those imperatives dramatically emerged in the late 1930s, in the aftermath of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Nevertheless, when the Comintern dissolved in June 1943, it bequeathed a political and organisational capital that historians have not thus far done enough to bring to light. World War Two laid the bases for an enormous qualitative leap of the communist movement, which acquired unprecedented mass dimensions in both Europe and Asia. The communists' participation in Europe's anti-fascist and in Asian anti-imperialist resistance movements represented the source of a new legitimacy, strengthened by the prestige of the Soviet Union in the aftermath

of its military victory over Nazism. This new legitimacy revived the idea of a subject bearing a non-capitalist “alternative modernity” now founded on the creation of a powerful “socialist camp” – and even more so in the aftermath of the Chinese Revolution of 1949. The point here is that such new mass dimension of international communism also relied on the existence of leaders and cadres who had survived both Stalinist terror and anti-communist massacres; on the accumulation of transnational links that were never completely interrupted; and on the capacity to integrate class and national discourses directed at offering credible bases for young generations and the postwar reconstruction.

The papers gathered in this volume propose to observe the history of international communism over a much longer period than that of the Comintern’s existence, pushing forward as far as the completion of the decolonisation processes in the 1960s. They intend to test the possibility of tying some of the spatial, cultural and biographical threads that emerged in the earlier period anti-colonial struggles to the later phase of decolonization. At the same time, by analysing communist projects, networks and practices, the papers shed light on some crucial factors and moments of the history of 20th-century Africa. The volume mainly focuses on the relations built between communists in Europe and revolutionary subjects – anti-imperialist activists, political militants, trade union organizers, socialists of various kinds – in different colonial and post-colonial countries of Africa.

There are many serious motivations behind the choice to investigate the connections between European and African communist and anti-imperialist actors. Despite their importance to the decolonisation context, African socialisms are less studied and well-known than Asian communism. Yet communists and Marxists had much wider influence in Africa than their numbers may suggest. They offered a varied panorama of the overlaps and aporias between internationalism and nationalism, precisely because the identification between nation and socialism was historically less direct than in the case of Asian communism. Most importantly, the history of African socialisms involved a direct relationship with Europe up to a very late phase of 20th-century history and allows us to capture the triangular transnational relations between European and Soviet communists and the revolutionary subjects in the colonial and post-colonial world, in a longer-term perspective. This history moreover intersects not only with the theme of nationalism, but also with the question of racism and blacks’ rights, thus offering a transnational perspective on the circulation of ideas and militants along the African-American axis.

Global communism maintained Eurocentric limitations as it constantly proposed its own model of centralised leadership and an “harmonisation of diversity”, even though dealing with the heterogeneity of cultures, religions, societies and races. This model was at the basis of the reorganisation of territory and authority within the USSR, through the massive use of state violence, while it proved inadequate to grasping the peculiarities and varieties that shaped the colonial universe and post-colonial trajectories, particularly in Africa. The communists did not dissolve the aporias constitutive of the relationship between class and nation, which were instead intensified by anti-colonial projects and interactions with the nationalist elites of the Third World. In Africa, the link between socialist calling, nation-building, and modernization took various and hybrid forms which need further investigation as they interacted, clashed and even marginalised the communist networks while also allowing the building of alliances with the Soviet Union. The emergence of Third Worldism coincided with the wave of African decolonization and interacted with the communist movement in many ways, but mainly in terms of conflicts overlapping with the competition between Soviet orthodoxy and Maoism. And it was precisely in Africa that the model of single party, state-led development revealed how incongruous it was as an “alternative modernity”, in its competition with Western development models.

The communist “global moment” in the post-Stalin era very soon revealed its limitations, especially on account of the Sino-Soviet split and the subsequent fractures of revolutionary cultures and experiences. The failure of a united front against empires exposed even more deeply the long-standing contradiction between Soviet imperial projects and the development of anti-imperialist movements – a contradiction that became the leitmotiv of Maoist propaganda. Communist legacies shaped nonetheless the fate of post-colonial Africa overlapping with the geopolitics of the Cold War. In the aftermath of 1968, the multiple fractures between diverging anti-imperialist projects, Cold War-inspired visions, bloc policies and non-aligned actors would become even more visible. They clearly affected the rise and fall of so-called Marxist-Leninist African regimes. This volume intends to provide a contribution to our understanding of the rise and fall of the communist “global moment”, and of how the antinomies of its trajectory may help shedding light on wider historical processes of the last century.

COMMUNIST
INTERNATIONALISM
AND ANTICOLONIAL
CULTURES:
THE PLACE OF
AFRICA

Anti-Racism and the Racial Question in Comintern Debates of the 1920s

Introduction

The intent of the Third International's global project of communism was to unite the world's exploited in a single revolutionary front, regardless of nationality, gender, or race. This radical universalism, however, had to confront the heterogeneity of the subjects it sought to engage. This challenge pertained not only to the varying levels of economic development, which corresponded to distinct social configurations, but also to the cultural frameworks within which political subjectivities were shaped. The dimension of "ethnological knowledge" therefore assumed central political relevance, as it was an indispensable prerequisite for constructing a global revolutionary subject. The term race was not frequently used in the Comintern's internal debates, yet alternative ways of designating "cultural otherness" in relation to the modern, industrial West were employed. Terms such as East, Black, Indigenous, and Muslim functioned, in different contexts, as markers of human groups for whom "special strategies" needed to be devised in relation to the revolutionary model developed for the Western proletariat.

In recent years, historiographical interest in the Comintern's activities in the Global South has grown considerably, leading to a wealth of significant studies that have examined its relationships with local revolutionary groups across various regions, with particular attention to the Afro-Atlantic world.¹ In this contribution, I aim to

¹ Among the most recent work see M. Kirasirova, *The Eastern International: Arabs, Central Asians, and Jews in the Soviet Union's Anticolonial Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024; O. Drachewych, *The Communist International, Anti-imperialism and Racial Equality in British Dominions*, London: Routledge, 2019; O. Drachewych-I. McKay (eds.), *Left Transnationalism: The Communist International and the National, Colonial and Racial Question*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University

explore how the Comintern conceptualized “cultural otherness” and the interpretive frameworks through which it sought to integrate diverse subjects into a global political strategy. Given my focus on the conceptual structures that shaped this process of engagement and inclusion, I believe that the heterogeneity of the case studies I analyze can help illuminate broader patterns.

The first area of inquiry concerns the “East”, an ambiguous and geographically fluid category that, in the early years of the Comintern, encompassed vast regions of Asia and Africa characterized by minimal or nonexistent industrialization, colonial or semi-colonial subjugation, and a cultural distinctiveness often associated with Islam. The second area addresses Jews and anti-Semitism – an issue deeply embedded in the history of socialist and Marxist thought, which re-emerged with remarkable intensity during the Russian Civil War. The third area examines the Comintern’s “discovery” of Latin America in the late 1920s and the associated “indigenous question”. Finally, I will consider the relationship between race and nation in the Afro-Atlantic context, particularly in relation to the “color line” and the discussions surrounding it at the Comintern’s Sixth Congress in 1928.

The Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East

The Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East was a pivotal event, attended by nearly two thousand delegates, primarily from Turkey, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Iran. Convened immediately after the conclusion of the Second Congress of the Comintern, it provided an opportunity for the Bolsheviks to demonstrate their solidarity with Muslim populations – both within and beyond Soviet borders – while simultaneously opposing all forms of socialist pan-Turanism

Press, 2019; H. Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic: African American Agency, West African Intellectuals and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers*, Leiden: Brill, 2013; D. Featherstone-C. Høgsbjerg (eds.), *The Red and the Black: The Russian Revolution and the Black Atlantic*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021; A.G. Mahler-P. Capuzzo (eds.), *The Comintern and the Global South: Global Designs Local Encounters*, London: Routledge, 2023; M. Di Maggio-S. Usai, *La “questione nera” e l’antisemitismo. La genesi contraddittoria dell’analisi comunista del razzismo*, «Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica», 1, 2022, pp. 133-156.

and pan-Islamism. Although the “race question” was never explicitly addressed during the Baku Congress, the event marked an initial engagement of communists with racial inequities. John Reed’s observations on the symbolic connection between the struggles of Eastern peoples and those of Black and Mexican farmworkers across the Atlantic illustrate how the Congress fostered transnational linkages between movements. At the same time, Western communists often tended to conflate diverse groups into a singular, racialized, and at times exoticized, mass. The recollections of Western communists who attended the Congress are permeated by a strong tendency toward exoticization in their descriptions of the various peoples they encountered.²

Two interrelated issues that occupied the congress and constituted a complex challenge in the internationalization of the Soviet revolution were prominently addressed in Baku: the Islamic question and the peasant question. The delegates in attendance primarily came from agrarian societies where the majority of the population was Muslim. For the Bolsheviks, this necessitated confronting a dual form of “otherness” in relation to their revolutionary framework. During the civil war, the Bolsheviks had, despite a contradictory and often tumultuous process, managed to secure the support of both the peasantry and a significant portion of the Muslim population of the Russian Empire. However, the transition from wartime propaganda to the concrete policies of Soviet governance marked the beginning of a new phase in this debate.

In his opening address, Zinoviev took care to distinguish the political vision of the Third International from that of the Second. He specifically recalled the discussions at the Stuttgart Congress of 1907 on the colonial question, in which the notion of a “progressive colonial policy” had been invoked.³ The Third International, on the contrary,

² See, for instance, A. Rosmer, *Moscou sous Lénine: les origines du communisme*, Paris: Horay, 1953; E.D. Stasova, *Genossin „Absolut“: Erinnerungen*, Berlin: Dietz-Verlag, 1969; K. Steinhardt-M. Mugrauer, *Lebenserinnerungen eines Wiener Arbeiters*, Wien: Alfred-Klahr Gesellschaft, 2013.

³ This position was mainly advocated by the Dutchman van Kol and the Germans Bernstein and David. However, the Stuttgart debate was marked by a lively internal dialectic, with several voices expressing strong criticism of colonialism. Among the most severe critics was Kautsky, who published a pamphlet shortly after the congress, K. Kautsky, *Sozialismus und Kolonialpolitik: Eine Auseinandersetzung*, Berlin: Buch-

carried an authentically universal message – said Zinoviev – and he further emphasized the race blindness of the communist revolution, which introduced a radical discontinuity from the more or less latent racism of the Second International: «... we want to free all peoples, all the toilers, regardless of the color of their skin, regardless of whether they are white, black or yellow».⁴ The rejection of all forms of racial discrimination was thus framed as a fundamental pillar of the Bolshevik global revolutionary project. Zinoviev further argued that peasants in the colonies were often ignorant and illiterate, adhering to superstitions and magical beliefs. However, rather than being subjects of ridicule, he contended that these conditions should serve as a motivation for revolutionary efforts aimed at guiding them toward progress and transformation.

Tashpolad Narbutabekov challenged Zinoviev's theses, bringing to light several contradictions inherent in Bolshevik policy in Central Asia. Drawing from his direct experience in attempting to foster social revolution in Turkestan in preceding years, Narbutabekov underscored the complexities of this endeavor. Having emerged from Jadidist circles, he was one of only two non-Russians elected to the Tashkent Soviet in March 1917.⁵ Narbutabekov faced a twofold struggle: on one side, he had to combat Great Russian chauvinism, which persisted in the shadow of the Soviet revolution; on the other, he had to confront the conservative ulema, who sought by all means to prevent young reformers from positioning themselves as the representatives of Tashkent's Islamic community within the revolutionary government.⁶ The reason who pushed many Muslim to the

handel Vorwärts, 1907; on the debate on race and colonialism in the Second International, see L. Costaguta, *Before Baku: The Second International, Race and Colonialism*, in Mahler-Capuzzo, *The Comintern and the Global South*.

⁴ J. Riddell (ed.), *To See the Dawn: Baku, 1920: First Congress of the Peoples of the East*, New York: Pathfinder, 1993, p. 67.

⁵ S. Agzamkhodzhaev, *Politizatsiya dzhadidskogo dvizheniya i vyrabotka im programnikh projektov budushchego ustroystva Turkestana: 1905-1917 gg.*, «Islam v sovremennom mire», 2, 2005. Accessed 1st July 2023, <https://idmedina.ru/books/islamic/?442>

⁶ R.A. Pierce, *Toward Soviet Power in Tashkent, February-October 1917*, «Canadian Slavonic Papers», 17/2-3, 1975, pp. 261-270; M. Buttino, *La Rivoluzione capovolta. L'Asia Centrale tra il crollo dell'impero zarista e la formazione dell'Urss*, Napoli: L'ancora del Mediterraneo, 2003.

side of Bolshevik – maintained Narbutabekov – was that in 1917 they advocated the immediate peace: «In the first days of the revolution, in opposition to Kerensky’s capitalist slogan of “War until final victory”, the Bolsheviks put forward the slogan of “Self-determination for the nationalities”». ⁷ Narbutabekov reminded the special appeal to the Muslims of Russia and the East signed by Lenin in November 1917 which stated: «Build your national life freely and without hindrance. It is your right. You yourselves must be the masters in your own land. You yourselves must build your life as you see fit». ⁸ However, a growing discrepancy emerged between the Bolsheviks’ stated principles and their observed behavior. While Muslim masses had initially supported the Bolsheviks during the civil war, they now expected the revolutionary government to uphold the principles it had proclaimed at the outset. The new Russia had to act accordingly by recognizing the distinct characteristics of the Muslim borderlands of the former empire and adapting the revolution to local economic, cultural, and religious circumstances.

At this stage, the Bolsheviks needed to purge their own ranks, expelling counterrevolutionary elements who continued to pursue aggressive and discriminatory policies toward Muslim religion and customs, echoing the practices of the Tsarist regime. This was not only a matter of principle but also of strategic interest for the Bolsheviks: if they failed to secure decisive support from the working class in the West, they could instead seek it among the exploited masses of the East. This idea, which also surfaced in other expressions of Islamic political radicalism during this period, reflects a certain strategic foresight – raising doubts about whether the decisive revolutionary impetus would truly come from Western Europe. ⁹

Despite these criticisms – voiced at the congress primarily by delegates registered as “not affiliated with any political party”, many of whom were in fact representatives of various Islamic nationalist groups – the Bolsheviks could point to the recognition of the Bashkir (1919) and Tatar (1920) Socialist Republics as exemplary cases of collaboration between the revolution and the Muslim masses.

The Bolsheviks were able to capitalize on the “Baku effect”, pre-

⁷ J. Riddell, *To See the Dawn*, p. 104.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁹ See M. Sultan-Galiev, *The Social Revolution and the East*, «Review (Fernand Braudel Center)», Summer 1982, 6 (1): pp. 3-11.

senting themselves to the exploited and colonized masses worldwide as the only Western-based political force that had transcended the color line dividing the world. Just one month after the Baku Congress, Zinoviev addressed the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD) Congress in Halle. In his four-hour speech advocating for the USPD's integration into the Third International, he repeatedly referenced the Baku conference. Responding to accusations from right-wing socialists, Zinoviev employed two simple but effective arguments: the Comintern was committed to promoting revolution on a global scale, and it stood firmly against racial discrimination.

He stated:

The Second International was restricted to people with white skin; the Third International does not classify people according to the colour of their skin. If you want a world revolution, if you want to free the proletariat from the chains of capitalism, then you cannot simply think about Europe, you also have to turn your sights to Asia.¹⁰

Baku indeed represented a pivotal moment of encounter between the Bolsheviks and Muslim political movements. However, despite the revolutionary rhetoric of inclusivity, Zinoviev's fervent speech could not entirely mask his patronizing attitude toward his Muslim colleagues in Central Asia. As an Islamic current began to take shape within the socialist camp, the Bolsheviks took decisive measures to prevent, by any means necessary, the autonomous development of an Islamic socialist movement. Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, who quickly rose to the highest ranks of Soviet administration as a member of the People's Commissariat for Nationalities, argued that Muslim intellectuals should lead their peoples toward socialism, helping to reframe Muslim peasants' historical hostility toward Russians, who had long been their colonizers. He further advocated for the creation of a Muslim Communist International, driven by his deep skepticism toward the Western working class, which he viewed as complicit in the exploitation of colonized peoples. Sultan-Galiev was arrested and expelled from the party in 1923, subsequently enduring a series of arrests and deportations until his execution in 1940.¹¹

¹⁰ J. Martov-G. Zinoviev, *Martov and Zinoviev: Head-to-Head in Halle*, London: November Publications, 2011, p. 137.

¹¹ A. Bennigsen-C. Lemerrier-Quelquejay, *Sultan Galiev. Le père de la révolution tiers-mondiste*, Paris: Fayard, 1986.

What was unacceptable in the eyes of the Bolsheviks was not the demand for cultural autonomy itself, but rather the challenge to the centralization of political authority that Galiev's proposals implied. Baku had been a remarkable gathering, bringing together people from across the vast Eurasian space. The Congress was, in many ways, a continuous process of translation, with speeches delivered in a multitude of languages. However, instead of embracing translation as a generative process for fostering mutual understanding and shaping political subjectivities, the Bolsheviks in Baku employed it instrumentally, using it as a tool to manipulate the audience. They selectively omitted or reworked portions of speeches, a practice that did not go unnoticed by some participants and ultimately contributed to growing mistrust toward the organizers.¹² More than a meeting to discover an unfamiliar world aimed at understanding its peculiarities, in the Bolsheviks' intentions, the Congress of Baku was an attempt to domesticate the "cultural otherness" by bringing it back within its own language.¹³ Anyway, the message of Baku resonated throughout the world and contributed to spread enthusiasm and fear for a Soviet revolution which thanks to its "race blindness" could challenge the international order overwhelming every attempt to reform it maintaining an imperial regime.¹⁴

¹² N. Menemencioglu, *Congress of the Peoples of the East, Baku, September 1920*, in *XI. Türk Tarih Kongresi: Ankara, 5-9 Eylül 1990. Kongreye Sunulan Bildiriler*, vol. 6, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1994, pp. 2223-2233.

¹³ Over the course of the 1920s, the Soviet Union pursued a fluctuating policy toward Muslim populations, combining episodes of violent repression with moments of compromise and the co-optation of local leaders into the state apparatus, see S. Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941*, Westport CT: Praeger, 2001.

¹⁴ The Peruvian marxist, Jose Carlos Mariátegui, saw in the Baku Congress the awakening of colonized peoples, J.C. Mariátegui, *Mariátegui: política revolucionaria. Contribución a la crítica socialista*, Vol. 1: *La escena contemporánea y otros escritos*, Caracas: Fundación Editorial El Perro y la Rana, 2010, p. 323; the congress was widely reported in the American press. For more details see P. Capuzzo-Ç. Oğuz, *The Baku Congress of the People of the East*, in A.G. Mahler-C. Lee, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of the Global South*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

The Jewish question

A particularly significant testing ground for examining the relationship between the Bolshevik Revolution and the question of race was the Jewish question, whose relevance extended beyond Russia itself. In a 1921 letter to W.E.B. Du Bois, Jamaican poet Claude McKay reproached him for his indifferent stance toward what he considered the greatest event in human history– the Soviet Revolution. He added:

For American Negroes the indisputable and outstanding fact of the Russian revolution is that a mere handful of Jews, much less in ratio to the member of Negroes in the American population, have attained, through the Revolution, all the political and social rights that were denied to them under the regime of the Czar.¹⁵

In these circles of African-American radicalism, the Jewish question in Soviet Russia was viewed as a pivotal historical development – one that served as a model for the global anti-racist struggle.

This issue took on particular significance for the Bolshevik leadership, given the exceptionally high proportion of Jews within its ranks, which in turn fueled narratives portraying the Russian Revolution as a Jewish conspiracy. Lenin's stance on the Jewish question was marked by contradictions. After initially recognizing Jewish national identity in response to the Bund's departure from the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1903, he later denied the Jews national status based on Kautsky's definition of a nation, which required territorial rootedness and a shared language. Lenin argued that Jews were not concentrated in a single territory but were instead dispersed across many nations, from which they had assimilated various cultural traits. Moreover, Yiddish – despite the Bund's efforts to elevate its status – was, in his view, little more than a dialect, unsurprisingly abandoned by more assimilated Jews in the West. From a socialist perspective, assimilation was thus the only viable solution to the Jewish question. Bundist and Zionist tendencies had to be opposed, as they introduced an ethnic dimension into the socialist struggle. In the years that followed, Lenin's position shifted once again, largely in response to the Bolsheviks' evolving relationship with the Bund. However, the dominant view

¹⁵ Quoted in W. James, *Holding aloft the banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean radicalism in early twentieth-century America*, London-New York: Verso, 1998, p. 166.

remained that the ultimate fate of Russian Jews was assimilation.¹⁶ In a 1913 essay, he cited New York as an example of Jewish assimilation into modern culture. According to Lenin, this process was the inevitable fate of modern Jews – precisely the opposite of what the Bund advocated. The Bund sought to preserve Eastern European Jews as a distinct social group, tied to what he saw as an outdated and regressive past.¹⁷ Lenin was evidently poorly informed about the cultural processes that accompanied Jewish political socialization in New York where Yiddish became the language of politicization of Eastern Jewish immigrants.¹⁸ The idea that modern capitalist society functioned as a dissolving force on “traditional” cultural identities – causing them to disappear in favor of a new, modern, urban, and industrial culture – was contradicted precisely by the forms that the Jewish socialist movement was taking in the city with the highest Jewish presence in the world.

While Lenin viewed the Jewish autonomy advocated by the Bund as an obstacle to the revolutionary path, he was simultaneously committed to combating the widespread anti-Semitism that permeated the Russian proletariat and even segments of the socialist movement. It was essential to protect Jewish workers from the violence incited by the state and facilitated by the police forces.¹⁹ In response to the wave of anti-Semitic violence triggered by the Kishinev pogrom (1903),²⁰ the Russian Social Democratic Party adopted a stance of resolute and active opposition. During the civil war, instances of anti-Semitism also emerged within the Red Army, though they were sporadic compared to the widespread and systematic anti-Semitism of the White Armies. Nevertheless, the revolutionary front was able to implement vigorous

¹⁶ E. Kenig, *Lénine et les Juifs de Russie. Contribution à l'étude des conceptions de Lénine sur la question juive*, Paris: Centre d'études et de recherches marxistes, 1976.

¹⁷ V.I. Lenin, *Osservazioni critiche sulla questione nazionale* (1913), in Id., *Opere*, Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1966, vol. 20, pp. 20-21.

¹⁸ T. Michels, *A fire in their hearts: Yiddish socialists in New York*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.

¹⁹ E. Traverso, *The Marxists and the Jewish question: the history of a debate, 1843-1943*, New York: Prometheus Books, 1994, pp. 84-85.

²⁰ S. Lambroza, *The Pogroms of 1903-1906*, in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, ed. J.D. Klier-S. Lambroza, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 195-247

measures to combat anti-Semitism, aided in part by the mobilization of radical Jewish political groups.²¹

At the Second Congress of the Comintern, the *Theses on National and Colonial Questions* explicitly mentioned anti-Semitism as one of the forms of bourgeois nationalist prejudice that needed to be vigorously opposed, as it represented a significant obstacle to the construction of internationalism.²² The commitment to combating anti-Semitism was therefore a duty for communists worldwide. At the same time, Zionism was to be opposed as an expression of Jewish nationalism incompatible with communist internationalism. The Polish branch of Poale Zion participated in the early congresses with consultative voting rights, awaiting formal admission that never materialized. The presence of organizations that *ethnicized* the proletariat within individual nations – this applied to all Jewish political organizations – was seen as a weakening of the internationalist project. This position was explicitly articulated by the Italian Jewish communist Umberto Terracini at the Third Congress, where he called for the exclusion of both the Bund and Poale Zion from all future congresses, in any form.²³ The issue was also addressed in Palestine, where the establishment of a communist party was mandated on the condition that it would not assume any specific Jewish identity. Instead, Jewish and Arab workers were to struggle side by side against any political formation based on ethnic identity. Only after providing assurances in this regard was the Palestine Communist Party accepted into the Comintern.²⁴

Poale Zion was tolerated in Russia until the late 1920s, whereas the Bund was quickly dissolved. Its left-wing members joined the Russian Communist Party, leading to the creation of the Evsektsiya, the Jewish section of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Evsektsiya subsidized Yiddish-language literature and theater, while

²¹ B. McGeever, *Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

²² J. Riddell (ed.), *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite!: Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress of the Communist International, 1920*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1991, p. 287.

²³ J. Riddell (ed.), *To the Masses: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the Communist International, 1921*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016, pp. 320-322.

²⁴ M. Budayri, *The Palestine Communist Party 1919-1948: Arab and Jew in the Struggle for Internationalism*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010 (1979).

simultaneously taking an active part in the violent campaigns aimed at dismantling the religious, educational, and cultural structures of Eastern European Judaism— campaigns in which other institutions and press organs were also involved.²⁵ For the first time in history, Yiddish became an official language in Ukraine and Belarus.²⁶ A participatory and passionate observer of the Eastern Jewish world, Joseph Roth, while acknowledging that nowhere else had there been such a vigorous commitment to combating anti-Semitism as in the Soviet Union, sharply criticized this “forced modernization”. He argued that it exposed the Bolsheviks’ lack of understanding of Yiddish culture. In Roth’s view, this culture was deeply embedded in centuries-old religious and cultural traditions; uprooting it from these foundations would inevitably result in a hollow and artificial construct.²⁷ Yet this was precisely the path that was taken, and the artificial construct reached another milestone with the 1928 decision to establish a Jewish Autonomous Oblast in the Russian Far East – a frozen wasteland on the Chinese border that many soon abandoned after initially migrating there. Though seemingly bizarre, this initiative aligned with the principles of *Korenizatsiya*: since the Jews lacked a designated territory, one was now provided to them, ostensibly to enable their national spirit to flourish.²⁸

At the end of the 1920s, there was a resurgence of popular anti-Semitism, which historiography has interpreted in various ways: as a deep-seated flaw of Russian society; as a reaction to the authoritarian modernization imposed by the Five-Year Plans, which created hardship and intensified social competition among workers; as the Soviet manifestation of the virulent anti-Semitism that afflicted all industrial

²⁵ R. Weinberg, *Demonizing Judaism in the Soviet Union during the 1920s*, «Slavic Review», 67/1, 2008, pp. 120-153.

²⁶ Z.Y. Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001, chapter 3; D. Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture: 1918-1930*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. In the 1926 census, Jews were 8% of the population in the Republic of Byelorussia and 5% in the Republic of Ukraine.

²⁷ J. Roth, *Juden auf Wanderschaft*, Berlin: Die Schmiede, 1927, pp. 96-104.

²⁸ Thereafter, Stalin rarely spoke out on the Jewish question, although some private anti-Semitic utterances are known, see S. Kotkin, *Stalin: Paradoxes of Power, 1878-1928*, New York: Penguin Random House, 2014, chapter *Dead-end banditry*.

societies during the economic crisis;²⁹ and as a consequence of the competition between nationalities generated by the policy of “affirmative action”.³⁰ What is certain is that, regardless of Stalin’s distrust and ambivalence toward Jews, the Soviet state took vigorous measures to suppress this wave of anti-Semitism, which was framed as an exogenous element—foreign to the socialist project and one that had to be eradicated.³¹ Moreover, the Soviet leadership perceived anti-Semitism not only as an attack on its policies but also as a direct threat to its authority, given the explicitly anti-Soviet tone that anti-Semitic rhetoric had adopted.³² Things would change dramatically over the course of the 1930s.

The question of race in Latin America: the Buenos Aires Congress (1929)

At the Sixth Comintern Plenum (1926), a decision was made to establish a base in Latin America to counter the aggressive imperialist expansion of the United States in the region. By the Sixth Congress in 1928, there was, for the first time, a significant presence of Latin American delegates, leading to a renewed push for initiatives in the continent. The final theses reaffirmed the Comintern’s support for «every movement against imperialist violence in the colonies, semi-colonies, and dependent countries (e.g. in Latin America); it carries on vigorous propaganda against every kind of chauvinism and imperialist ill-treatment of enslaved peoples and races, large and small (the attitude towards Negroes and workers of the ‘yellow races’, anti-semitism, etc.), and supports their struggle against the bourgeoisie of the oppressing nation».³³

Following this commitment, two significant conferences were or-

²⁹ A. Sloin, *Theorizing Soviet Antisemitism: Value, Crisis, and Stalinist “Modernity”*, «Critical Historical Studies», 3/2, 2016, pp. 249-282.

³⁰ T. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press, 2017; a similar thesis was maintained already by I. Larin, *Evrei i antisemitizm v SSSR*, Moscow: Gosizdat, 1929.

³¹ A. Sloin, *Theorizing*, p. 257. W. Korey, *The origins and development of Soviet anti-Semitism: An analysis*, «Slavic Review», 31/1, 1972, pp. 111-135; 115-118.

³² S. Davies, ‘*Us against Them*’: *Social Identity in Soviet Russia, 1934-1941*, in S. Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Stalinism: New Directions*, London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 47-70.

³³ J. Degras, *The Communist International 1919-1943: documents*, vol. 2, 1923-1928, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 521.

ganized. The first, held in Montevideo in May 1929, was a gathering of revolutionary trade unions that led to the creation of the Confederación Sindical Latinoamericana. The second, held in Buenos Aires in June 1929, was the most important meeting of Latin American Communist parties to date, bringing together approximately 40 delegates representing a dozen political parties. One of the central issues discussed in Buenos Aires was the “question of race”, for which José Mariátegui was invited to present the main report at the recommendation of Jules Humbert-Droz.³⁴ Humbert-Droz, who was increasingly alienated from the politics and methods of the Comintern, managed to secure a mission to Argentina, allowing him to distance himself from Moscow for a time.³⁵ Within Comintern circles, it was well known that the most sophisticated analysis of the indigenous question had been developed by Peruvian intellectuals led by Mariátegui, who had founded the Peruvian Socialist Party in 1928.³⁶ For this reason, they were asked to report on the issue of race, despite being recognized as a heterodox political group toward which caution was deemed necessary.³⁷

Due to his poor health, Mariátegui was unable to attend the congress and sent Hugo Pesce as his personal delegate. Pesce presented the

³⁴ J. Mothes, «Luis» gegen Mariátegui? Zur Rolle von Jules Humbert-Droz bei der Entwicklung der Lateinamerika-Politik der Kommunistischen Internationale, pp. 139-167, in *Centenaire Jules Humbert-Droz: Actes*, La Chaux de Fonds: Fondation Jules Humbert-Droz, 1992.

³⁵ Two years later he would remove from all positions, J. Humbert-Droz, *De Lénine à Staline: dix ans au service de l'Internationale communiste, 1921-1931*, Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1971, chap. 26.

³⁶ Letter of Victorio Codovilla to Martínez de la Torre, a close collaborator of Mariátegui, dated 29 March 1929, in *La Internacional Comunista en América Latina en documentos del archivo de Moscú*, eds. V. Jelfets-A. Schelchkov, Santiago: Ariadna Ediciones, 2018, p. 1027.

³⁷ Codovilla warned the other organisers of the dangerous deviation of Mariátegui: «[Mariátegui] insiste excesivamente sobre la necesidad de tener en cuenta “la realidad peruana”, y en el fondo aboga por un partido socialista “amplio”, pretextando una situación ambiental distinta de la de los otros países», in *La Internacional Comunista en América Latina*, p. 1212. Codovilla referred to the editorial *Aniversario y balance*, published on «Amauta», n. 17 (September 1928), pp. 1-3; on the conflict between Mariátegui and the Comintern, see A.F. Galindo, *La agonía de Mariátegui: la polémica con la Komintern*, Lima: Desco, 1980.

report, situating the question of race within the broader framework of class relations in Peru. Revolutionary strategy, he argued, had to be anchored in a multiethnic working class capable of recognizing its shared exploitation beyond racial differences. This does not mean that Mariátegui overlooked the presence of racism in Peruvian society. On the contrary, he regarded it as one of the main obstacles to building class solidarity, noting that feelings of superiority and violent discrimination against Indigenous peoples were pervasive even within urban revolutionary circles. His insistence on the need to eradicate all traces of inter-ethnic racism to forge a cohesive revolutionary subject was closely aligned with the Leninist position on race.

At the same time, however, this perspective fundamentally opposed the interpretation of Indigenous peoples as an oppressed nation entitled to claim and pursue self-determination – specifically, the creation of a republic for the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. Mariátegui maintained that such a republic would merely reproduce class domination and exploitation. More fundamentally, the core problem with the Comintern’s strategy was that Indigenous peoples did not constitute a nation in the first place. The Quechua population, for instance, was spread across the Andean highlands from Colombia through Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, extending as far as Argentina and Chile in the south. To conceive of South America’s geopolitical boundaries in terms of ethnic identity, he argued, was an entirely abstract exercise that ignored the reality of colonial states, which Mariátegui regarded as Latin America’s definitive geopolitical framework.

The Peruvians’ report was sharply criticized by Rabinovich, a Comintern official of Georgian origin who had been active in Latin America. While he acknowledged Mariátegui’s materialist approach in emphasizing the social basis of Indigenous exploitation, he faulted him for failing to recognize the Indigenous question as a national issue. According to Rabinovich, this limitation stemmed from an unquestioning acceptance of existing political boundaries, which did not correspond to coherent national formations and thus required revision. Instead, he called for drawing lessons from the Soviet experience in which the national autonomy “to people like the Chuvash and the Kirghiz whose cultural and economic level is not much higher than that of the majority of the indigenous populations” has proved the success of the self-determination strategy.³⁸ Rabinovich thus merely reiterated the orthodox

³⁸ S.S.A. de la I.C., *El movimiento revolucionario latinoamericano. Versiones de la*

line established at the Sixth Congress, without directly engaging with the substantive issues raised by the Peruvian delegation.

The subsequent speeches reinforced the necessity of continuous efforts to eradicate racial prejudice and discrimination, particularly within trade unions, where such divisions were actively exploited by the bourgeoisie to weaken the unity of the labor movement.³⁹ Several speakers also criticized the Brazilian delegates to the Sixth Congress for their earlier claim that racial issues did not exist in Latin America.

This argument was later taken up by Jules Humbert-Droz, who emphasized the significance of the fact that a congress of communists was systematically addressing the race question. He acknowledged its immense importance—comparable to the situation in South Africa or the United States—but also underscored its complexity. Latin America presented a distinct challenge due to the coexistence of racial discrimination along color lines and the substantial presence of Indigenous populations, particularly in countries such as Peru, Bolivia, and Guatemala. Beyond Indigenous groups, themselves divided into numerous cultures and tribes, there were also Black populations, Creoles, and mestizos, forming a heterogeneous society that could not be easily aligned with the Comintern's framework of self-determination based on a direct connection between race and nation.

In making this argument, Humbert-Droz placed himself in a precarious position, as he was implicitly challenging the applicability of the Comintern's nationalities policy to Latin America. To avoid an outright rupture, he proposed that no final resolution be published, given the diversity of perspectives expressed during the debate. However, on one crucial point, he took a firm stance: he insisted that a fundamental task of communist parties in the region was to work toward the elimination of racial divisions and the construction of a unified, multiracial revolutionary subject. This also extended to the inclusion of Chinese workers, regarding whom concerns had been raised in some speeches about their integration into the movement.⁴⁰

In his final response, Hugo Pesce reaffirmed the Peruvian delegation's position, drawing a clear distinction between the national and

Primera Conferencia Comunista Latino Americana Junio de 1929, Editado por la revista «La correspondencia sudamericana», Buenos Aires, 1929, p. 299.

³⁹ Particularly Ricardo Arturo Martínez, Venezuela, and Alejandro Barreiro Olivera, Cuba.

⁴⁰ *El movimiento revolucionario latinoamericano*, p. 312.

racial questions. He defined the nation as a historically contingent entity, fundamentally unrelated to any racial categorization. This conception of nationhood stood in stark contrast to the definition proposed by Stalin in 1913, which included “psychological unity” as an essential criterion, thereby veering into cultural essentialism. Ultimately, two final theses were published, each placing different emphases on the significance of the national question. However, they shared a common commitment to the anti-racist struggle:

The false concept of racial inferiority wielded by the bourgeoisie or “civilizing” imperialism, as well as the promotion of rivalries between races in world of labour, have contributed to the persistence and intensification of racial prejudice that has delayed and continues to delay the unification of the proletariat white and mestizo with the indigenous and black proletariat.⁴¹

In Buenos Aires, the Peruvian delegation sought to demonstrate that race and nation were asymmetrical concepts referring to distinct subjects. They argued that revolutionary dynamics in Latin America had to be organized at the level of existing postcolonial nation-states and oriented toward an internationalist horizon, rather than being fragmented into abstract ethnic entities.

This position directly challenged the logic underpinning the Comintern’s self-determination thesis— an issue that Jules Humbert-Droz recognized, emphasizing the need for further study. Indeed, without tracing back to the Tupac Amaru revolt of the 18th century, there had been recent indigenous uprisings, such as the 1915 Rumi Maqui rebellion, which Mariátegui himself had analyzed. However, the Comintern neither engaged in a systematic analysis of these movements nor sought direct contact with indigenous resistance groups. This rigid, top-down approach – premised on the reification of an abstract map of “nation/race” categories that ignored the reality of a continent where migration and labor force mixing were the norm – led to absurd extremes. A striking example was the proposal of Rodolfo Ghioldi – the former Secretary of the Argentinian Communist Party – to divide Argentina into three separate nations: one for Italians, one for Poles, and one for Jews.⁴²

⁴¹ *Proyecto de Tesis sobre el problema de las razas*, in «*La Correspondencia Sudamericana*», 16, August 1929, p. 26. The two theses and a commentary by Humbert-Droz are published at pp. 25-30.

⁴² M. Caballero, *Latin America and the Comintern 1919-1943*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. p. 58.

Native Republics and self-determination in the Black belt

At the Third Comintern Congress (1921), two white South Africans, David Ivon Jones and Sam Barlin, introduced the issue of South African communism into Comintern debates, emphasizing a strong historical and political connection between African American and South African contexts. This marked the beginning of a discussion that revealed uncertainty about how to conceptualize the question of race in the Afro-Atlantic world. Three main approaches were considered: convening a global Black conference modeled on the Baku Congress; framing the African American question within the Leninist paradigm of national self-determination; and prioritizing the overcoming of racial divisions within trade unions. The 1922 Rand Rebellion in South Africa, which exposed the deep-seated racism among white workers, led South African communists to recommend a more gradual approach. They argued that emphasizing Black unity risked exacerbating interracial tensions within the working class.⁴³

At the Fourth Comintern Congress, the Afro-Atlantic question received greater attention, particularly through the participation of Surinamese activist Otto Huiswoud and Jamaican writer Claude McKay. Huiswoud emphasized that racism represented a major barrier to Black participation in labor struggles, as many Black workers distrusted unions led by white leadership.⁴⁴ The final resolution, however, left limited room for a specifically anti-racist struggle. Nonetheless, the emphasis on integrating Black workers into trade unions implicitly acknowledged its importance. The resolution underlined the shared fate of white and Black workers – both victims of capitalism and imperialism – who were called upon to form a united front. At the same time, race was recognized as a transnational source of identity across the Atlantic space. African Americans – particularly those who had migrated to the industrial cities of the northern United States – were envisioned as the natural leaders of a revolutionary front. This front was intended to connect a broad region encompassing the Caribbean, the West African coast, and African countries such as South Africa and the Congo, where initial processes of industrialization were already underway.⁴⁵

⁴³ Drachewytsch, *The Communist International*, pp. 48-49.

⁴⁴ J. Riddell (ed.), *Toward the united front: proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International 1922*, Leiden: Brill, 2012, pp. 800-805.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 947-952.

The debate at the Fifth Congress appeared to create space for an anti-racist campaign. August Thalheimer argued that the principle of national self-determination required reconsideration in multi-ethnic contexts such as the United States, where a territorialization of national identities was unfeasible.⁴⁶ The African American Lovett Fort-Whiteman argued that racism in the United States was not targeted at a specific class but affected all Black people, thereby fostering a form of interclass racial solidarity. He further observed that African Americans perceived racism as a global issue, which led Black political movements to adopt a supranational orientation.⁴⁷ Thus, any socialist strategy needed to begin with an acknowledgment of the pervasive nature of racism in order to effectively engage Black communities in the project of world revolution.⁴⁸ Finally, John Pepper argued that the principle of national self-determination for Black Americans was merely an abstract formula. In reality, they were fighting for both formal and substantive emancipation, but this struggle was rooted within the United States, as they identified as Americans. In a country where workers spoke 56 different languages, national self-determination held little political significance for the migrant and multiethnic proletariat, whereas anti-racism and the pursuit of civil rights were of primary importance.⁴⁹

This debate reflected a growing awareness of the specificity of racism and the transnational nature of the struggle against it. However, the Sixth Congress ultimately redefined the Black question in the United States and South Africa strictly in terms of the self-determination of oppressed nations. This shift was the outcome of internal debates

⁴⁶ *Protokoll, Fünfter Kongress der. Kommunistischen Internationale*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1967, pp. 580-581.

⁴⁷ M. Solomon, *The cry was unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917-1936*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998, pp. 47-49. The supranational character of black political movements becomes clear as early as the nineteenth century, on the interwar period see B.H. Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora. Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.

⁴⁸ *Protokoll, Fünfter Kongress*, pp. 666-669.

⁴⁹ *Protokoll, Fünfter Kongress*, pp. 699-700. John Pepper was a Hungarian communist of Jewish origin who fled to Austria and then Russia after the failure of the Hungarian revolution. In 1922 he was sent to the U.S. by the Comintern, see T. Sakmyster, *A Communist Odyssey: The Life of József Pogány/John Pepper*, Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2012.

within the Comintern, revealing two alternative strategies grounded in different understandings of the racial question. Drawing on Lenin's parallel between the Irish and African-American struggles,⁵⁰ Nasonov – a rising figure of the Young Communist International – came into close contact in Chicago with Harry Haywood, a prominent emerging voice in the African-American communist movement. Together, the two developed a proposal for Black self-determination in the form of an independent republic to be established in the Black Belt.⁵¹ Harry Haywood was virtually the only African American within the Communist Party of the United States to advocate for this position. He received his political education in Moscow, attending the Communist University of the Toilers of the East since the 1925 and the International Lenin School in 1927. Immersed in Soviet ideological training, he came to define himself as a “Black Bolshevik.”⁵²

During the congress, African American delegates voiced strong opposition to this proposal – most notably James W. Ford and, in even more forceful terms, Otto Hall, Harry Haywood's brother. A similar stance was taken by Sidney Bunting in response to the proposed shift in South African strategy toward the creation of a Native Republic. However, the South African Communist Party experienced internal divisions on this issue. Alex La Guma, who had been invited to Moscow in 1927, supported the principle of self-determination and advocated for framing the Black question in South Africa within the broader context of the anti-imperialist struggle. Between 1924 and 1927, the South African party had grown significantly, expanding its

⁵⁰ In the *Thesis On National and Colonial Questions* approved in the Second Congress, Lenin mentioned Irish and Afro-American as underprivileged nations.

⁵¹ Nasonov published an article on the Bulletin of International Bureau in 1928, N. Nasonov, *Negritianskaia problema v Severo-Amerikanskikh Soedinennykh Shtatakh*, in Rgspi 495-155-46, pp. 66-75. The Black Belt was an area of predominately African American counties stretching from eastern Virginia to eastern Texas; see H. Kkehr-W. Thompson, *Self-determination in the black belt: Origins of a communist policy*, «Labor History», 30/3, 1989, pp. 354-366.

⁵² See H. Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist*, Chicago, IL: Liberator Press 1978; on the meaning of “black bolshevist” see C. Høgsbjerg, *Communism and the Colour Line. Reflections on Black Bolshevism*, in Mahler-Capuzzo, *The Comintern and the Global South*, pp. 96-121; and C. Bergin, ‘Something Real’: *Black Bolshevism and the Comintern*, «Twentieth Century Communism», 24, 2023, pp. 43-74.

Black membership largely through its alliance with the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union, its outreach efforts in Black communities and workplaces, and its use of the Bantu language for propaganda purposes.⁵³ The adoption of the Native Republic strategy marked the prelude to a party crisis in the early 1930s – not only due to the content of the theses themselves, but also because of the increasingly rigid, hierarchical relationship between the Comintern center and its peripheries. This centralization fostered disaffection and mutual distrust.

The Black Belt Republic thesis found little support among CPUSA leaders, who were compelled to adopt it slowly and reluctantly in the years that followed. Its reception further deepened the divide between white and African American workers. Moreover, African Americans largely aspired to full integration within the United States, rather than being relegated to a separatist enclave.⁵⁴ Among the most forceful criticisms came from Otto Huiswoud, who argued that the Black question could be framed as a national-colonial issue in Africa and the West Indies, but not in the United States. In his 1930 article *World Aspects of the Negro Question*, he did not even mention the principle of self-determination, nor did he define African Americans as a nation. On the contrary, he emphasized the struggle for racial equality as one of the most crucial arenas of communist engagement: «The old Social Democratic notion that the Negro question is only a class question, prevailed with us for a considerable time. We are only now beginning

⁵³ On the South African Communist Party see A. Drew, *Discordant comrades: Identities and loyalties on the South African left*, London: Routledge, 2019 (2000), pp. 94-111; R. Kelley, *The Third International and the Struggle for National Liberation in South Africa*, «Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies», 38 (1), 2014, pp. 245-246; Drachewych, *The Communist International*, 75-97; on the formation of the Negro Bureau and its function in the late 1920s Comintern strategy, see H. Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic. African American Agency, West African Intellectuals and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers*, Leiden: Brill, 2013, pp. 122-129; H. Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919-1939*, Trenton: Africa World Press, 2013,

⁵⁴ O. Berland, *The Emergence of the Communist Perspective on The "Negro Question" in America: 1919-1931: Part One*, «Science & Society», Vol. 63, No. 4 (Winter, 1999/2000), pp. 411-432; *The Emergence of the Communist Perspective on the "Negro Question" in America: 1919-1931: Part Two*, «Science & Society», Vol. 64, No. 2 (Summer, 2000), pp. 194-217; H. Adi, *Pan-Africanism*, chapter 2.

to realize that the Negro question is not only a class question but also a race question». ⁵⁵ And he concluded in a way that clearly opposed the Thesis of the VI Congress: «It is the duty of our Party to mobilize and rally the masses of white workers in defense of the Negro workers, linking up the struggles of the white with that of the black workers through all of its campaigns and activities». ⁵⁶

The idea of establishing an independent Black state within North America never held a significant place in African American political movements. In 1917, Cyril Briggs, leader of the African Blood Brotherhood, briefly entertained the possibility of advocating for a Black independent state within the borders of the United States, drawing inspiration from the struggles of Poles and Serbs in Europe. However, he soon abandoned this position in favour of proposing a migration to South America or Africa. ⁵⁷ This was an option already proposed by certain figures within nineteenth-century Black abolitionism, such as Martin Delany. In 1924, Hubert Harrison also put forward the idea of establishing a state within the United States. ⁵⁸ Thus, the pursuit of this policy risked discrediting the communists within Afro-American political circles; the NAACP denounced the proposal as “a plan of plain segregation”. ⁵⁹

The CPUSA’s inaction in implementing the 1928 decision prompted the Comintern to issue a second directive, reaffirming that the question of self-determination was crucial and that the party was expected to actively commit to it. The program was further refined to distinguish it clearly from Garveyite nationalism. The envisioned black states in the Black Belt were to form a single political entity, determine their own relations with other nations, and carry out land confiscation from white owners in order to redistribute it to black peasants.

During the discussions surrounding the drafting of the document

⁵⁵ O. Huiswoud, *World Aspects of the Negro Question*, «The Communist», vol. 9, no. 2 (February 1930), pp. 132-147: 132.

⁵⁶ O. Huiswoud, *World Aspects*, p. 147.

⁵⁷ T. Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, London: Routledge, 2017 (1957), p. 323.

⁵⁸ J.B. Perry, *Hubert Harrison: The Struggle for Equality, 1918-1927*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2020, chapter 16.

⁵⁹ R. Kanet, *The Comintern and the ‘Negro Question’: Communist Policy in the U. S. and Africa, 1921-41*, «Survey», 19/4 (Autumn), 1973, pp. 86-122: 105.

for the Sixth Congress, Nasonov's primary opponent was Endre Sík.⁶⁰ Sík, a Hungarian from a converted Jewish family, had been taken prisoner in Russia during the First World War and joined the Russian Communist Party in 1920. From the mid-1920s, he began teaching in the Comintern schools, focusing on Africa and African-American issues, while simultaneously pursuing his own university studies, which culminated in an extensive doctoral dissertation on the history of Black Africa.⁶¹

Sík was a staunch opponent of the thesis advocating for a Black Republic in the Black Belt. He emphasized the necessity of combating racism as a mechanism of imperialist domination, which strategically divided the working class along artificially constructed racial lines, arguing that race had no biological foundation.⁶² In the United States, the exploitation of Black people had historically been rooted in racial contempt and the doctrine of racial inequality. It was now essential to recognize the political foundations of racism and to combat them. However, it made little sense to define these social groups in terms of a separate national identity, since they were fully American – albeit subjected to structural inequality, which precisely needed to be dismantled. The case of the African colonies was different: there, the anti-racist struggle could also take the path of anti-colonial national emancipation. It was no accident, Sík argued, that in the U.S., it was the Black middle class that played the card of nationalism in order to preserve its relative class privilege. The struggle, therefore, had to be framed primarily as an anti-racist one – a struggle for equality, not for national independence.

The battle between Nasonov and Sík continued in the *Kutv Journal*

⁶⁰ On the confrontation Nasonov-Sík, see I. Filatova, *Anti-Colonialism in Soviet African Studies (1920s–1960)*, in *The Study of Africa*, Volume 2: *Global and Transnational Engagements*, ed. P. Tiyambe Zeleza, Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2007, pp. 203–223; 216; A. Davidson, *Pervoe pokolenie otechestvennykh afrikanistov*, «Novaia i noveishaia istoriia», 5, 2019, pp. 69–80; A. Davidson, *The Study of South African History in the Soviet Union*, «The International Journal of African Historical Studies», 25/1, 1992, pp. 2–13; D. Colin-G. Littlejohn, *Endre Sík and the Development of African Studies in the USSR: A Study Agenda from 1929*, «History in Africa», 10, 1983, pp. 79–108.

⁶¹ I. Filatova, *Anti-Colonialism in Soviet African Studies*, p. 209.

⁶² A. Sík, *The Comintern Programme and the Racial Problem*, «The Communist International», no. 16, 15 August 1928, pp. 407–411.

«Revoliutsionnyi vostok».⁶³ Sík argued that the Comintern's debate was marked by a superficial and confused use of the term "race", and he devoted a substantial volume to clarifying the concept.⁶⁴ This was the most far-reaching intellectual contribution on the subject of race produced within Comintern circles. Sík undertook the ambitious task of developing a communist conception of race, critically analyzing it as a cultural-historical construct, devoid of any naturalistic foundation in physical anthropology. At the same time, he expressed concern that the notion of a greater or lesser aptitude of different peoples for historical change and progress – based on presumed racial characteristics – was still circulating even within the Soviet sphere.⁶⁵ Moreover, he criticized the inconsistency and conceptual confusion arising from any conflation of the race question with the national question, which he regarded as one of the most serious limitations of the Comintern's analytical framework. In the preface to the volume, the presidium of the Research Group on National and Colonial Problems stated that Comrade Sík's book constituted the only rigorous attempt at a systematic study of the race question, one capable of overcoming the revisionist interpretation advanced by Kautsky.⁶⁶ However, Sík's positions, which diverged in significant ways from the line adopted by the Comintern after 1928, did not go unnoticed. Nasonov, invoking the orthodoxy of the Sixth Congress, launched a harsh attack on Sík's volume⁶⁷ and Sík's political defeat became evident when he was compelled to engage in a humiliat-

⁶³ The article of N. Nasonov, *Negritianskaia problema v Severo-Amerikanskikh Soedinennykh Shtatakh* was republished in «Revoliutsionnyi vostok», 1929, no. 6, pp. 59-76; the critical response of A. Sík, *K voprosu o negritianskoi probleme v SASSH*, «Revoliutsionnyi vostok», 1929, no. 7, pp. 138-167.

⁶⁴ A. Sík, *Rasovaya problema i marksizm*, Moskva, 1930.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8. He referred to a course held by Mikhail Pavlovich in 1922-23, *Imperializm. Kurs lektsiy chitannykh v Akademii General'nogo Shtaba v 1922-1923 gg. Lektsiya pervaya: Filozofskaya teoriya o sushchnosti imperializma – teoriya Seyera*, Moskva: Krasnaya Nov', 1923, p. 12; Pavlovich was considered the most prominent marxist orientalist in Soviet Russia in the 1920s and he was one of the main speakers at the Baku congress, see M. Kemper, *Red Orientalism: Mikhail Pavlovich and Marxist Oriental Studies in Early Soviet Russia*, «Die Welt des Islams», 50/3, 2010, pp. 435-476.

⁶⁶ They referred to K. Kautsky, *Rasse und Judentum*. Ergänzungsheft zur "Neuen Zeit", Stuttgart: J.H.W. Dietz, 1914.

⁶⁷ N. Nasonov, *Rasovaya problema i marksizm v ponimanii t. Shiika*, «Revoliutsionnyi vostok», 1930, no. 9-10, pp. 323-331.

ing act of self-criticism for having defended positions that ran counter to those of the Comintern.⁶⁸ The irony of the story lies in the fact that Nasonov was executed a few years later during the Stalinist purges, whereas Sík, after a brief detention at the Lubianka, went on to study at the Academy of Sciences and subsequently enjoyed a distinguished postwar political career in socialist Hungary.

Conclusion

In the 1920s, the Communist International and the Soviet Revolution represented an unequivocally anti-racist force operating globally in a world where racial discrimination and oppression were fundamental organizing principles of both international and interpersonal relations. Building a universal political subject that would unite all people exploited by capitalism and imperialism required the elimination of prejudice and discrimination based on skin color, race, national belonging, religious belief, and other markers of identity. This radical universalism marked a decisive break with the earlier socialist tradition. The Second International, at the Stuttgart Congress (1907), was in fact divided on the condemnation of colonialism. Justifications for colonial rule, which circulated within international socialism, were grounded in a barely concealed hierarchical conception of human races.

The Comintern actively worked to overcome obstacles to the construction of a truly universal internationalism. At the same time, however, it had to confront the strong heterogeneity of the political subjectivities it encountered throughout the world. The guiding principle of its overall strategy was shaped by a Leninist compass – namely, the connection between the anti-capitalist struggle of the industrial proletariat in the global North and the anti-imperialist struggle of the oppressed nations in the global South. Yet, the simplicity of this scheme proved inadequate for providing the necessary tools to understand the diverse contexts in which the Comintern operated.

Nevertheless, during the 1920s, it remained possible to exercise critique within the Comintern and to engage in a genuine effort to understand cultural “otherness”. Although this was not “free research” in the strict sense – given that a clear political agenda guided the setting

⁶⁸ A. Sík, *Zamechaniia na kritiku tov. Nasonova*, «Revoliutsionnyi vostok», 1930, no. 9-10, pp. 331-334.

of priorities – there was still a plurality of perspectives and a vibrant debate. This was particularly evident within the Comintern’s educational institutions, which functioned as an extraordinary laboratory for the encounter between different radical political cultures, despite being embedded in a pedagogical project aimed at the Bolshevization of the international communist movement.

On this journey to discover the non-Western exploited people of the world, the term race was not often used. The “bourgeois doctrines” of race, which were highly popular during the era of positivism, were completely rejected, while there was a growing tendency to classify cultural differences along national lines. This process reached its turning point in 1928, with the Sixth Congress, when the program of “Native Republics” was launched. The radicalization of the Comintern line led to a reinforcement of political initiatives in the global South and to a more energetic involvement of Black members within the Comintern leadership, although this was short-lived. This “national turn” in Comintern strategy was consistent with the *Korenizatsiya* policy within the Soviet Union. The revolutionary strategy of the 1930s further emphasized the national framework that had been embedded in Bolshevik political culture since the pre-war period. In this context, transnational anti-racist struggles and the construction of multiracial communist parties were subordinated to a strategy centered on the nationalization of subaltern subjects from the South – or were even hindered or opposed outright. The strategy of national emancipation was wrapped in multicultural rhetoric, within which subtle forms of racialization could nevertheless persist, compatible with Stalin’s essentialization of “national psychologies”.

Other ways of constructing political subjectivities that the Comintern encountered during its expansion – those based on a migrant and multiethnic proletariat that had lost its roots or relocated them into diasporic identities irreducible to nation-state-building narratives – were marginalized. This ultimately undermined the anti-racist potential that the Bolshevik Revolution had initially generated and alienated many individuals who had looked to the Comintern as a vehicle for social liberation and freedom from racial discrimination.

PAOLO CAPUZZO

Nationality Policies and Land Reforms in African Communism

1. *Introduction*

This paper sketches a very brief and rough reconstruction of how communists treated two questions in distinct national situations – land reform and policy of nationalities. Both were particularly important for the Third World, during and even after the years of the Comintern. They represent indeed an actual ground of the theoretical debate on “African socialism”, in a more intricate way than the binary opposition between marxism and nativism elaborated by Westad’s seminal book.¹ At the same time, it was a sphere of action different from the “distant front” embodied by the foreign politics of USSR in terms of technical, military, and financial assistance to African national governments.²

The Comintern was founded as a radically opposite alternative to the Second International, which rested on two ideological pillars: the refusal of the war, and the revolution as a current question. Two further ideological pillars were strictly connected: the working class as the main player of the revolution, and the proletarian internationalism as an opponent of what the Second International termed “Nation-

¹ O.A. Westad, *Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times*, Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. For the debate on African socialism see A. Drew, *Soviet and African marxist perspectives on the colonial question*, in F. Blum et al. (eds.), *Socialismes en Afrique. Socialisms in Africa*, Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 2021, pp. 107-117.

² S. Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War. The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956-1964*, Palo Alto CA: Stanford University Press, 2010 (or ed. Moscow 2008); T. Rupperecht, *Soviet Internationalism After Stalin: Interaction and Exchange Between the Ussr and Latin America During the Cold War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

alitätenfrage”.³ However, it is a well-known and peculiar historical paradox that the international communism gained its only victories in “backward countries” without an established working class, such as China or Vietnam, when the Comintern was long since abolished. In those countries the Communists were able to conjugate the peasants’ mobilization for the conquest of the land with the national struggle against the colonial domination. It resembled to a tacit neglect of the ideological pillars of original communism, except for the one which referred to the feasible revolution.

Within Soviet Union and throughout the world, the Leninist principle of peoples’ self-determination was the key to defend the revolution, as well as to exert influence upon non-European peoples. According to many historians, the final dissolution of Soviet Union was a «revenge of the past», represented by non-repressed, and re-emerging nationalities.⁴ But until it worked, the Bolshevik federalism represented an experiment of peoples’ self-determination that was able to influence many anti-colonial leaders, as well as to represent an image of the USSR as a non-imperialist power.

Throughout the world, the principle of self-determination seemed to prevail once the liberal internationalism established by the Treaty of Versailles actually saved the colonial empires and lessened the «Wilsonian moment». Consequently, in Africa and Asia the disillusionment with Paris Peace Conference created momentum for communist propaganda.⁵

³ R. Gallissot, *Nazione e nazionalità nei dibattiti del movimento operaio*, in *Storia del marxismo*, v. 2, Turin: Einaudi, 1979, pp. 787-864.

⁴ R.G. Suny, *The revenge of the past: Nationalism, revolution and the collapse of the Soviet Union*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993; Y.M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State 1953-1991*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998; S.Dullin-E. Forestier Peyrat, *Flexible Sovereignties of the Revolutionary State: Soviet Republics Enter World Politics*, «Journal of the History of International Law», 19, 2017, 2, pp. 178-199. For a different (and rather chaotic) interpretation of Bolshevism as nationalism, see P. Zwick, *National Communism*, Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1983; Y. Slezkine, *The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism*, «Slavic Review», 53, 1994, 2, pp. 414-452.

⁵ G. Eley, *Marxism and Socialist Revolution*, in S. Pons-S.A. Smith (eds.), *Cambridge History of Communism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, v. 1, p. 51; E. Manela, *Wilsonian Moment: Self-determination and the International Origins of*

2. *The «Faustian bargain»*

In the Comintern's view nationalist movements in Africa and Asia – unlike the European ones, which emerged from WW1 as the worst enemies – played a revolutionary role because they were aimed at breaking the nexus of exploitation between the core and the peripheries of colonial empires. In a somewhat instrumental way, which partly emerged from the debate between Lenin and the Indian anti-Gandhian marxist M.N. Roy, the Comintern recommended the alliance of the peasants and proletarians in the colonies with the «national bourgeoisie» more or less involved in the foreign administration, but distinct from the «comprador bourgeoisie» which acted as a mere broker of the colonial system. In Asia and Africa the reasons of the class struggle were temporarily suspended, in order to develop an anti-imperialist mobilization and support the revolution in the advanced countries. To the communist militants in the colonies it was proposed a kind of «Faustian bargain» with the national bourgeoisies: the soul of a future revolution in exchange for a current subservient role in an anti-imperialist coalition on the road to independence.⁶ Future leaders of the decolonization like Hồ Chí Minh or Nehru, who participated to the 1927 Comintern-sponsored congress in Belgium of the League against imperialism, built their worldview within this ideological mood, which identified colonialism and capitalism, joined communism and freedom,

Anticolonial Nationalism, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. For the parallel intellectual development of the right to self-determination in France and US see S.C. Dunstan, *Race, Rights, and Reform: Black Activism in the French Empire and the United States from World War I to the Cold War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021.

⁶ K. Maitra, *Roy, Comintern and Marxism in India*, Calcutta: Darbar, 1991; S. Wolkow, *L'Internationale communiste 1919-1943: le Komintern ou le rêve déchu du parti mondial de la révolution*, Paris: l'Atelier, 2010, p. 49; A. Hughes, *The appeal of Marxism to Africans*, in Id. (ed.), *Marxism's Retreat from Africa*, London: Routledge, 2015, pp. 4-20; S.D. Gupta, *Communism and the Crisis of the Colonial System*, in Pons-Smith, *Cambridge History*, v. 1, pp. 214-215. For a totally opposing (and stereotyped) interpretation founded on «class scenario», revolutionary party, and violence, see L.T. Lih, *Bolshevik Roots of International Communism*, in Pons-Smith, *Cambridge History*, v. 1, pp. 142-165.

while refused cultural alternatives founded on the concept of race, such as Pan-Africanism.⁷

Indeed, many African and African American activists did not regard Pan-Africanism and Communism as conflicting ideologies. For instance, George Padmore from Trinidad attended medical school in the United States, where he joined the Communist Party in 1927. Since 1929 he stayed in Moscow to direct the Negro Bureau of the Red International of Labor Unions (Profintern). But in 1933 Padmore clashed with Comintern about USSR's diplomatic strategy of alliances with the colonial powers of Britain and France. Still, Padmore never dismissed the nationality policies carried out in the Soviet Union as the only alternative to the imperialist policy of *divide et impera*.⁸

The disillusionment of Padmore was not fortuitous. In 1927 the bloody clash between the Chinese Communist Party and the party of national bourgeoisie embodied by the Guomindang represented an indirect but significant support for the Stalinist turn in favor of the socialism in one country, eventually established at the VI congress of the Communist International in 1928. The world was ordered according to a rigid hierarchy; first, the defense of the Bolshevik revolution, second, the communist parties in capitalist countries, and third, the laboring masses in the colonies. An enduring opposition against Gandhi by the Communist Party of India was the result, along with its isolation from the mainstream nationalist movement.⁹ In Vietnam Hồ Chí Minh strategy of anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism (land

⁷ F. Petersson, «We are Neither Visionaries Nor Utopian Dreamers»: Willi Münzenberg, *the League against Imperialism and the Comintern, 1925-1933*, Lewiston NY: Mellen, 2014.

⁸ L. James, *George Padmore and decolonization from below*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; M. Solomon, *The Cry was Unity: Communists and African-Americans, 1917-1936*, Jackson MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1998; H. Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: the Communist International, Africa and the diaspora, 1919-1939*, Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 2013; G. Padmore-D. Pizer, *How Russia transformed her colonial empire: A challenge to the imperialist powers*, London: Dobson, 1946. For a different interpretation that underestimates the point and is centered on a mythical view of Black Atlantic Pan-Africanism, see A. Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019.

⁹ S.D. Gupta, *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India 1919-1943: Dialectics of Real and a Possible History*, Kolkata: Seribaan, 2011.

to the tiller) was replaced by leftist sectarianism; in 1930 an abortive communist uprising ended in disaster.

The new strategy of popular front adopted at the VII congress of Comintern in 1935 strengthened the «Faustian bargain». The invasion of Ethiopia by fascist Italy unified the Pan-Africanist movement in defense of the last black state: the only colored nation, along with Japan, which defeated white powers at arms.¹⁰ To the contrary, Comintern was increasingly focusing on Europe and the beginning of the Spanish civil war. The prompt recognition of Italy's annexation of Ethiopia by the USSR as a counterbalance to Germany's expansionism, was a case in point. Anti-fascism was not fully equivalent (and possibly opposite) to anti-colonialism, since European empires like United Kingdom and France were engaged in the battle against Nazism. Therefore, the new strategy of popular front overshadowed the possibly dividing anti-colonial phrases. African communist parties were constrained under the leadership of their British and French comrades.¹¹ It was an Eurocentric shift, that was confirmed during the Cold War and went on until the mid-1950s, and the final cycle of decolonization. One of the few exceptions was Hồ Chí Minh, who in 1941 could resume his anti-imperialist and anti-feudal strategy by the establishment of the Viet Minh front. Elsewhere in Africa and Asia, small communist parties were subjected to the influence of larger anti-colonial movements; in the colonies the strategy of popular front very often limited communists' action and propaganda in terms of class struggle and land reform.

Nevertheless, the end of the armed coalition with the Western powers reduced the USSR's degree of colonial «contamination». After 1945 in Africa and Asia the appeal of communist ideology was again

¹⁰ G. Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle for Africa*, New York: Roy Publishers, 1956, p. 145; S.K.B. Asante, *Pan-African protest: West Africa and the Italo-Ethiopian crisis, 1934-1941*, London: Longman, 1977; G. Procacci, *Il socialismo internazionale e la guerra d'Etiopia*, Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1978; W.R. Scott, *The Sons of Sheba's Race: African-Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War 1935-1941*, Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1993; N. Srivastava, *Italian Colonialism and Resistances to Empire, 1930-1970*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 88.

¹¹ Gupta, *Communism*, pp. 224-225; B.H. Bayerlein, *Addis Ababa, Rio De Janeiro and Moscow 1935. The double failure of Comintern anti-fascism and anti-colonialism*, in K. Brasken-N. Copey-D. Featherstone (eds.), *Antifascism in a Global Perspective*, New York-London: Routledge, 2021, pp. 218-233.

significant. Beside the speed of USSR industrial modernization, its starting rural backwardness notwithstanding, it enclosed a «natural» anti-colonial (more specifically, anti-Western empires) impetus.¹² Furthermore, the principle of peoples' self-determination and the policy of nationalities adopted in USSR resembled an influential model in countries marked by a historical efflorescence of languages and ethnic diversities, which weakened the Pan-Africanist call of the common black race.¹³ Thus, the overall picture of twentieth-century Africa displays a striking contradiction between the communists' weakness before the independence and the large majority of post-colonial African states claiming to be socialist or communist.

However, in many countries (1958 Egypt, 1959 Iraq, 1965 Indonesia, 1971 Sudan, 1979 Iran, 1980 Ethiopia) the «Faustian bargain» with the nationalist parties was a tragically mistaken choice, leading to the elimination of tens of thousands of communist activists. Almost everywhere the communist parties were reduced into an awkward condition of repressed minority. It was the consequence of a kind of “inferiority complex” enclosed in the communist political culture. The perspective of the “democratic-bourgeois revolution” constrained the party propaganda in terms of social class and land reform, leaving the initiative (and the consensus) to the allies. Notwithstanding an almost secular debate on the agrarian problem, Comintern's legacy reproduced an ambiguity about rural classes that limited the actions of African communist movements. Where the room for peasants' mobilization was not left to others (e.g., China, Cuba, Vietnam) the communist revolution won, conjugating anti-colonial, nationalist and social appeal. Since the early 1950s Hồ Chí Minh's Việt Minh stepped up land reform in North Vietnam while continued to support the

¹² M. Matusevich, *Soviet Antiracism and Its Discontents: The Cold War Years*, in J.Mark-A.Kalinowsky-S.Marung (eds.), *Alternative Globalizations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World*, Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2020, pp. 229-250.

¹³ Adi, *Pan-Africanism*, p. 71; F. Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy*, Westport CN: Greenwood Press, 1960; K. Dawisha, *Soviet Cultural Relations with Iraq, Syria and Egypt, 1955-1970*, «Soviet Studies», 28, 1975, 3, pp. 418-442; M. Matusevich, *Revisiting the Soviet Moment in Sub-Saharan Africa*, «History Compass», 7, 2009, pp. 1-10; C. Katsakioris, *Socialist Federalism as an Alternative to Nationalism: The Leninist Solution to the National Question in Africa and Its Diaspora*, «Humanities», 8, 152, 2019, pp. 1-11.

united anti-colonial front. After 1956 the anti-landlord excesses were at least partially amended.¹⁴ To the contrary, a cumbersome influence of the communist parties of the metropolitan countries (e.g., the PCF in Algeria or the PCGB in India) constrained the indigenization of the communist parties in the colonies.

3. *The Gospel by Matthew*

Despite the persisting ambiguity on land reform, however, the most important argument actually on the part of Communism was that the communist state had displayed the capacity to supply capital and entrepreneurship, whereas both were deficient in nations emerging from colonial domination.¹⁵ Thus, the common point between the Bolshevik experience and the anti-colonial movements was a confidence in the state power («the dictatorship of the proletariat») as the silver bullet to solve the situations. In his autobiography Kwame Nkrumah, the first leader of independent Ghana, echoed the Gospel by Matthew (6:33): «seek ye first the political kingdom and all other things shall be added unto you».¹⁶ Embodied by parliaments and ministries, hydroelectric dams and airlines, the modern state as developmental state did not display any difference in its Western-bourgeois or Eastern-socialist version. The utopia of the United States of Africa, imagined by Nkrumah himself at the moment of Ghana's independence, was extremely short-lived.

It was a crucial point in communist political culture, that new generations of scholars less familiar with Marxism often miss. Stalinism underscored the hyphen between Marxism and Leninism as a defining dogma. Actually, that hyphen meant a break in continuity and a degeneration. Marxism was an effort to analyze the global transformations induced by the capitalist mode of production in the society. According

¹⁴ T. Vu, *It's Time for the Indochinese Revolution to Show Its True Colors: The Radical Turn in Vietnamese Politics in 1948*, «Journal of Southeast Asian Studies», 40, 2009, 3, pp. 519-542; S. Quinn Judge, *The History of the Vietnamese Communist Party 1941-1975*, in N. Naimark-S. Pons-S. Quinn Judge, *Cambridge History of Communism*, v. 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 421-424.

¹⁵ S.G. Marks, *How Russia Shaped the Modern World*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003.

¹⁶ *The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, Edinburgh: Nelson, 1957, p. 164.

to an ethnocentric approach, the developed countries offered a mirror for the future development of the less developed countries. But in Marx the references to the nation-state were sporadic and marginal. To the contrary, Leninism was a doctrine of the revolutionary party as a tool to conquer the power. The tactical use of alliances among different social classes on the path of the revolution largely prevailed on the analysis of the economic structure as well as the design of the future. Even the Bolshevik revolution responded to the Gospel by Matthew, 6:33. As Gramsci wrote in the *Prison Notebooks*, «in the East the state was all».¹⁷ «One of Lenin's worst ideas was one of the most influential in Africa, and not just in states that claimed to pursue socialist economic policies: the single party».¹⁸ It went very often hand in hand with the state ownership of factories and farms, conceived as the only remedy to the preponderance of Western economies in the global markets. In a kind of paradoxical nemesis, the myth of *négritude* as a classless society instrumentally reemerged in the practical shortcut of political (and often military) authoritarianism. Africa as an imagined community justified the recourse to a «revolution from above» led or protected by armed forces, since pluralism or democracy were not necessary.¹⁹

The ironic contradiction was that socialism and communism were the label of an attempt to transplant a historical Western pattern of state-building in many locations and peoples (e.g., the area named Zomia by James Scott) which never experienced it, as they were historically accustomed to another kind of clan loyalties.²⁰ Especially among Muslim communities, the strong relationship with the USSR represented a handicap for the indigenous communist parties, since they were perceived as the Trojan horse of a new colonial and atheist power

¹⁷ A. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, v. 2, Turin: Einaudi, 1975, p. 866.

¹⁸ F. Cooper, *Conclusion*, in F. Blum, *Socialismes*, p. 692. For a significant example on the cultural journal of the Italian Communist Party see S.G. Ikoku, *Una tesi sul partito unico nell'Africa di oggi*, «Rinascita», January 16, 1965, pp. 17-19.

¹⁹ For a typical illustration see K. Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and ideology for decolonization and development with particular reference to the African revolution*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964.

²⁰ J.C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed. An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, New Haven CN: Yale University Press, 2009. For the interpretive framework of the book see Id., *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, New Haven CN: Yale University Press, 1998.

that was seeking dominance against well-established religious identities. Nevertheless, it was according to the usual «Faustian bargain» that the Egyptian communists choose a mimetic name (Democratic Movement for the National Liberation) and worked in alliance with Nasser and the Free Officers who overthrew the monarchy in 1952.²¹ The anti-colonial solution to the Suez crisis in 1956 enforced the connection between USSR and Arab nationalism. But at the moment when communists came out as a newly unified Egyptian Communist Party, Nasser brutally repressed them, as well as moved into the orbit of USSR. By an underground charity work among the urban and rural poor Islamist organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood began to replace communists and prepare their comeback. Analogous dynamics took place in Iran, Iraq, and Algeria.

An interpretation in terms of Cold War (i.e., the *Primat der Aussenpolitik*) led communists to support nationalist and Islamist movements as anti-imperialist players, able to detach their countries from US and shift to the socialist camp. Thus, it was prevailing the presumption that the shortage of capital and investment in infrastructures would automatically push post-colonial élites toward the financial assistance of USSR, as the experience of Egypt (and Cuba, subsequently) demonstrated. The questions of nationalities and land reform receded into the background and anti-imperialist gestures overcame the elaboration of a possible and indigenous road to socialism. The ancient Leninist paradigm-constrain of the «democratic-bourgeois revolution» was still in use.²² In the meantime, the political and cultural struggle against Pan-Africanism and «négritude» led communists to reject any resurrection of traditional African values or peculiarities because expression of racism, primitivism, and “false consciousness” of cross-class nationalism. The merely tactical alliance with the national bourgeoisies excluded any contamination in terms of political culture. In this fashion and according to the principle of peaceful coexistence, the 1960 Conference of 81 Communist and Workers’ Parties coined the formula “states of national democracy” to comprehend post-colonial nations wherein the action of commu-

²¹ A. Alexander, *Communism in the Islamic World*, in S.A. Smith (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 276.

²² For an “exotic” confirmation see V. Spano, *La funzione delle borghesie nazionali nella lotta contro il colonialismo*, «Rinascita», November 1, 1958, pp. 770-775.

nist parties was allowed as a guarantee of their progressive and anti-imperialist nature. Such non-socialist governments still seemed to offer possibilities for both long-term transitions as well as immediate opportunities in the context of the USSR's superpower competition.²³ From the Kremlin's point of view, "national democracies" implied a possible "non-capitalist path" to socialism, that is an evolution of state capitalism in post-colonial contexts without a socialist revolution but with a rapid industrialization under central planning and foreign financial aid.²⁴

In any case the effort of state-building by post-colonial ruling élites largely overcame the recognition of different nationalities and ethnic identities. Traditional micro-local forms of self-government such as the councils of the elderly were discarded as an atavism, destined to be cancelled by the modernity. One of the few exceptions was the nation of Botswan

a, whose constitutional charter (1966) included the *kgotla*, that in Bantu language means a mix of village public assembly, community council and law court. That Botswana has been one of the most stable and peaceful countries in the continent is no coincidence.²⁵ It was the exception that confirmed the rule. African post-colonial élites practiced state- and nation-building as a struggle against tribalism; but failed to cancel traditional identities and ethnic belongings (including their own ones). Accordingly, they provoked resentment and deepened the cleavage between town and countryside. Communitarian

²³ A. Hilger, *Communism, Decolonization and the Third World*, in N. Naimark-S. Pons-S. Quinn Judge, *Cambridge History*, v. 2, p. 329. In retrospect the PCI noted the difference (more precisely, hosted an opinion PCF did not tolerate) between the category of "national democracy" and the Maoist category of "new democracy" as led by communist parties, see Asiaticus (J. Chesneaux), *Due tesi sull'evoluzione dei paesi ex-coloniali*, «Rinascita», January 26, 1963, pp. 14-15. For the author's identification see. L. Foa, È andata così. *Conversazioni a ruota libera in via Aurelia*, Palermo: Sellerio, 2004, p. 87.

²⁴ D. Engerman, *Learning from the East: Soviet Experts and India in the Era of Competitive Coexistence*, «Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East», 33, 2013, 2, pp. 227-238; Id., *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2018, ch. 8.

²⁵ D. Acemoglu-S. Johnson-J.A. Robinson, *An African Success Story: Botswana*, in D. Rodrik (ed.), *In Search of Prosperity: Analytic Narratives on Economic Growth*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003, pp. 80-119.

forms of rural economy with their intrinsic anti-colonial value were not considered as a possible alternative to the modern commodities' market.²⁶

4. *Lost in translation*

Given the political room occupied by nationalist parties, the arguments of nationalities and land reform were indeed the only spheres of actions available to the communist parties. Both had to be elaborated in terms of social class, meaning that the material condition of landless peasants (or owners of small and low-quality estates) was common and could mobilize whole peoples, overcoming different ethnic belongings. Federalism and land redistribution could be not only the aims of independence but even the reforms to radically transform the post-colonial country and put it into the way toward a modern and self-sustained economic development. That was the possible communist difference. Meanwhile, that was the possible translation of the word "democracy" in contexts where it was historically unknown.

After all the question of land reform was the first and foremost problem that divided the Bolshevik elite in the wake of the conquest of power in Russia. Accordingly, it was the most urgent problem the newborn communist parties in "backward countries" had to face. But the shared limit and obstacle – in Soviet Union like elsewhere – was a discursive representation of the reality in allegoric terms ("national bourgeoisie", "landless peasants", "*kulaki*", "laborers") with ethical and political implications. There was no socio-economic understanding of the actual differences in terms of income and its sources, and equally no attention to the problem of agrarian productivity. The political theme of the alliances overcame the economic knowledge of the agricultural production in the diverse areas. The moral opposition against the private property dictated the practical imposition of cooperatives as well as excluded rural elites and middle classes from the revolutionary fronts. Meanwhile, a dogmatic Marxism-Leninism

²⁶ E. Gilbert, *Rice, Civilisation and the Swahili Towns: Anti-Commodity and Anti-State?*, in S. Hazareesingh-H. Maat (eds.), *Local Subversions of Colonial Cultures Commodities and Anti-Commodities in Global History*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 170-186.

likened small landowners to urban artisans as mere legacies of an old world that was bound to be replaced by larger industries and farms.²⁷

Famously, the theses on the agrarian question approved at 1920 congress of Comintern were very clear on subjecting the rural masses to the leadership of the urban and industrial proletariat; the mobilization of the former could only follow the conquest of power by the latter (and the subsequent expropriation of large landowners).²⁸ The Peasant International (Krestintern) operated under that ideological and tactical constrain, and it was no coincidence that the decline of Krestintern at the end of the 1920s was simultaneous to the repeal of the NEP and the adoption of the “socialism in one country” perspective. Only a few leaders like Gramsci conceived the formula of “government of workers and peasants” something more than a synonym of “dictatorship of proletariat”, that is the joint power of party and state. An enduring prejudice about the non-modernity of agriculture reduced the whole sector to a merely tactical space for secondary alliances. It was a durable element of continuity between the Comintern and the communist contribution to the decolonization. Stalin’s collection of writings on *Marxism and the National Question* became the reference text all over the Third World, as it combined the subordination of agriculture and the nation-state as instrument of modern development.²⁹ But even far beyond the space-time limits of Comintern, one of the basic models adopted in development economics was after the name of Arthur Lewis (first colored professor at the London School of Economics, economic adviser of Nkrumah in 1957, Nobel laureate in 1979) and envisaged the movement of people from the backward rural sector to the modern industrial sector.³⁰

Within the Comintern there were a few exceptions. The bloody separation from Guomindang in 1927 pushed the Chinese Communist

²⁷ J. Brown, *Rural Life*, in S.A. Smith (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 455-470.

²⁸ F. Rizzi, *L’Internazionale Comunista e la questione contadina*, in *Storia del marxismo*, 3.I, Torino: Einaudi, 1980, pp. 489-513, particularly p. 495; J. Vigneux, *La faucille après le marteau. Le communisme aux champs dans l’entre-deux-guerres*, Besançon: Presses Univeritaires de Franche-Comté, 2012.

²⁹ J. Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, New York: International Publishers, 1942.

³⁰ A.W. Lewis, *Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour*, «Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies», 22, 1954, 2, pp. 139-191.

Party toward the peasantry and the countryside: a political turn supported by Mao Zedong even before the defeat.³¹ A policy of attention and the bestowal of land on peasants built the rural support for the Chinese communists during the Long March. To the contrary, the Guomindang strategy of retaining the cities at all costs (even though sharply hit by inflation and subsequent discontent) proved to be mistaken. Actually, the communist land reform distributed “allegoric” class labels and mobilized villagers against the landlords and rich peasants. A consistent minority estimated between 8 and 10 percent of the rural population was expropriated, executed, or compelled to labor under party officials’ supervision. Until the 1958 catastrophe of the Great Leap Forward, various forms of cooperation were enforced among the rest of peasants, with large-size units gradually replacing the village communities. Thus Mao’s original idea to follow a development path excluding the brutal collectivization accomplished by Stalin and leading to a small-scale amalgamation of agriculture and industry, turned out to be a fatal failure. Backyard furnaces were not able to expand iron and steel production, while diverted peasants from timely performance of agricultural tasks, contributing to one of the deadliest famines in human history.³²

Nevertheless, the Vietnamese victory over France at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 reinforced the original content of the Chinese Long March, that is the working connection between communism, land reform, and anti-colonialism. And guerrilla too, as the winning revolutionary tool: an idea echoed by the Cuba uprising a few years later, and successively launched by Guevara as a keyword for the whole Latin America up to Central Africa.³³

³¹ Mao Tse-tung, *Report on an investigation of the peasant movement in Hunan (March 1927)*, in Id., *Selected Works*, v. 1, Oxford-New York: Pergamon, 1961, pp. 19-58, quoted in G. Samarani-S. Graziani, *Il Partito comunista cinese e il Comintern 1921-1927*, «Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica», 44, 2022, 1, pp. 43-44; C. Jian, *The Chinese Communist Revolution and the World*, in N. Naimark-S. Pons-S. Quinn Judge, *Cambridge History*, v. 2, p. 92. For the connections with the debate on the oriental despotism and the Asiatic mode of production see G. Sofri, *I problemi della rivoluzione nei paesi asiatici*, in *Storia del marxismo*, v. 3.II, Torino: Einaudi, 1981, pp. 939-974.

³² F. Dikotter, *Mao’s Great Famine: The History of China’s Most Devastating Catastrophe 1958-1962*, New York: Walker, 2010.

³³ P. Gleijeses, *Marxist Revolutions and Regimes in Latin America and Africa in the*

African newly independent nations in the early 1960s faced common problems: a rapid demographic increase provoked by the import of antibiotics and the related fall in infant mortality, a population almost totally embedded in a low-productive agricultural sector very often divided between inefficient small holdings and foreign-owned large estates, a shortage of capital and investment. To that situation, typical of the countries located in the so-called Third World (a term USSR never liked as it implied an alternative to capitalism/socialism confrontation), the First and Second World offered similar remedies: financial assistance, state building, infrastructures, and heavy industry, despite the relative improvement of Soviet peasants' incomes under Khrushchev.³⁴ Due to the deficiency of private entrepreneurs, the seemingly crucial difference between a command and a market economy was not an operative difference. As Lorenzini showed, the ideas of the economist Eugen Varga deeply influenced Soviet policies in the Third World, their controversial political approval within the Kremlin notwithstanding.³⁵ By the mid-1960s, for instance, USSR investment in India was destined to iron and steel plants, power stations, coal, mining, and oil industries. A “stageist” approach considered agriculture as an instrumental platform for the development of industry: consequently, large-scale farming represented the most convenient tool to drain tax revenues. Small farmers and local community tenants were discarded as unproductive legacies of the past; «medieval lumber» was the quoted term Lenin adopted for the pre-revolutionary Russia.³⁶

1970s, in J. Fürst-S. Pons-M. Selden (eds.), *Cambridge History of Communism*, v. 3, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 95-120.

³⁴ J. Baberowski, *Nikita Khrushchev and De-Stalinization in the Soviet Union*, in N. Naimark-S. Pons-S. Quinn Judge, *Cambridge History*, v. 2, p. 130. The term “Third World” was coined by the French demographer A. Sauvy, *Trois mondes, une planète*, «L'Observateur», August 14, 1952.

³⁵ S. Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019, p. 43; Id., *The Socialist Camp and the Challenge of Economic Modernization in the Third World*, in N. Naimark-S. Pons-S. Quinn Judge, *Cambridge History*, v. 2, pp. 341-363.

³⁶ For the Western textbook of the stageist approach, see W.W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Development: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960. For an updated view of USSR's policies in developing countries see D.C. Engerman, *The Second World's Third World*, «Kritika», 12, 2011, 1, pp. 183-211; S. Marung, *Entangling Agrarian Modernities: The “Agrarian Question” through*

Thus, neither Soviet Union nor China suggested a real alternative to the Western model of industrial modernization. Introducing a somewhat parochial parenthesis, there was a line of continuity between Rostow, Lewis, and the Italian historian Romeo, who maintained the “*felix culpa*” by Northern Italy in exploiting the South in order to allow capitalist accumulation.³⁷ Gramsci’s peculiarity in considering the so-called *questione meridionale* and the perspective of a government of workers and peasants was part of that debate. In any case Western cultural influence in Africa at the moment of independence was predominant: the large majority of films programmed in African cinemas was from Hollywood. Western financial, trade and educational cooperative projects far outnumbered socialist contributions. Only since 1979 the number (some tens of thousands) of African students educated in the USSR (those educated in China were a tiny fraction) exceeded the number of students educated elsewhere. Accordingly, their «soviet» education rested much more on science and technology than on Marxism-Leninism; returning home, they were employed in the public bureaucracy (including armed forces) since the state was considered the main and possibly exclusive player of modernization in terms of investment and schooling.³⁸

5. *Urban bias*

In fact, rural population in developing countries became the mere deposit from which resources had to be extracted. In 1958, just after

the Eyes of Soviet Africanists, in J. Mark-A. Kalinowsky-S. Marung, *Alternative Globalizations*, pp. 145-165. For significant case-studies see A. Iandolo, *The Rise and Fall of the ‘Soviet Model of Development’ in West Africa 1957-64*, «Cold War History», 12, 2012, 4, pp. 683-704; A. Hilger, *Socialist Internationalism, World Capitalism, and the Global South: Soviet Foreign Economic Policy and India in Times of Cold War and Decolonization, 1950s–1960s*, «Journal of World History», 32, 2021, 3, pp. 439-464.

³⁷ R. Romeo, *Risorgimento e capitalismo*, Bari: Laterza, 1959.

³⁸ G. Chomentowski, *Implanter le socialisme par le cinéma? La diffusion des films soviétiques en Afrique au début des années 1960*, in Blum, *Socialismes*, p. 473; P. Yengo-M. de Saint Martin, *Quelles contributions des élites «rouges» au façonnement des États post-coloniaux?*, «Cahiers d’Études Africaines», 57, 2017, 226, p. 234; C. Katsakioris, *The Lumumba University in Moscow: higher education for a Soviet-Third World alliance, 1960-91*, «Journal of Global History», 14, 2019, 2, pp. 281-300.

one year since his appointment, Lewis divorced from Nkrumah because the latter insisted on too big and “political” industrial projects instead of supporting rural small producers. As far back as the mid-1960s, Soviet experts began to criticize the corruption of African bureaucracies.³⁹ The process is well known among Western sociologists and economists as “urban bias”.⁴⁰ While the rural sector contained the large majority of population, the urban sector held the institutional power which collected tax revenues. But public spending was concentrated in cities and urban population. Given that the town-country divide very often overlapped with ethnic cleavages, the result was a precociously declining consensus and authority of the ruling élites. The original confidence in the state power meant the recourse to the armed force as a convenient shortcut. In Sub-Saharan Africa “quasi-states” or “vampire states” were the outcome, accompanied by military coups (the first took place in Ghana in 1966) and civil wars.⁴¹ In a kind of historical nemesis, many African states followed over a few years a path resembling the anti-peasant radicalization of the Soviet Union. To the contrary, the land reform adopted in 1957 by communist-led government of the Indian state of Kerala was a significant exception, which established a durable peculiarity in terms of human development.⁴² However, the received view within the Communist political culture was that the military coups in Africa were provoked

³⁹ R.L. Tignor, *W.Arthur Lewis and the birth of development economics*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006, p. 167; Lorenzini, *Socialist Camp*, p. 350.

⁴⁰ M. Lipton, *Why Poor People Stay Poor: A Study of Urban Bias in World Development*, London: Temple Smith, 1977; G.A. Jones-S. Corbridge, *The Continuing Debate about Urban Bias: The Thesis, Its Critics, Its Influence, and Implications for Poverty Reduction*, London: London School of Economics, Department for International Development, 2005. For anticipations of the argument see F. Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*, Paris: Maspero, 1961; R. Dumont, *L’Afrique noir est mal partie*, Paris: Seuil, 1962.

⁴¹ R.H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Third World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; J.N. Frimpong Ansa, *The Vampire State in Africa: The Political Economy of Decline in Ghana*, London: Curley, 1991.

⁴² T.J. Nossiter, *Communism in Kerala: A study in Political Adaptation*, Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1982, pp. 291-301; N. Mannathukkaren, *Redistribution and recognition: land reforms in Kerala and the limits of culturalism*, «Journal of Peasant Studies», 38, 2011, 2, pp. 379-411. One of the first scholars who recognized Kerala’s peculiarity was the Nobel laureate in Economic Sciences (1998) A. Sen, *More*

by Western neo-colonialism in alliance with the African nationalist urban élites, composed by comprador and bureaucratic bourgeoisie.⁴³ Accordingly, African bourgeoisie as well as African large landowners did not have a progressive role because they were not interested in the development of the productive forces. In turn, a real class consciousness hardly emerged in traditional rural communities, governed by kinship and clan allegiances. Thus, the revolutionary classes were reduced to small and dispersed clusters of waged employees and laborers in public works. That explains the missing popular reaction against the authoritarian involution. In fact, the one-party system revealed to be only an external and fragile container of opposing interests.

In the early 1960s the «peaceful coexistence» launched by Khrushchev raised alarm among Third World leaders, as the perspective of a condominium between the great powers was intended to deprive them of political leverage. Mao's China gained room for maneuver with her anti-imperialist attitude, especially among African governments and parties. Emphasizing a shared “non-white” identity in opposition to USSR, Chinese strategy relegated Marxism in the background and was perceived as a less stringent supporter and partner of the socialist camp. Rather, China resembled a peer to peer player in South-South economic relations aimed at the self-reliance of former colonies. In 1962 a conference of African communist parties held in Prague showed an increasing bent on Chinese position; between 1963 and 1964 the premier Zhou Enlai visited thirteen African countries.⁴⁴ At least in theory, the perspective of an anti-colonialist revolution embodied by communist China was opposing the anti-capitalist revolution envisaged by USSR.⁴⁵ But in fact, Chinese financial and technical assistance did not change the standard model of industrial modernization at the expenses of agriculture. And, ultimately, from this point of view USSR represented the original, and China only a pale copy. Further, Chinese influence aimed at reviving the armed struggle as the

than 100 Million Women are Missing, «New York Review of Books», December 20, 1990.

⁴³ R. Ledda, *Problemi della lotta politica e sociale nell'Africa nera*, «Critica Marxista», 5, 1967, 2, pp. 77-101.

⁴⁴ P. Borruso, *Il Pci e l'Africa indipendente. Apogeo e crisi di un'utopia socialista 1956-1989*, Firenze: Le Monnier, 2009, p. 69.

⁴⁵ J. Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World*, Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

main way to revolution, was overlapping with a third historical cycle of political terrorism, inspired by *guerrilla* in Vietnam and Cuba (after the anarchist one before 1914, the nationalist one comprised between 1916 Dublin and late 1950s Algiers, and before the Islamist one since 2001) spreading even to an extremist new left in the West as well as in Middle East.⁴⁶ Almost everywhere, that cycle was reinforced by the radicalization of the Chinese Cultural Revolution launched by Mao in 1966. But it resolved into bloody failures and came to an end (e.g., in Ulster, Basque region, Colombia) without any result, as the 1967 violent death of Guevara in Bolivia envisaged. In many African countries it coincided with a long period of useless and bloody civil wars, such as the Biafra armed conflict.⁴⁷ From an African point of view, the Chinese revolution can hardly be considered «*the great revolution of the twentieth century*».⁴⁸

Alternative experiences were not missing. In Algeria the FNL government early banned the communist party in November 1962, mere three months after the independence, as a step toward a one-party regime. The negative epilogue of the “Faustian bargain” between communism and “national bourgeoisie” was to be repeated, notwithstanding the peculiar path of democratic pluralism followed by Algerian communists in order to avoid any merger with the FNL.⁴⁹ The new minister of agriculture Amar Ouzegane had abandoned communism for Islamism as far back as the 1950s. Following Chinese suggestions,

⁴⁶ D.C. Rapoport, *The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism*, in A. Cronin-J. Ludes (eds.), *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004, pp. 46-73; K. Rasler-W.R. Thompson, *Looking for Waves of Terrorism*, «*Terrorism and Political Violence*», 21, 2009, 1, pp. 28-41.

⁴⁷ For the Chinese impulse toward the armed struggle in the mid-1950s Cameroon see G. Siracusano, *Le Pcf, le Pci et l'Union des Populations du Cameroun : entre lutte politique et lutte armée*, in F. Blum et al., *Les partis communistes occidentaux et l'Afrique. Une histoire mineure?*, Paris: Hémisphères Éditions, 2021, pp. 211-226.

⁴⁸ S.A. Smith, *Toward a Global History of Communism*, in Id. (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 3.

⁴⁹ A. Drew, *We are no longer in France: Communists in colonial Algeria*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014, p. 270; P.J. Le Foll Luciani, *The Communists in Algeria (1920-93)*, in L. Feliu-F. Izquierdo Brichs (eds.), *Communist Parties in the Middle East: 100 Years of History*, London: Routledge, 2019, pp. 199-215; Id.-M. Rahal, *Participer, fusionner, s'opposer ? Les communistes algériens et le socialisme d'État dans l'Algérie des années 1960 (1962-1971)*, in F. Blum, *Socialismes*, pp. 253-275.

his land reform looked for an equilibrium between central planning and peasants' organized self-government. A system of flexible co-operation, mixing private property, common work, and collective purchase of seeds and fertilizers was introduced. But nearly one third of the rural labor force retained inefficient small holdings or no land at all. Popular agriculture and productive agriculture were not the same thing; the idea that the liberation from colonial exploitation was just enough to perform a take-off in development, early revealed as mistaken.⁵⁰ The key question was asked by the Algerian premier Ben Bella in 1964 in a meeting with a delegation of the Italian Communist Party: «is it possible an autonomous development in a still peasant country?».⁵¹ The shared answer was provided by the model of Western modernization. In 1965 Bouteflika, by the time Algerian Minister for Foreign Affairs, told a US delegation: «the US gives us bread; what we need is work. We need factories that create things and give work to our people».⁵² Urban bias was still at work. In the summer of the same year the military coup led by Boumedienne capitalized on popular resentment in connection with traditional Islamism, which represented the «natural» religion of the colonized against the Christianity, religion of the colonizers. Not only in Algeria armed forces revealed to be more disciplined and able to control (by any means) the countryside than the political parties.

Overall, newly independent African states were constrained by two powerful pressures. On one side, domestic demographic increase (by a fertility rate almost triple than in developed countries) represented a constant danger of food crisis. As it happened to the newborn Bolshevik state, the peasants became the source from which the grain had to be extracted at any cost to avoid starvation. On the other side, global market forces imposed unequal terms of trade between imported manufactures and exported commodities. Thus the room for maneu-

⁵⁰ T. Smith, *The Political and Economic Ambitions of Algerian Land Reform, 1962-1974*, «Middle East Journal», 29, 1975, 3, pp. 259-278. The point is totally absent (a good illustration of *Primat der Aussenpolitik*) in J.J. Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization and the Third World Order*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

⁵¹ M. Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il movimento dei paesi non allineati 1955-1975*, Milano: Angeli, 2011, p. 95.

⁵² Memcon of Mennen Williams and Bouteflika, 2 January 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, National Security Files, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 111, quoted in Byrne, *Mecca*, p. 240.

ver was drastically limited, albeit urban bias dictated political choices with several negative implications.

Even the experiment of Tanzanian *ujamaa* («family» in Swahili) led by president Nyerere tried to build African socialism on the basis of a land reform which prejudicially excluded the principle of class struggle. Education and cooperative production were the tools to avoid the formation of a privileged rural class. Accordingly, to develop agriculture instead of industry was thought to be the key to save self-reliance in foreign politics and escape urban bias. But the voluntary basis of the experiment rendered the process too slow and unequal. Many individuals in the villages invested more time and money in their private farms, using the state support, and only satisfied the minimum *ujamaa* requirements by dedicating some of their time to working on the communal farm. Thus, it ended in disaster when peasantry (13 million people, equivalent to 80 percent of the population) was forced into villages. From a net exporter in 1967, Tanzania became a net importer, like many other African countries.⁵³ Again, the problem was the difficult equilibrium between private property, collective equality, macroeconomic development.

6. *African socialism?*

These exceptions notwithstanding, the debate within communist parties remained confined to the paradigm of industrial modernization, that implied only a minor and instrumental view of agriculture. Accordingly, the process of decolonization was represented as a “passive revolution”, still constrained by an enduring agreement between new national bourgeoisies and old colonial powers. But after all, African peasants lacked the tradition of collective organization that emerged in some areas of the Western European countryside (Spain, France, Italy) over the final decades of the nineteenth century. Farms and waged land laborers, wherein that tradition especially spread, were often replaced in Africa by large and foreign-owned plantations. Moreover, internal movements of population from the countryside into the major towns complicated the political representation of the

⁵³ P. Lal, *African Socialism in Postcolonial Tanzania: Between the Village and the World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

peasants as well as the implantation of different political parties, and made the one-party solution easier.

As far back as the early 1950s intellectual circles such as the *Groupe d'études communistes* operating in francophone Western Africa, were involved in the project of an African agrarian and communitarian socialism («the ancestors' socialism»⁵⁴). Their representation (partly real, partly imagined) of the African rural community as a natural «collectivist space, shaped by family cooperatives» was echoed by independence leaders like Senghor and inspired the Union des Populations du Cameroun, a peculiar case of Marxist and Pan-Africanist party as well.⁵⁵ But that project remained always marginal and distant from political power. Since the beginning, the shortage of money was the urgent and pressing need the post-colonial governments had to face. There was no time to wait the slow development of low-productive rural villages. Senghor's Senegal launched voluntary slogans such as «animation rurale» and «investissement humain» that could not replace the actual want of technical education and mechanization.⁵⁶ Unlike the Bolshevik revolution, decolonization could be a majority revolution but rapidly transformed itself into a top-down (and eventually imposed) state policy. Even that original and capital difference from the Leninist experience (a minority revolution) did not avoid a similarly authoritarian involution. Nkrumah did not hesitate to blame the conservative culture of African rural villages, as compared to the individualist and open-minded Puritanism of the British Industrial Revolution.

Customs which extol the virtues of extended family allegiance sustain nepotistic practices, and regard the giving and taking of 'presents' as implicit and noble, because they promote the family welfare. They encourage indolence and

⁵⁴ J. Suret-Canale, *Les Groupes d'études communistes (GEC) en Afrique noire*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994; A. Roy, *Une paysannerie prédisposée au socialisme ? Le «socialisme des ancêtres» à l'épreuve de la politique agricole de Modibo Keita au Mali*, in F. Blum, *Socialismes*, pp. 279-300.

⁵⁵ L.S. Senghor, *Liberté 2. Nation et voie africaine du socialisme*, Paris: Seuil, 1971, pp. 256, 265; G. Siracusano, *La lutte armée au Congo et au Cameroun. Un acteur inattendu: le Parti communiste italien*, «Mondes», 11, 2022, 1, pp. 139-160.

⁵⁶ R. Tiquet, *Développement socialiste et mise au travail rural : les politiques d'investissement humain dans le Sénégal de Senghor et Dia*, in F. Blum, *Socialismes*, pp. 301-318.

bribery, they act as a brake upon ability, they discourage that deeper sense of individual responsibility which must be ready in a period of active reconstruction to accept obligation and fulfill trust. Above all, they retard productivity and oppose savings, the crucial factors in the rate of development. Polygamy donates its quota to these retarding influences, while our laws of succession and inheritance stifle the creative and inventive urge [...] Our less energetic society must be goaded into the acceptance of the stimuli necessary to rapid economic development by alterations in our social relationships and habits, if necessary by law.⁵⁷

The industrial paradigm was evenly reinforced in the 1960s, when neo-Marxist scholars such as Emmanuel and Amin elaborated a new concept of neo-colonialism, in the wake of the publication of *Monopoly Capitalism* by Baran and Sweezy.⁵⁸ The basic mechanism was the unequal exchange between manufactures provided by Western multinational companies and natural resources extracted from the former colonies. In this way economic exploitation replaced political domination. What is commonly termed “dependency school” was destined to a quick and widespread diffusion, framing a new paradigm about underdevelopment. In order to regain productive independence, developing countries had to adopt policies of import substitution industrialization, wherein the modern industrial sector (protected by tariffs on dutiable imports) drained capital and labor from the traditional agricultural sector.⁵⁹ At the end of the 1950s, roughly one-third of the world’s population lived in socialist countries, and another

⁵⁷ K. Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, New York: Praeger, 1963, pp. 104-105.

⁵⁸ P.A. Baran-P.M. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966; A. Emmanuel, *L'échange inégal. Essai sur les antagonismes dans les rapports économiques internationaux*, Paris: Maspero, 1969; S. Amin, *L'accumulation à l'échelle mondiale. Critique de la théorie du sous-développement*, Paris: Anthropos, 1970; K. Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, London: Nelson, 1971.

⁵⁹ The idea of import substitution was based upon the so-called (after the names of the distinguished economists who coined it) Prebisch-Singer thesis of a secular decline in the terms of trade between primary products and industrial manufactures, whose first formulation was in United Nations, Economic Commission for Latin America, *The Economic Development of Latin America and Its Principal Problems*, Lake Success NY: United Nations Department of Economic Affairs 1950. See D.A. Irwin, *The rise and fall of import substitution*, «World Development», 48, 2021, 139, 105306.

50 percent or so lived in countries where governments proclaimed state-led industrialization, as a kind of “third way” between capitalism and socialism. It was not until 1993 that more than 60 percent of the world’s output, and more than 50 percent of the world’s population, was located in open economies.⁶⁰

Again, the history of the Soviet Union (possibly excluding the NEP interlude) worked as a model of development in African countries, whose shortage of private entrepreneurs requested a proactive role of the state and made Western liberal examples more difficult to replicate. Accordingly, agriculture was the sacrificial victim – the mean that justified the end. Not only agriculture, indeed. If the famous motto by Lenin was «communism is soviet power plus electrification», even the soviet, that is popular self-government, was sacrificed on the altar of electric power.⁶¹ Ironically, the Third-Worldist ideology spreading in the West over the 1970s, along with Maoism, envisaged a world revolution coming from abroad and, namely, from the working classes of developing countries («surround the cities from the countryside»), just when the policies of industrial modernization adopted in those countries were exploiting and constraining in a continuing condition of poverty millions of peasants, or even literally killing them, as it happened in Great Leap Forward China.

An enduring statist and industrialist paradigm constrained communist political culture and prevented the consideration of a «return to agriculture» and more farmer-friendly policies, that were proposed since the early 1970s by development economists such as P.T. Bauer. Even the old theories by Mariátegui on the vitality of the indigenous communities in Latin America were dismissed as «romantic marxism». ⁶² Accordingly, the expansion of the socialist bloc to Angola and Mozambique in the mid-1970s can hardly be interpreted in terms of

⁶⁰ J.D. Sachs-A. Warner, *Economic Reform and the Process of Global Integration*, «Brookings Papers on Economic Activity», 25, 1995, 1, p. 12.

⁶¹ The motto is contained in V.I. Lenin, *Our Foreign and Domestic Position and Party Tasks*, speech of November 21, 1920, in Id., *Collected Works*, v. 31, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965, p. 418.

⁶² P.T. Bauer, *Dissent on Development: Studies and Debates in Development Economics*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1972; J.R. Webber, *The indigenous community as “living organism”: José Carlos Mariátegui Romantic Marxism, and extractive capitalism in the Andes*, «Theory and Society», 44, 2015, 4, pp. 575-598.

«Afrocommunism», as a counterpart to Eurocommunism.⁶³ Despite the attempt by FRELIMO in Mozambique to emulate Nyerere's model, urban bias was not different and both countries precipitated into civil wars at the end of the decade. In Somalia the 1969 revolution by Syad Barre with his effort to employ socialist ideology as a unifying tool of nation-building lasted only a few years, and was rapidly converted into a further version of urban bias, one-party regime, and authoritarian involution.⁶⁴

Even after the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of communist parties, an enduring urban bias was indirectly a driver of the Islamism revival; probably a driver more significant than the appeal of Islam by itself. On the other hand, the collapse of USSR restrained the influence of leftist organizations on the African political scene. Even in revolutionary events such as the 2011 Arab Springs they played almost no role, notwithstanding the unprecedented mobilization of workers and urban middle classes.

GIOVANNI GOZZINI

⁶³ D. Ottaway-M. Ottaway, *Afrocommunism*, New York-London: Africana, 1981. For a revision see P. Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976*, Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002; J.M. Mabeko Tali, *Guerrilhas e lutas sociais : o MPLA perante si próprio (1960-1977) : ensaio de história política*, Lisboa: Mercado de Letras, 2019; Id., *Angola: révolution marxiste sans marxistes ? Aux racines intellectuelles du « socialisme » angolais sous le parti-État MPLA, 1975-1991*, in F. Blum, *Socialismes*, pp. 65-84.

⁶⁴ P. Borruso, *The Italian Communist Party and the Horn of Africa*, in F. Blum, *Les partis*, pp. 227-237.

Gender and Communist Agendas in the Union of South Africa (1920s-1930s)

«I am slowly going red»,¹ said South African activist Cissy Gool in 1930, when a racially exclusive act passed by Parliament granted the right to vote to white women in the Cape, while excluding all other women and setting the stage to strip a number of non-white men of this right they still held. This phrase indirectly reflects the relative importance of gender-related issues within the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA). This paper will examine how the gender(ed) politics of the CPSA – a party that was part of a transnational communist movement, which paid particular attention to the so-called “woman question”, at least in its early stages – evolved within the largely patriarchal, yet changing, social and political context of the Union of South Africa during the interwar period.²

The analysis of this topic will draw on works dedicated to the history of South African communism in relation to the broader political, economic, and social context of the Union of South Africa, and on the relatively recent but rapidly expanding field of study focused on gender issues within the international communist movement.

Echoing debates and clashes between communist women and liberal feminists in the 1920s, Western historiography that emerged in the second half of the 20th century largely focused on the discrepancies between communist theoretical thinking and its proclaimed goals and politics on the one hand, and the practices adopted by the Soviet Union toward women, their dynamics (e.g., in the 1930s), and their

¹ Cited in C. Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, New York 1991, p. 53.

² I would like to thank Allison Drew and Arturo Zoffmann Rodriguez for their insightful comments on the first version of this article. I am also grateful to all the participants of the conference *A World Without Empire? Encounters and Connections between African, European, and Soviet Communists, 1920s to 1970s* at Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa for their stimulating suggestions, which helped me improve this article.

outcomes on the other.³ Extended to the communist international movement, this criticism raised another related issue: the subordination of policies toward women to the agendas of communist parties, particularly that of the Soviet Union.⁴ This interpretation was later revisited and refined by subsequent works that emphasized the importance of women's emancipation within the communist project, while also highlighting the agency of communist women who could work to promote their agenda within the framework set by the party.⁵ Regarding gender-related issues within the international communist movement, a general chronology for the interwar period emerged: the initial surge in the years following the October Revolution, the subsequent loss of interest and decline in activity by the end of the 1920s, and a renewed revival and restructuring of women's participation in political struggles with the advent of anti-fascist policies in the mid-1930s.⁶ However, one limitation of this analysis – justified by the authors – is that it still largely focuses on core institutions like the Comintern and its women's structures, primarily addressing European countries, and to a lesser extent, the US and China.⁷ Thus, it remains to be questioned whether this Eurocentric analysis can be confirmed by studies of other geographical regions, particularly Africa.

For its part, the historiography on communism in South Africa dates back to the 1940s,⁸ and since then, various works have been dedicated to the topic. These include publications of primary sources, studies primarily focused on the political history of the party, and

³ C. Chatterjee, *Ideology, Gender and Propaganda in the Soviet Union: A Historical Survey*, «Left History», 6/2, 1999, p. 16.

⁴ D. Dyakonova, *Through the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in all Countries, Onward to the Complete Emancipation of Women!': the Transnational Networks of Communist Women's Movement in the Early 1920s*, «Journal of Women's History», 35/1, 2023, p. 13.

⁵ K. Ghodsee, *Second World, Second Sex: Socialist Women's Activism and Global Solidarity During the Cold War*, Durham 2019.

⁶ B. Studer, *Communism and feminism*, «Clio», 41, 2015, pp. 139-152.

⁷ C.K. Gilmartin, *Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s*, Berkeley 1995.

⁸ E. Roux, *Time Longer than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa*, London 1948; J. Simons-R. Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, London 1983.

biographies of its members.⁹ Although crucial for understanding the evolution of the party's politics until its dissolution in 1950, as well as its interactions with other South African organizations and Comintern-related bodies,¹⁰ these works generally gave little attention to gender-related issues. Nonetheless, this issue gradually began to be addressed. Recently, an extensively researched biography of Josephine Palmer (Josie Mpama), one of the first non-white female CPSA activists, was published, while other works touched on communist engagement with gender-related issues within the broader context of female labour, activism, and resistance in South Africa.¹¹

This article aims to connect both historiographies and address gender-related issues within the interwar Communist Party of South Africa. It situates these issues within the broader context of the international communist movement, while drawing on a gender studies approach that emphasizes the relational nature of socially constructed gender roles, the embedding of gender in other power relations, and intersectionality as an analytical tool for understanding hierarchically organized social relations and power dynamics.¹² Analyzing the gender(ed) politics of the CPSA from this perspective requires distancing oneself from the "women's history" approach and incorporating other dimensions, such as class and race. It will, therefore, be instructive to

⁹ *South African Communists Speak: Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party 1915-1980*, ed. by B. Bunting, London 1981; I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity: Women in South African Industry, 1900-1980*, Bloomington and London 1992; *South Africa and the Communist International: A Documentary History*, vol. 1, ed. by A. Davidson et al., London Portland 2003; A. Drew, *Between Empire and Revolution: a Life of Sidney Bunting, 1873-1936*, London 2007; Ead., *Discordant Comrades: Identities and loyalties on the South African Left*, Aldershot 2000; *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History*, ed. by A. Drew, vols. 1-2, Cape Town 1996, 1997; S. Johns, *Rising the Red Flag: The International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, Belleville 1995; D. Musson, *Johnny Gomas, Voice of the Working Class: A Political Biography*, Cape Town 1989.

¹⁰ A. Drew, *Writing South African Communist History*, «Science & Society», 61/1, 1997, p. 107.

¹¹ R.R. Edgar, *Josie Mpama/Palmer. Get up and Get Moving*, Athens 2020; C. Walker, *Women and Resistance*.

¹² J.W. Scott, *Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis*, «The American Historical Review», 91/5, 1986, pp. 1053-1075.

explore how the evolving relationships between gender, class, and race influenced the CPSA's gender(ed) politics.

This article will address this topic by drawing on CPSA sources, the party press archives (*Umsebenzi*), and Comintern documentation. It will focus first on the marginalization of gender-related issues during the early years of the party's existence with its overwhelming focus on class. It will then analyze the short-lived yet prominent reassessment of gender within the CPSA at the turn of the 1930s, as connected to the adoption of the Independent Native Republic thesis by the Comintern. The last section will outline the developments in the party's stance and the emergence of new opportunities at the end of the decade.

Gender diluted in class, 1921-1926

When the CPSA was formed in 1921 through the merger of several socialist groups, the primary focus of its political analysis and actions was class struggle. Initially, the party was small and predominantly white. It faced challenges in defining its stance on the racial divisions and tensions that were deeply ingrained among South African workers at the time. Considering race, the party, which began to increasingly engage with black workers but remained divided on labour issues following the Rand Revolt,¹³ nonetheless emphasized the need for solidarity and the shared interests of the working masses, despite racial divisions. The priority ascribed to class was even more crucial in marginalizing gender issues within the CPSA, which stood in sharp contrast to developments in the international communist movement at the time. Indeed, both Bolshevik political thinking and the early practices of the Soviet state, rooted in a broader shared European tradition, gave unprecedented attention to what was called "woman question". Although not without ambiguities, this gender-related agenda, to use more contemporary terms, had a significant impact on the Comintern and the international communist movement in the 1920s.¹⁴

The small South African party, however, was largely unresponsive to these global developments in its early years, and work among women

¹³ Chapter 4, *Searching for the socialist road: the Rand Revolt and the turn to black labour*, A. Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, pp. 58-79.

¹⁴ B. Studer, *Communism and feminism*.

was clearly not on the agenda in the national political context. Despite the changing economic situation, in which rapid industrialization and urbanization contributed to the growing role of women in production, both in agriculture and industry, the country's political authorities remained primarily focused on further tightening control over male – particularly black – workers and their mobility. On rare occasions, this relative disregard for female labour by the government could even present certain advantages: as noted by Rebecca Notlowitz Bunting of the CPSA in 1927, this was the case with the obligation to carry passes, which for some time did not apply to black women, unlike black men.¹⁵ Besides these economic reasons, widespread patriarchal attitudes, which relegated women to the domestic sphere while simultaneously accepting the harsh labour exploitation of the vast majority of them, largely marginalized women's issues within the white-male political milieu. For their part, women were not inactive. Trade unionism was growing among white female workers, while "coloured" and black women¹⁶ participated in various organisations, such as the Bantu Women's League and the Industrial and Commercial Worker's Union.¹⁷ They were also involved in local protests, such as anti-pass actions and demonstrations against high prices. However, their demands generally did not focus on overtly political rights or on women as individuals, but rather on working conditions, motherhood, and family/community issues.

The CPSA's negative stance fit within this broader South African context, but the marginalisation of gender-related issues stemmed from a somewhat different logic. Patriarchal attitudes undoubtedly played a role.¹⁸ The male leadership of the South African party likely did not prioritize gender-related issues or regard them as an important area of work in the early years of the CPSA's existence, while the Comintern had little involvement in the party's internal affairs during

¹⁵ Report by Rebecca Bunting, september 1928, RGASPI, coll. 495, inv. 64, file 72, p. 39.

¹⁶ The categories of "African", "Coloured", "Indian" were constructions used by the South African state administration that were entrenched in legislation and institutions and used by contemporary actors.

¹⁷ C. Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, pp. 32-35; Information on work among women in South Africa, 13 March 1927, RGASPI, coll. 495, inv. 64, file 84, p. 20.

¹⁸ C. Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, p. 48.

that time.¹⁹ However, this marginalization was also linked to women's position in the national economy. Within the working class – particularly among urban workers, whom the communist party focused on – women were a minority. Most women, particularly black women, were still primarily engaged in agricultural work. Moreover, the CPSA had very limited human, time, and material resources: the party was small, its members had to balance activism with regular work to make a living, and available finances were scarce. In later reports, South African communists specifically cited this undeniable lack of resources as a reason for the party's neglect of work among women.²⁰ The CPSA therefore focused on what it considered essential issues, marginalizing others – gender-related agenda was among them. Ideological considerations also played a role: capitalism was viewed as a core factor in the oppression of both male and female workers, leading to an emphasis on the necessity of a shared struggle between men and women as part of the same working class.

These various factors help explain the initial marginalisation of gender-related issues in the party's work: no women's department was established within the party during the 1920s, women did not take part in the Central Executive Committee meetings, little work was done among women, and the party's press organ paid little attention to gender-related issues. However, within the national context in which the CPSA was operating, the party still offered new perspectives. Through its very participation in the transnational communist movement, the South African party, at least in theory, subscribed to the ideas of gender equality and women's full involvement into public life. Its organ, *International*, published the Comintern's appeal to enhance work among women in 1922.²¹ Although the party press, struggling with financial difficulties and limited in size and circulation, largely prioritized other topics, gender-related issues were not entirely absent from its pages, and women were able to contribute articles.²² While there are no regular or reliable statistics on CPSA membership, let alone on

¹⁹ A. Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, p. 59; A. Davidson, *Politika Kominternu v Afrike*, in *Istoriya Kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala 1919-1943: Dokumental'nye ocherki*, A. Chubaryan (ed.), Moscow 2002, p. 356.

²⁰ Report by Rebecca Bunting, september 1928, RGASPI, coll. 495, inv. 64, file 72, p. 41.

²¹ C. Walker, *Women and Resistance*, pp. 46-47.

²² A. Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, p. 73.

the percentage of women, women were present among the rank and file, with some – such as Rebecca Bunting, Molly Zelikowitz Wolton, Fanny Klenerman – actively involved in general party work.²³ All of this was significant in the South African context of the time, where women's roles were widely seen as confined to the private sphere, and their participation in political organisations was restricted, as was the case, for instance, with the African National Congress (ANC), where women did not have full membership rights.

Racial divisions and gender importance, 1927-1934

Gender-related issues began to gain prominence starting from 1927-1928, when the intersection of gender, class, and race was reassessed. This shift was influenced by both the Comintern's heavy-handed interventions and initiatives within the party. At this time, the issue of race was pressing in South Africa. The national government was intensifying its pressure on black Africans following the 1924 elections, and tensions between white and black workers were escalating, despite some efforts to overcome existing rivalries. Meanwhile, black workers were becoming more involved in protests, and black organizations, such as the ICU and ANC, were seeking ways to curb further exploitation and improve the conditions of black people.²⁴ While the CPSA leadership continued to emphasize the unity of the South African working class, some of its prominent members seized the opportunity in 1927 at the Brussels Congress of the League Against Colonial Oppression to highlight the issue of racial oppression in the Union of South Africa. Alongside South African representatives from the Trade Union Council and ANC, James La Guma of the CPSA strongly supported calls for the right of self-determination for oppressed colonial people. Shortly thereafter, in Moscow, he further articulated his position on “an Independent Native South African Republic”²⁵ in discussions with Comintern members, including Bukharin.²⁶ The

²³ C. Walker, *Women and Resistance*, p. 49.

²⁴ T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, London-New York 1983, pp. 3-9.

²⁵ R.D.G. Kelley, *The Third International and the Struggle for National Liberation in South Africa*, «Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies», 38/1, 2014, pp. 258-259.

²⁶ Davidson, *Politika Kominterna v Afrike*, p. 356.

emergence of a new political orientation led to a split within the CP-SA. However, at the VI Congress of Comintern in 1928, the majority leadership's position on "unity" was criticized. The adopted resolution, which called for «an independent native South African republic as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' republic with full, equal rights for all races», urged the party to «orientate itself *chiefly* upon the native toiling masses»²⁷. The increased emphasis on race from 1928 onward – reflecting a broader Comintern trend to more actively support anti-colonial struggles following the failed revolution in Germany in 1923 –²⁸ led to intense internal conflict within the CPSA and fuelled disagreements over the party's stance toward the white working class in South Africa.²⁹ Although the new resolution called for continued work among white workers, some feared that emphasizing race would contradict the party's previous non-racial policy and alienate white workers from the CPSA. On the other hand, some argued that white workers were numerically inferior and represented the "aristocracy of labour".³⁰ While class remained an essential analytical tool for communists, it was reassessed in light of the "Independent Native Republic" thesis.

Gender-related issues also gained prominence during this period, reflecting the broader communist political analysis of the situation in the Union of South Africa. It was acknowledged that black Africans made up the majority of the country's population, as well as the majority of workers and peasants. This "national question" was closely tied to the agrarian problem, as the black population was largely deprived of land. As a result, there was a renewed emphasis on the need to extend the party's efforts beyond urban areas and to organize the

²⁷ Resolution on "The South African Question" adopted by the Executive Committee of the Communist International following the Sixth Comintern congress, accessed online, 30 August 2023, <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/Comintern/sections/sacp/1928/Comintern.htm>. If La Guma was definitely among the proponents of self-determination and was in favour of the new line, as Apollon Davidson highlights, it's difficult to establish if the initiative came from La Guma or the Comintern, Davidson, *Politika Kominternu v Afrike*, pp. 356-357. A similar policy was applied by the Comintern in the US south.

²⁸ Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, p. 95.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 97-105.

³⁰ Danchin and Kalk, report on the political situation in South Africa, n.d., RGAS-PI, coll. 495, inv. 64, file 72, pp. 46-51.

peasantry.³¹ Meanwhile, with the increasing migration of black men to the cities, black women, who remained largely engaged in agricultural work, were assuming a greater role in agricultural production. Although this last connection was not explicitly addressed in the party's general overviews of the Union of South Africa and party's new policies to be implemented, specific reports on the situation of women in the country compiled at the time highlighted racial disparities among women as a group. In addition to issues such as lodger's permits and the potential introducing of new circulation restrictions (passes) that did not affect white female workers, these reports emphasized that semi-skilled and skilled positions were inaccessible to black women. Their wages were much lower, and their participation in trade unions or other political organizations was more limited. This focus on black women was consistently reflected in broader overviews of women's situation in the South Africa, which also highlighted women's economic disadvantages compared to male workers and their additional double burden as housewives.³² These reports regularly conveyed the idea that different forms of domination and discrimination intersected, anticipating the concept of intersectionality, which was formally articulated much later.³³

Increased yet fragile gender-related activism at the turn of the 1930s

This renewed analysis of the political and economic situation in South Africa at the end of the 1920s initially helped foster the growth of gender-related activism even though it occurred alongside a decline in the party's influence. This decline was driven by factors such as intense police repression, the adoption of the Native Republic thesis – which fueled internal divisions and led to multiple expulsions –

³¹ A. Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, p. 105.

³² Report by Jones and Brown (Danchin and Kalk) on the position of women workers in South Africa, 28 February 1929, RGASPI, coll. 495, inv. 64, file 72, pp. 18-21; Report by Rebecca Bunting, september 1928, *ibid.*, pp. 38-41; Information on work among women in South Africa, 13 March 1927, *ibid.*, file 84, pp. 19-20; Women's position in South Africa (in Russian), 1929, *ibid.*, pp. 21-23.

³³ K. Crenshaw, *Demarginalising the Intersection of Race and Sex: a Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*, «University of Chicago Legal Forum», 1, 1989, pp. 139-167.

strained relations with white workers, and a harsher stance towards so-called reformist organizations, reflecting the Comintern's "class against class" strategy and further isolating the CPSA.

However, starting in the late 1920s, women in the party did begin to play a more prominent role, especially in a comparative perspective. While it is difficult to establish precise figures for female participation in the small CPSA, given the overall challenge in confirming its membership numbers, various internal documents suggest that women may have accounted for up to 10 percent of the party's membership.³⁴ This is notable in the South African context, where women's participation in political parties and organizations on equal terms was far from the norm (as seen in the ANC, for example). It is also comparable to female membership in European communist parties, such as the PCF, where women made up around 3-4 per cent of the membership during the same period.³⁵ During this time, more energetic female organizers joined the CPSA. One example is Ray Alexander, who arrived from Latvia in 1929, quickly became involved in trade unionism, and immediately started working for the party. Another is Josie Mpama from Potchefstroom, who, among the new "coloured" and black female recruits, quickly established herself in the party's national leadership. Beyond sheer numbers, women's role within the party appears to have been strengthened. While no women seem to have attended meetings of the Central Executive Committee in the mid-1920s,³⁶ this situation began to change in the years that followed. In 1928, for example, Rebecca Bunting and Molly Wolton participated in its sessions. Additionally, with the departure of Edward Roux, Sidney and Rebecca Bunting to the VI Congress of the Comintern in the same year, Molly Wolton assumed the role of chair for at least a four-month period.³⁷ On other occasions, women delivered oral reports to the party headquarters, sometimes in a reproving tone, as in the case of Mpama's intervention in 1931.³⁸

It's interesting to note that, in such conflictual situations – where

³⁴ La Guma, Information on work among women in South Africa, 13 March 1927, RGASPI, coll. 495, inv. 64, file 84, p. 19.

³⁵ B. Studer, *Communism and feminism*, p. 128.

³⁶ Central executive committee meetings, 1925 and 1926, respectively RGASPI, coll. 495, inv. 64, files 42, 53.

³⁷ Minutes of Central executive committee meetings, 1928, *ibid.*, file 75.

³⁸ Minutes of Central executive committee meetings, 1931, *ibid.*, file 113, p. 9.

internalized hierarchies and gendered attitudes were likely more prone to surface – the discussions seem to have unfolded on relatively egalitarian terms. Female party members' speeches and actions were not met with condescension or dismissiveness, nor were they discredited simply because they came from or were carried out by women. Furthermore, they could be criticized just as men were. For example, during the internal struggle over the interpretation of the Independent Native Republic thesis, Rebecca Bunting was criticized in her own right as a party member, despite the potential for her marriage to Sidney Bunting to subtly fuel such criticism.³⁹ When it came to the issue of trade unions, Bennie Weinbren did not hesitate to criticize the same Rebecca Bunting and Molly Wolton but he framed his criticism in terms of the hierarchy within communist organizations. He attempted to organize new unions to break the colour bar, following the directives he received from the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), but faced resistance from Bunting and Wolton. In response, he appealed to the Comintern, asking, «Who am I to listen to? Comrade Mrs. Bunting and Molly, or instructions from the RILU?». ⁴⁰ The overall tone of Weinbren's critique is similar to that directed at male party members on other occasions.

Gender-related issues gained greater visibility within the CPSA due to a combination of grassroots activism and influences from international communist organizations, and were consistently framed alongside race and class considerations. A notable example of this intersection was the Potchefstroom mobilization against lodger's permits, which required any adult living in a family home to register and pay an additional monthly fee. Lodger's permits imposed a significant economic burden on poor African households and threatened to further destabilize family structures, particularly through the possible eviction of workers' family members, which especially concerned their wives. In response, protests erupted, and the CPSA provided organizational, political, and legal support to the struggle. The campaign focused on the interests of the community – specifically the black working-class residents. Women, especially black women, who were both vocal and militant, fought as part of and on behalf of this community, simultaneously defending their own rights which were deeply

³⁹ La Guma to Petrovsky, August 8, 1929, *ibid.*, file 77, p. 25.

⁴⁰ Extracts from letter from B. Weinbren, Secretary of the Amalgamated Laundry Cleaners' and Dyers' Union, 19 January 1929, *ibid.*, file 80, p. 26.

intertwined with family issues. This party involvement in local issues helped bring new recruits, including women, into the expanding local party branch. Josie Mpama, who joined the CPSA at this time and continued to focus on gender-related issues in her subsequent party work, later explained in interviews that her decision to join the CPSA rather than the ANC was motivated by the party's emphasis on «basic domestic issues»⁴¹. Although the implementation of this work was inconsistent, the need to address «all questions affecting women» was acknowledged in the party press.⁴²

At the same time, the party leadership was regularly urged by the Comintern to engage more energetically with women, while systematically linking this work to race-class considerations and embedding it within the broader political analysis of the situation in South Africa. The importance of women activism and work among women was emphasized on several occasions. In late 1928, the Comintern's Women's Department instructed the CPSA to launch in 1929 a comprehensive campaign related to the celebration of March 8th and aligned with the Independent Native Republic thesis. The ultimate goal was to reach out to black women leaving in rural areas, while also strengthening agitation among (predominantly white) urban female workers and addressing mutual tensions between the two groups. Here, gender was once again embedded within class and race issues. Women's specific concerns – such as female labour protection, maternity and child welfare, and equal pay for equal work – were emphasized by the Comintern as vital demands for the entire South African working class, including men, with the CPSA urged to fully commit to the campaign. However, for the Comintern, broader global issues were at stake: the mobilisation on March 8th in South Africa, while addressing oppression within the country, was also meant to contribute to the international workers' denunciation of the looming imperialist war, which would harm workers across borders and, most notably, threaten the first workers' state, the USSR.⁴³ South African communists were therefore periodically encouraged to establish these uneasy

⁴¹ C. Walker, *Women and Resistance*, p. 49.

⁴² *Women's National Conference Convened for August*, «Umsebenzi», 26 June 1931, p. 3. The party being in the mids of internal disarray, this women's conference does not seem to have taken place, C. Walker, *Women and Resistance*, pp. 51-52.

⁴³ International Women's secretariat to the CEC of the CPSA, 26 December 1928, RGASPI, coll. 495, inv. 64, file 72, pp. 1-11.

connections between local gender-related activism, national political issues, and the analysis of international developments, the latter being of particular concern to the Comintern.⁴⁴

While these interventions - whether related to International Women's Rights Day, the International Day Against Imperialist War⁴⁵ or the 1929 elections in Cape⁴⁶ - helped raise the visibility of gender-related issues within the CPSA, the rhetoric promoted by the Comintern, with its emphasis on international matters, also contributed to rising tensions. Gender considerations were implicitly woven into the polemics surrounding party policies, including its stance on black party members and workers.

Tensions involving race/gender dimensions, 1927-1934

The party's increasingly radical shift in policy drew significant criticism, indeed. After adopting the Independent Native Republic thesis, the CPSA began openly advocating for a national-agrarian revolution, emphasizing the insufficiency of constitutional methods and supporting protests by black Africans. This stance led to heightened repression, particularly against its black members and sympathizers, including women. Josie Mpama, who had joined the Party precisely because of its commitment to issues important to local communities, openly voiced her concerns. In 1931, she reported that in Potchefstroom, the authorities were actively persecuting black communists - mostly men who burnt their passes, though women were targeted as well. Thus, one female party member was blackmailed: either she left the Party, or she would be evicted from the location. While such pressure was not always effective - the woman in question ended up in jail - the threat of eviction of family members, particularly women, was a heavy argument that led many black communists to leave the Party. This was exacerbated by the high costs of frequent imprisonments and the burning of passes. According to Mpama, who was well-acquainted with Potchefstroom and was relaying the pleas of local blacks, there

⁴⁴ On the focus of the Comintern and of some of the CPSA's members on international issues and how the adoption of the Native republic thesis was related to the latter, see Davidson, *Politika Komintern v Afrike*, p. 358.

⁴⁵ Central women's department to the CPSA, 4 June 1929, *ibid.*, file 84, pp. 24-29.

⁴⁶ Women's department to the CPSA, 2 March 1929, *ibid.*, file 79, pp. 11-14.

was a clear need for better guidance from the Party, which should have more fully understood the consequences of its policies and taken greater responsibility for its members.⁴⁷

This neglect was also highlighted in 1932 by another African communist, Gana Makabeni,⁴⁸ in a critical letter addressed to both the Party and the Comintern headquarters in Moscow, on behalf of «members dissatisfied with the Party's position». Makabeni pointed out racial tensions within the Party, noting that condescending attitudes towards black communists had recently been coupled with the CPSA's disconnection from local struggles and the African «masses». He shared the story of black communist Johannes Nkosi's murder and the subsequent fate of his family. Nkosi, a young, energetic, and popular communist organizer in Durban, was killed in clashes with the police during the burning of passes on Dingaan's Day, that on official level commemorated Afrikaners' victory over Zulu.⁴⁹ In a pedagogical tone, Makabeni explained that, due to the circumstances of his death, Nkosi was locally regarded as having «fallen on the battlefield» rather than being «dead», and was therefore considered «left behind». Following Nkosi's own words – «if one dies, another must take his place with the least hesitation» – his followers continued to resist, even as they were «gaoled and deported, group after group». Nkosi's wife and mother also adhered to local customs, and «never wiped tears from their eyes», in keeping with the tradition for relatives of fallen fighters. In the aftermath of his death, they remained active, attending meetings and addressing gatherings. However, two years later, Makabeni noted, «Comrade Nkosi's mother is crying daily and is working in the kitchens. Comrade Mrs. Nkosi is roaming the streets of Johannesburg looking for work and she can't get it», adding that «she can't get work, but would not pass the doors of the Party».⁵⁰

At the very moment when the CPSA was encouraged to increase its

⁴⁷ Report of the CC meeting, 28-30 December 1931, RGASPI, coll. 495, inv. 64, file 113, p. 33.

⁴⁸ He was expelled from the party by the end of 1932 accused of «Buntingism», A. Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, p. 125.

⁴⁹ S.M. Ndlovu, *Johannes Nkosi and the Communist Party of South Africa: Images of «Blood River» and King Dingane in the Late 1920s-1930*, «History and Theory», 39/4, 2000, pp. 111-132.

⁵⁰ Report to the Second conference of the party. Members dissatisfied with the Party position, 13 November 1932, RGASPI, coll. 495, inv. 64, file 108, pp. 73-74.

influence among black workers, it was therefore criticized for its failure to take responsibility for its own policies, its disengagement from local struggles, and its neglect of both male and female members and sympathizers. This criticism, raised by both male and female communists, was accompanied by a growing dissatisfaction among female party members towards their male counterparts. Patriarchal attitudes among the men appeared to generate more discontent, whether through their occasional remarks about the need to prioritize family and children, their sociability that left little room for women,⁵¹ or their lack of attention to gender-related issues in general. Furthermore, the very ability of men to lead the struggle was sometimes questioned. Mpama, who was herself highly active in local campaigns and also involved in party work among women, described the repression by local authorities as follows:

[...] at the time the passes were burned, the people showed great militancy. Now individuals are being arrested. The Police obstruct the people and they are not willing to force their way through. All organisers sent from the Party Centre are deported and we have not learned to do underground work. The people are afraid of the Party. The women will not organise and fight they are disheartened by the failure of the men.⁵²

While the party as a whole was criticized for being «weak and not leading the districts», local male activists were also easily blamed for not resisting the police more effectively, despite the fact that state repression was consistently denounced. Implicitly drawing on the broader communist discourse on the need to emancipate women and involve them in political struggles, Mpama unproblematically transormed this idea into an accusation. This criticism, while reflecting broader tensions around gender roles in South Africa – particularly in related to the increased participation of women in the economy – was not however generalized and did not challenge the necessity of a united class struggle for working men and women within the CPSA.

⁵¹ R.R. Edgar, *Josie Mpama/Palmer*, pp. 126-127.

⁵² Minutes of the Central Committee of the CPSA, 4 July 1931, RGASPI, coll. 495, inv. 64, file 113, p. 9.

From 1935 onward: old aspirations, new opportunities

While women and gender-related issues gained more visibility during the period of the Independent Native Republic line, the party's overall activity sharply diminished due to intense factional struggles, multiple expulsions, the ban on cooperation with so-called reformist organizations, and increased police repression of party activists. Party membership dwindled to just a few dozen members across the country and, following an initial increase in focus on gender-related issues between 1927 and 1931, efforts to organize women almost ceased due to a severe lack of resources and the party's isolation. It was not until the Comintern's shift towards the People's Front policies in the mid-1930s – and the possibility of class cooperation being reopened – that the groundwork laid in this area could be further developed.

The new line adopted at the VII Comintern Congress in 1935 did not have immediate effects on the CPSA, but from late 1936 onward, gender-related activism began to revive gradually. In many ways, the rhetoric remained consistent, encouraging women to «enter the political field»⁵³ and urging the party to involve women more actively in political struggles and organizational work. This need was highlighted, for example, at the VI National Conference in 1936 by both Ray Alexander and Josie Mpama, who had recently returned from Moscow, where she had studied at the KUTV university and served as a delegate to the Congress itself.⁵⁴ Such continuity reflected the broader communist tradition of self-criticism, but it also highlighted the poor state of the party in recent years, during which such work had been nearly entirely neglected. Furthermore, it was emphasized once again that, in order to attract women to the party and build a truly “mass movement”, it was essential to address the issues most important to women – for example, the right to brew beer, which was a significant source of income – while framing the authorities' attacks on these specific issues within the broader context of discriminatory legislation against women. As in the previous period – and more generally with-

⁵³ J. Mpama, *An Appeal to African Women. Join the Struggle against Oppressive Laws*, «South African Worker. Umsebenzi», 30 January 1937, p. 4.

⁵⁴ C. Walker, *Women and Resistance*, p. 51. Address of J. Mpama to Six National Conference, CPSA, September 1936, in *South Africa and the Communist International: A Documentary History*, vol. 2, ed. by Davidson *et al.*, p. 216. On Mpama's trip and stay in the Soviet Union, see R.R. Edgar, *Josie Mpama/Palmer*, pp. 78-92.

in different sectors of the transnational communist movement – the communist appeal to link local struggles with broader global frameworks remained central.⁵⁵

The new People's Front policy, however, provided new opportunities for broader action. Communist activists, particularly female activists, could now engage with various organizations on issues that directly or indirectly affected women. In the wake of the formation of the All-African Convention, Josie Mpama welcomed the CPSA's involvement in this umbrella organization, which included representatives from the ANC and the ICU, reflecting a «variety of class and regional interests».⁵⁶ She urged the continuation of this work and the strengthening of the movement as a counterforce to the “ruling class”. While her appeal clearly reflected considerations of class and race, it also underscored Mpama's commitment to the idea of a shared struggle between working men and women. Furthermore, she emphasized her belief that «black women and men shared a common barrier, the colour bar»⁵⁷. The CPSA also collaborated with “coloured” intellectuals and leftists within the newly formed National Liberation League and, later, the Non-European United Front (NEUF), both chaired by Cissy Gool and involved in the fight against segregation measures. As head of the NEUF Transvaal branch, Mpama was able to address local issues, including the matter of home-brewing.⁵⁸ In 1939, Ray Alexander and Cissy Gool became involved in the Consumer Vigilance Council in the Cape, which brought together a wide range of actors and focused on food prices, a significant issue for women and their families.⁵⁹ That same year, both Alexander and Gool, who had recently joined the CPSA, were elected to the party's political bureau.

Conclusion

The treatment of gender issues within the CPSA did not occur in isolation; rather, it evolved in connection with reflections on class and

⁵⁵ J. Mpama, *African Women Must Be Organised. We Are Prepared to Move*, «South African Worker. Umsebenzi», 26 June 1937, p. 4.

⁵⁶ A. Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, p. 202.

⁵⁷ R.R. Edgar, *Josie Mpama/Palmer*, p. 127.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁵⁹ C. Walker, *Women and Resistance*, p. 54.

race. Initially, an overwhelming focus on class analysis contributed to the marginalization of both racial and gender dimensions. By the late 1920s, a new approach emerged at the intersection of strong top-down directives and grassroots initiatives from South African communists. While still centered on class, this approach placed a much greater emphasis on race, prioritizing black workers and dispossessed peasants. This, in turn, helped revitalize discussions on women's roles and gender issues more broadly.

It was no coincidence that this period also saw growing recognition of the interplay between multiple forms of oppression – what would later be termed intersectionality – in party documentation. However, the increasing activism of female communist militants and the heightened visibility of gender-related concerns within the CPSA did not emerge without generating tensions that intertwined gender with other pressing issues, such as the party's stance on race-related issues. Amid resource constraints and genuine political debates – where discussions of race and gender were present but did not always align along clear-cut gender-race lines – the very visibility of gender-related issues, and the tensions they provoked, might be further examined. They may, in fact, be understood as unintended consequences of the Independent Native Republic thesis advanced by the Comintern and adopted by the CPSA. The growing disarray within the party in the early 1930s anyway quickly curtailed the newly inspired momentum. It was not until the mid-1930s, with the adoption of Popular Front policies, that the CPSA was able to revive its gender-related agenda and expand its work among women.

While understanding the fluctuations in the CPSA's approach to gender politics is difficult without considering its deep entanglement with class and race, this entanglement likely also helps explain the discrepancies in addressing gender issues within the South African context: gender concerns gained prominence in the late 1920s following a period of relative neglect, whereas within the European dimension of the international communist movement, developments followed an almost opposite trajectory.

The Comintern and Pan-Africanism. Policy Networks and Cultural Connections between Europe and French Possessions in Tropical West Africa

In recent decades, historiography has frequently explored the origins and development of Pan-African movements, driven by the growing significance of African-American history, which has been closely tied to postcolonial studies since the 1960s.¹ This research on the history of the Pan-African movement highlights the connections between Africa and America, underscoring the importance of transatlantic relations.² However, especially in the English-speaking world, these approaches have often been marked by a neglect of colonial dynamics and cultural impositions in the regions under European domination. Historiographical interpretations are often influenced by an African-American perspective, which tends to overemphasize the links between Africa and the United States. As a result, such research has seldom considered Francophone anticolonial circles, which were shaped by distinct political and social dynamics due to the different colonial administrations. Only recently have studies begun to reveal the connections between French anti-colonialism and African-American struggles, emphasizing the significance of transatlantic Pan-African networks.³ Some of the research focused on anti-colonialism in interwar France has expanded its historiographic scope, identifying Paris as a hub of transnational connections, links, and divisions

¹ R.L. Harris Jr, *Coming of Age: the transformations of Afro-American Historiography*, «The Journal of Negro History», 67/2, 1982, pp. 107-121.

² T. Adeleke, *Black Americans and Africa: A Critique of the Pan-African and Identity Paradigms*, «The International Journal of African Historical Studies», 31/3, 1998, 505-536; M. Malisa-P. Nhengeze, *Pan-Africanism: A Quest for Liberation and the Pursuit of a United Africa*, «Genealogy», 28/2(3), 2018, <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy2030028> (november 2024).

³ See: S. Dunstan, *Race, Rights and Reform. Black Activism in the French Empire and the United States from World War I to the Cold War*, Cambridge 2021; A. Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, Princeton 2020.

among the diverse ethnic groups fighting for freedom.⁴ Despite these recent innovative perspectives, postcolonial studies have often overlooked the integration of Pan-African organizations and networks with the labour movement. Instead, the emphasis on transatlantic historiography has often led to an underestimation of the role of the Communist movement in its relations with African anti-colonialism. However, the works of Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood stand out as notable exceptions, offering an analytical examination of the relationship between international communism and Pan-Africanism. These are complemented by Allison Drew's research which provides a comparative perspective on international communist networks in South Africa and Algeria. Additionally, Serge Wolikow's recent research highlights the Comintern's engagement with the colonial question and its analysis of the Pan-African issue.⁵ In these cases, the study of the dynamics between Communist and workers' parties is intertwined with the development of Black radicalism across Africa, the United States, and the Caribbean, supported by a deep understanding of the literature on the subject.⁶

Building on these analyses, my research intends to redefine the subjects and dynamics of the Pan-African networks connected to the Comintern-led international Communist movement. The focus of inquiry is shifted to the Francophone political and cultural space. The intention is to emphasise its transnational connections with the Communist movement and Pan-African radicalism, but also to show the differences with Anglophone circles. The research takes into consideration various documentary and bibliographical materials, delving into different types of party and institutional sources. Through this approach, an attempt is made to reconstruct the links between the transformations of Communist political cultures and those linked to Black radicalism. This is a starting point for shedding light on the paths,

⁴ See: M. Goebels, *Paris, capitale du tiers monde. Comment est née la révolution anticoloniale (1919-1939)*, Paris 2017.

⁵ S. Wolikow, *Quelle place pour l'Afrique dans la politique du Komintern ?*, in *Les partis communistes occidentaux et l'Afrique. Une histoire mineure ?*, ed. by F. Blum et al., Paris 2021, pp. 21-37.

⁶ See: H. Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919-1939*, Trenton 2013; Id., *Pan-Africanism: an history*, London 2018; A. Drew, *Bolshevizing Communist Parties: The Algerian and South African Experiences*, «International Review of Social History», 48/2, 2003, 167-202.

trajectories and political projections of various Pan-African leaders and movements which were formed in Francophone circles. It can also reconstruct their real cultural and ideological inheritance during the era of decolonisation in the 1950s and 1960s.

In addition to the reference literature on the history of Pan-Africanism and anti-colonialism, this study makes use of various archival materials. These include the papers of the Comintern's Negro Bureau and those of the PCF and its colonial section in the inter-war years, preserved in Moscow and digitised by the Maison de Sciences de l'homme in Dijon. In addition to these are the major police sources available at the Archives nationales de France, as well as those of the governorships of French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa received from the Ministry of Colonies and the colonial security services, all kept at the Archives nationales d'outre-mer in Aix-en-Provence.

Anti-militarist propaganda among French colonial troops and the origin of Francophone Pan-African organisations (1921-1926)

In 1920, the theme of the emancipation of colonial peoples was the focus of the Second Congress of the Communist International (CI). It was on this occasion that the Comintern's theses on the national and colonial question took shape.⁷ This shed light on the characteristics of the struggle for the social progress of the colonial masses and the worldwide overthrow of capitalism. According to Leninist analysis, capitalism could not be overthrown without the liberation of the colonies, which were the main source of raw materials for imperialism and the weak link in the world system. On the other hand, this perception was accompanied by the conviction that only the end of imperialist domination in dependent countries could foster the colonial people's economic and social development. Hence the 1920 theses called for the CI to collaborate closely with composite revolutionary movements, in which the few proletarians present were meant to represent the vanguard of a broad alliance with peasants and the national bourgeoisie.⁸

⁷ S. Wolikow, *L'Internazionale comunista. Il sogno infranto del partito mondiale della rivoluzione (1919-1943)*, Roma 2016.

⁸ R. Gallissot, *L'imperialismo e la questione nazionale e coloniale*, in *Storia del marxismo*, III: *Il marxismo nell'età della Terza Internazionale*, 2: *Dalla crisi del '29 al XX Congresso*, Torino 1997.

Spurred on by these Leninist directives, the Comintern's sections in the colonial powers were active in gathering support from workers hailing from the colonies. Particularly important in this regard was the role of colonial troops, crucial to the military balance of the Great War and an instrument of repression of the working class after it was over. From the Communist perspective, the colonial populations suffered such strong alienation that they themselves become instruments of imperialist power, through the ruling classes' militarist policy. In the early 1920s, Maghrebians and Senegalese made up the backbone of the Entente troops which were still engaged in countering the Revolution in Russia and Communist uprisings in Europe.⁹

The SFIC (Séction Française de l'Internationale Communiste), later the PCF, was the first Communist Party to organise a colonial section.¹⁰ This had the task of organising political and propaganda work among the natives of Africa and Asia. Initially structured as a Colonial Studies Committee, this section took up Leninist slogans and organised debates and initiatives against militarism in Africa, moreover launching a press campaign directed at African soldiers in the French army.¹¹ Already created after the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920, the PCF's Colonial Studies Committee was made official in Marseilles in December 1921, during the Party's national Conference, and immediately attracted the attentions of the security services and the interim Colonial Minister Maginot.¹² The concern at the Ministry and within the police was also linked to Communist activities among the colonial migrant communities in metropolitan France, where heightened anti-French subversion was feared. In 1922, in fact, the cooperative

⁹ D. Domergue-Cloarec, *Une histoire en partage : les tirailleurs sénégalais dans la Première Guerre mondiale*, «Humanisme», 4, 2014, pp. 95-99; A. Guyon, *Les tirailleurs sénégalais. De l'indigène au soldat. De 1857 à nos jours*, Paris 2022; or see M. Echenberg, *Les tirailleurs sénégalais en Afrique Occidentale Française (1857-1960)*, Paris 1992.

¹⁰ P. Durand, *Cette mystérieuse section coloniale. Le P.C.F. et les colonies (1920-1962)*, Paris 1986; A. Ruscio, *Le PCF et la question coloniale (de 1920 à 1935)*, in *Les communistes et l'Algérie*, Paris 2019, pp. 27-53.

¹¹ PCF archives (APCF), 517_1_185, *Matériaux de la commission coloniale du PCF*, 1924; ANOM, SLOTFOM III 24, *Union intercoloniale*, 1924, Notes by Désiré du 2 et 6/12/1924.

¹² ANOM, SLOTFOM III 84, Comité d'études coloniales, Letter from Maginot to the governors of AEF, AOF, Togo and Cameroon [April 1922].

society “Le Paria” was founded, bringing together various Communist and anti-colonialist militants from the territories of Africa and Asia. It published a newspaper of the same name, which they distributed also in the Overseas Territories and among the troops. “Le Paria” became the newspaper of the “Union intercoloniale”, an association that already in 1921 brought together militants from various French colonies, in particular from North Africa, West Africa and Indochina.¹³

The PCF made this commitment to the anti-colonial and anti-militarist struggles in the context of a decisive move away from the Socialists, already dictated by Lenin at the Comintern’s Second Congress. At that time, in fact, revolutionary prospects seemed to be looking up for the Communists, and the urgent concern was to undermine the foundations of the Entente armies. The already mentioned Leninist anti-colonialism of 1920, however, was partially reconsidered at the Comintern’s Third Congress in 1921. At that time, the revolutionary stagnation in Europe, the failure of the uprisings in Germany and the climate of civil war in Italy led to a cautious rapprochement with the Socialists, thanks to what was called the “united front tactic”.¹⁴

This strategy would appear to presage a democratic seizure of power by a now-united working class. But this retreat from revolutionary strategy in favour of dialogue with the Socialists also influenced the Comintern’s anti-colonial policy. On the one hand, it was necessary to be in dialogue with a part of the labour movement that saw colonialism as a tool to modernise society and develop the proletariat outside Europe. On the other, it was also important to consider the national interests of the USSR, interested in easing tensions with Western powers which often ruled over large colonial empires.¹⁵

At this point, the PCF’s Centre for Colonial Studies also became increasingly autonomous, breaking away from Comintern directives as it sought to respond to the demands of French domestic politics.¹⁶ The quest for working-class victory through the “united front” also

¹³ APCF, 517_1_185, *Matériaux*; ANOM, SLOTFOM V 36, *Le Paria : tribune du prolétariat colonial, organe de l’Union Intercoloniale*.

¹⁴ M. Hájek, *Storia dell’Internazionale comunista (1921-1935). La politica del fronte unico*, Roma 1969.

¹⁵ Wolikow, *L’Internazionale*; H. Adi, *Panaficanism and communism*.

¹⁶ APCF, 517_1_258, *Matériaux de la Commission coloniale du Comité central du PCF, Projet de réorganisation de la Section coloniale du Parti français*, undated [1924-1926].

put strains on the Leninist theory that colonialism is the weak link in imperialism. The priority was no longer to destroy colonialism in order to undermine European capitalism but rather to seize power in the metropolises in order to subsequently liberate the colonial peoples.¹⁷ This understanding recurred throughout the PCF's proclamations addressed to the so-called "indigènes". This term defined the natives of the colonies not only as part of an entity different from the metropolitan French, but also as subject to an unjust legal regime separate from that of French citizens.¹⁸

The lack of precise directives from the International and elaborations on the national question in connection to anti-colonial politics fed the emergence of differences in interpretation even among African, Caribbean and Asian militants. Within the Intercolonial Union, as well as the Colonial Section of the PCF, it was felt that the anti-colonial struggle needed to be organised on the basis of ethnicity.¹⁹ Moreover, the PCF's strategy approached the colonial question as a French issue. In 1925, the Guadelupian Gothon Union, whom the PCF had already the previous year sent to the USSR as a colonial representative, accused the party of not being at all interested in the emancipation of the black population.²⁰ Thus, in the radical Pan-African and anti-colonial circles in France, reflection developed on the need to create autonomous organisations, even if they were ideologically influenced by the PCF.²¹

In 1926, Africans and Caribbeans united in the Comité de défense de la Race nègre, an independent organisation set up with the support of the PCF.²² It was influenced by Pan-Africanist ideas and represented black workers in France. The leader of this new organisation was

¹⁷ See G. Siracusano, *La questione coloniale in Africa (1920-1939)*, «Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica», 1, 2022, pp. 109-131: 115-120.

¹⁸ ANOM, SLOTFOM III 84, Comité d'études coloniales, open letter of the PCFs Comité d'études coloniales «to our native brothers», 2 January 1922.

¹⁹ See M. Goebels, *Paris, capitale*.

²⁰ APCF, 517_1_258, *Matériaux de la Commission coloniale du PCF : Rapport de Gothon Union sur la situation dans les colonies et le travail du PCF dans les colonies*, 25 October 1925.

²¹ APCF, 517_1_407, *Matériaux de la Commission coloniale du Comité central du PCF : L'activité de la Commission coloniale centrale du PCF en avril 1926*, 27/04/1925 ; Id., Letters from Semard to the CI secretariat, 10 June 1926.

²² ANOM, SLOTFOM III 37, 1926, *Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre*, Note de l'agent Désiré du 4 mars 1926; Id., Note de l'agent Désiré du 8 mars 1926.

Lamine Senghor, a Senegalese veteran of the Great War, who was also a PCF member.²³ The Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre expressed the Pan-African demands that had reached militants in Europe and Africa from the Caribbean and the United States. However, in the early 1920s, Pan-African Communist militants were not yet part of a true global network and Senghor was more linked to the PCF than to African-American circles.²⁴

In this context, the Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre waged a continuous fight against the conscription of Africans into colonial armies. The issue was even more serious on account of the Rif War, where the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were sent to suppress the revolt led by Abd El Krim. However, this anti-militarist policy was also flanked by a Marxist-hued anti-colonialism. Its efforts in opposition to forced labour in Africa sought to counter what the Communists saw as an anti-historical return to slavery. Likewise, propaganda designed to politicise African sailors became indispensable for the formation of a conscious workers' vanguard in Africa. The sailors' importance was surely also connected to the means of circulating propaganda and ideological material between metropolitan France and the African colonies.²⁵

The circulation of Pan-African ideas in the early 1920s

In the early 1920s, the CI seemed to underestimate the real situation on the African continent. This lack of attention jarred with the rapid and burgeoning development of the Pan-African movement and so-called "Black internationalism", which in the 1920s brought together the aspirations of Africans and the African diaspora. The awareness

²³ D. Murphy, *Defending the 'Negro race': Lamine Senghor and black internationalism in interwar France*, «French Cultural Studies», 24/2, 2013, pp. 161-173.

²⁴ ANOM, SLOTFOM III 37, 1926, *Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre*, *Note de l'agent Désiré du 21 avril 1926*.

²⁵ APCF, 517_1_330, *Lettre au secrétariat du PCF sur l'attitude du PCF vis à vis du Comité de défense de la race nègre*, 9 June 1926; ANOM, SLOTFOM III 37, 1926, *Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre*, *letters from the prefecture of Gironde, Bouche du Rhone and the Lower Seine*, October 1926; Id., *Note de l'agent Désiré du 16 octobre 1926*; Id., *note on Lamine Senghor*, 23/10/1926 ; APCF, 517_1_468, *Matériaux du comité de défense de la race nègre*, 1926 [Not available in digital version. A copy is kept on microfilm at the Archives départementales de la Seine – Saint Denis (ADSSD)].

that they represented a community different and separate not only from «whites», but also from other dominated peoples, led many African, Caribbean or African-American intellectuals to construct an identity of their own. This vision of their identity was based in an analysis of the oppression and enslavement of “Black” people, specifically called “Negro” or “Nègre” as a designation of a new African man.²⁶

Still, the building of transatlantic cultural and ideological channels between the American continent and Africa was conditioned by the lack of a truly unified Pan-African movement. This seemed to remain an only rather literary proposal, an ideal horizon. The absence of a single model caused political splits between Marxist-influenced radicals, moderates and – among the followers of Marcus Garvey – advocates of the black diaspora’s return to Africa. This affected international connections, too, as radicals drew closer to the Communist International and moderates more toward Socialists and liberals.²⁷ In this way, the communication channels between American Pan-Africanism and African and European Pan-Africanism often followed the trails of pre-existing party networks. Linguistic affinities also played an important role in these links: militants from Nigeria and Gold Coast were strongly influenced by the African-American cultural milieu.²⁸ In contrast, those hailing from the French colonies were linked to French-speaking circles and Parisian political life.

Between 1922 and 1927, a period also marked by Lenin’s death in 1924, the Comintern’s anti-colonial initiatives were mostly entrusted to the individual national sections, which worked on them autonomously. The Comintern’s limited interest made links with Pan-African militants belonging to other national sections rather arduous. However, the French security services were closely attentive to the activity of anti-colonial movements and their connection with the Communists. The authorities’ controls thus focused on West African port cities, as the anti-colonial groups’ propaganda efforts were mainly directed toward sailors and workers in French and colonial seaports. Hence, between 1922 and 1926 Lamine Senghor held a series of rallies in port cities such as Marseille, Le Havre or Bordeaux with the aim

²⁶ Adi, *Pan-Africanism*, pp. 1-5.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ H. Weiss, *Framing a radical African Atlantic. African American Agency, West African Intellectuals and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers*, Boston 2014, pp. 45-110.

of recruiting more members for his organisation.²⁹ However, despite Senghor's efforts and the material aid provided by the PCF to support him, the Comité de défense de la race Nègre's activities up till 1926 remained essentially limited to France and its African and Caribbean colonies. Contacts with anti-colonial movements in other countries remained sporadic, especially those with the Pan-African movements in the USA.³⁰ It was not until 1927-1928 that real transnational anti-colonial and Pan-African networks linked to the Communist International were established. It was at this point the Comintern provided the political networks that allowed contacts between French-speaking and English-speaking militants. Relations were established that had their main hubs in cities like Moscow, Paris, Brussels, and Hamburg, where Communist activity was strongest.

The League Against Imperialism: the first transnational anti-colonial network

At the end of the 1920s, international events focused the Comintern's attention on the colonial question. Not only the Rif war, but above all the outbreak of the Chinese civil war between Communists and Nationalists, changed the Communist interpretation of anti-colonialism: how could Communists remain in dialogue with national movements that risked becoming instruments of imperialism?³¹

This posed the need for organised Marxist anti-colonial movements and the political education of militants. Some top figures in the International were especially active in this regard, such as the German Willi Münzenberg, a leader of the KPD, the Communist Party of Germany. Thus, the KPD became the main Communist force bringing together anti-colonial militants and drawing the Communist International closer to non-European realities. In 1927, Münzenberg, in close collabora-

²⁹ ANOM, SLOTFOM III 37, 1926, *Comité*; Id., *Note de l'agent Désiré du 16 octobre 1926*; Id., note on Lamine Senghor, 23/10/1926; ANOM, SLOTFOM III 84, *Comité d'études coloniales*, 1922-26.

³⁰ Archives nationales de France (ANF), F/7/13166, *Police générale, Partis et mouvements politiques 1894-1936, circulaire n° 72 du 7 février 1928, propagande révolutionnaire dans les colonies*.

³¹ R. Galissot, *L'imperialismo*; A. Agosti, *La Terza Internazionale. Storia documentaria*, Roma 1979.

tion with the Comintern, organised a major anti-imperialist congress in Brussels, inviting militants from all over the world. There were several African attendees, including Lamine Senghor, who became one of the leading figures in the League Against Imperialism that was now being set in motion. This body offered a link between all anti-colonial forces, even while leaving them autonomy in their decision-making and operations. At the same time, it created an important connection with the Comintern. The League Against Imperialism was built on national sections in which the different ethnically and geographically defined anti-colonialist circles came together.³²

With the establishment of the French section of the League Against Imperialism, the Comintern's influence on Francophone anti-colonialism grew. At a time when the differences and tensions between Socialists and Communists were deepening – culminating in the Sixth Congress and the condemnation of supposedly «social-fascist» social democracy – frictions also arose within the Pan-African movement. This was the context in which the Communist fraction of the Comité de défense de la race nègre decided to form the Ligue de défense de la race nègre to distance itself from the moderate component.³³ The Ligue published the newspaper *La Race Nègre* and conducted propaganda in the African colonies. This newspaper focused on the «conscience de la personnalité nègre», which thus complemented class consciousness.³⁴ Paradoxically, the Comintern's increased direct involvement in the Pan-African and colonial question brought a loosening of the PCF's control over the African émigré organisations in France. The organisation of anti-colonial propaganda in Africa no longer concerned the national sections alone but became a matter of general interest that was part of the broader struggle against capitalism. The Communists saw the need to connect the different radical Pan-African movements to create a more operational network.

³² APCF, 517_1_563, *Lettre signée par le secrétaire de la Ligue contre l'oppression coloniale et l'impérialisme, adressée au secrétariat du PCF, sur la création "officielle" de la Ligue*, 29 April 1927; H. Adi, *Panafrikanism.*; D. Murphy, *Tirailleur, facteur, anticolonialiste : la courte vie militante de Lamine Senghor (1924-1927)*, «Cahiers d'histoire», 126, 2015, pp. 55-72; M. Goebels, *Paris capitale*.

³³ ANOM, SLOTFOM III 24, 1927, *Note de l'agent Désiré du 24 mai 1927*; see Murphy, *Defending.*; P. Dewitte, *Les mouvements nègres en France 1919-1939*, Paris, 1985.

³⁴ *La générosité française sous la IIIème République*, «La Race Nègre», 3 September 1927.

In this new phase of relations between Pan-Africanism and Communism, the Sudanese (Malian) Tiemoko Garan Kouyaté became the new leader of the *Ligue de défense de la race nègre*, replacing Lamine Senghor, who died shortly after the Brussels Congress in 1927.³⁵

The Comintern's Sixth Congress and the "Negro Question"

In 1928, the holding of the Comintern's Sixth Congress confirmed the Communists' determination to organise the anti-colonialist struggle in Africa. The Communist International set itself in frontal opposition to the Socialists, who were now declared enemies and labelled tools of capitalism. The Comintern's political analysis foresaw the looming outbreak of all-out class warfare; anti-colonialism became fundamental in the fight against capitalism, not least for the sake of cutting off resources to the colonial powers. In fact, one of the fundamental focuses of the Congress was a rejection of the Socialist International's interpretation of the colonial question: the Socialists believed that colonial authorities were capable of modernising their possessions, then creating a working class and thereby opening the way to social progress in the colonies. Bukharin, Kuusinen and Togliatti each railed against this conception, emphasising the close connection between the workers' struggle in their homelands and the struggles of the anti-colonial movements. In fact, colonialism halted all development, condemning the dominated territories to become a reserve of raw materials in an enduring "feudal" phase. The issue was part of a strategy which the Comintern built on the "three pillars of revolution": the USSR embodying socialism, the workers' movement in capitalist countries, and the anti-imperialist movements in the colonies.³⁶

Events in China showed the difficulty of dialogue with non-Europe-

³⁵ H. Adi, *The Comintern and Black Workers in Britain and France, 1919-37*, «Immigrants & Minorities», 28/2-3, 2010, pp. 224-245.

³⁶ See N. Bucharin, *La situation internationale et les taches de l'IC - compte rendu du Comité Exécutif de l'Internationale Communiste*, «La correspondance internationale», 72/8, 1 August 1928; O. Kuusinen, *Discours de cloture de Kuusinen, 21 aoutf 1928 (soir)*, *ibid.*, 143/8, 27 November 1928; P. Togliatti, *La socialdemocrazia e la questione coloniale, rapporto tenuto il 15 agosto 1928 al VI Congresso dell'Internazionale comunista*, in P. Togliatti, *Opere*, II, 1926-1929, ed. by E. Ragionieri, Rome 1972, pp. 472-505.

an nationalist movements.³⁷ But the Comintern did move to analyse the Pan-African question in greater depth. Certain differences of interpretation emerged in relation to the various geographical, ethnic and social contexts at issue. In Asia, where society was considered more mature and already more patterned by industrial development, the Communist movement was stronger and had to build a class struggle that would set it in opposition to the nationalists. In sub-Saharan Africa, however, the situation looked completely different: the economy was mainly confined to the appropriation of raw materials that could only be processed in Europe. This had produced a society in which the dominant exerted an overwhelming power over the dominated, and whose continued underdevelopment had prevented human progress. The primary goal was, then, to free these societies from colonialism by all possible means, in order to find a path to modernity that could lead to a subsequent raising of consciousness and the advent of socialism. The anti-colonial struggle in Africa should thus be in dialogue with and rely mainly on the non-Communist nationalist and Pan-Africanist movements.³⁸

The “Black” question was thus analysed differently than other colonial contexts. The African people and its diaspora became the crux of imperialist oppression in the colonies and capitalist exploitation in the metropole. Racism was henceforth a category that helped define the relations of production, between white bosses and black workers. This analysis was also enabled by the ideological contribution of figures like George Padmore. The latter, a Trinidadian member of the CPUSA and the Comintern, developed an understanding that combined class struggle with Pan-Africanism. He identified the image of the new African man in the black worker who emancipated himself from the colonial master or ruler. For Padmore, in fact, the role of “race” was central to the history of the imperial development of capitalism: the most racist and supremacist aspects of colonisation in Africa provided the greatest tools of imperialist domination. Racism served to justify the colonial powers’ oppression and paternalism. From Padmore and other Comintern leaders arose the idea that they should favour the construction of independent “Black” states in central Africa (Congo)

³⁷ R. Galissot, *L'imperialismo*.

³⁸ See H. Adi, *Pan-Africanism and communism*; R.E. Kanet, *The Comintern and the Negro Question: Communist Policy in the United States and Africa, 1921-41*, «Survey», 19/4, 1973, pp. 86-122.

and the Southern states of the United States, the so-called “Black Belt”. The strategy to be adopted towards the African and African American populations also derived from the new reading of the world situation and the “three pillars” paradigm. In fact, black workers in Europe and the Northern states of the US were part of the labour movement in the capitalist countries, where they lived, and must therefore fight racism and integrate their struggle with that of white proletarians. Their situation thus differed from the one envisaged for people in the Southern states of the US and sub-Saharan Africa.³⁹

The strategy of approaching the Pan-African movement was opposed by several Comintern delegates, who considered it wrong to separate the struggle of the African masses from that of the labour movement. They expressed doubts as to whether the African context should be analysed differently from that of the industrialised countries. The South African Communists (CPSA) expressed their special disappointment about the division of the goals of blacks from whites in a nationalist and separatist key.⁴⁰ However, the African American delegates of the CPUSA and other important leaders of the International like Kuusinen were instrumental in approving this approach.⁴¹

Kuusinen also chaired an important sub-commission of the Colonial Commission at the Sixth Congress, namely the “Negro Commission”. In November 1928, a “Negro Bureau” was established, directly subordinate to the International’s Eastern Secretariat. The bureau’s main task was to organise propaganda and agitation among the African, Caribbean and African-American masses. The bureau also had to pressure the European Communist parties, the CPSA and the CPUSA to apply the dictates of the CI in the colonies or among the black migrant workers.⁴²

The “Negro Bureau” became very active on African issues from early 1929, when it began a long correspondence with the PCF and CPGB. The presence of members of the Profintern and Krestintern

³⁹ L. James, *George Padmore and Decolonization from below. Pan-Africanism, the Cold War and the of Empire*, London 2015, pp. 15-22.

⁴⁰ R. Bunting, *Discussion sur le rapport de Boukharine*, «La correspondance internationale», 72/8, 1 August 1928; see also A. Davidson et al., *South Africa and the Communist International: a documentary history*, London 2003; A. Drew, *Discordant Comrades: Identities and Loyalties on the South African Left*, Pretoria 2002.

⁴¹ Kuusinen, *Discours de cloture de Kuusinen*.

⁴² Weiss, *Framing a radical*.

in the commission was aimed at bridging the gap between the work done in the USA and South Africa and that in Western or Equatorial Africa, by emphasising trade union and peasant work. The French and British Communist parties were thus asked to pursue a more vigorous policy in the African colonies and among immigrants in the metropole. They should thus assert their ideological and organisational hegemony among African revolutionary movements. The colonial sections of the two parties were to co-operate with the “Negro Bureau”, periodically producing reports to be sent to Moscow and also creating a sub-commission entirely dedicated to Africa. This had the task of coordinating work among “the black masses” and promoting the recruitment of African militants, including through concrete efforts against racism both in and outside of these parties. Added to this were efforts directed toward the political training of cadres from Africa, both at party schools and at the Leninist School in Moscow. Furthermore, both the PCF and CPGB have a duty to set up a national revolutionary organisation among the migrant workers of France and Britain, so that they can direct the work in the African colonies through this movement. These general lines must serve the fight for the “evacuation” of imperialism from the “Black” colonies, for the establishment of independent “Black republics”.⁴³

Already in early 1929, the Negro Bureau began correspondence with the French, British and Belgian Communist Parties, proposing closer collaboration in the organisation of labour in the African colonies. In addition to stepping up propaganda in Africa and among African sailors, the Comintern called for the development of a strong link between the Communist Parties and the revolutionary movements and trade unions in the colonies. The aim was to engage in this political work not only in those contexts which were considered more advanced, but also in places like Equatorial Africa, identified by the Negro Bureau as the new epicentre of Communist efforts on the continent.⁴⁴

⁴³ Fonds français de l'internationale communiste (FFIC), 495_155_80, *Correspondance du Bureau Noir du Secrétariat de l'Est du CEIC*, 15 March 1929; letters to the Central Committee of the CPGB, 25 March 1929; letters to the CPGB Secretariat, 25 March 1929; letters to the Central Committee of the PCF, 5 April 1929.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Metropolitan organisations, circulations and ramifications in the colonies in the late 1920s and early 1930s

The Comintern's increasingly direct engagement with the "Negro Question" had the effect of gradually connecting the Pan-African movements in the various British or French colonies to Moscow. The foundations were thus laid for the establishment of a genuine Pan-African Communist network. However, the national Communist sections, which were supposed to be in charge of organising the struggle in the colonies under their own countries' jurisdiction, relaxed their commitment to this issue. Rather, this focus became more internationalised, as it was no longer confined by the borders of the respective colonial empires.

Despite pressure from the Negro Bureau, the PCF and CPGB moved both slowly and late on African issues. The initiative was instead left up to the League Against Imperialism or the Communist fraction of the *Ligue de défense de la race nègre*, in collaboration with the Bureau. The French and British parties' neglect was also owed to their belief that Communist parties could not be created where the working class was absent.⁴⁵

Instead, the Comintern's Negro Bureau looked with interest at events in Equatorial Africa, where there were mounting episodes of subversion against colonial administrations between 1928 and 1933.

From the early 1920s, the Belgian Congo was shaken by various religious and anti-European uprisings. The mystic Simon Kimbangu, arrested by the administration in 1921 for sedition, presented himself as the messiah and liberator of Africa from the whites, and stirred up rebellion.⁴⁶ Tensions rose throughout the decade, and finally exploded in 1928 and 1929. At that time, the revolt spread to many regions of the Belgian colony and even extended into the neighbouring French *Moyen-Congo*. The *Haute-Sangha* region, between *Moyen-Congo* and *Oubangui-Chari*, had been in the grip of riots linked to animist mystic sects for several years. Across the end of the 1920s and the

⁴⁵ FFIC, 495_155_80, *Correspondance du Bureau Noir du Secrétariat de l'Est du CEIC*, letter to the PCF, 9 September 1929; APCF, 517_1_1126, *Matériaux de la Section coloniale du PCF*, 3 November 1931; Weiss, *Framing*, pp. 122-129.

⁴⁶ ANOM, SLOTFOM III 47, *Comité syndical international des ouvriers nègres – note sur la propagande révolutionnaire intéressant les pays d'outre-mer*, 31 January 1924.

beginning of the 1930s, the revolt was prompted by the sorcerer Karinou, who presented himself as a divine envoy on Earth destined to defeat the colonial settlers.⁴⁷ Riots broke out also in Nigeria at the end of 1929 and the French colonial intelligence services feared infiltration by the Comintern.⁴⁸ The Negro Bureau had indeed sent directives to the CPGB to set up a revolutionary network in the British West African colonies, but the commitment of the British Communists in this regard still seems to have been very weak.⁴⁹

The Communists looked on with interest at the Congolese movements of a mystical and religious nature: at the Sixth Congress, while the Asian nationalist movements were condemned, attention was instead drawn to the African uprisings. However, the debate showed an opposition between those who thought that colonialism was developing capitalism in Africa and those who denied this. The Belgian Communist Party delegation believed that imperialism was giving birth to a Congolese proletariat.⁵⁰ Togliatti and Kuusinen, on the other hand, emphasised the reactionary nature of colonialism. Bukharin, in his report, then pointed to the possibility of a non-capitalist development in the colonies, which first need to be liberated and then modernised through proletarian revolution in the industrialised countries.⁵¹ The key lay in the strategic distinction between “advanced” and “backward” colonies, characterised by their relative degree of industrial development and working-class populations. The regions of Equatorial Africa fell into the “backward” category and were identified by the Sixth Congress as the heart of an independent black state to be established in Africa on the ashes of colonialism, by way of an alliance with various non-Communist forces. The Congolese situation

⁴⁷ ANOM, GGAEF 1D 251, *Grébige confidentielles*, 1929-1932; ANOM, GGAEF 1D 251, 1933 *Confidentiel au départ*; C. C. Vidrovitch, *Le Congo au temps des grandes compagnies concessionnaires 1898-1930*, vol. 1, Paris 2001, pp. 197-219.

⁴⁸ ANOM, SLOTFOM III 114, *Note sur les désordres qui se sont produits en Nigéria du Sud en décembre 1929*.

⁴⁹ FFIC, 495_155_80, *Correspondance du Bureau Noir du Secrétariat de l'Est du CEIC*, letter to the CPGB, 25 March 1929.

⁵⁰ See the speech on the Congolese situation by J. Jacquemotte, «La correspondance internationale», 18 October 1928.

⁵¹ Togliatti, *La socialdemocrazia e la questione coloniale*; Kuusinen, *Discours de clôture de Kuusinen*; N. Bucharin, *Programme de l'Internationale communiste (Rapport de Boukharine)*, «La correspondance internationale», 25 August 1928.

attracted the particular interest of the CI's Negro Bureau and one of its main leaders, George Padmore. In his book *The life and the struggle of Negro toilers*, Padmore noted two hotbeds of revolt in tropical Africa: one in Belgian Congo, triggered by the mystic Kimbangu and branching out throughout the colony, and the Moyen-Congo and Oubangui-Chari rebellions, which were more varied but affected the entire French AEF. Despite the fact that the uprisings of 1928-30 had a messianic and mystical character and its leaders presented themselves as spiritual leaders, Padmore and the Comintern's Negro Bureau judged them to be more politically significant than those in the past. According to this view, the uprisings were provoked by the terrible living conditions imposed by the colonists, the exploitation of African workers in the Congolese mines, compulsory conscription and, above all, semi-slavery and forced labour in the construction sites of the Congo-Océan railway. In Padmore's eyes, therefore, these movements took on not only an anti-colonial character, but also a working-class one, because they were so closely bound up with the workers in the mines and on the railways. The uprisings thus represented the alliance between peasants, anti-colonial nationalists and the proletariat.⁵²

The uprisings linked to André Matswa Grénard in Brazzaville garnered even more praise from Padmore and the Comintern. Matswa Grénard was in fact the leader of an organisation of French Equatorial African workers based in Paris and linked to the PCF, namely the "Amicale des originaires de l'AEF". So-called "amicalist" organisations such as his were characterised by a membership that transcended ideologies and instead grouped together anti-colonial militants on the basis of their geographical origin. His leadership increasingly took on messianic characteristics when he returned to the Congo in 1929. His arrest and condemnation to a three-year prison sentence in 1930 triggered a rebellion and general strike throughout the country.⁵³

The Negro Bureau thus attempted a decisive rapprochement with the movements of revolt in Equatorial Africa. The aim was not to take the lead, but to be part of the movement and progressively influence its political course. The French, British and Belgian Communist parties were thus urged to play their part in supporting and organising the African uprisings as much as possible. However, the PCF's commit-

⁵² G. Padmore, *The life and the struggle of Negro toilers*, London 1931, pp. 28-38.

⁵³ See ANOM, 1 AFFPOL 649, *Sur l'affaire Grénard et consorts (Association amicale des originaires de l'AEF)*, 6 July 1937.

ment proved insufficient, despite the publication of a few articles in *l'Humanité* dedicated to the Congolese events.⁵⁴ The inadequacy of the PCF's anti-colonial policy was already expressed in a letter from the colonial section to the leadership, where it called for greater emphasis on the uprisings that had broken out in Equatorial Africa.⁵⁵

Moreover, the Negro Bureau favoured the establishment of organisations directly linked to the Comintern that could politicise these struggles by playing an active role. In May 1932, the Negro Bureau circulated an appeal signed by the Ligue du Peuple du Congo pour la liberté. This document affirms the central role of this organisation in the direction of the «lutte du peuple congolais contre le régime sanglant du gouvernement Belge et des Compagnies». In the text, this formation attributed itself the leadership of the workers' and peasants' struggle against exploitation, hunger, forced labour and the arrogance of the colonial regime. The appeal called on all Congolese people to join the struggle and used a strongly Marxist rhetoric and language, referring to colonialist abuse, the plundering of resources and the exploitation of workers. The document also concerned African soldiers: appealing to the brotherhood that bound them to all black peoples, it called on them to refuse to open fire. An African identity thus overlapped with class identity, itself becoming an instrument of raising consciousness. This document thus demonstrated the Comintern's effort to build bridges with Pan-Africanism while introducing elements typical of Marxism-Leninism. In this way, the "ethno-national" character that Pan-Africanists assigned to African identity was supplanted by a revolutionary imprint that increasingly coincided with the conditions of exploitation experienced by the working class in industrialised countries.⁵⁶

At the same time, the Negro Bureau sent precise directives to the Belgian Communist Party regarding the Congolese situation. The

⁵⁴ ANOM, SLOTFOM III 78, *Révoltes en AEF, campagne de l'Humanité*, M. Joubert, *En Afrique Equatoriale Française les nègres se dressent contre la colonisation sanglante*, «l'Humanité», 19 January 1929; Id., *Pourquoi le prolétariat doit soutenir les nègres d'AEF*, «l'Humanité», 26 January 1929.

⁵⁵ ANOM, SLOTFOM III 78, *Révoltes en AEF, campagne de l'Humanité*, letter sent from the Colonial Section to the Party, 1929.

⁵⁶ FFIC, 495_4_186, *Procès-verbal n° 238 de la Commission Politique du Secrétariat Politique du CEIC, Programme of action of Congo People League for freedom*, 3 May 1932; ANOM, SLOTFOM III 111, *Propagande communiste au Congo Belge*, 1932.

PCB should mobilise the working class in favour of the anti-colonial movements, creating a network of contacts with them. The party was, however, severely reprimanded by the Negro Bureau because of its inactivity. This attitude was defined as a vague humanitarian position often indistinguishable from a social-democratic one.⁵⁷

According to information from French public security agents, the Comintern and the Soviet Union were still in 1934 inciting the Congolese uprisings. The authorities were worried that the Communists would infiltrate the rebellions, which were still active between the Belgian Congo and Oubangui-Chari. However, such sources often tended to overestimate the extent of the Communist threat even when its real significance was minimal.⁵⁸ This police interpretation often had a hard time distinguishing between the direct involvement of the International and that of the PCF, which seemed to be weakening.

The *Ligue de défense de la race nègre* gradually took over the reins of the political and propaganda campaign against colonialism in Africa. In the spring of 1931, under the aegis of the Comintern's Negro Bureau and the League Against Imperialism, the *Ligue* participated in the organisation of a counter-exhibition against the great colonial exhibition in Vincennes. This time, however, the colonial section of the PCF was very active in organising the anti-colonial counter-exhibition. Here, the French Communists forged a stronger connection than before with the League Against Imperialism and other anti-colonial organisations linked to the party.⁵⁹ Police and colonial ministry sources also shed light on the frenetic organisational activities associated with the counter-exhibition, viewed with concern by the authorities as a direct Comintern intervention in France's national affairs.⁶⁰

In organising the counter-exhibition, the PCF and its colonial section also benefited from the documentary material and pictures

⁵⁷ FFIC, 495_155_100, *Directives du CEIC, programmes d'action de la Ligue pour la défense du Congo*, Directives to Belgian Communist Party on activities relating to Belgian Congo, 3 March 1932.

⁵⁸ See notes on "bolchéviques" interpretations of the Congo uprisings, ANOM, SLOTFOM III 70, 1933-34.

⁵⁹ APCF, 517_1_1126, *Matériaux de la section coloniale du PCF: L'exposition coloniale de Vincennes*, 09-12 January 1931; Ivi, *Note sur l'exposition anticoloniale*, 29 September 1931.

⁶⁰ ANOM, SLOTFOM III 5, *Exposition coloniale de Vincennes et contre-exposition de la Ligue Anti-impérialiste*, 1931.

sent by numerous African correspondents, regarding the conditions of workers on the Congo-Océan railway, the mines, and the plantations.⁶¹

The links forged with various militants in French West Africa became more intensive from the early 1930s onwards. The success of the counter-exhibition showed the possibility of setting up a transnational anti-imperialist network with its hubs in African harbours, European capitals and especially Moscow. AOF's commercial ports of call had been a focus of Communist activity since the early 1920s, but this seems to have almost only involved their French citizens. The native sympathisers, on the other hand, were referred to as "separatists", seen as closer to nationalism than to socialism. However, contacts between the *Ligue de défense de la race nègre* and several African militants in Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and Dahomey intensified in the early 1930s. The colonial authorities noted with concern the increase in anti-colonial and Pan-African publications sent to the AOF and AEF through sailors, counting them among "bolchevique" propaganda materials. The Ministry of the Colonies devoted particular attention to the activities of some figures who would later play a crucial role in the decolonisation processes of the 1960s: among them, Léon M'Ba, future president of Gabon, a subscriber to anticolonial periodicals in French and English.⁶² The sending of English-language materials to the French colonies demonstrated an attempt to transnationalise a struggle that risked remaining closed off within the colonial context. This does not itself prove that there were major and direct contacts between African-American communities and the AOF. But it does testify to the great mobility of radical Communist and Pan-African leaders between Moscow and European cities: the material was in fact sent by the Anglophone leaders of the Comintern's Negro Bureau, arriving in Germany and then in France via the League Against Imperialism. Germany was surely the hub of anti-imperialist and Pan-African networks in this period. Its cities were at the centre of communication networks that connected the Comintern and Moscow with the communities of migrant workers in France, Britain and Belgium, but also with the African colonies. In 1929, Frankfurt was

⁶¹ *Ibid.*; APCF, 517_1_1126.

⁶² ANOM, GGAEF 1D 251, *Gouvernement générale de l'AEF, 1932*, letters sent by AEF Governor to the Minister of Colonies about communist propaganda and Léon M'Ba attitude.

chosen to host the Second Congress of the League Against Imperialism while Hamburg hosted the first International Conference of Black Workers (1930), a direct expression of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW), the Pan-African section of the Profintern.⁶³

The Negro Bureau's attempt at direct engagement in West Africa is also evidenced by an appeal similar to the one already drafted for Congo, in this case signed by the "Ligue de lutte pour la liberté du Sénégal et du Soudan" in March 1933. The document refers to the cultural and social identities of the individual Senegalese and Sudanese populations. However, these specificities were linked to a mass anti-imperialist struggle led by a local working class and peasantry. The language is strongly characterised by Marxist concepts such as the oppression and alienation of the worker, their lack of access to the goods produced, and the expropriation of raw materials by the colonial rulers. As in the case of the Congolese appeal, this text also sought to demonstrate the presence of a completely African organisation, which operated according to local categories and mindsets, albeit through an anti-imperialist lens.⁶⁴

The Comintern's attempts at branching out were reflected in the internal dynamics of the Ligue de défense de la Race Nègre. In July 1931, the need for an organisation more closely linked to Communist networks led to a split and the birth of the "Union des travailleurs nègres" (UTN),⁶⁵ which was more politicised and connected with the French Communists than the previous organisations. However, it seems to have enjoyed a certain autonomy from the PCF, thanks to several direct contacts with Moscow at least up till 1933.⁶⁶

⁶³ ANOM, SLOTFOM III 124, information about the International Black Congress in Hamburg, 12 June 1930.

⁶⁴ FFIC, 495_3_270, *Fonds du Comité Exécutif de l'Internationale Communiste, Secrétariat Politique du Comité Exécutif de l'Internationale Communiste Procès-verbal n°161*, 21 January 1933; APCF, 517_1_1246, *Appels de la Ligue de lutte pour la liberté des peuples du Sénégal et du Soudan*, 1933; ANOM, SLOTFOM III 111, transmission to colonial intelligence services regarding the establishment of the Ligue de lutte pour la liberté du Sénégal et du Soudan, 15 November 1933; S. Wolikow, *Quelle place*.

⁶⁵ B.H. Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora. Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, Cambridge MA 2003, pp. 245-252.

⁶⁶ ANOM, SLOTFOM III 73, *Union des travailleurs Nègres*, 1932-1935.

The nationalisation of the Communist Parties and its effects on the colonial question

The Comintern's anti-colonial strategy began to change from the end of 1933. Nazi Germany became the enemy against which its forces now had to be concentrated. France became the focus of the International's efforts in Europe, and the danger posed by Nazism also forced changes to the Communists' formerly antagonistic stance toward the Socialists. The advent of the Nazi regime also marked the weakening of the League Against Imperialism, which was based in Germany and had found concrete support in the German Communist Party. At the same time, the final establishment of the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union led to tighter control over the leadership of the International, which increasingly became an instrument of Soviet foreign policy. The growth of the Nazi threat thus led the Comintern to attempt a rapprochement with the Socialists in an anti-fascist key between 1934 and 1935. At the same time, the USSR tried to engage in dialogue with Paris and London, also softening the PCF and CPGB's previous "class-against-class" approach.⁶⁷

All this had an obvious impact on Communist anti-colonialism. The Second International advocated modernising the colonies by bringing in European civilisation and this could not fail to influence the Communists in their attempts at dialogue with the Socialists. At the same time, contacts with Paris and London depended on a certain relaxation of anti-imperialist initiatives.

In this context, therefore, the Comintern's Negro Bureau began to lose its importance, gradually giving way to individual national approaches. In France, the PCF again took over the reins of the colonial work it had loosened in previous years (notwithstanding the success of the anti-colonial counter-exhibition). This new commitment was made with a view to a reorganisation of the Communist parties on a national level, which was only finalised in 1935.⁶⁸ This was a further confirmation of the PCF's reading of the colonial question as a French issue. The first step in this new strategy was a tighter control over the initiatives of the Union des travailleurs nègres, until then effectively

⁶⁷ See Wolikow, *L'internazionale*; R. Galissot, *L'imperialismo*.

⁶⁸ See *Antifascisme et nation*, ed. by S. Wolikow-A. Ruget, Dijon 1996; A. Agosti, *L'Internationale communiste et la question nationale*, «Territoires contemporains», 1/4, 1997.

autonomous from the party. This new pattern of relations is evident from the increase in documents and correspondence between the Colonial Section and Kouyaté's organisation. The reports by state security agents also testify to the now-more frequent visits to the UTN headquarters by Communist leaders (such as Robert Déloche or Julien Racamond).⁶⁹ With the strengthening of the PCF's control over the UTN, internal tensions grew within the Pan-African organisation, which progressively lost its direct line with Moscow. Hostilities emerged in full force when Kouyaté and other African militants challenged the indoctrination and political education initiatives promoted by the PCF and supported by the UTN's Caribbean members. Kouyaté, still in line with the directives of the Negro Bureau, interpreted anti-imperialism in Africa as a unitary anti-colonial struggle. The "amicalist" and messianic uprisings in Congo were thus to be supported, because they were symptomatic of a particular social situation where European categories should be avoided and where the revolt was mostly ethnic in character. Caribbean militants' readings were instead focused on the classical categories of Marxism-Leninism. According to them, as for the leaders of the PCF's colonial section, class tensions counted for far more than racial ones – and working-class unity between blacks and whites was necessary not only in the metropole but also in the colonies. For this reason, the anti-European uprisings in French Equatorial Africa considered counterproductive. This created quite a few misunderstandings with the Africans: the latter remained attached to the "separatist" perspectives dictated by the Sixth Congress of the Comintern.⁷⁰

These tensions had already been agitating French-speaking Pan-African circles for some years. Indeed, in 1929, the Ligue de défense de la race nègre began a debate on the possibility of setting up a Communist cell in West Africa, following the Comintern directives. However, disagreements between Kouyaté and Stéphane Rosso, a leader in the Caribbean very loyal to the PCF's approach, caused the failure of this initiative: Rosso took advantage of the Sudanese leader's absence to

⁶⁹ ANOM, SLOTFOM III 5, *Union des travailleurs nègres*, notes, no date [1934-1938]; see also the reports of the informants of the Ministry of Colonies in the same file (1932-1938); ANOM III 73, *Union des travailleurs nègres*, 1931-1935. About Racamond's visit to UTN, see APCF, 517_1_1515, *Matériaux de la fraction communiste de l'union des travailleurs nègres (en France)*, 7 juillet 1933.

⁷⁰ APCF, 517_1_1515, *Matériaux de la fraction communiste*, 1931-1935.

set up a political commission formed only by Caribbeans, prompting Kouyaté's resentment and his withdrawal from the project.⁷¹

Rosso was also the treasurer first of the LDRN and then of the UTN, and it was from him that there began the enquiry that led to Kouyaté's ouster from the PCF and its Pan-African organisation in October 1933. He was accused of embezzlement (a charge often used to tarnish the public image of political opponents), but the real motivations were ideological. Kouyaté was accused of preferring a "frontist" strategy to a "class-against-class" one, though he in fact stood much closer to the line decided at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern than his party did.⁷² This "frontism" was in fact attached to the idea of Pan-Africanism as a community without class distinctions – just as had been dictated by the International in 1928. It referred, therefore, to the paradigm of the "three pillars" of revolution, asserting that African peoples pursued their struggle in different conditions to workers in Europe. On the contrary, Kouyaté categorically rejected an alliance with the European Socialists. The PCF leadership's accusations instead denoted a return to a homogenisation of political interpretations across both the metropole and the colonies, thus tending to confine the French-speaking black question within a French national space. On this reading, the working class would have to act in unison, in both France and Africa, to fight against capitalism, imperialism and fascism. The "separatist" perspectives for the colonies set out in 1928 were thus buried.⁷³ This runs against the historiographical reading of the PCF as a still "class-against-class" party ever-aligned with the dictates coming from the Communist International. For it instead demonstrates the existence of the PCF's own autonomous strategy, hinging on national issues. In this case, the concordance is much more evident in relation to the needs of the Soviet Union and Stalin, aimed at the defence of the socialist state and the nationalisation of the Comintern's parties. The PCF was thus the forerunner of a path that would develop more fully in the immediately subsequent years. In the course of 1934, in fact, the Comintern increasingly lost control of the individual national sections, which structured themselves into

⁷¹ ANOM, SLOTFOM I 3B, *Parti communiste sénégalais*, note sent to the Ministry of Colonies on a meeting of the LDRN on 28 April 1929.

⁷² Reasons for Kouyaté's exclusion from the PCF, «l'Humanité», 31 October 1933; B.H. Edwards, *The Practice*, p. 256.

⁷³ See ANOM, SLOTFOM III 73, *Union des travailleurs nègres*, 1931-1935.

completely autonomous parties, putting national issues at the top of their agenda. The PCF thus seems to have been in the vanguard of the rethinking of a global strategy, increasingly tending towards anti-fascism and a frontism that ought to be distinguished from the mass struggle envisaged by Kouyaté in Africa. The rapprochement with the Socialists reflected both a Soviet foreign-policy need – unity against the Hitlerite threat – and a French “national” concern for the PCF, which sought workers’ unity to change the country, starting from its national government. From this perspective, working-class power in metropolitan France would also change relations between the centre and the colonial periphery, constituting a large egalitarian socialist community on the Soviet model. This strategy was not accepted by Kouyaté and the radical Pan-Africanists, who felt that their demands for emancipation had been betrayed.⁷⁴

After Kouyaté’s expulsion, the UTN toned down its involvement in the colonial territories. It limited itself to dealing with African and West-Indian natives residing in France and increasingly focused its analysis on opposition to fascism. The colonial security services themselves reported on this change in tactics, emphasising the close correlation between the strategy of the PCF and that of the UTN.⁷⁵

The showdown finally took place within the Comintern itself. As early as the summer of 1933, Padmore resigned from the secretariat of the ITUCNW, causing strong resentment in Moscow. Because of the Nazi threat, the Trinidadian trade union leader fled from Hamburg, where he had been living, to England. But he found himself isolated. In fact, he became aware of the changing Comintern outlook on revolution, increasingly under the heel of Soviet demands and ever less interested in the colonial question. Padmore was in contact with Pan-African “separatist” circles, with Kouyaté and the moderate Émile Faure also participating in a meeting that sought to organise a future great “Congrès mondial nègre” to be held between Paris and London (finally held in Manchester in 1945). The aim was to create a unified and autonomous Pan-African platform that would not depend on European political theories.⁷⁶ Padmore’s severing of relations with the

⁷⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁵ ANOM, SLOTFOM III 73, UTN, Letter from the Governor-General of the AOF to the Minister of Colonies, 28 December 1933.

⁷⁶ ANOM, SLOTFOM III 73, UTN, *Congrès mondial nègre, Extraits des délibérations et des décisions initiales des réunions du 4 et 9 novembre 1933.*

Profintern and his increasingly close contacts with moderate Pan-Africans lead to disagreements with the Comintern, which called for a commission of enquiry against him. Padmore was finally expelled from the International in February 1934.

The invasion of Ethiopia, the Comintern's Seventh Congress and the popular fronts

Between 1934 and 1935, countering the pressure of Fascist expansionism in both Europe and Africa became an ever-more urgent concern for the Communists. Italian Fascism's sights on the Mediterranean and the Horn of Africa were interpreted in relation to Germany's sights on its pre-war colonies. The invasion of Ethiopia by Mussolini's regime in 1935 represented a turning point in the relationship between international communism and Pan-Africanism. With the fascist assault against Abyssinia, the French Communists feared a Nazi offensive against Cameroon and Togo, former German dominions in Africa that were now under French mandate. Anti-fascism also gained ground in black workers' organisations in France.⁷⁷ As early as February 1935, the UTN, the League Against Imperialism and other related organisations organised an anti-war and anti-fascist meeting in Paris. The Italian Communists, whose Foreign Centre was located in the French capital, also participated in this meeting. The PCI expressed its clear opposition to Mussolini's designs on the Ethiopian empire.⁷⁸

In Moscow, an intense debate opened up on how to deal with the invasion of Abyssinia, seeking to sharply denounce the attack without pushing Italy closer into Nazi Germany's arms.⁷⁹ The needs of Soviet foreign policy thus marginalised the International's anti-imperialist and anti-colonial demands. In fact, the Comintern also had to reckon with an attempt by the Kremlin to build better relations with France and Britain, colonial powers whom Pan-African militants considered co-responsible for the invasion.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ ANOM, SLOTFOM III 70, *Afrique*, Notes on the situation in Cameroon and Togo, 1934-1937.

⁷⁸ ANOM, SLOTFOM III 73, *Union des travailleurs nègres*, *Grand meeting d'Abysinie*, 28 February 1935.

⁷⁹ See G. Procacci, *Il socialismo internazionale e la guerra d'Etiopia*, Roma 1978.

⁸⁰ Id., *Le Internazionali e l'aggressione fascista dell'Etiopia*, «Annali della Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli», 1977, pp. 7-104.

During the Comintern's Seventh Congress, the question emerged in the debate, clearly distinguishing the positions of the various national parties. With the strategy of anti-fascist popular fronts now confirmed, Togliatti reconciled the Comintern directives with the PCI's analysis of fascism: the regime must be hit at its weakest point, namely in its imperial and colonial projects. This meant combining anti-fascism and anti-colonialism in a single struggle.⁸¹ For the other Communist parties, however, the rapprochement with the Socialists induced a change in political strategies, which no longer included anti-colonialism as an instrument of struggle. Indeed, in many cases, anti-European movements were seen as outright dangerous because they were easily influenced by Nazi propaganda against Britain and France. The priority was thus to consolidate an anti-fascist front also in the colonies.⁸²

The PCF's changing course is particularly telling in this regard. In 1936, its efforts were concentrated on strengthening the popular front formed with the Socialists. With the success of this strategy and the rise to government of Léon Blum, the Communist-conceived project of democratising France seemed to be realised. This pointed to the possible construction, in the near future, of a large and egalitarian French-speaking community, including the colonies. The period of the popular front government in fact represented the PCF's moment of greatest activity in Africa. It focused on the creation of militant cores, cells and real satellite parties that set themselves the task of strengthening anti-fascism also beyond metropolitan France itself.

A few months before the popular front's electoral triumph in France, the Ministry of Colonies received several reports of an attempt to found a Senegalese Communist Party. The African cell engaged in intense anti-fascist propaganda among the Dakar dockworkers and maintained contacts with the colonial section of the PCF through the Communist leader Robert Déloche, one of the advocates of the "unitarian" line between the colonies and the metropole. The setting up of a Communist section in the AOF had already been attempted by Kouyaté's UTN, but the amicalist and separatist aspirations of the African leader had turned the French Communists against the initiative. The project was revived in 1936 without the subversive characteristics of a few years previously: the aim now was to strengthen a frontist,

⁸¹ G. Siracusano, *La questione coloniale*, pp. 129-131; N. Shreevastava, *Italian colonialism and Resistance to Empire, 1930-1970*, London 2018, pp. 44-48.

⁸² *Ibidem*.

anti-fascist perspective, with the expectation of achieving strong cohesion with a forthcoming metropolitan popular front government. Indeed, when Blum took over the reins of France's government, Communist initiatives in Africa seemed to multiply.⁸³

The radical Pan-African militants, irritated by the Comintern's choices and distanced from Communist circles, moved closer to the moderates and Garveyists. The "separatist" model became the guiding star of these new contacts. Outrage at the Fascist offensive against Ethiopia and at the hypocrisies of the Western powers led to the rise of a more cohesive Pan-African movement, no longer bound to European or American parties. It was now capable of propagandising autonomously among Africans and African-Americans, while setting its own political line and strategy.⁸⁴ This new platform, active in solidarity with Ethiopia, led ten years later to the Pan-African Congress held in Manchester in 1945. The coming together of moderate and radical Pan-Africans underpinned the cultural influences of the African decolonisation processes of the 1960s, but completely failed to break through the limits of colonial spheres of influence. Indeed, postwar African leaders (particularly French-speaking ones) often remained politically linked to trade union or party circles in metropolitan France. An example of this is Sékou Touré, a former CGT trade unionist, the first president of independent Guinea, who built his emancipatory myth only when he did not receive the right political guarantees from Paris to secure his leadership within the "Communauté Française". Striking, here, is the difference with Kwame Nkrumah, who had since his university studies in the United States linked his fate to that of the African-American community: the characteristics of British colonialism surely drove his estrangement from British politics, but his knowledge of the English language also helped build bridges with the radical demands of blacks in the USA.

⁸³ ANF, *Intérieur, Direction générale de la Sûreté nationale: surveillance du Parti communiste français*, 20010216/35, dossier 877, *Ligue pour la lutte des peuples du Sénégal et du Soudan*, 1934-35; Id., 20010216/47, dossier 1287, folio 1-20, *Renseignements sur Marcel Arnaud, dirigeant du Parti communiste sénégalais*, 1937; ANOM, SLOTFOM I 3B, *Parti communiste sénégalais*, 1929-1937.

⁸⁴ ANOM, SLOTFOM III 70, *Les noirs et les blancs. Guerre Italo-Abyssinie*, «La Izvestia», 1936.

Conclusions

The study of Comintern anti-colonialism in its connection to Pan-Africanism reveals the influence of international dynamics in the relations between the two. Their moments of rapprochement and greater distance may thus be shown to be a result of global dynamics and indeed the political choices made by the Communists. These latter responded to a Eurocentric vision, accompanied (and justified) by their theoretical interpretations.

In this perspective, the geography of black radicalism in the 1920s and 1930s also seems to be redefined: in this analysis, Moscow turns out to be the real hub of the cultural and political relations and networks linking African, African-American militants and European Communists. However, an important role was also played by other European cities, which served as the centres of anti-colonialism's cultural life in the different empires. In addition to Paris, London and Brussels, German cities like Hamburg and Frankfurt become the hubs of a close relationship between African militants and the Comintern. This revolutionary geography was shaken by the Nazi seizure of power in Germany, changing the Communists' priorities and prompting the departure of the radical Pan-Africans.

Despite the frictions, international communism nevertheless remained the sole interlocutor of black radicalism up until the 1960s. References to social justice and the freedom of colonial peoples fascinated African militants. But the deep connection with a transnational force such as the Comintern had by now disappeared. The leaders who had been behind "Communist" Pan-Africanism now sought to build a unified Pan-African platform.

However, this research aims to show how even this attempt at unity was limited to only a few cultural circles, particularly Anglophone ones. Indeed, in the case of Francophone anti-colonialism, the PCF's renewed control over Pan-African organisations gave rise to a generation of anti-imperialist militants, personally linked to the metropolitan cultural milieu but soon dissatisfied with its schematic Eurocentrism and paternalism.

GABRIELE SIRACUSANO

The Other Shore of the Spanish Civil War: African Anticolonialists and the Republican Cause (1936-1939)

This chapter begins by providing a concise overview of existing scholarship on the racial and colonial dimensions of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The first section reconstructs the pro-Republic propaganda efforts of communists in colonial Africa, primarily focusing on Northwest Africa, and assesses the impact of their campaigns. The narrative then shifts to diasporic communities in the French and Spanish metropolises, illuminating the transnational biographies of the Africans who actively supported the Spanish Republic and their motivations. The involvement of African anticolonialists on the Republican side is examined in the context of multiple transnational and intercolonial mobilization chains. These include Pan-Arabism, Pan-Islamism, Pan-Africanism, and the Global South dimension of international Communism. Finally, the chapter explores the complex relationship between anticolonial Nationalism and the cause of the Spanish Popular Front. It argues that African and Afrodiasporic anticolonialists came to view the Spanish Civil War as a “lesson” about colonial liberation and an opportunity to point to the contradictions inherent in communist internationalism.

1. *The Colonial and Racial Dimension of the Spanish Civil War: Scholarship and Memory*

In July 1936, the call to either support or oppose the military insurrection led by General Francisco Franco and Emilio Mola against the Republican government resonated far beyond the borders of Spain. As it is known, the Nationalist coup was backed by Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Portugal, while the Republic’s elected government received support from the Soviet Union and Mexico. The Popular Front government was also defended by tens of thousands of non-Spanish volunteers forming the six “International Brigades”.

It is only quite recently that the scholarly understanding of the Spanish Civil War's international dimension has overcome its original Eurocentrism. In the early 2000s, groundbreaking research by scholars such as María Rosa de Madariaga and Sebastian Balfour successfully bridged the historiographical gap between the Civil War and colonial conflicts in North Africa.¹ They pointed out that the Nationalist "Alzamiento" originated in Melilla, within the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco. The rebellion began with insurgents gaining control of the Army of Africa and promptly capturing colonial Ceuta and Tétouan. These studies focused on the role played by Moroccan colonial troops, known as Fuerzas Regulares Indígenas and led by Francoist officers, in securing the Nationalist military victory. These Moroccan conscripts, numbering around 80,000 and representing the second-largest foreign contingent after the Italians, were often deployed as "shock troops" and, tragically, as "cannon fodder" on the front lines. Some argue that their contribution proved decisive, along with the Nationalists' direct access to colonial resources during the war.²

By addressing the problem of the recruitment methods employed by the Nationalists, this scholarship started to give voice to the experiences of colonial and racialized actors.³ Such methods ranged from the use of force to the exploitation of dire poverty, as well as persuasion through propaganda. Notably, a few Moroccan leaders, including Abdelkhalek Torres and Mohammed al-Makki al-Nasiri, played crucial roles in enlisting their compatriots. Their propaganda endeavors, facilitated by organizations such as the Hizb al-Islah al-Watani (also known as Partido Reformista Nacional; 1936-56) and the Hizb al-Wahda al-Magribiyya (Partido de Unidad Marroquí; 1937-60), were generously funded by the rebels and recognized after the war.⁴

¹ S. Balfour, *Deadly Embrace: Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War*, Oxford 2002; M.R. de Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco: la intervención de tropas coloniales en la Guerra Civil*, Barcelona 2002; A. Paz, *La cuestión de Marruecos y la República española*, Madrid 2000; A. Mechbal, *Los Moros de la Guerra Civil española: entre memoria e historia*, «Amnis», 2, 2011, pp. 1-15.

² S. Fleming, *Spanish Morocco and the Alzamiento Nacional, 1936-1939: The Military, Economic and Political Mobilization of a Protectorate*, «Journal of Contemporary History», 18, 1983, pp. 29-38.

³ A. Al Tuma, *Guns, Culture and Moors. Racial Perceptions, Cultural Impact and the Moroccan Participation in the Spanish Civil War*, London 2018.

⁴ J. Wolf, *Les secrets du Maroc Espagnol: L'épopée d'Abd-el-Khaleq Torres*, Paris

In the last two decades, the racial and colonial dimension of the Spanish Civil War has also come under the lens of cultural studies. Much attention has been dedicated to the representation of the Moroccan enemy in Republican propaganda. These inquiries have scrutinized the widespread racialized depictions of “Moorish” soldiers in the leftist press, visual propaganda, radio broadcasts, songs, and poems. Images of this kind, portraying the “Moor mercenary” as uncivilized, bloodthirsty, fanatically religious, and “very black”, have been analyzed in the context of traditional orientalist and Islamophobic threads dating back to the *Reconquista*.⁵

Another recently uncovered aspect is the participation of approximately ninety African Americans in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, fighting on the side of the Republic.⁶ Their involvement has been situated as part of the evolving relationship between the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) and Black communities. It stemmed from a popular front-era definition of “fascisms” that encompassed not only European fascism but also issues such as segregation, lynching, the color bar in trade unions, and police brutality.⁷ Their experience was celebrated as a symbolic struggle against

1994; Y. Fukasawa, *Moroccan and Pan-Arab Nationalists during the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*, «Wüþü Lùncóng», 19, 2012, pp. 4-7.

⁵ E. Martín Corrales, *La imagen del magrebí en España: Una perspectiva histórica, siglos XVI-XX*, Barcelona 2002, pp. 99-177; S. Balfour, *El otro moro en la guerra colonial y la guerra civil*, in J. Gonzalez Alcantud (ed.), *Marroquíes en la guerra civil española: Campos equívocos*, Granada 2006, pp. 95-110; M. Bentrott, *Rojos, Moros, y Negros: Race and the Spanish Civil War*, PhD diss., University of Georgia, 2010; E. Bolorinos Allard, *The Crescent and the Dagger: Representations of the Moorish Other during the Spanish Civil War*, «Bulletin of Spanish Studies», 93, 2015; E. Robins Sharpe, *Tracing Morocco: Postcolonialism and Spanish Civil War*, «Ariel», 49, 2018, pp. 89-117.

⁶ J. Brandt (ed.), *Black Americans in the Spanish People's War against Fascism 1936-1939*, New York 1981; D. Collum-V. Berch (eds.), *African Americans in the Spanish Civil War: "This Ain't Ethiopia, but It'll Do"*, New York 1992; R. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*, New York 1994, pp. 121-153; P. Carroll, M. Nash, and M. Small (eds.), *The Good Fight Continues: World War II Letters from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, New York 2006, pp. 116-150; D. Featherstone, *Solidarity: Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism*, London 2012, pp. 99-130.

⁷ M. Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression*, New York 1983, pp. 169-219; C. Vaughn-Roberson, *Fascism with a Jim Crow Face: The National Negro Congress and the Global Popular Front*, PhD diss., Carnegie Mellon University, 2019.

“Europe’s Jim Crow” in the first, albeit unofficial, non-segregated US military force. Moreover, the undertaking to “stop and defeat fascism” before it spread outside Europe was linked to the previous mobilization against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (1935-36).⁸

The involvement of African volunteers on the Loyalist side during the Spanish Civil War has begun to receive attention in recent years. This emerging scholarship has uncovered individual experiences that had previously languished in obscurity. These publications have sparked internal debates within French, Spanish, and Moroccan historiography and offered some estimates regarding the number of African volunteers.⁹ According to Moroccan historian Abdelmajid Benjelloun, volunteers from the Maghreb region numbered up to a thousand.¹⁰ Algerians comprised the largest contingent of these volunteers, with estimates ranging from five to six hundred, three-quarters of whom were of Arab or Amazigh descent.¹¹ As scholars have noted, the task of counting volunteers from the colonies is complicated by the fact that they are often lumped together with French, Spanish, and British volunteers in Soviet sources, which historians of the International Brigades frequently rely on for quantitative data. Their participation was marginal or absent in contemporary Western accounts, although

⁸ C. Robinson, *The African diaspora and the Italo-Ethiopian crisis*, «Race and Class», 27, 1985, p. 63.

⁹ The first to write about the Arab brigadistas was A. Ben Salem, *Los voluntarios árabes en las brigadas internacionales (España, 1936-1939)*, «Revista internacional de sociología», 4, 1988, pp. 543-574), taken up in 2004 by S. Bofarull, *Brigadistas arabes en la Guerra de España*, «Nación Árabe», 52, 2004, pp. 121-134, and P. Martínez Montávez, *Los intelectuales arabes en la Guerra Civil de España*, in J. Rodríguez Puértolas (ed.), *La República y la cultura: Paz, guerra y exilio*, Madrid 2009, pp. 505-510. Since 2020, Arabic-language works have appeared that include Maghrebi participation in the International Brigades in their reconstructions or recover episodes of resistance and anti-conscription revolt: A. al-Hasnawi, *Suwar al-jeneral Franco fi al-sahafa al-sadira bi-shamal al-Maghrib khilal fatrat al-harb al-ahliyya al-Isbaniyya, 1936-1939* (2020) (a study of Franco’s image in the Spanish Protectorate); B. Buhadi, *Al-Maghrib wa-al-harb al-ahliyya al-Isbaniyya, 1936-1939* (2020) (a history of Morocco in the Civil War); Mustafa al-Marun, *Firaq al-jaysh al-Maghribi fi al-harb al-ahliyya al-Isbaniyya* (2021) (a history of the Moroccan army in the conflict).

¹⁰ Bofarull, *Brigadistas árabes*, 121.

¹¹ A. Castells, *Las Brigadas Internacionales en la Guerra de España*, Barcelona 1973; G. Gonzalez, *L’Algérie dans les brigades internationales: 1936-1939 et ses lendemains*, Paris 2016, p. 40.

it was occasionally celebrated in the communist international press, as discussed in more depth below.

The use of the expression “African anticolonialists” in this chapter introduces a set of challenges. The primary issue revolves around the overrepresentation of Maghrebi individuals in the chapter’s narrative, driven by both numerical dominance and the reliance on French source materials. This may create a need to specify further when categorizing these individuals. While “Arab” might seem an appropriate label, it fails to account for the significant Amazigh presence among the volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. Despite originating from predominantly Muslim colonies, protectorates, and monarchies – including Algeria, Egypt, Iran,¹² Iraq,¹³ Lebanon,¹⁴ Morocco, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Tunisia – many volunteers coming from colonial areas were either atheists or Jews. Ultimately, shared language determined the volunteers’ assignment to particular units. The volunteers from Africa were dispersed across various Companies, Battalions, and Brigades, as plans for specialized units such as an Arab Brigade, a North African Battalion, or one consisting of Moroccan deserters and prisoners never materialized.¹⁵

This chapter contributes to the understanding of this topic by drawing on a diverse range of sources, including multilanguage press materials, as well as archival documents from the French Archives Nationales, Service Historique de la Défense, Archives Nationales d’Outre-mer, and Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History.

2. *African Anticolonialists and the Republican Cause*

2.1 *Propaganda Activities of Communist and Socialist Solidarity Committees, Trade Unions, and Youth Organizations in Colonial Algeria*

Recruitment and propaganda efforts in North Africa in support of the Republic were orchestrated primarily by solidarity committees,

¹² Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History [RGASPI] Records of the International Brigades [545] /6/438.

¹³ RGASPI 545/6/437.

¹⁴ RGASPI 545/6/607.

¹⁵ M. Ibnu Jala, *El batallón de milicias marroquíes*, «Mundo Obrero», 6 October 1936; A. Ben Salem, *La participación de los voluntarios árabes en las brigadas internacionales. Una memoria rescatada in Campos equívocos*, p. 117; R. Skoutelsky, *L’espoir guidait leur pas : Les volontaires français dans les brigades internationales, 1936-1939*, Paris 1998, p. 348; see the part on Najati Sidqi in this paper.

comprising organizers from diverse political backgrounds. Mutual Aid organizations emerged at the onset of the Civil War and were active, particularly in colonial Algeria, despite the French empire's prohibition on enlistment in the Spanish government army following the adoption of the Non-Intervention policy.

In various Algerian departments, committees such as the *Comités d'Entr'aide du Peuple Espagnol* and *Comités d'Entr'Aide franco-espagnols* were established. These committees, composed of communists, socialists, and anarchists, operated with the backing of the Spanish Embassy. Their objectives included recruiting volunteers for Spain «amongst French and foreigners»¹⁶ and collecting essential supplies and medicines to support the Republican Army.

In July 1936, the founding of a *Comité d'Action Franco-Espagnol* in Bab El Oued, a poor pied-noir neighborhood in Algiers, drew around 100 participants. In the span of three weeks, this committee facilitated the departure of 63 Spanish volunteers.¹⁷ On 17 September 1937, residents of Belcourt (now Mohamed Belouizdad), a working-class neighborhood in Algiers with a predominantly Muslim population, convened at Cave Cervantes. Here, the *Comité algérien d'Aide au Peuple espagnol* sent «its most fraternal greeting to the Spanish populations who are suffering with terror the invasion of our countries by the troops of Hitler and Mussolini» and vowed «to increase the work of solidarity» in support of the Spanish «fighters for freedom».¹⁸

Youth organizations affiliated with political parties also undertook similar efforts. In early September 1936, Algiers witnessed multiple meetings organized by groups such as the *Comité de la Jeunesse contre la Guerre et le Fascisme* and the *Jeunesses Socialistes*, with the support of the International Red Aid. These meetings garnered significant attendance, and they culminated in a “National Youth Day in support of the Spanish Popular Front” that attracted hundreds of participants to the Bois des Arcades. Similar activities were reported in Affreville

¹⁶ Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer [FR ANOM] Gouvernement général de l'Algérie [GGA]/3CAB/33, Interior Minister to Governor-General of Algeria, 14 August 1936.

¹⁷ FR ANOM GGA/3CAB/33, Prefect of Alger to Governor-General of Algeria, 24 August 1936; Departmental Security of Algiers, Report No. 4662, 28 July 1936.

¹⁸ FR AN 81F/1001-1002, Algerian Committee for Aid to the Spanish People – Order of the day, 17 September 1937, forwarded to French Interior Minister on 20 September 1937.

(now Khemis Miliana), where the local Jeunesses Communistes organized a meeting addressed by an Algerian orator and attended by 70 individuals.¹⁹

Political parties organized solidarity and propaganda initiatives as well. As observed by historian Allison Drew, the late 1930s coincided with a phase in which, «despite prioritising anti-fascism over anti-colonialism, the PCF» – whose Région algérienne had just transformed into the Algerian Communist Party (most often referred to by the French acronym PCA, October 1936) – «was nonetheless increasingly attractive to radicalised Muslims», as Algerian communists «organised in rural areas around demands for bread, peace and freedom».²⁰

In the city of Biskra, often referred to as the Door of the Sahara Desert, Algerian communists Abdallah Hamdah and Sakraoui Hamdah organized a gathering on 4 September 1936, drawing 400 participants, half of whom were described as “natives” (Arab or Amazigh). During this event, funds were raised to support the families of Spanish republicans who had lost their lives in the war. Just three weeks later, another gathering orchestrated by local communists saw a turnout of 800 people, including 250 to 300 “natives”. These gatherings served both to collect funds and to express solidarity with the Republican cause through speeches and songs. Propaganda posters urging young local men and women to support Spanish youth were displayed throughout the city.²¹ While the precise impact of these propaganda efforts remains uncertain, it is worth noting that Maurice Laban, a pied noir born in Biskra, assumed leadership of the 2nd Company within the 12th Battalion of the XIV Brigade.²² Similar activities were also reported in Souk Ahras and Philippeville (now Skikda), an industrial port city linked to Constantine.²³

The International Red Aid, known for its commitment to provid-

¹⁹ FR AN 19940500/183, Governor-General of Algeria to Interior Minister, 4 November 1936.

²⁰ A. Drew, *We are no longer in France: Communists in colonial Algeria*, Manchester 2014, p. 82; T.A. Schweitzer, *Le Parti communiste français, le Comintern et l'Algérie dans les années 1930*, «Le Mouvement social», 78, 1972, pp. 115-136.

²¹ FR AN 19940500/183, Governor-General of Algeria to Interior Minister, 4 November 1936.

²² He was a Communist and later a fighter for Algerian independence. Gonzalez, *L'Algérie*, 37.

²³ FR AN 19940500/183, Governor-General of Algeria to Interior Minister, 4 November 1936.

ing humanitarian assistance to Spanish victims,²⁴ also extended its activities to the North African colonies. In Mostaganem, a port city in northwestern Algeria, the local Red Aid section organized a meeting in September 1936 attended by 150 people, including 100 “natives”.²⁵ Trade union organizations likewise carried out activities in favor of the Spanish Republic involving the local populations. Algerians and Tunisians had gained the right to trade union organization in 1932, and this right was extended to the entire French empire by the Popular Front in 1937, albeit with membership limited to literate individuals holding an elementary school diploma.²⁶ In September 1936, syndical meetings in the Algiers department saw dockers, construction workers, cooperatives, and quarry workers expressing solidarity with the Spanish Republic. During these meetings, representatives from the local Comité d’Entr’Aide collected funds in support of the cause.²⁷

In December, the French Interior Minister communicated to the Governor-General of Algeria that «certain organizations with communist tendencies were endeavoring to recruit native North Africans to place them at the disposal of the Spanish Government. A bonus of 2500frs, payable on arrival in Spain and a salary of 25 francs per day is promised to the volunteers». The Governor-General forwarded this

²⁴ L. Branciforte, *El Socorro Rojo Internacional (1923-1939). Relatos de la solidaridad antifascista*, Madrid 2011.

²⁵ FR AN 19940500/183, Governor-General of Algeria to Interior Minister, 4 November 1936.

²⁶ G. Busch, *The Political Role of International Trades Unions*, London 1983, p. 78; R. Galissot, *En Afrique du Nord : le syndicalisme colonial, école des syndicalismes nationaux du XIX^e siècle à 1945*, in Id., *Le Maghreb de traverse*, Paris 2000, pp. 85-110. In the context of repression of political activity in the French empire, trade unions were prohibited in Morocco by the Dahir of 23 May 1914 on Associations (typically applied in synergy with the Dahir of 6 March on gatherings, that of 26 March on meetings, and that of 27 April 1914 on the press). In the 1930s, French trade unions started a more intense work of propagandization in North Africa. In 1930, the Congress of North African Trade Unions was held in Paris and the CGT’s Union départementale du Maroc was created with a membership limited to European workers. *Bulletin Officiel du Protectorat de la République Française au Maroc* 3, no. 2, 2 August 1914, p. 631; A. Ayache, *Contribution à l’étude Du Mouvement Syndical Au Maroc: La Création de l’Union Des Syndicats Confédérés Du Maroc (C.G.T.) (1929-1930)*, «Le Mouvement social», 66, 1969, pp. 51-64.

²⁷ FR AN 19940500/183, Governor-General of Algeria to Interior Minister, 4 November 1936.

information to the Prefect of Algiers and the Sub-Prefect of Médéa, asking «if similar facts of recruitment have been noted» in their departments.²⁸

Indeed, similar occurrences were observed as a result of the trade unions' recruitment efforts. On that month, the Police Commissioner of Nemours (present-day Ghazaouet, situated on the border with French Morocco) reported to the Prefect of Oran that three young Algerians had made an unsuccessful attempt to leave their families and enlist in the Spanish army. During their interrogation by local police, they revealed that they were encouraged and financed by Buhana Jacob and Hamal Lahcène, General Confederation of Labour (CGT) organizers. In the eyes of the French, «This affair, propagated by the grieving families, had aroused a certain emotion in the native circles and it was very unfavorably commented on by public opinion».²⁹

2.2 *The Oran Region: A Crossroad of European Activism in North Africa*

Returning to the topic of European pro-Republican activism in colonial Algeria, it is important to highlight that Oran, the second-largest port city in the colony, witnessed the passage of hundreds of pied-noir and migrant volunteers. According to the 1936 census, nearly half of the significant European population in the Oran region had Spanish origins, and Spanish was widely spoken by both Europeans and Algerians.³⁰ The predominantly working-class population in this area nurtured a local socialist tradition and fostered the circulation of radical ideas. Consequently, this region proved to be highly responsive to events in Spain. Local groups organized solidarity demonstrations and sent men, aid, and weapons to Catalonia and the Eastern provinces.³¹

²⁸ FR ANOM 912/123-126, Governor-General of Algeria to Prefect of Alger regarding the 'Recruitment of North African Natives for Spain', 4 December 1936; FR ANOM GGA/3CAB/33, Interior Minister to Governor-General of Algeria on the same subject, undated.

²⁹ FR ANOM GGA/3CAB/33, Police Commissioner of Nemours to Prefect of Oran, 12 December 1936.

³⁰ A. Lakjaa, *Oran, une ville algérienne reconquise ; Un centre historique en mutation*, «L'Année du Maghreb», 4, 2008, pp. 441-456.

³¹ C. Marynowar, *Le moment Front populaire en Oranie : mobilisations et reconfigurations du milieu militant de gauche*, «Le Mouvement social», 3, 2011, pp. 20-21.

In July 1936, a Spanish Committee of Republican Vigilance was established to support «the Spanish Government, legally constituted and the legitimate representative of the People, in defending the Republic and the sacrosanct principles of freedom with arms».³² In November, at the headquarters of the local branches of the French Communist Party (PCF) and of the CGT on Rue Cavignac, the Committee for Free Spain set up a supply center for the anti-Fascist militias in Spain.³³ Their activities, conducted «in direct contact with the columns of militiamen on the front lines in Spain», included collecting and delivering solidarity-oriented donations such as medicines, clothing, food, and cigarettes.³⁴

A significant recruitment effort was led by the French communist Jean Chaintron (known as Barthel), who served as a political commissar in Spain.³⁵ The Algerian communist Larbi Bouhali was appointed to the International Red Aid to agitate in support of the Republican cause. Larbi Bouhali, an orphan born to poor farmers from El Kantara and a clerk, shared part of his political formation with other colonial actors mentioned below. He briefly collaborated with the PCF's colonial section in Paris and attended the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) in Moscow. He became one of the founders of the PCA and eventually its Secretary General.³⁶

Thanks to these recruitment activities, a number of ships carrying hundreds of volunteers for the Republican Army, primarily of Spanish nationality, departed from Oran. On 1 October 1936, the Spanish steamer *Vicente la Rosa* left Oran for Alicante with 120 passengers on board, including a dozen volunteers for the Spanish Popular Front from Oran and Las Palmas. According to Inspecteur Principal Bera-neck, a Judicial Police Officer seconded to the port of Oran, «About 300 people watched the departure, most of them out of curiosity, and sang revolutionary songs».³⁷ On the same ship, the port police seized

³² Its printed propaganda appealed «to the good men of this country of ours to support us with all their sympathy». FR ANOM GGA/3CAB/33, *To the people of Oran*; Chief of Departmental Security to Prefect of Oran, 25 July 1936.

³³ FR ANOM GGA/3CAB/33, Chief of Departmental Security to Prefect of Oran, 29 November 1936.

³⁴ FR ANOM GGA/3CAB/33, *Committee for Free Spain*, undated pamphlet.

³⁵ F. Koerner, *Les répercussions de la Guerre d'Espagne en Oranie (1936-1939)*, «Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine», 22, 1975, p. 480.

³⁶ Drew, *We are no longer*, p. 94.

³⁷ FR ANOM GGA/3CAB/33, Chief of Departmental Security to Prefect of Oran, 2 October 1936.

a 5 to 6-kilogram package of Republican propaganda from Spain that included a dozen posters which Alfred Poignand, a high school teacher in Algiers, allegedly went on to use for a series of lectures on the Spanish Revolution.³⁸ On 13 November 1936, the Spanish steamer *Jaime II* left Oran with about 40 volunteers, and on 2 December with 15 volunteers who had embarked in Casablanca to join the Republican Army in Alicante. Six days later, the Spanish steamer *Ciudad de Ibiza* left the same port with 130 passengers from Morocco, approximately 50 of whom were Spanish volunteers for the Republic.³⁹ On 21 November 1936, the French steamer *Asni* from Tangier disembarked in Oran. Of the 148 passengers on board, 137 were determined to reach Alicante as soon as possible to join the Republican Front and were assisted by the Consul General of Spain in Oran.⁴⁰ On 26 November and 10 December 1936, the French steamer *El Mansour* left for Port-Vendres, carrying about 100 volunteers (who had arrived from Morocco on board of the *Oued Sebou II*) and then 139 volunteers (from Tangier and Sidi Bel Abbès), all of whom already possessed passports issued by the Spanish Consuls in these cities.⁴¹

2.3 *The Spanish Republic and Sub-Saharan Africa*

Although this chapter primarily accounts for the participation of Marghrebi volunteers, it aims to do so without replicating the “exceptionalist narrative” about the Arab and Islamic world. On the contrary, it stresses the interconnectedness of the North Africa and the Western Mediterranean with multiple areas, namely Western Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Black Atlantic, and Soviet Russia.⁴²

Indeed, the Republican cause also garnered sympathies in Sub-Saharan Africa. News of anti-Francoist armed protests, occurring in Tétouan and Melilla in December 1937, and then in Tétouan, Melilla,

³⁸ FR ANOM GGA/3CAB/33, Chief of Departmental Security to Prefect of Oran; report by Principal Inspector Béranek, 1 October 1936.

³⁹ FR AN 81F/1001-1002, Governor-General of Algeria to Interior Minister, 30 November 1936 [three communications]; 11 December 1936.

⁴⁰ FR ANOM GGA/3CAB/33, Chief of Departmental Security to Prefect of Oran; report by Béranek, 1 October 1936.

⁴¹ FR AN 81F/1001-1002, Governor-General of Algeria to Interior Minister, 12 and 19 December 1936.

⁴² I. Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914*, Berkeley 2013, is a skillful implementation of this approach.

Larache in January 1938, and Ceuta in August 1938, resonated internationally beyond North Africa, being reported in South African and Gold Coast (today's Ghana) periodicals.⁴³

In South Africa, relief funds in favor of the Republic were collected in various provinces. In Cape Town, trade union organizations united to form a solidarity Committee.⁴⁴ In Johannesburg, the Friends of the Spanish Republic gathered aid and sent an ambulance, as well as organizing movie showings and dances for fundraising, and the local Jewish Workers Club held benefit bazaars.⁴⁵ The South African press celebrated the heroic deeds of African American volunteers.⁴⁶ In December 1936, the weekly *Cape Standard* announced that an unspecified number of young South Africans, both men and women, might «soon be fighting in Spain if the funds necessary for their transport can be found».

[...] most of the volunteers from Cape Town will probably join the Government, while recruits from Johannesburg and Pretoria will fight on Franco's side. Reason for this is said to be that in Cape Town the Communist group is particularly active, and that the young intellectuals here have for years been participating actively in the Communist movement, whereas, in Johannesburg, the Fascist groups are reported to have the strongest support among the younger intelligentsia. [...] According to Mr. D. Forsyth, Secretary-in-Chief to the Spanish Consulate, in Cape Town there is no lack of enthusiasm, as he has to cope with numerous enquiries almost daily.⁴⁷

In fact, there were also instances of volunteers departing from Sub-Saharan colonies. One such case involved an engineering student from Spanish Guinea who was interviewed by the African American writer Langston Hughes. His motivations were reported in the popu-

⁴³ *Arabs rise against Franco*, «Guardian» [leftwing weekly printed in Cape Town], 7 January 1938; *Unrest Supreme amongst Moors*, 22 January 1938; *Franco's Spain Moors Revolt*, «Gold Coast Spectator», 6 August 1938.

⁴⁴ *Relief for Sufferers in Spain*, «Guardian», 4 June 1937; *Anniversary of the Spanish War*, «Guardian», 23 July 1937; *Help for the Spanish Government*, «Guardian», 9 June 1937.

⁴⁵ *Friends of the Spanish Republic*, «Guardian», 22 October 1937; *Fascist war methods condemned*, «Guardian», 24 June 1938.

⁴⁶ *Negro Battalion Commander*, «Guardian», 12 November 1937.

⁴⁷ *To Fight in Spain - South Africans May Sail Soon*, «Cape Standard», 28 December 1936.

lar weekly *Baltimore Afro American*: «I really want the government to win the war. They stand for a liberal colonial policy with a chance for the people in Africa to develop and become educated. On the other side with the Fascists are all the old dukes and counts and traders who have exploited the colonies for so long».⁴⁸

According to Francisco Sánchez Ruano, as many as 31 Ethiopians volunteered for the Spanish Republic.⁴⁹ The experiences of two of these volunteers gained significant publicity at the time. Ato Gabre Givet was frequently mistaken by the Republican press for one of the sons of the Ethiopian noble and diplomat Imru Haile Selassie, with whom he had fought against the Italian invasion of his country.⁵⁰ The Abyssinian anticolonial hero was interviewed by many Loyalist periodicals. In a long interview with the Barcelonan periodical *Mi Revista*, he was able to explain his reasons (translated from English to Spanish thanks to the mediation of a polyglot Guinean volunteer):

Your misfortunes [of the Spanish people] were so similar to ours, so similar was your situation with what my people lived – it was the struggle of a people against an international fascism that has believed itself to be the absolute owner of the destinies of the world – that I, an Abyssinian combatant, thought, like other brothers of my race, that the defense of our cause was in Spain.⁵¹

Similar interviews were published by *Frente rojo*, the official press organ of the PCE in Valencia, and the Madrilene daily *ABC*.⁵²

The lesser-known Ahmed din Josef, «an Ethiopian subject from Somaliland» enlisted as a machine-gunner in the Garibaldi Battalion of the XVI Brigade, was promoted to Sergeant and killed on the frontline in June 1937 while «fighting against the very invaders who had stolen and plundered his native land».⁵³

⁴⁸ L. Hughes, «Organ Grinder's Swing» Heard Above Gunfire in Spain – Hughes, «Baltimore Afro-American», 6 November 1937.

⁴⁹ Sanchez Ruano, *Islam y guerra*, 278.

⁵⁰ *An Ethiopian Fights for Spain*, «Negro Worker», March 1937.

⁵¹ *Un hijo de Ras Imru combate en el Ejército Popular Español*, «Mi Revista», 15 March 1937.

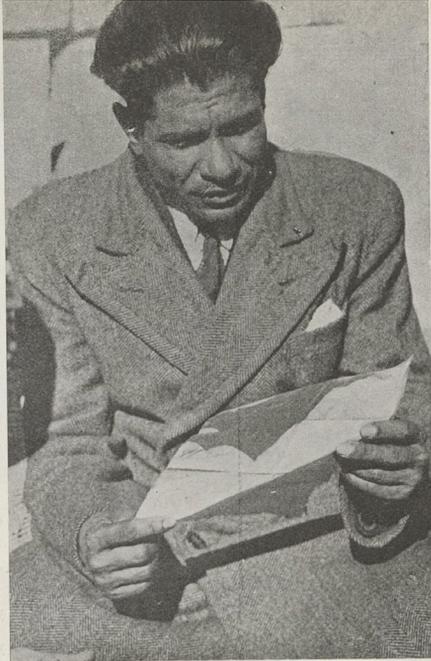
⁵² *An Officer of Ras Imru's Army at the Spanish Front*, «New Times and Ethiopia News», 6 March 1937.

⁵³ *Two Ethiopians*, «Negro Worker», March 1937; *Abyssinian Killed in Spain*, «Negro Worker», June 1937.

UN EJEMPLO DE LOS
PUEBLOS HERMANOS

*Un hijo del
ras Imru
combate en el
Ejército Po-
pular*

Por
RUIZ DEL CAMPO



Ghvet, hijo de un ras abisinio, que lucha con nuestros heroicos soldados contra el fascismo.

Mi Revista, 15 March 1937

2.4 *Afrodiasporic Communities in France: Transnational Biographies and Recruitment Pathways*

While the number of volunteers from sub-Saharan Africa remained limited, the largest number of colonial volunteers consisted of North Africans who had already emigrated to the metropole and become radicalized there. Most of them came from the French metropole, primarily Paris, but also Bordeaux, Lyon, Marseille, Nanterre, and Toulouse.⁵⁴

Algerian nationalists actively promoted the Republican cause among North African communities in the capital. At the outbreak of the civil war, the Étoile Nord-africaine (ENA) – an anticolonial organization founded by Algerian migrants in Paris (1926-37) and often considered a precursor to the Front de Libération Nationale – and the Kuthlat al-‘Amal al-Watani – a nationalist group based in the French Protector-

⁵⁴ Gonzalez, *L'Algérie*, 40.

ate and commonly known in French as Comité d'Action Marocaine (CAM; 1934-37) – organized solidarity demonstrations in support of the Republic.⁵⁵ On 31 July 1936, the ENA passed a resolution during a rally in Paris, protesting the French and British Non-Intervention policy. They called on the «Muslim brothers of Morocco, who are suffering under the boot of Fascism, to stand with the Republicans of the Spanish Popular Front against the rebel generals».⁵⁶ It is worth noting that this position faced some internal opposition within the ENA. In August 1936, while its leader Messali Hadj was touring Algeria, Imache Amar, one of the founders, spoke strongly against sending North African volunteers to support the Republic, arguing that the ENA should limit itself to fundraising and providing aid. Similarly, the Tunisian Neo Destour (1934-64) was expressing solidarity with the Spanish people but not actively encouraging the dispatch of volunteers.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Messali supported the motion put forth by the treasurer Belkacem Radjef and emphasized the need to “appeal to the Moroccans in the Spanish zone, urging them not only to refrain from enlisting with the rebels but to take up arms against them and drive them out of the Rif”.⁵⁸ Riad al-Solh, the future Prime Minister of independent Lebanon and a nationalist organizer and student in Paris at the time, delivered a speech in Arabic in support of the Republic via Radio Paris, addressing Moroccans.⁵⁹

Apart from endorsement by nationalists, the biographies of North African volunteers who joined the International Brigades shed light on the contributions of socialist, communist, and anarchist anticolonialists.

Mohand Belaïd, an emigrant from the Kabyle village of Maxene

⁵⁵ FR AN 19940500/183, *The Muslim World and Current Events*, police report, 27 November 1936.

⁵⁶ J. Derrick, *Africa's 'Agitators': Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918-1939*, London 2008, p. 363.

⁵⁷ Nonetheless, at the outset of September 1936, the Republican newspaper *Política* reported a solidarity demonstration attended by 20,000 workers in Tunis, although it was unspecified how many were European emigrants. «*Política*», 9 September 1936, cit. by Bofarull, *Brigadistas árabes*, p. 141.

⁵⁸ B. Stora, *Messali Hadj: Pionnier du nationalisme algérien (1898-1974)*, Paris 1982, pp. 150-151; O. Carlier, *Le voyageur de « l'Étoile »*, Ahmed Yahiaoui secrétaire et colporteur, «*Siècles*», 1, 1995, p. 6.

⁵⁹ J.P. Filiu, *Un sunnite éclairé*, «*Commentaire*», 130, 2010, p. 534.

in the province of Béjaïa, had been residing in France for years and had joined the Socialist Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière (SFIO). He had also served in the military as a reserve sergeant in the 31st Régiment d'Aviation from 1927 to 1931. Belaïd enlisted in the Republican army as an aviator mechanic in the small Spanish Republican Air Force. The 7th Section of the SFIO informed Belkacem Belaïd, the father of the Algerian volunteer, about his son's «heroic death» on 28 December 1936, during an engagement with a German plane over Teruel. The Spanish Civil War film directed by André Malraux, who led Belaïd's aircraft squadron, depicts the Algerian militiaman's coffin draped with a flag featuring the Muslim crescent alongside a machine gun. On learning of this news, the French authorities in Béjaïa expressed concerns that Belaïd's «death for a foreign cause might influence the thinking of our subjects». They presumed that «a certain number» of those residing in the Paris region «may have been recruited similarly to Belaïd, for Spain».⁶⁰

This assumption was indeed accurate, as demonstrated by the case of the communist volunteer Rabah Oussidhum. Oussidhum had emigrated in 1926 from the village of Iboudraren in Kabylia to Billancourt, located southwest of Paris, initially to work as a driver. He soon came to the attention of the Parisian police as an «active propagandist in the North African milieu of the capital» on behalf of the PCF.⁶¹ Oussidhum was a member of the party's colonial commission in 1933 and 1935, first in the North African sub-committee and later responsible for colonial workforce issues.⁶² He regularly contributed to the Confédération générale du travail unitaire (CGTU)'s Arabic and French-language monthly *al-'Amel*, printed in Paris since 1932, under the pseudonym «Mahieddine».⁶³ After studying at the KUTV from November 1933 to April 1934, Oussidhum returned to Paris. Employed as a metalworker, he served as the treasurer of the communist cell at Renault from 1934 to 1936. In October 1936, he returned to Algiers to participate in the founding of the PCA. From there, he joined the XI International Brigade and eventually became the lead-

⁶⁰ FR AN 81F/1001-1002, Administrator of the Mixed Commune of La Soummam to Prefect of Constantine, 15 January 1937.

⁶¹ Service historique de la Défense [SHD] Armée de terre [GR]/9/M/834, Intelligence report no. 372/D, Rabat, 18 February 1936.

⁶² *Ibidem*; Drew, *We are no longer*, 101.

⁶³ SHD GR/9/M/834, Intelligence report no. 372/D, Rabat, 18 February 1936.

er of the “Commune de Paris” battalion, which was part of the XIV Brigade. According to most accounts, Oussidhum lost his life in Miraflores during the Battle of Caspe in March 1938.⁶⁴

‘Ali ‘Abd al-Rahmani, who joined the XV Brigade in 1937, had emigrated from Algiers to Nanterre to work as a miner. While in Nanterre, he became an active member of the CGT and PCF. Like Belaïd, he had served as a sergeant in the French army, spending two years in the 17th tirailleurs regiment during the Rif War. In French Morocco, he was detained for six months and demoted due to his involvement in anti-war protests.⁶⁵ His biography underscores that many North African volunteers were veterans, bringing their expertise to the battlefields of Spain. In addition to his military experience, al-Rahmani carried with him the memories of being conscripted to fight against fellow Maghrebi soldiers who were resisting French colonial rule.

In conclusion, it is important to note that the volunteers departing from Paris had diverse backgrounds, and not all of them originated from French North Africa. For instance, ‘Abdel Hafiz, an Egyptian barber and member of the CGT since 1933, had previously served as a sergeant in the French Foreign Legion for six years. He joined the XIV Brigade, also known as the Marseillaise Brigade and consisting mainly of French and Belgian volunteers, on 12 February 1938. He was reported missing after the Republican attack on the Ebro on 26 July 1938.⁶⁶ Andre Diamantopoulos, likely of Egyptian-Greek descent, had also immigrated to Paris before enlisting in the British Battalion (16th) of the XV International Brigade. After being wounded twice and losing a leg in battle, he attempted to travel to Britain with the support of the Communist Party of Great Britain.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ C. Pannetier, ‘OUSSIDHOUM Rabah’, *Le Maitron*, 30 November 2010, <https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article124514>; *For a Free Algerian Republic: the 25th anniversary of the Algerian Communist Party*, «African Communist», 1962, p. 31. Oussidhum’s life inspired the novel by R. Aouadène, *Un maure dans la Sierra*, Ben Arous 2015.

⁶⁵ Gonzalez, *L’Algérie*, pp. 35-36.

⁶⁶ RGASPI 545/6/436, Individual Record of Abdel Hafiz.

⁶⁷ RGASPI 545/6/436, Central Committee [CC] of the CPGB to the CC of the PCE, 7 September 1937. Another Egyptian volunteer whose presence is documented was Victor Tabbush, a mercantile assistant from Cairo, likely of Jewish origins. He had been a member of the CPGB since 1932 and was well-versed in French and German, as well as having some knowledge of Spanish. Tabbush joined the International Brigades

3. Spain, Najati Sidqi, and the Hispano-Moroccan Anti-Fascist Association

To gain insight into pro-Republic propaganda and recruitment efforts targeting colonial actors in the Iberian Peninsula, we can begin by examining the peripatetic life and work of Muhammad Najati Sidqi, also known as Najati Sidqi.

Najati Sidqi was a multilingual Post and Telegraph employee from Jerusalem who became a member of the Palestine Communist Party (PCP) in 1924. Najati Sidqi was then sent to Moscow to attend the KUTV for three years, from 1925 to 1928, graduating with a dissertation on Arab nationalism⁶⁸. After university, he returned to Haifa, where he contributed to agitating against the British Mandate and land dispossession and was put in charge of the difficult task of “Arabizing” the party. Due to his anticolonial activities, Najati Sidqi served two years in Mandatory prisons; he was released at the end of 1932.⁶⁹ In June 1933, on orders from the Comintern, he moved to Paris, where he founded and edited the Arabic-language communist monthly *al-Sharq al-‘Arabi* (“Arab East”, 1933-1936) until the French authorities arrested him and deported him back to Palestine.⁷⁰ After a third stay in the Soviet Union, he accepted Dmitry Manuilsky’s proposal to contribute to the Republican cause in Spain, which he reached via Paris in August 1936.⁷¹ Besides Najati Sidqi, there were 125 more volunteers from Palestine in Spain, mostly working-class Jews, a few of whom had already emigrated to Paris and Vienna.⁷² ‘Ali

in January 1938 and managed to escape in May, boarding the English steamer *Numeric*. RGASPI 545/6/436, Biography of Activists, PCE CC, 14 April 1938.

⁶⁸ M. Najati Sidqi, *Mudhakkirat Najati Sidqi*, ed. by Hanna Abu Hanna, Beirut 2001, pp. 21-69.

⁶⁹ J. Hen-Tov, *Communism and Zionism in Palestine: The Comintern and the Political Unrest in the 1920’s*, Cambridge 1974, p. 106.

⁷⁰ W. Matthews, *Confronting an Empire, Constructing a Nation: Arab Nationalists and Popular Politics in Mandate Palestine*, London 2006, p. 157.

⁷¹ Sidqi, *Mudhakkirat*, pp. 122-147. Spanish trans. by N. Paradelá: *Nayati Sidqi: recuerdos de un comunista palestino en la guerra de España*, «Nación Árabe», 51, 2004, pp. 137-152; French trans. by A. Ben Salem: *J’ai défendu la liberté des Arabes sur le front de Madrid. Mémoires d’un Palestinien dans la guerre civile espagnole*, «Revue d’Etudes Palestiniennes», 88, 2003, pp. 74-93.

⁷² Based on Gonzalez, *L’Algérie*, p. 69. However, Comintern sources provide

‘Abd al-Khaliq, another Arab member of the PCP Central Committee, died in the Battle of Caspe in March 1938.⁷³

Once in Madrid, Najati Sidqi was tasked with producing propaganda to ‘open the eyes’ of Franco’s Moroccan troops. He personally authored pamphlets, press interventions and radio broadcasts, and even addressed the enemy Moroccan lines with a megaphone, urging them to desert. While it may seem unlikely that Najati Sidqi’s vague promises, delivered in a mixture of Moroccan Arabic and Spanish by a Levantine Arabic speaker, could have had any effect on most Amazigh Riffians, his memoirs recall causing scuffles in Córdoba («The Spanish officer pushed me to the rear, telling me: – What is this? Have you thrown bombs from your mouth?»).⁷⁴ As noted by Nieves Paradela, the most challenging part of his mission proved to be convincing the Spanish left, particularly the Communist Party of Spain (PCE), that their lack of attention to the Moroccan question was problematic.⁷⁵ Strong opposition from prominent figures in the PCE, such as Vicente Uribe and Dolores Ibárruri who vehemently disagreed with the idea of showing solidarity with Moroccans, led in December 1936 to Najati Sidqi’s departure for Algeria, where he attempted to establish a Republican radio broadcast.⁷⁶

One way Najati Sidqi’s commitment to the Republican cause impacted the colonial and racial dimension of the conflict was the creation of the Hispano-Moroccan Anti-Fascist Association (Agrupación Antifascista Hispano-Marroquí / al-Jam‘iyat al-Isbaniyya al-Maghribiyya). The Association originated from Najati Sidqi’s collaboration with «a group of young Spanish republicans who were working in favor of the Moroccan question and the brotherhood between Spaniards and Moroccans».⁷⁷ It was financially supported by the PCE and aimed to «convince the Moors that the government of Loyalist Spain is their

information on 55 Palestinian volunteers, deployed across the XI, XII, and XV Brigades, as documented in RGASPI 545/6/625, List of Palestinian volunteers; Characteristics of evacuated Palestinian comrades; multiple individual records.

⁷³ Sanchez Ruano, *Islam y guerra*, p. 267.

⁷⁴ Şidqi, *Mudhakkirat*, p. 134.

⁷⁵ N. Paradela, *Acción Política y estancia española de Nayati Sidqi*, «Temas Árabes», 3, 1987, p. 129.

⁷⁶ L. Catherine, *Palestine: La dernière colonie?*, Berchem 2003, p. 59.

⁷⁷ Şidqi, *Mudhakkirat*, p. 147.

friend». ⁷⁸ A few Moroccans who had deserted Franco's ranks for the Republican side worked for the Association. The British journalist Nancy Cunard interviewed Sidi Hamar, one of them, in January 1938, and wrote the following account of his experience: «He was a sergeant in the Fascist army; he's a sergeant here now. He's not in the least interested in politics, or in the international side of it all. He just hated the Fascists so much, he wanted to fight against them after all he'd been through». ⁷⁹



The main activity of the Association was producing visual and printed propaganda (posters, leaflets, cards, literacy material) to dis-

⁷⁸ R. Wright, *American Negroes in Key Posts of Spain's Loyalist Forces*, «NYC Daily Worker», 20 September 1937.

⁷⁹ N. Cunard, *Moors in Spain*, «New Times and Ethiopia News», 22 January 1938.

seminate on the front or send «back home to the families». In his autobiography, Langston Hughes described two of these posters inviting «the industrious and decent Moor» to «not take up a gun» hanging in «a classroom for the Spanish soldiers [...] training to fight the Moors» in Arguelles.⁸⁰ According to historian Abdellatif Ben Salem, three months after Najati Sidqi's departure, the Association passed into the hands of a man named Omar Sulayman, in Valencia.⁸¹ Although Ben Salem suggests that Sulayman was a Tunisian, his identity can be more plausibly linked to that of a homonymous Moroccan who had fled Tétouan at the outbreak of the war and reached Barcelona thanks to French consular aid.⁸² The Moroccan Suleyman had already written to the Governor-General of Algeria in December 1936 to express his indignation against the spread of propaganda directed at Africans «by the enemies of France, the Germans, the Italians, and the partisans of Franco». In the letter, he had announced his desire to warn his «brothers from North Africa and Asia [...] against all false propaganda and enlighten them on the actions of Italy in Tripolitania» and asked consular mediation to allow him to travel.

As mentioned, the Republican press, particularly the Spanish press, generally portrayed Moroccan soldiers fighting on the opposing side in a derogatory manner. Najati Sidqi contributed in part to changing the prevailing rhetoric depicting Moroccans as ruthless mercenaries or, at best, not 'evolved' enough to develop a political conscience. He wrote in several Madrilenian periodicals, such as *Mundo Obrero*, *Claridad* (of the Unión General de Trabajadores), *Heraldo de Madrid*, *Informaciones*, *La Libertad*, *El Sol*, and *Política* (of Manuel Azaña's Izquierda Republicana), under the farfetched Moroccan pseudonym of Mustafa Ibnu-Jala, in Spanish phonetics.⁸³ In these articles he wrote «on behalf of the anti-Fascist Moroccans», to make Spanish public opinion aware of pro-Republic initiatives among colonial volunteers or deserters.⁸⁴ The Secretary General of the PCA, Ben Ali Boukort, also

⁸⁰ L. Hughes, *I Wonder As I Wander: An Autobiographical Journey* (1956) in J. McLaren (ed.), *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, Vol. 14, Columbia 2003, p. 340.

⁸¹ Ben Salem, *Najati Sidqi*.

⁸² FR ANOM GGA/3CAB/33, Omar Sulayman to Governor-General of Algeria, 14 December 1936. The letter was translated to French by the Governor's office.

⁸³ Sidqi, *Mudhakkirat*, 132.

⁸⁴ M. Ibnu-Jala, *Se va a crear el batallón antifascista de milicias marroquíes*, «La

published in *Mundo Obrero* asserting that «the heroic struggle of the Spanish people against the Fascist army greatly interests the oppressed Arab countries».⁸⁵



Moroccan Soldiers who deserted to the Government side.

Negro worker, January 1937

During the Civil War, a discourse of solidarity toward “Franco’s Moors” gained some traction in the leftist press. The poor *campesino marroquí* was occasionally depicted as a (“deceived”, “deluded”, “misled”, “driven”, “trapped”, “coerced”) victim of Fascism, but still a potential ally in the working-class international struggle. To support this argument, Spanish periodicals such as *Mundo Obrero* and *El Sol* reported episodes

Libertad», 9 November 1936, in A. Bensalem, *Najati Sidqi, un internacional palestino en el Madrid de la guerra* in D. Gil-Benumea (ed.), *De Maýrit a Madrid: Madrid y los árabes, del siglo IX al siglo XXI*, Madrid 2011, pp. 136-145.

⁸⁵ *Los pueblos árabes al lado de la España republicana*, «Mundo Obrero», 29 August 1936. Boukort shared several steps in his radicalization trajectory with Najati Sidqi and other actors mentioned in this chapter. He was born in Mazouna, west of Algiers, and, in his early 20s, he became involved with Communist Youth in Sidi Bel Abbès. Subsequently, he was compelled to join the military from 1925 to 1927. Afterward, he relocated to Paris, where he actively participated in the ENA, CGTU, and PCF. Boukort also contributed to radical publications such as *al-Amel* under the pseudonym ‘El Djazairi’ (the Algerian). Between 1932 and 1934, he pursued his studies at the KUTV. R. Gallisot, ‘BOUKORT Ben Ali’, «Le Maitron», 24 septembre 2010, <https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article89294>.

of desertion among the Moroccan troops.⁸⁶ Instances of anti-Franco rebellion were celebrated in the African American press as well.⁸⁷

4. *Anticolonialism, Nationalism, and the Spanish Republic: A Complex Interplay*

Several press interventions enthusiastically celebrated interracial solidarity within the International Brigades while presenting the Spanish Republic as a defender of colonial interests.

The primary elements of this rhetoric of Hispano-Moroccan Republican solidarity are condensed in the appeal «To the Moroccan youth» published in the Madrilen press organ of the Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas in December 1936.⁸⁸ In this lengthy call to join forces to fight against Fascism and for the freedom of all subjected peoples, the Spanish youth organization invoked the «glorious traditions» of the Moroccan people. It recalled how Morocco came to be regarded as the home of explosive anticolonial revolts, the most inspiring of which was the five-year war (1921-1926) waged by a coalition of Rifian tribes led by Abd el-Krim against the Spanish and French.⁸⁹ In *Juventud's* argument, the failure of imperialist attempts to quell the rebellion «was largely due to the resistance of the Spanish workers, who refused to take up arms». The Republic is then presented as a progressive force: since its establishment, the Moroccans have allegedly «enjoyed a series of new freedoms». According to the authors,

The republican State is concerned about your fate because it considers you equal to us and wants to help you develop your living conditions and culture. We want your freedom because a people that subjugates another, as Marx said, is not a free people.⁹⁰ And we want to be.

⁸⁶ De Madariaga, *Los moros*, pp. 318-327.

⁸⁷ *Moors Rebel Against Gen. Franco's Italians: Hundreds executed*, «Washington Tribune», 14 August 1937; E. Roberthson, *Harlem Youth Back Home From The Spanish Civil War, Reveals Moors Are Cannon Fodder*, «New York Age», 31 December 1938.

⁸⁸ A youth organization formed in 1936 through the merger of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party's (PSOE) and the PCE's youth groups. *To the Moroccan youth: Fighting against Fascism is fighting for your freedom*, «Juventud», 6 December 1936.

⁸⁹ G. Ayache, *La guerre du Rif*, Paris 1996.

⁹⁰ This very fortunate expression, to whom the critics of the Republic's colonial

On the contrary, a victory by the Fascist generals, «enemies of the freedoms of the Spanish people and Morocco», would guarantee the definitive loss of all political concessions. Moreover, the continued drain of people and resources for the Army of Africa will leave «a broken Morocco, without youth, which they could easily tame».

Nonetheless, some anticolonialists distrusted Republican Spain, believing that it did not have the credentials to present itself as a defender of Moroccan freedom or colonial freedom in general. As mentioned in the *Juventud* article as well as other propaganda pieces, it was true that the Spanish working class had participated in protests against colonial wars. Generally speaking, however, their support for the cause of Moroccan independence was not selfless. In fact, since 1907, the Socialist opposition to colonial wars had been fueled primarily by the loathed military conscription imposed on the Spanish working class. The protests erupted in the port cities where the recruits were embarked.⁹¹ The Riffian rebellion received unprecedented international sympathy for an anticolonial cause. Nevertheless, most solidarity activities took place in France rather than Spain, as a response to the Comintern's call to "fraternize" with Moroccan revolutionaries.⁹² The

policy repeatedly referred to, as will be seen, originates from Marx's writings about Ireland and was further popularized by Lenin's writings on the national question. M. Löwy, *Marxists and the National Question*, «New Left Review», 96, 1976, pp. 81-100.

⁹¹ Barcelona (1909), Bilbao (1921), Malaga, and Santander (1923). The Catalanian general strike of 1909, known as the *Semana Trágica* because of the harsh military repression which followed, was called against the sending of new reserve troops to Morocco. M.E. de Vega, *La actitud popular ante las guerras coloniales españolas: de la movilización patriótica al antimilitarismo* in A. Morales Moya (ed.), *Estado y nación en la España contemporánea*, Madrid 2000, pp. 67-83; A. Bachoud, *Los españoles ante las campañas de Marruecos*, Madrid 1988, pp. 165-172; E. Martín Corrales, *Movilizaciones en España contra la guerra de Marruecos in Semana Trágica: Entre las barricadas de Barcelona y el Barranco del Lobo*, Barcelona 2011, pp. 121-182.

⁹² N. Le Guennec, *Le Parti communiste français et la guerre du Rif*, «Le Mouvement social», 78, 1972, pp. 39-64; M.R. de Madariaga, *Le Parti socialiste espagnol et le Parti communiste d'Espagne face à la révolte rifaine* in *Abd El-Krim et la République du Rif*, Paris 1976, pp. 341-364; J. Crémadeills, *Le mot d'ordre de fraternisation pendant la guerre du Rif (1924-1926)*, «Cahiers de la Méditerranée», 14, 1977, pp. 53-64; G. Oved, *La gauche française et le nationalisme marocain, 1905-1955*, Vol. I, Paris 1984, pp. 198-317; M. Kharchich, *Left wing politics in Lyons and the Rif War*, «Journal of North African Studies», 2, 1997, pp. 34-45; *Extracts from a manifesto of the Eastern bureau of*

resulting campaign was waged by a minority within the PCF and was ultimately unable to reach out to the Riffians, who benefited instead from German help.⁹³

Despite the discouraging signs, some Moroccan nationalist leaders – a delegation of the Agrupación Nacionalista in 1931-1933⁹⁴ and Hasan Ouazzani and Omar Abdeljalil for the CAM in 1936 – attempted to establish a dialogue with the Republican governments, but their efforts were largely unsuccessful.⁹⁵ Therefore, the Spanish Republican governments struggled to present themselves as credible allies in opposition to the highly despised French oppressor. The dismantling of the Spanish Protectorate was seen as impractical, to say the least, even for a coalition of progressive forces. On one hand, the influential French neighbors understandably dreaded the contagion of aspirations for full political independence within their own section of the Moroccan protectorate. Simultaneously, the British Empire sought to maintain a buffer state between its stronghold at Gibraltar and the expansion of French dominion. As a result of these pressures, the Protectorate's status was substantially left untouched during Azaña's Reformist Biennium (1931-1933) and the Popular Front era.⁹⁶ Overall, the new civilian administration governed in continuity with the monarchy's previous policies, guided by the chief concern of maintaining order within the Protectorate and shielding it from the Peninsula's political instability.⁹⁷

the ECCI against the war in Morocco in J. Degras (ed.), *The Communist International: 1919-43 Documents*, Vol. II, Oxford 1956, pp. 220-222.

⁹³ D. Slavin, *The French Left and the Rif War, 1924-25: Racism and the Limits of Internationalism*, «Journal of Contemporary History», 26, 1991, pp. 5-32; D. Sasse, *Français, britanniques et allemands dans la guerre du Rif 1921-1926*, Munich 2006.

⁹⁴ D. Stenner, *Centring the periphery: northern Morocco as a hub of transnational anti-colonial activism, 1930-43*, «Journal of Global History», 11, 2016, pp. 440-443.

⁹⁵ M.R. de Madariaga, *The Intervention of Moroccan Troops in the Spanish Civil War: A Reconsideration*, «European History Quarterly», 22, 1992, pp. 89-90; A. Benjelloun, *Pages d'histoire du Maroc: le patriotisme marocain face au protectorat espagnole*, Rabat 1993.

⁹⁶ S. Balfour-P. La Porte, *Spanish Military Culture and the Moroccan Wars, 1909-36*, «European History Quarterly», 30, 2000, p. 308; N. Tabanera García, *The Mediterranean in the Foreign Policy of the Second Spanish Republic*, «Mediterranean Historical Review», 13, 1998, pp. 65-67.

⁹⁷ S. Fleming, *Spanish Morocco and the Second Republic: Consistency in Colonial Policy?*, «Mediterranean Historical Review», 13, 1998, pp. 84-90.

These facts could not be ignored by African anticolonialists, even when they displayed solidarity with Spanish working-class organizations. Although Messali Hadj had condemned the French and British Non-Intervention policy and called on North Africans to take up arms alongside the Republic, he publicly maintained that the only way to gain their collaboration was to endorse independence. To plead this cause, the ENA also petitioned Spanish President Azaña.⁹⁸

5. «*Un pueblo que sojuzga a otro no es un pueblo libre*»: *The Spanish Civil War as a "Lesson" About Colonial Liberation*

In conclusion, it seems that this distrust and its underlying motivations played a role also in shaping Western understanding of the colonial dimension of the Civil War.

Some observers interpreted the suppression of the Asturias revolt in October 1934 through a similar lens. The previous conservative government had already employed Moroccan *Regulares* to repress the Asturian miners' strike. As pointed out by Elisabeth Bolorinos Allard, this event primarily served to reignite a racially charged popular imagery in Spain.⁹⁹ Nonetheless, international communist circles discussed it in other terms. In February 1935, an article titled *Colonialism and Fascism: The revolt in Spain and the Moroccan troops* was published in *Le Journal des Peuples Opprimés*, the French-language official monthly of the League against Imperialism. This article commented on the fact that the Asturian Commune had been defeated by the Foreign Legion and Moroccan regiments. The anonymous author warned that:

However, it would be as wrong to blame the Arab workers for this sad fate as to make the Spanish and French workers responsible of the imperialist conquest of Morocco. A lesson undeniably emerges from this sad reality, which is that the liberation of the workers of the metropole and that of the oppressed peoples of the colonies depends on whether they will support or fight each other.

According to the author, the «anti-fascist brothers in Spain» had failed to exert the «necessary effort to win the support of the natives whom their own imperialism exploited». In fact, «to prevent Fascism from using colonial troops against anti-fascists, the latter must

⁹⁸ Derrick, *Africa's Agitators*, p. 363.

⁹⁹ Bolorinos Allard, *The Crescent*, pp. 2-7.

demonstrate, through persistent efforts, that they stand with the colonized peoples against their own imperialism». Looking at the failure of Spanish workers to “understand” and apply this principle, the repression in Asturias appeared to be a “prelude”¹⁰⁰ to the Spanish Civil War in terms of its colonial dimension as well.

Moving on to the Civil War, the voices of colonial actors on this issue occasionally surfaced in the Western press, albeit indirectly. For instance, the *Pravda* correspondent, Mikhail Koltsov, published an interview with Najati Sidqi. In the article, Koltsov criticized «the chauvinistic-colonialist stance» and racist, anti-Moroccan «rumors» circulating in the Madrilene press. He also condemned «the attitude of some “politicians” who still dream of preserving a colonial regime that was the worst of all colonial regimes» by refusing to grant «democratic freedom to the Riffian people».¹⁰¹

The encounter with Moroccan soldiers in the Nationalist army was disheartening for other Black volunteers from the African diaspora, who were occasionally mistaken for Moroccans.¹⁰² These encounters were reported in the African American press, and their dramatic implications were analyzed by journalists and leading intellectuals from the diaspora. Langston Hughes, the primary African American voice from the conflict by virtue of his spending six months on the Spanish front, maintained an optimistic view of the Republic’s intentions toward the colonies;¹⁰³ in contrast, other observers probed further into the reasons for this seemingly paradoxical situation.¹⁰⁴

According to Jamaican-American poet Claude McKay, the outcome

¹⁰⁰ S. Payne, *The collapse of the Spanish republic, 1933-1936: Origins of the civil war*, New Haven 2006.

¹⁰¹ M. Koltsov, «Pravda», 20 September 1936, quoted in Ben Salem, *Najati Sidqi* in the Spanish translation issued under the title *Moors in Toledo* in «Mundo Obrero», 18 October 1936. Koltsov’s articles appeared on *Mundo Obrero* from September to November 1936.

¹⁰² L. Hughes, *St. Louis Man’s Spanish Helped Him Cheat Death*, «Baltimore Afro-American», 22 January 1938; Collum-Berch, *African Americans*, p. 66.

¹⁰³ Hughes, *I Wonder*, 308. On Hughes’ Spanish adventure, see I. Soto, “*I Knew that Spain Once Belonged to the Moors*”: Langston Hughes, Race, and the Spanish Civil War, «Research in African Literatures», 45, 2014, pp. 30-46.

¹⁰⁴ For a more extensive analysis of these criticisms of Spanish colonial policy, see A. Buelli, *Three pan-Africanist readings of the “Moorish” participation in the Spanish Civil War. Langston Hughes, Claude McKay and George Padmore*, «Contemporanea», 23, 2020, pp. 201-224.

of the Spanish conflict exemplified «the disastrous consequences for any democratic government that persists in a reactionary colonial policy», and he believed that the future of the Spanish Republic was buried in its «African cemetery».¹⁰⁵ Trinidadian organizer George Padmore felt that «democratic Spain, by failing to make an anti-imperialist gesture to the Moors, played into the hands of Franco».¹⁰⁶ Both of these former CPUSA militants' experiences are often framed in the debated narrative of a split between Pan-Africanism and international communism that some scholars posit as taking place in the mid-1930s due to the USSR's rapprochement with European powers.¹⁰⁷

During this phase, many anticolonialists began to feel that an antifascist alliance with an «imperialist democracy» in Europe would amount to a betrayal of the liberation struggles in the colonies. In their view, supporting the Spanish Republic meant engaging in a «war for democracy» on the side of a Western power, even though it still maintained colonies in Africa. Moreover, although the «comradeship» existing in the International Brigades was presented as a lesson for interracial organizing,¹⁰⁸ not everyone found this lesson convincing. These anticolonialists believed that genuine comradeship could not exist under conditions of asymmetry.

ARLENA BUELLI

¹⁰⁵ *Native Liberation Might Have Stopped the Franco Revolt*, «New Leader», 18 February 1939; *North African Triangle*, «The Nation», 8 May 1943.

¹⁰⁶ N. Cunard, *Authors Take Sides in the Spanish Civil War*, London 1937. Padmore developed his stance in the article *Why Moors help Franco*, «New Leader», 20 May 1938.

¹⁰⁷ C. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Chapel Hill 1983, pp. 261, 396; N. Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*, Cambridge 2004, p. 110. A critic of this narrative of Black disaffection with organized communism is B. Mullen, *Popular Fronts: "Negro Story" Magazine and the African American Literary Response to World War II*, «African American Review», 50, 2017, pp. 938-948.

¹⁰⁸ B. Dolinar, *The Black Cultural Front: Black Writers and Artists of the Depression Generation*, Jackson 2012, p. 96.

THE SOCIALIST
CAMP, ANTI-
IMPERIALIST
PLAYERS AND
DECOLONIZATION
IN AFRICA

Reflections on Twentieth-Century Communism in Africa

Recent years have seen a striking increase in research on twentieth-century communism and socialism in Africa, indicating a growing interest in this history. This new literature points to the many varieties of communist and socialist experiments and experiences across Africa.¹ While the Cold War fostered ideological assessments of communism, the twenty-first century provides more distance and space to historicize it, the need for which has been highlighted by Enzo Traverso, amongst others, in an article commemorating the 1917 Russian Revolution's centenary. This chapter offers a broad overview of communism in Africa, assessing the relevance of Traverso's argument.²

The core-periphery debate, centered around the Soviet Union, has dominated communist studies since the mid-twentieth century, and reflects these ideological perspectives. Communist historiography has been divided between those seeing communism as a top-down movement strongly shaped by Soviet intervention – a Cold War view – and,

¹ See, amongst others, F. Blum-M. Di Maggio-G. Siracusano-S. Wolikow (eds.), *Les partis communistes occidentaux et l'Afrique : Une histoire mineure?* Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose and Hémisphères, 2021; F. Blum-H. Kiriakou-M. Mourre-M.-B. Basto-P. Guidi-C. Pauthier-O. Rillon-A. Roy-E. Vezzadini (eds.), *Socialismes en Afrique: Socialisms in Africa*, Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2021; E. Burton-C. Katsakioris, *Africans and the Socialist World: Aspirations, experiences, and trajectories. An introduction*, «International Journal of African Historical Studies», 54, 3, 2021, pp. 269-277.

² E. Traverso, *Historicizing Communism: A Twentieth-Century Chameleon*, «South Atlantic Quarterly», 116, 4, October 2017, pp. 763-780, 769. Part of the broader category of socialism, communism often refers to Soviet communism and the political parties that supported the USSR, although such a focus reinforces a Moscow-centric and state-centric perspective. It is sometimes used to include predecessors to Soviet communism and developments such as Stalinism, Trotskyism and Maoism, “state socialism” and “actually existing socialism”.

from the 1960s, a younger generation of historians stressing local and national contexts that shape communist parties and practice. Bryan Palmer observes that the study of communism remains «stalled in a fruitless ... historiographic impasse, ordered by oppositions: Moscow domination vs. local autonomy; authoritarianism vs. the pursuit of social justice». While noting that recent approaches in the study of British communism – biographical/prosopographical and political/institutional – have complicated the binary core-periphery debates, he also points to the vagueness with which Stalinism has been discussed in the English-language literature. In his words, historians should begin with «more totalizing appreciations that encompass both sides of a seemingly divided logic of classification and ... [come] to grips with the meaning of Stalinism».³

Moscow was indeed the center of an international communist world that viewed the USSR as the first and by the mid-1920s the only successful socialist revolution – until the 1949 Chinese Revolution. Thus, the Soviet Communist Party became a model for other communist parties. National sections applied and sometimes modified Soviet-made policies, often with fierce debates and expulsions of those who refused to toe the Soviet line. This continued after Stalin's dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, with the Soviet stance presented through the Soviet Communist Party, the Cominform, formed in 1947, and other bodies. In my view, Soviet-aligned communism should be seen in terms of a complex reciprocal relationship between center and periphery that applies with variations to all national sections and incorporates diverse colonial-metropole and geopolitical relations. The core-periphery debate nonetheless rests on a state-centric view of communism that marginalizes other socialist traditions, both earlier syndicalist and ethical socialist traditions and later anti-Stalinist tendencies such as the New Left. Communist historiography will remain stalled until it is situated within a broader understanding of a historicized communism that addresses Stalinism. I define Stalinism as a political-economic system based on the gulag use of forced labor and psychological terrorism associated with a distinct intolerant po-

³ B.D. Palmer, *How Can We Write Better Histories of Communism?*, «Labour/Le Travail», 83, Spring 2019, pp. 199-232: 200, 203-204, 216-217; K. Morgan-G. Cohen-A. Flinn, *Communists and British Society, 1920-1991*, London-Sydney-Chicago: Rivers Oram, 2007.

litical culture and discourse.⁴ Language may not determine our reality, but it certainly shapes and influences it, as George Orwell described in 1984.⁵ Stalinism's impact in Africa has certainly been felt in political culture and discourse, and Stalinist-like practices have also been adapted by African states.

From the late 1950s on, as African states became independent, the core-periphery relationship was overshadowed by relations between the two communist superpowers and African states. The Soviets and Chinese competed for influence in Africa, especially after the 1961 Sino-Soviet split, and communist influence, whether Soviet or Chinese, became more diffused.⁶ In turn, African states pursued various foreign policy relationships ranging from non-alignment to close ties with the Soviet Union or Communist China. The Soviets generally prioritized relationships with African states over their communist parties, although they supported communist parties and liberation movements in countries fighting white supremacy. The core-periphery framework needs to be reassessed within this broader postcolonial context, while recognizing that literature focusing primarily on superpower rivalry and the Sino-Soviet split risks overlooking national specificities that shaped or impeded the building of communism.

Traverso's argument

I begin by examining Traverso's general argument about communism and applying it to African contexts. Pointing to the opposing politicized interpretations of events unleashed by the Russian Revolution, Traverso argues that historicizing communism entails transcending the good versus bad dichotomy and evaluating communism in all its complexities. His argument is important precisely because it confronts Stalinism, which has been much discussed in the historiography of Russia, but less so in Anglophone communist studies

⁴ My thanks to Sophie Quinn-Judge and Paul Quinn-Judge for their insights into this problem.

⁵ A. Wirsching, *Violence as Discourse? For a "linguistic turn" in communist history*, «Twentieth Century Communism», 2010, 2, pp. 12-39; G. Orwell, 1984, ed., intro and notes by John Bowen, Oxford: Oxford University, 2021 [1949].

⁶ J. Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2015, pp. 1-24.

more broadly.⁷ Perhaps it is only in the twenty-first century that the international left and its historians can come to an understanding of Stalinism.

Describing communism as a «twentieth-century chameleon», Traverso breaks it down into four aspects, all of which, he contends, had roots in the 1917 revolution. First, communism as a revolution; secondly, communism as a regime; thirdly, as anticolonialism and fourthly, as a social democratic variant. His main points are, first, that the Bolshevik Revolution arose out of the First World War and, alongside its creative and democratic elements, Bolshevism promoted a militaristic and authoritarian paradigm of revolution. This was expressed in terms such as dual power, armed insurrection, proletarian dictatorship, civil war and violence against counterrevolution. This militarism was reproduced during the Resistance against fascism and in subsequent wars. He suggests that communism's male-dominated gender hierarchy arose from its militaristic origins.⁸ Secondly, communism laid the groundwork for the decolonization movement, namely, when the Second Comintern Congress in 1920 called for colonial revolution against imperialism. Thirdly, the late 1930s Soviet purges and show trials established communism as a regime based on the rule of terror – the Stalinist regime. Finally, social democratic communism, which aimed to reform rather than overthrow capitalism, was geographically and chronologically circumscribed and generally excluded from power.⁹

In Africa, however, the strengths, periodizations and overlaps of these four aspects differ in important ways from the Russian and European experiences on which Traverso bases his argument. To address this problem, we need to examine how colonial capitalism developed in Africa. Even before colonialism, the transnational slave trade depopulated parts of Africa, set its economy on an externally oriented path and produced a global ideology of white supremacy that facilitated colonialism. From an economic perspective, colonial capitalism can be divided into two very broad types, first, colonies in which indigenous rural cultivators retained their access to land but were subjected to the market and became increasingly proletarianized over time, and, secondly, those with significant land expropriation by

⁷ *Twentieth-century Communism and Socialist History*, for example, contain very few articles on Stalin and Stalinism.

⁸ E. Traverso, *Historicizing*, pp. 766-768.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

settler populations or private companies and concessions, sometimes accompanied by industrial development based on mining. Samir Amin breaks this down further, describing Africa of the labor reserves where capital needed a large proletariat; Africa of colonial type trade, which took various forms with both small and large landholdings; and Africa of the concessionary companies found in central Africa.¹⁰ Compounding these regional patterns were the varied types of colonialism introduced by the British, French, Italian, German, Portuguese and, in Namibia, South African-colonizers.

Initially, Africa's mainly rural and dispersed population did not offer a likely terrain for communism, which saw the urban working class as the driver of political and socioeconomic change. Nonetheless, communist ideology gained a foothold in African port cities, in industrial areas with unionized labor and along railways and roads enabling the dissemination of literature. Communists made headway in establishing trade unions, especially in proletarianized countries like Algeria and South Africa. Subsequently, Africa's tremendous population surge – from estimates of 164 million in 1930, to 219 million in 1950, to 352 million in 1970 to 1.5 billion today – combined with growing urbanization and improved transportation facilitated the spread of communist ideas.¹¹ However, communism remained relatively weak in most of Africa, despite an influence sometimes greater than its numbers would suggest, especially in liberation movements.

Yet Constantin Katsakioris argues that «socialist visions and Marxism-Leninism as a theory and ... strategy for achieving national sovereignty and modernization made tremendous inroads all over Africa».¹² Perhaps these contradictory views can be reconciled by considering communism both as a political movement from below and as a top-down statist project. From this combined perspective communism had a long-term, if often tenuous, presence in twentieth-century Africa. But colonialism and apartheid are over, and the

¹⁰ S. Amin, *Underdevelopment and Dependence in Black Africa – Origins and Contemporary Forms*, «Journal of Modern African Studies», 10, 4, 1972, pp. 503-524.

¹¹ S. Feierman, *Social Change in Colonial Africa*, in P. Curtin-S. Feierman-L. Thompson-J. Vansina, *African History: From earliest times to independence*, 2nd edition, London-New York: Longman, 1995, pp. 490-512: 504-505.

¹² C. Katsakioris, *Socialist Federalism as an Alternative to Nationalism: The Leninist Solution to the National Question in Africa and Its Diaspora*, «Humanities», 8, 152, 2019, pp. 1-11: 1.

postcolonial African socialist regimes that turned to China and the Soviet-aligned regimes have collapsed. All this suggests that communism was weak, even more so today when a number of African countries are being torn apart by religious extremists and warlords while communism seems to have left little long-term mark, with South Africa a possible exception.

Not surprisingly, communism reflected the different regions and times of its emergence. On the north and south ends of the continent, both political economy and contact with Europe favored the diffusion of communist ideas, although geopolitics influenced them in very different ways.¹³ In South Africa almost 90 per cent of the land was expropriated by white settlers. Mineral discoveries facilitated industrial development and the emergence of an industrial working class receptive to syndicalist and socialist ideas introduced by Britons and East Europeans, amongst others. In North Africa, Algeria was also characterized by significant dispossession and proletarianization, with socialist and communist ideas introduced by the French.

By contrast, Marxist ideas spread between West Africa and Europe, but West Africa's smallholder and market-oriented production were not conducive to communism. Nor was central Africa, where colonial powers allocated land as concessions for plantation production. Although East Africans dispossessed of their land became farm workers on large estates producing for overseas markets, there was less contact with Europe and less communist influence than in West Africa. Northeast Africa was different. An Egyptian communist party was established around 1918-1920, affiliating to the Comintern in 1922. Active in the trade union movement, it fragmented during the Second World War. In 1958 a unified party emerged but faced waves of repression, reconstituting itself in the late 1970s.¹⁴ In Sudan Marxist ideas were introduced by Egyptian communists, by Eastern European immigrants working on the railway and later by British soldiers. Marxism took root among students, railway workers and cer-

¹³ This discussion draws on A. Drew, *Communism in Africa*, in S.A. Smith (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, Oxford: OUP, 2013, pp. 285-302 and *Comparing African Experiences of Communism*, in N. Naimark-S. Pons-S. Quinn-Judge (eds.), *Cambridge History of Communism*, vol. 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2017, pp. 491-517.

¹⁴ *Egyptian Communist Party Communiqué: "The Elimination of All Voices Opposing the Treaty"*, «Middle East Report», 82, November/December 1979.

tain farmers, but its proponents were heavily repressed.¹⁵ In Ethiopia students introduced varieties of Marxism from the early 1960s and remained its primary base until crushed in the 1970s.¹⁶

Communist parties and movements

Returning to Traverso's schema, did communism in Africa need a revolution or could it have been built with a party? As colonial powers tightened their grip following the First World War, worker and peasant protests erupted in many African countries. News of the Russian revolution influenced local socialist, trade union and anticolonial struggles. But communist ideology was often introduced by European and white settlers living in societies rigidly divided along ethnic, racial or religious lines. Not surprisingly, they typically saw urban workers from their own kith and kin as the proletarian vanguard – what Trotsky called the slaveholding mentality. This is seen in both South Africa and Algeria. Over time, though, through both local pressure and international pressure from the Comintern, these communist parties became more indigenized. The Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) turned to black labor in 1924, and by the late 1920s was overwhelmingly black in membership, although not leadership. By contrast, communism in Algeria faced difficult legal and social hurdles and, despite periodic success at attracting Algerians, did not indigenize until the late 1940s. Both communist parties promoted non-racialism to counter the rigid social divisions of their countries.¹⁷

There was no clear pattern in the formation of communist parties,

¹⁵ M.N. El-Amin, *The Sudanese Communist Movement, the First Five Years*, «Middle Eastern Studies», 32, 3, July 1996, pp. 22-40: 25-26; A. Gresh, *The Free Officers and the Comrades: The Sudanese Communist Party and Nimeiri Face-to-Face, 1969-1971*, «International Journal of Middle East Studies», 21, 3, August 1989, pp. 393-409: 395.

¹⁶ B. Zewde, *The Quest for Socialist Utopia: The Ethiopian student movement c. 1960-1974*, Oxford-Addis Ababa: James Currey and Addis Ababa University Press, 2017; E.C. Zeleke, *Ethiopia in Theory: Revolution and knowledge production, 1964-2016*, Chicago: Haymarket, 2020.

¹⁷ A. Drew, *Discordant Comrades: Identities and Loyalties on the South African left*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000, pp. 76-86, 94; Ead., *We are no Longer in France: Communists in Colonial Algeria*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014, pp. 155-160.

even within regions. For example, the Algerian region of the *Parti communiste français* (PCF, French Communist Party) was formed in 1920, replaced by the *Parti communiste algérien* (PCA, Algerian Communist Party) in 1936. The autonomous CPSA was founded in 1921, and its successor, the South African Communist Party (SACP), in 1953. The Sudanese Movement for National Liberation formed in 1946 renamed itself the Sudanese Communist Party in 1956. The Portuguese Communist Party established an underground wing in Luanda in 1948, and a tiny ephemeral Angolan Communist Party was formed in 1955. A supranational Lusophone network helped spread anticolonialist and Marxist ideas amongst political leaders in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau. In Ethiopia several tiny Marxist groups were formed during the country's mid-1970s revolution, including an Ethiopian Communist Party influenced by Albania's communist leader Enver Xoxha. These variations suggest the difficulty, if not impossibility, of continent-wide generalizations.

Communism's ability to intersect with popular movements in Africa was more important than its parties. Of Traverso's typology, anticolonial communism was the most sustained. Of course, the Comintern was more concerned with Europe and Asia – areas of primary Soviet foreign policy interest – than Africa. Nonetheless, anticolonial communism maintained a grip in Africa from the 1920s through to the armed struggles against Portuguese colonialism, influencing popular movements, regimes and notions of revolutions. So, communism's support for anticolonial nationalism was crucial in maintaining its influence in Africa, especially Southern Africa. However, although Traverso claims that «the October Revolution laid the premises of decolonization», communism was not the only external anticolonial influence.¹⁸ The American Revolution was also anticolonial, and African anticolonialists often used the rights-based discourse of colonial powers against them to demand their own rights. Crucially, despite these external influences, African anticolonialism was generally internally generated. From early days communists supported ongoing anticolonial struggles, a notable example being the 1921-1926 Rif War against Spain and France; communist support for the Riffians led to massive retaliation, especially in Algeria. By contrast, the 1929 Aba women's war in southeast Nigeria reflected women's direct experiences of a racially and gendered hierarchical colonialism in stark contrast

¹⁸ E. Traverso, *Historicizing*, 772.

to their precolonial women's institutions, which colonial authorities suppressed. People became anticolonial first and foremost through their experiences rather than through an adopted ideology.¹⁹

Communist efforts to build alliances with anticolonial movements began in the 1920s. To the varying degrees that interwar African nationalist movements were influenced by left-wing doctrines, these were more likely to be communist rather than social democratic, as European social democracy did not normally reject colonialism but instead argued for its reform. As Stalinism developed, Soviet foreign policy needs became more important for European communists than anticolonialism; Stalinism strengthened Eurocentrism. During the popular front period Algerian communists subordinated anticolonialism to antifascism, for example, defined in terms of solidarity with the Soviets. Stalinism was exported to the national sections and was seen in continuing expulsions and changes in leadership in the African communist parties.

While fascism's defeat was critical for Soviet power and prestige, the Second World War impacted African countries very differently, reflecting both their varied relationships with European imperial powers and their geopolitical positions. This metropole-colony dynamic reinforced the different periodizations and experiences of communists in Europe and Africa. For example, when the war in Europe ended in May 1945, the French Communist Party enjoyed tremendous national support. But this was also the moment of the Sétif massacre in eastern Algeria, when European settlers slaughtered many thousands of Algerians, and which turned Algerian nationalists against communists, both French and Algerian. In the massacre's aftermath, the Algerian Communist Party campaigned exhaustively against state repression. In the late 1940s, young, radicalized Algerians gravitated to the PCA, both because of the nationalist movement's intolerance and because nationalist organizations did not address poverty, inequality and social justice. Reflecting this demographic change, alongside the pull of a burgeoning national liberation movement, the PCA's politics became increasingly autonomous *vis-à-vis* its French counterpart as it reimaged the Algerian nation. Because Algerian communists came to their understanding of the national question through their campaign

¹⁹ G. Rudé, *Ideology and Popular Protest*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980; A. Drew, *No Longer in France*, pp. 38-39; Ead., *Female Consciousness and Feminism in Africa*, «Theory and Society», 24, 1995, pp. 1-33.

against state repression, their imagined Algerian nation reflected the need for a vibrant civil society and pluralist democracy – in contrast to the Soviet one-party model.²⁰

The post-war years were marked by two global dynamics: firstly, the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, and secondly, anticolonial and anti-imperial movements. These dynamics were seen in Southern Africa, for example. The South African government rationalized apartheid as a means of stopping the spread of communism, while the Soviets supported the anti-apartheid movement and other struggles against white minority regimes. The dynamics were also seen in North Africa and Europe, where they pulled the French and Algerian Communist Parties in different directions. Following the Soviet two-camp policy, the French Communist Party viewed the United States as the leading imperialist force whose influence was to be resisted at all costs, and it prioritized French and European concerns. The Algerian Communist Party, by contrast, prioritized the struggle against French imperialism, its eyes on Vietnam and Africa. One consequence of anticolonial agitation was an increase in the international flow of ideas about emancipation from colonial rule, as liberation movements sought to learn from each other. Armed struggles in Tunisia, Morocco and Vietnam introduced communists and nationalists to the possibilities of guerrilla struggle in Algeria. Similarly, while the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 were pivotal events for European communists, this was not so for African communists, who were far more concerned with their own national liberation movements – Algerian communists were planning their armed struggle in the late 1950s, for example, and South African communists were doing so in the 1960s. European communists supported the Soviets in the Cold War; African communists prioritized the international decolonization movement.²¹

Indeed, African communists and their fellow-travelers participated in an international communist community that offered possibilities for undercutting oppressive colonial relationships. Whether through reading, studying in overseas communist schools or attending various

²⁰ Ead., *No Longer in France*, pp. 138, 145-160, 267-278.

²¹ D. Joly, *The French Communist Party and the Algerian War*, Basingstoke-London: Macmillan, 1991, ch. 16, pp. 42-43; M. Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era*, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 42; A. Drew, *No Longer in France*, pp. 183-185.

types of international conferences, African communists and their sympathizers learned about conditions across the colonized world, knowledge that became particularly important as the decolonization movement spread across Asia and Africa. In the crucial areas of education and networking, Soviet communism played an important decolonizing role. Significantly, the transnational flows of activists and students to Europe and the Eastern Bloc expanded greatly after the Second World War, and generational change became especially important.²² But in contrast to their participation in international networks, African communists faced harsh conditions at home, and building parties was extremely challenging. When the Soviet Communist Party held its Twenty-Second Congress in October 1961, only six African communist parties were present: Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, South Africa, Sudan, and Réunion. Only in Tunisia and Réunion were the parties legal, while Egypt's fragmented communist movement was heavily repressed.²³

African Socialist regimes

The independence of African states coincided with the fracturing of global communism precipitated by the Sino-Soviet split. Relations between the two communist powers and African states overshadowed Soviet-centred core-periphery relations, and leftist ideologies became more diffused. The challenge was how to build socialism in poor non-industrial countries. The Soviets adopted the idea of a non-capitalist path of development, hoping to promote state-led industrialization as a means to create a working class and pave the way to socialism. Initially, with capitalism tarnished by its association with colonialism and apartheid, the USSR hoped that newly independent African countries would follow its model. In West African states such as Ghana, Guinea and Mali, the Soviets promoted state-led ventures

²² E. Burton-C. Katsakioris, *Africans and the Socialist World: Aspirations, experiences and trajectories. An introduction*, «International Journal of African Historical Studies», 54, 3, 2021, pp. 269-277; J.-M. Mabeko-Tali, *Rêves Fragmentés: La gauche portugaise et le nationalisme radical angolais en 1950-1977*, in Blum et al., *Partis communistes occidentaux*, pp. 261-271: 263.

²³ W. Kolarz, *The Impact of Communism on West Africa*, «International Affairs», 38, 2, April 1962, pp. 156-169.

aimed at agricultural development. But their projects soon foundered with mutual recriminations, the African states fearing possible Soviet domination.²⁴

African leaders preferred a non-aligned path between East and West. Many chose African socialism, which was seen as both indigenous and pan-Africanist and based on a precolonial and supposedly classless Africa, in contrast to communism's stress on class struggle. African socialism offered a mobilizing slogan to address the challenges of post-colonial development. While it resonates with Traverso's idea of social democratic communism, Traverso's category, based mainly on European experiences, was marginal to state power, whereas African socialism was at the very center of state power.

African socialism's meaning and implementation varied from one country to the next, reflecting their different economic conditions and needs. Its first wave, led by Ghana and Guinea, aimed at national unification, Jodie Yuzhou Sun argues, while the second wave aimed at localized development projects, as seen in Tanganyika [Tanzania from 1964], Zambia and Kenya.²⁵ As a variant, Algeria styled itself as a Third World Mecca at the crossroads of the Arab and African worlds. It promoted Algerian Socialism, which prioritized land redistribution and a one-party system that repressed the Algerian Communist Party and imprisoned leftist dissidents. Algeria's *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) was relatively agnostic about the Sino-Soviet split, although slightly more sympathetic to China, while the Algerian Communist Party was pro-Soviet.²⁶

The Sino-Soviet rivalry led to two conceptions of revolution. For the Soviets anticapitalism was the primary and class-based struggle. For the Chinese, anti-imperialism, which saw the world divided between

²⁴ J. Friedman, *Ripe for Revolution: Building Socialism in the Third World*, Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 2021, pp. 125, 208.

²⁵ J. Yuzhou Sun, *Historicizing African Socialisms: Kenyan African Socialism, Zambian Humanism, and Communist China's entanglements*, «International Journal of African Historical Studies», 52, 3, 2019, pp. 349-374: 350.

²⁶ Drew, *No Longer in France*, p. 270; J.R. Nellis, *Algerian Socialism and Its Critics*, «Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique», 13, 3, September 1980, pp. 481-507; M. Rahal-P.-J. Le Foll-Luciani, *Participer, fusionner, s'opposer? Les communistes algériens et le socialisme d'État dans l'Algérie des années 1960 (1962-1971)*, in F. Blum *et al.*, *Socialismes en Afrique*, pp. 253-276.

oppressed and oppressor nations, was paramount.²⁷ When Soviet scholar I. I. Potekhin derided African socialism as unscientific and utopian, African socialists turned to China, not surprisingly, especially in East Africa, which lacked a tradition of Soviet-aligned communism. African leaders saw China as a model because of its agrarian revolution and collectivized agrarian farms and, Yuzhou Sun suggests, because it represented a departure from European Marxism. Julius Nyerere introduced his notion of *ujamaa* [familyhood] to Tanganyika in 1962, Kenya under Jomo Kenyatta adopted African Socialism in 1965, and Zambia under Kenneth Kuanda adopted African Humanism in 1967, each pursuing different relationships with China.²⁸

One of the foremost exponents of African socialism, Nyerere sought self-reliance and aid without strings. Although the Soviets tried to convince Nyerere to turn the Tanganyika African National Union into a vanguard party, he pragmatically preferred the Chinese, whom he believed were less concerned with influencing Tanzania's ideology and policy. Initially he intended the *ujamaa* cooperative villages to be voluntary. But his 1967 Arusha Declaration called for state-led development and nationalization, and he imposed forced relocation to promote villagization and cooperative farming. This involved eighty percent of the population and proved extremely unpopular. If the 1960s was the decade of African socialism, by the 1970s it was generally discredited by its unsuccessful economic projects and one-party regimes that repressed its socialist critics.²⁹

The moment of Soviet influence

Instead of non-alignment, the 1970s saw a wave of Soviet-aligned states. Angola, Benin, Cape Verde, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Madagascar, Mozambique, the People's Republic of the Congo and Somalia all

²⁷ J. Friedman, *Shadow Cold War*, pp. 1-24.

²⁸ I.I. Potekhin, *On African Socialism: A Soviet view*, pp. 97-112, F.G. Burke, *Tanganyika: The search for Ujamaa*, pp. 194-219, and J.K. Nyerere, *Ujamaa*, pp. 238-247, all in W.H. Friedland-C.G. Rosberg, Jr. (eds.), *African Socialism*, Stanford: Hoover, 1964; Y. Sun, *Historicizing African Socialisms*, pp. 349-374: 352, 355-356, 373-374; E. Burton-C. Katsiakoris, *Africans*, p. 271.

²⁹ J. Friedman, *Ripe for Revolution*, pp. 139-140, 150, 164-165; A.M. Babu, *African socialism or socialist Africa?*, London: Zed, 1981.

espoused Marxism-Leninism and pursued closer ties with the USSR, sometimes reflecting ideological beliefs, but often playing off the East and West and exacerbating Cold War tensions. Although African states frequently repressed their communist parties, the Soviets prioritized friendly regimes over those communist parties.

Since African communist parties were small, weak and limited in number, the Soviets pushed the idea of state-led vanguard parties to build communism. Soviet-aligned regimes in independent Africa were imposed from the top down, reflecting both the appeal of the USSR's industrial success and the prospects for alliances offered by Cold War politics. David Ottaway and Marina Ottaway distinguished Ethiopia, Angola and Mozambique from other Soviet-aligned states, describing them from 1977 as Afrocommunist. Marina Ottaway defines Afrocommunism in terms of vanguard party-building, nationalization and collectivization – an institutional formulation. While other African states used Marxist-Leninist discourse, she argues, Ethiopia, Angola and Mozambique applied it as a blueprint for state-led development. Afrocommunism was domestically driven, she maintains, with ideological commitments, structural conditions and historical accidents crucial to those domestic processes and outcomes. But a decade later the three countries had clearly diverged: war-torn Angola and Mozambique lacked the resources to implement top-down development, and their foreign policies wavered between East and West.³⁰

The focus on state institutions and regime types may explain temporary Cold War alliances but not how such different countries arrived at seemingly similar regime types or how Marxist, communist or Stalinist ideas were transposed to Africa. Explanations need to consider each country's internal dynamics as well as Cold War and Sino-Soviet dynamics. Ethiopia is distinctive in that the centuries-old empire fought against Italian colonization in the late 1930s, achieving independence in 1941. From the 1960s Marxist university students, often influenced by Maoist and New Left ideas, sought to Africanize Marxism and agitated for social reforms. These protests culminated in 1974 with the Ethiopian Revolution – mass social upheavals and the Emperor's overthrow by the "Derg", a non-ideological military committee. With continuing pressure from below, the Derg implemented land reform and gradually adopted Marxist-Leninist ideology, using

³⁰ M. Ottaway, *Afrocommunism Ten Years after: Crippled but Alive*, «Issue: A Journal of Opinion», 16, 1, 1987, pp. 11-17: 11, 12, 14.

discourse that Addis Hiwet describes as a «highly regimented ... contorted and lifeless ... vulgar version of Soviet Marxism». From 1976 to 1978 the Derg imposed its Red Terror, slaughtering tens of thousands of socialists of all tendencies, including members of the anti-military Ethiopian Communist Party. The Derg's Soviet turn occurred in mid-1977, it discarded Marxism-Leninism at the start of the 1990s, and Ethiopia's Marxist political culture dissipated.³¹ Whether the Derg was an Afrocommunist, a Stalinist or a ruthless military regime that used Communist discourse opportunistically remains an open question.

In contrast, nationalism in Angola and other Portuguese colonies developed later than in other African countries, reflecting disparate rural populations, poor infrastructure and intense political repression. Anticolonial and Marxist ideas emerged in post-Second World War Luanda amongst small groups of intellectuals committed to cultural regeneration and, like the Ethiopians, to Africanizing Marxism. In the 1950s some of them studied in Lisbon, joining the underground Portuguese Communist Party. Fleeing Portuguese repression, some went to Paris, meeting communists, Maoists and other Marxists. Like the French communists, who had prioritized the struggle against German and Italian fascism over anticolonialism, Portuguese communists prioritized the struggle against Salazar's dictatorship and his *Estado Novo* regime and sought to control communists in their colonies. So they were dismayed when Angolan communists turned to the Lusophone Brazilian Communist Party for advice.³²

Lusophone anticolonialists who had studied in Europe were unusually transnational. The *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA) was formed in December 1956 of nationalists and commu-

³¹ A. Hiwet, *Analysing the Ethiopian Revolution*, «Review of African Political Economy», September 1984, 30, pp. 32-47: 38; S.A. Admasie-D. Fantaye, *Marxism in Ethiopia: Initial Notes and Puzzles*, Blum et al., *Socialismes en Afrique*, pp. 171-194, n. 10; Zeleke, *Ethiopia in Theory*, p. 1.

³² J.-M. Mabeko-Tali, *Dreaming Together, Fighting for Freedom Together: African progressive nationalism and the ideology of unity in Portugal's African colonies in the 1950s and 1960*, «Journal of Southern African Studies», 2020, 46, 5, pp. 829-844: 835-6, 843; J.M. Neves, *Frantz Fanon and the Struggle for the Independence of Angola: The meeting in Rome in 1959*, «Interventions», 17, 3, 2015, pp. 417-433; B. Davidson, *In the Eye of the Storm: Angola's People*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975, pp. 153-155, 156, 171-172; L. Pawson, *In the Name of the People: Angola's Forgotten Massacre*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2016, pp. 117-118; Mabeko-Tali, *Rêves Fragmentés*, pp. 265-267.

nists. In 1957 Lusophone activists launched the supranational *Movimento Anti-Colonial* that enabled them to coordinate activities across borders. Their direct links were impressive; in comparison, the Algerian Communist Party's periodic relations with Tunisian and Moroccan communists were generally mediated by Paris. Nonetheless, the supranational network accentuated the division between a largely white and *mestiço* university-educated elite and the African peasant masses divided along tribal, ethnic and regional lines, compounding the difficulty of establishing national organizations in the colonies; in short, Angola's factionalized liberation movement had internal roots.

Angola and Mozambique gained independence in 1975 following Portugal's April 1974 military coup. Yet Angola's continuing civil war pulled it directly into the Cold War. Rival powers funded competing political movements, and Sino-Soviet rivalries accentuated the MPLA's factionalism.³³ In May 1977 an attempted Marxist coup was met by extreme repression and mass killings.³⁴ In December 1977, the MPLA adopted Marxism-Leninism as the state ideology – given its weak social base the MPLA needed continuing foreign support. It became a vanguard party and implemented state-led development. Jeremy Friedman describes the MPLA as a party of «Lenin without Marx», but it must be underlined that like Ethiopia, Angola had diverse, if short-lived, Marxist influences before they were repressed.³⁵ All these pro-Soviet regimes foundered following the Soviet Union's collapse. Without a powerful ally, and faced with neo-liberal economic pressures, they lacked a social base upon which to sustain themselves.³⁶

One-party and military regimes became the norm in the 1970s as the democratic structures hastily put in place by colonial powers broke down. These regimes often used left-wing discourse to justify their seizure of power, while repressing their own communist and socialist critics. Thus, Gaafar Nimeiri launched Sudan's 1969 military

³³ J.-M. Mabeko-Tali, *Angola : Révolution marxiste sans marxistes ? Aux racines intellectuelles du « socialisme » angolais sous le parti-Etat MPLA*, in Blum et al., *Socialismes en Afrique*, pp. 65-84; 65; J.-M. Mabeko-Tali, *Rêves Fragmentés*, pp. 262-263.

³⁴ L. Pawson, *In the Name*, pp. 143, 165, 182-183, 238-242; R. Soares de Oliveira, *Business Success, Angola Style: Postcolonial politics and the rise and rise of Sonangol*, «Journal of Modern African Studies», 45, 4, 2007, pp. 595-619.

³⁵ J. Friedman, *Ripe for Revolution*, pp. 194-196, 200, 202.

³⁶ Id., *Ripe for Revolution*, pp. 165-166, 206, 210; M. Matusevich, *Revisiting the Soviet Moment in Sub-Saharan Africa*, «History Compass», 7, July 2009, pp. 1-10.

coup, announcing the formation of a progressive one-party system, but two years later he executed hundreds of communists. The Soviets nonetheless maintained cordial relations with the regime, only reconsidering when it shifted its Cold War allegiances.³⁷

Mairi MacDonald argues that both colonial powers and communist states set benchmarks for what postcolonial states saw as conceivable, but that postcolonial leaders chose their own repressive methods. She points to Guinea's judicial system, which in the 1960s-1970s resembled that of Stalin's Great Terror. There is no evidence that Guinea directly borrowed from either the USSR or China, she argues, despite cordial relations with them, but Guinea's leader Sekou Touré enmeshed repressive methods in local political culture in order to maintain power.³⁸ Similarly, argues Benedito Machava, postcolonial Mozambique organized so-called reeducation centers modelled after those in China and comparable to internment camps across the communist world.³⁹ For some African leaders, both past colonial experience and Sino-Soviet state power legitimized repression and contributed to its modernization.

In some cases, regime power met its antithesis in rebellious students. Transnational movements of African students had already increased in the post-war years. With independence, increasing numbers of Africans began studying overseas in Europe, the Eastern bloc and the USSR. Some were impressed by the Soviet model, but many became Maoists and New Leftists. When Ethiopian students returned home, they challenged the authoritarian regime and suffered brutal retaliation. In South Africa, an early New Left was crushed in 1963-64 by imprisonment and exile, although later New Left influence was seen in the 1970s black consciousness and trade union movements.

Alliance politics were crucial for southern African communists, who integrated themselves into armed liberation movements that continued into the late twentieth century. Here, returning to Traverso, we

³⁷ A. Gresh, *The Free Officers*, pp. 396-406; G. Warburg, *Islam, Nationalism and Communism in a Traditional Society: The Case of Sudan*, London: Routledge, 1978, pp. 93-101.

³⁸ M.S. MacDonald, *Guinea's Political Prisoners: Colonial Models, Postcolonial Innovation*, «Comparative Studies in Society and History», 2012, 54, 4, pp. 890-913; 891-892, 900, 906.

³⁹ B. Machava, *Reeducation Camps, Austerity, and the Carceral Regime in Socialist Mozambique (1974-79)*, «Journal of African History», 60, 3, 2019, pp. 429-455: 434.

see echoes of Bolshevism's militarism in that armed liberation struggles had the same mystique in Africa that the Russian revolution had for so many. Often assessed with rose-tinted spectacles, these armed struggles left a legacy in male-dominated militarized political cultures and Stalinist discourse. This raises the problem of gendering communism's history in Africa. Research indicates that possibilities for gender equality fall by the wayside in hierarchical organizations, and the Moscow-based communist hierarchy closed off the gender fluidity that had developed in earlier socialist currents, such as Britain's ethical socialism. Undoubtedly gender relations in African communist parties and regimes reflected uneasy tensions between imported and pre-existing gender norms.

The South African case is significant. In contrast to Angola, where long-running armed struggle impeded the development of civil society, in South Africa armed struggle played a limited external role, enabling civil society to develop. Yet, despite the trade union movement's leading role in the liberation struggle, the armed struggle had more glamour. While most African communist parties rebranded themselves after the USSR's collapse, the SACP escaped critical scrutiny due to its role in the armed struggle and its close connection to the governing ANC. However glorified, armed struggle had depended on Soviet training and financing and thus became a vector for the continuing transmission of Stalinist political culture and discourse.⁴⁰ While the SACP legitimizes itself by its century-old history, it is ever more undemocratic in the democratic era. Its predecessor, the CPSA, had a steady turnover of leadership until the Second World War. Despite the difficulty of democratic practices in the underground years, by 2000 elections had become «vigorously competitive». But in 2017, observed Tom Lodge, the SACP «made a virtue of filling its top offices without contested elections, and ... it re-elected virtually all serving Central Committee members».⁴¹ Militarization, political culture and discourse are crucial for understanding the reproduction of Stalinist values in Africa.

⁴⁰ E. Roux, *S. P. Bunting: A Political Biography*, Cape Town: Myibuye, 1993, p. 153, complained about «Imprecor language».

⁴¹ T. Lodge, *Red Road to Freedom: A History of the South African Communist Party 1921-2021*, Auckland Park: Jacana, 2021, p. 483.

Conclusion

Like nationalism, communism is an extremely elastic concept that reflects its environment and timing, and so it is indeed chameleon-like. Communism and socialism have undoubtedly had an attraction for many African intellectuals, political leaders and workers. However, in colonial Africa communism was associated with liberation from power, while in postcolonial Africa communism and socialism became associated with the maintenance of power. Overall, communist parties were weak and frequently faced extreme repression, and leftist regimes, transient and damaging to democratic prospects.

The core-periphery model mentioned earlier makes sense if African communist parties are seen in a complex and reciprocal relationship with both the Soviet Union and their parent metropole parties, one that incorporates the salience of geopolitics in shaping perceptions and values. Crucially, Soviet communist policies applied in innumerable national and local contexts inevitably produced different outcomes. But these were not relationships amongst equals. The Soviets prioritized their country's geopolitical interests, and European communist parties prioritized their own interests over those of communists in the colonies. In exceptional circumstances, African communist parties challenged Soviet policies. For example, Algerian communists successfully challenged both French and Soviet communists to support armed struggle and recognize the FLN's provisional government. South African communists, by contrast, were notoriously subordinate to the USSR. Generally, though, the core-periphery model breaks down when the focus of analysis shifts to state-state relations, particularly in the independence period.

Returning to Traverso's schema, although it leads us to pose some interesting questions, it does not explain communist development in twentieth-century Africa. Rather, it illuminates Africa's very different patterns compared to Russian and European experiences, signaling the limitations of general models derived from Western or super-power experiences in explaining specific historical developments elsewhere. African experiences highlight communism's extreme diversity across regions and over time. Communism in Africa is a complex phenomenon that needs diverse and comparative approaches to examine its ideas and transmission, its relationships with popular movements and armed struggles, its areas of strength and weaknesses, and even its absences. The weaknesses of communism and socialism in Africa reflect the differential power relations amongst Soviet, European and

African communists, the destructive impact of superpower rivalries and the repression to which generations of Marxists were subjected by their own states. Socialism may be an impossible ideal confronted with brutal global capitalism. But its weakness in Africa is due in no small part to the killings and imprisonment by African states of so many young Marxists.

ALLISON DREW

Challenging Socialist Solidarity: Yugoslav Perspective on Intra-Socialist Competition in Colonial and Post- Colonial Algeria (1959-1965)¹

Introduction

Despite extensive ruptures in ideological and socio-political visions, which started appearing after the Second World War, socialist regimes remained in accord with supporting the global proletariat's fight against capitalist exploitation. The notion of solidarity among the working class across national borders, known as "proletarian internationalism", gradually evolved into joint support for the developing and decolonized world in the struggle against Western hegemony. Left-wing governments enthusiastically endorsed "socialist internationalism", pledging military, humanitarian, and development aid to national liberation movements and newly independent countries. However, the practice of socialist internationalism in the Third World often fell short of this ideal. Instead of collaborating to assist liberation efforts and post-colonial reconstruction, Eastern European countries frequently engaged in competitive practices. This competition undermined their collective efforts and highlighted the gap between ideological aspirations and practical realities.

The rivalry between socialist countries over humanitarian assistance was driven by their desire to enhance their reputations in the Third World and advance their national agendas. Simultaneously, the influx of various foreign actors into the Third World highlighted the strategically planned "diversification policy" of the local leadership, which had a clear understanding of the motives behind these military, humanitarian and development initiatives. This policy allowed Third World countries to increase the amount of assistance received while preventing any single power from gaining excessive ideological and

¹ This research has been additionally supported by the ERC-funded project "HumanEuroMed: Humanitarianism and Mediterranean Europe – A Transnational and Comparative History, 1945-1990" (Grant Agreement No. 101019166).

political influence. Algeria serves as a particularly illuminating case of this dynamic. Jeffrey J. Byrne has described «a race to provide humanitarian aid» among various socialist actors in the country following its independence,² also evident in the numerous foreign healthcare workers present on the ground.³ However, there is a significant gap in the research regarding the continuity from the support provided by socialist governments to anti-colonial movements to their assistance in post-colonial state-building. Thus, this paper focuses on the intra-socialist competition in Algeria from 1959 to 1965, primarily from the perspective of Yugoslav non-political actors – humanitarians and healthcare workers. It examines how the rivalry between socialist governments transitioned from humanitarian to development aid, and how this competition played out at the micro-level through the experts dispatched within technical aid programs. In this study, I will argue that socialist regimes prioritized their national interests over the proclaimed internationalist agenda of combating colonial and imperialist influences in the context of humanitarian and development aid to colonial and post-colonial Algeria.

Owing to the documents kept in the Archives of Yugoslavia (*Arhiv Jugoslavije*) in Belgrade, particularly the fond of the Yugoslav Red Cross (*Jugoslovenski Crveni Krst*) and the Federal Administration for International Technical Cooperation (*Savezni Zavod za međunarodnu naučnu, prosvetno-kulturnu i tehničku saradnju*), I will point out to two significant examples of intra-socialist rivalry in Algeria in which Yugoslavia took part as one of the main actors. The first one deals with the case of a failed attempt to conduct a joint action among national Red Cross societies to transport the Algerian fighters wounded during the anti-colonial struggle for rehabilitation abroad. The second case focuses on development assistance to the post-colonial Algerian government in the domain of public healthcare, revealing the resistance of the Yugoslav policymakers and medical staff to cooperate with their socialist peers within local medical establishments. Before delving into these two cases, I will explain the theoretical and practical aspects of socialist internationalism and its implications in the Third World.

² J. Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 134-139.

³ Y. Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 157.

Theory and practice of socialist internationalism

The concept of internationalism occupies a central place in socialist ideology. Gaining prominence during the Cold War, it defines the relationships between socialist and communist movements, parties, and governments united by anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist sentiments. Integral to socialist internationalism, which evolved from the “proletarian internationalism” rooted in Marxist-Leninist political theory, is the principle and practice of solidarity. Emerging from the socialist world, “solidarity” became a powerful and influential buzzword in the 1960s, resonating strongly across the turbulent political landscape that would later be known as the “Global South”. Far from being a mere catchphrase, “solidarity” inspired hope among political leaders and populations of newly decolonized countries, offering an alternative vision of global order that marked a significant departure from the exploitative practices of former colonial masters.

Associating capitalism with colonialism and neo-colonial influences, most of the newly established countries in Africa were inclined towards establishing a closer partnership with socialist regimes, opting for a socialist path of economic development. As Marcia C. Schenck *et al.* phrased it, «socialism promised an alluring break with the colonial and neo-colonial order. Their experience of capitalist exploitation and institutionalized racism under European colonialism made socialism an attractive foundation on which to build their visions of modernity». ⁴ In fact, the enthusiasm for the possibility of creating a global network of partnerships based on mutually beneficial cooperation rather than one built on hierarchical and paternalistic standings peaked in the first half of the 1960s. In practice, socialist internationalism was translated into provisions of development aid which were regularly accompanied by a language of solidarity. While Western benefactors openly asserted hierarchical relationships, socialist countries discursively constructed themselves as equal partners, thus blurring lines dividing donors from recipients. In line with this, to reflect a mutually beneficial relationship, rather than unilateral “aid” or “assistance”,

⁴ M.C. Schenck *et al.*, *Introduction: Moorings and (Dis)Entanglements between Africa and East Germany during the Cold War* in *Navigating Socialist Encounters: Moorings and (Dis)Entanglements between Africa and East Germany during the Cold War*, ed. Eric Burton *et al.*, Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021, p. 18.

socialist countries opted for the term “cooperation” in their official rhetoric when dealing with their counterparts from the Global South.⁵

After Stalin’s death and Nikita Khrushchev’s opening to the Third World in the mid-1950s, internationalism became a central tenet of the Soviet socialist doctrine. Detecting undergoing decolonization in Africa as an opportunity to expand influence and forge new alliances, the Socialist Bloc commenced building ties with the Third World by (re)introducing the concept of socialist internationalism in foreign political practice.⁶ Under Khrushchev’s leadership, the Soviet Union and their junior allies became committed to supporting liberation movements and postcolonial states that pursued a non-capitalist development in their fight against (neo)colonial influences. With this modified outlook, the Eastern Bloc began providing them humanitarian, economic, military and technical assistance. Despite their limited resources, members of the socialist Bloc – Romania, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Bulgaria – handed out enormous low-interest loans with an extended repayment period. Moreover, under favourable financial conditions, the countries of the CMEA posted thousands of technicians, medical staff and military personnel across the Global South.⁷

Differently from the long-dominating public and historiographic belief of the Warsaw Pact consisting of a monolith bloc, under the doctrine of “active foreign policy”, Moscow encouraged its junior members to foster independent economic relations with the Third World. With granted autonomy in foreign policy, the CMEA countries developed their own agendas towards Africa, only loosely coordinated by the Kremlin.⁸ An indicative example of Soviet junior

⁵ S. Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019, p. 45.

⁶ T. Rupprecht, *Soviet Internationalism After Stalin. Interaction and Exchange between the USSR and Latin America during the Cold War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 22-23.

⁷ J. Mark-A. M. Kalinovsky-Steffi Marung (eds.), *Alternative Globalizations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020; J. Mark-P. Betts (eds.), *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonisation*, Oxford University Press, 2022; A. Calori et al. (eds.), *Between East and South: Spaces of Interaction in the Globalizing Economy of the Cold War*, Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019.

⁸ A. Calori et al., *Alternative Globalization?*, p. 22.

allies' autonomy serves the Czechoslovak stance in the Sand Wars fought between Algeria and Morocco in October and November 1963 over a resource-rich frontier. In order not to put relations with Morocco, its leading economic partner in Africa, at stake, Czechoslovak policymakers chose not to follow the official Soviet camp policy and refrained from publicly supporting Algeria.⁹ The aforementioned case also points out the primacy of domestic economic considerations over ideological ones, which was another important aspect of the altered Bloc's policy. From the mid-1960s, most CMEA countries were turning to the South in search of commercial opportunities in which ideology played only a limited role.

For example, arms exports played an important role in Czechoslovakia's relations with the South, which had originated and developed from the pre-independence provisions of military aid to national liberation movements. Nevertheless, there were countries, primarily Bulgaria, which had less direct economic interests in this type of engagement. Hopes of securing a stronger political and trading position within the Warsaw Pact by acquiring prestige and influence abroad ran Bulgaria's Third World agenda. Somehow similarly yet with a strong sense of autonomy, Romania searched in the developing world to strengthen its political and economic independence within the socialist bloc. Through self-identification as a "developing country" and by joining the G77 in 1976, Romania affirmed deep connections to the Global South.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Poland had never developed a particularly active Third World policy but instead set its political and economic focus on Europe. Poland's engagement in the Global South was mostly limited to scholarship programmes for students from developing countries.¹¹ Since Moscow was heavily occupied with its Western Bloc rivals, sometimes its junior allies played a more prominent role in the Global South than the superpower itself. The Kremlin approved this

⁹ P.E. Muehlbeck, *Czechoslovakia in Africa 1945-1968*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 178-179.

¹⁰ B.C. Iacob-I. Vasile, *Agents of Decolonization? Romanian Activities in Mozambique's Oil and Healthcare Sectors (1976-1984)*, in *Between East and South*, pp. 137-138.

¹¹ P. Gasztold, *Lost Illusions: The Limits of Communist Poland's Involvement in Cold War Africa*, in *Warsaw Pact Intervention in the Third World: Aid and Influence in the Cold War*, eds. P.E. Muehlenbeck-N. Telepneva, London: I.B. Tauris, 2018, pp. 197-220.

situation as its allies served as a gateway to the countries, which were hesitant to forge close relations with the Soviet Union fearing its hegemonic aspirations. Until 1968, Czechoslovakia held the reputation of the most influential non-Soviet country in the Global South, while from 1968 this title took over the GDR.¹² The CMEA countries affiliated with Third World affairs had not only run competitions against the countries of the West but also between each other. Instead of cooperation, an intra-bloc rivalry emerged for the Third World alliances and markets, which were seen as an opportunity to acquire economic profit and cover budget deficits.

Though remaining outside the Bloc since 1947, the political leadership of Yugoslavia joined the socialist fight for the Third World network of alliances under similar premises. Known as the “non-alignment”, since the early 1950s, Yugoslav leadership developed a policy of fostering strong political and economic partnerships with anti-imperialist nations and movements that had equally declared distance from the two power blocs. The wide-range network of non-aligned alliances reinforced Yugoslavia’s ambitious position in international affairs, which in turn granted legitimacy to Tito’s communist regime and its policy at home. Only when the non-alignment had been firmly internationally and domestically established in the mid-1970s, did economic interests start to significantly prevail over political considerations in the engagement with the Global South. However, one of the earliest reasonings of Yugoslav politicians was to secure the fast-growing Yugoslav industry a market expansion for the sales of industrial products and purchase of raw materials. The authorities believed that Yugoslavia was an attractive trading partner for the Third World countries as it possessed a “suitable degree” of technological development.¹³ This perspective guided Yugoslavia’s strategy in international

¹² Muehlenbeck-Telepneva, *Warsaw Pact Intervention*, pp. 326-327.

¹³ D. Bogetić, *Nesvrstanost kroz istoriju. Od ideje do pokreta*, Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike, 2019, pp. 9-50; Id., *Nova strategija spoljne politike Jugoslavije 1956-1961*, Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2006, pp. 147-168; V. Petrović, *Jugoslovenska samit-diplomatija 1944-1961*, in *Jugoslovenska diplomatija 1945-1961*, ed. S. Selinčić, Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2012, p. 40; J. Dinkel, *The Non-Aligned Movement: Genesis, Organization and Politics (1927-1992)*, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2018, pp. 134-142; A.Z. Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970, pp. 209-212.

relations, as exemplified by its efforts in Algeria to establish itself as a prominent and influential political actor.

Scramble for the Algerian Wounded Fighters

In a fashion similar to other socialist regimes, Yugoslav state-party leadership emphasized the anti-imperialist and anti-hegemonic character of the country rooted in socialist internationalism when communicating with the Third World. As a way of approaching national liberation movements standing at the forefront of the decolonization of Africa, the Yugoslav political elite adopted anti-colonial discourse and declared anti-colonialism as one of its main foreign political principles. President Marshall Tito frequently spoke about anti-colonialism as a “historical” and “inevitable” global process. Although political entities in socialist Yugoslavia have never been under colonial oppression, the political elite continually addressed the similarity of historical experiences¹⁴ and the shared memory of the anti-imperialist struggle.¹⁵ Comparable to other socialist solidarity projects, a memory of the past was crucial to creating bonds with the post-colonial nations fighting for independence. In fact, the discourse of the “shared past” played an important role in building ties with the Algerian independence movement forged by the National Liberation Front (FLN). Generally, the official Yugoslav discourse aimed at presenting anti-colonialism as the continuation of the anti-fascist struggle during World War II. By identifying the Yugoslav partisan liberation movement as one of the FLN, the recent past was employed as a mobilization tool for the local Yugoslav population to support the Algerian independence struggle and express in practice the principles of solidarity proclaimed by the state.¹⁶

From the onset of the Algerian War in November 1954, the Yugo-

¹⁴ A. Sladojević, *Slike o Africi/Images of Africa*, Beograd: Muzej savremene umetnosti, 2015, pp. 15-17; *Tito u Africi. Slike solidarnosti*, eds. P. Betts-R. Vučetić, Beograd: Muzej Jugoslavije, 2017.

¹⁵ J. Đureinović, *Internationalizing the Revolution: Veterans and Transnational Cultures of Memory and Solidarity between Yugoslavia and Algeria*, «International Review of Social History», 69, 2024, pp. 139-158.

¹⁶ N. Radonjić, *Slika Afrike u Jugoslaviji (1945-1991)*, PhD diss., University of Belgrade, 2020, pp. 161-164.

slav leadership had already demonstrated practically the principles of solidarity with the burgeoning anti-colonial movement by selling a smaller number of weapons to Egypt intended for mediated delivery to the fighters in Algeria. Throughout the war, the substantial military and diplomatic support for the Algerian efforts was complemented by humanitarian gestures.¹⁷ Notwithstanding regular deliveries of food, clothing, hygiene supplies, medicine and medical equipment for over 300,000 Algerians who found refuge in Tunisia and Morocco,¹⁸ the highlight of Yugoslav humanitarian aid was its detailed and systematic efforts to provide rehabilitation treatments to wounded Algerian combatants. A cadre of medical practitioners working under the banner of the Yugoslav Red Cross embarked on a task across both shores of the Mediterranean to help wounded and disabled Algerians with medical, social and professional rehabilitation. With the establishment of the Nassen Centre in April 1961 near Tunis, the Yugoslav Red Cross commenced with comprehensive physical rehabilitation *in situ*. Before the requisite conditions were made possible on the spot, a significant number of severely wounded combatants, many of whom were amputees and paraplegics, were transported to Yugoslavia for medical treatment. Over the period spanning from May 1959 until the end of 1963, about 300 Algerians were hospitalized in medical establishments across Yugoslavia.¹⁹ Since it had been the first to bring fighters of the Algerian movement for medical treatment on its soil, the country was proclaimed by the FLN as one of the first “friends of Algeria”. However, Yugoslavia earned that title primarily owing to the discord and refusal of other socialist actors to cooperate on the task.

The Algerian wounded fighters quickly came under the lens of Eastern European socialist governments who were among the first providers of humanitarian assistance to the FLN. This group of patients sparked their interest for several reasons. First of all, those Algerians represented an opportunity to bring the faces of the anti-colonialism home, introduce them to the local population and, in this way, trans-

¹⁷ Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World*, pp. 52-53, 85-86, 205, 233; L. Dimić, *Jugoslavija i Hladni rat: Ogledi o spoljnoj politici Josipa Broza Tita (1944-1974)*, Beograd: Arhipelag, 2014, pp. 280, 284.

¹⁸ M. Rahal and B.T. White, *UNHCR and the Algerian War of Independence: Postcolonial Sovereignty and the Globalization of the International Refugee Regime, 1954-63*, «Journal of Global History», 17, 2022, pp. 331-352.

¹⁹ Z. Pečar, *Alžir do nezavisnosti*, Beograd: Prosveta, 1967, pp. 593, 599-600.

late the abstract idea of solidarity into a tangible form.²⁰ For instance, during different public events, including film screenings, lectures, and exhibitions, Yugoslav people got the chance to get in touch with wounded Algerian fighters. A similar case was with students and workers who had come to Yugoslavia for training and education. These interactions aimed to foster sympathy for the Algerian anti-colonial struggle among Yugoslav citizens and cultivate their support for the country's new foreign policy direction.²¹ Secondly, expressing meticulous care for the wounded combatants was a way to win the hearts and minds of the Algerian population and the FLN leadership, which was rising to great global prominence, especially among other revolutionary movements. At the same time, it was a chance to demonstrate the achievements of socialist modernization through medical expertise and promote the viability of the own brand of the socialist system.²²

Rather than being donor-initiated, the proposal for the action came from the Algerian side. Seeking international logistical support, in February 1959, the Algerian Red Crescent contacted the Yugoslav Red Cross society. Intending to reach medical facilities in Czechoslovakia and East Germany, the Algerians requested maritime transport for 100 wounded fighters to Yugoslavia and their subsequent railway transport to the Hungarian border. Alongside logistical assistance, they asked Yugoslavia to host 20 wounded fighters for medical treatment. After evaluating the situation as a political opportunity to improve the country's image, and despite initial concerns that the two socialist countries had not formally accepted the Algerians, Yugoslav government officials eventually ignored the possibility of a border-crossing issue and approved the request instead. Organising the transportation, covering the associated costs, and implementing the plan to host the fighters was taken over by the Yugoslav Red Cross society.²³

As the first ship was prepared to sail from Rijeka to Tangier by the

²⁰ Y. Hong, *Cold War Germany*, p. 146.

²¹ D. Tot-S. Grgić, *The FLN 1961 football tour of Yugoslavia: mobilizing public support for the Algerian cause*, «*Soccer & Society*» 24/2, 2023, pp. 235-244.

²² N. Radonjić, *Slika Afrike u Jugoslaviji*, Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2023, p. 216.

²³ D. Tot, *Translating Humanitarian Aid into Technical Cooperation: Yugoslavia's Medical Assistance to the Algerian National Liberation Movement (1958-1965)*, «*The International History Review*», *in press*.

end of March 1959, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs appeared sceptical about the readiness of their socialist counterparts for collaboration. Before starting the action, the Yugoslav Red Cross Secretary-General Olga Milošević reached out to the national Red Cross societies in Czechoslovakia and East Germany, which were responsible for carrying out the joint operation, to request from them a confirmation of the reception of patients from Algeria. To her surprise, officials in Prague and Berlin responded briefly – deeming Yugoslav logistical support unnecessary.²⁴ This course of events could be attributed to the fact that Yugoslav participation in the action would have downplayed the contribution of the two Bloc members. Furthermore, arrival by aeroplane rather than ship, whether passengers or cargo, caught greater public attention and made a stronger media impact.²⁵ On the other hand, not only Algerian partners from the Eastern Bloc refrained from collaborating with the Yugoslavs. The same case reveals a vice-versa attitude. Although the Algerian fighters were accepted for rehabilitation in the Soviet Union, Yugoslav officials refused to cooperate with Moscow and to place at disposal its naval force for maritime transportation of the Algerians.²⁶ Likely because in such a joint action, the credits would have been attributed to the socialist superpower, while the Yugoslav contribution would have remained in the background.

Eventually, Yugoslavia successfully took advantage of Czechoslovakia's and GDR's failure to organize the arrival of the Algerians on their soil and the maritime connection and proximity offered by the Mediterranean Sea. Namely, a few weeks after the joint action failed, the Yugoslav Red Cross received an appeal from the Algerian Red Crescent to transfer and host 50 heavily wounded Algerian fighters for rehabilitation in Yugoslavia. Presenting a grand opportunity to thrust the country into the international spotlight, Yugoslav officials accepted the request without hesitation. The first of three ships set sail from Tangier end of April 1959, carrying eight Algerians who arrived in Rijeka six days later. By mid-May 1959, all 50 Algerians were hospitalized in Yugoslavia. After receiving comprehensive medical checks, the wounded were assigned to clinical treatments in hospitals in Bel-

²⁴ O. Milošević, *Beleška*, 27 March 1959; Ead., *Beleška*, Belgrade, 1 April 1959, Arhiv Jugoslavije - Jugoslovenski crveni krst, AJ-731-468.

²⁵ I thank Jelena Đureinović for pointing that out to me.

²⁶ Letter from the Ministry of Health to Dr Herbert Kraus, Belgrade, 3 April 1959, Arhiv Jugoslavije - Sekretarijat SIV-a za Narodno Zdravlje, AJ-605-21-32.

grade, Zagreb, Ljubljana and Banja Luka, while the largest number of them were sent to the specialist hospital for physical rehabilitation in Stubičke Toplice centre near Zagreb.²⁷

The event caught significant attention among the FLN leaders and the Algerian population. For example, in June 1959, Ferhat Abbas, a prominent figure of the FLN and the President of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA) arrived in Yugoslavia to personally express his appreciation for hosting their fighters as well as to seek diplomatic support and secure additional military and humanitarian aid.²⁸ His visit was part of a global diplomatic tour to promote and garner international support for the Algerian cause; and on the list of countries visited, Yugoslavia was the only European entity. To promote and preserve the memory of the event among Algerians, the Yugoslav Red Cross published and distributed booklets in French *Les Blessés Algériens en Yougoslavie*. Accompanied by a collection of photographs, the brochure narrated the arrival, stay and rehabilitation process in Yugoslavia of the first two groups of wounded Algerians.²⁹

While Yugoslavia was profiled as the first non-Arab country to host Algerian fighters for treatment abroad, the Eastern Bloc commenced with the same practice soon after. According to a Yugoslav Red Cross report, by the end of 1959, the USSR hosted about 100 wounded Algerians, Hungary welcomed 40 of them, East Germany 17, Bulgaria and Albania received 10 experts, while an unknown number sojourned in Czechoslovakia.³⁰ The practice continued even after the ceasefire – with socialist countries welcoming Algerian patients in ever greater figures. Rather than humanitarian, non-political motives stood in the background as the “scramble” for the wounded and disabled had proven a tested modality to earn political capital among the new Algerian authorities and third-world liberation movements. Maja Plavšić, a key figure in the Yugoslav Red Cross who was responsible for organising care for the Algerians and a close associate of Secretary General Olga Milošević, described the humanitarian aid race between socialist

²⁷ D. Tot, *Translating Humanitarian Aid into Technical Cooperation*, in press.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ *Les Blessés Algériens en Yougoslavie*, Beograd: Jugoslovenski crveni krst, 1960. This booklet can be found in the archival collection of the Yugoslav Red Cross at the Archive of Yugoslavia (AJ-731-470).

³⁰ M. Plavšić, *Beleška o poseti i razgovorima sa delegacijom Alžirskog crvenog polumeseca*, 20 November 1959, AJ-731-468.

countries in the early days of independence in 1962, which especially evolved around the wounded fighters:³¹

Aid is coming to Algeria from all over. Now all the countries, especially the Eastern ones, seem to be competing who can send and provide more aid. Everyone is scrambling for the wounded. The Poles, who have not taken over the wounded so far, proposed to receive 500 – the Russians 1,500, – the Poles want to send 50 nurses, the Hungarians sent a complete hospital with 100 beds (Hungarian and our plane were standing next to each other at the airport) and take the wounded, West Germany sends huge amounts of medicine. The Algerians told us that now everyone is grabbing the wounded and sending aid because they see political benefits in it, while we helped them constantly during the war and they receive our aid as normal, brotherly and selfless help.³²

In the quest to earn the goodwill of the FLN and the Algerian population, the creators of Yugoslav activities in the Third World acknowledged that significant political capital could have been acquired from “being first to come” and anticipating the competitors. Apart from hosting wounded fighters, the tendency to “rush” into Algeria was revealed in other humanitarian activities, such as opening the centre in Douera (successor of the Nassen rehabilitation centre). The continuity of this attitude can be noted in some of the earliest Yugoslav business ventures in independent Algeria. For example, in October 1962, Yugoslavia immediately responded to the emergency request of the Algerian Ministry of Agriculture. Within two days, the two governments concluded a deal to sell 500 Yugoslav-made tractors. Furthermore, Yugoslavia became a country which built the first factories in independent Algeria. Likely without previously having conducted a profound market analysis, Yugoslavia rushed to take the business opportunity which granted a special title.³³ Even though the

³¹ While the “scramble” focused on the fighters, it also extended to their children, though to a much lesser extent. For instance, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia arranged summer holidays for the children of deceased Algerian fighters. Nijaz Dizdarević to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algiers, 31 December 1963, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Socijalistički savez radnog naroda Jugoslavije, AJ-142II-1550.

³² M. Plavišić, *Izveštaj sa službenog puta – obilazak ranjenika iz Alžira od 24 augusta u 6 ujutro do 22 augusta u 22 časa*, Belgrade, 31 August 1959; Ead., *Izveštaj sa puta u Alžir 18 i 19 septembra 1962*, Belgrade, 21 September 1962, AJ-731-468.

³³ D. Tot, *The Engagement of Yugoslav Technical Cooperation Experts in Post-Colo-*

projects were not a great success in terms of economic viability, Yugoslavia acquired significant symbolic capital from participating in these investments. Finally, all those cases show that a prompt response was crucial to Yugoslavia's soft power strategy. This approach is probably best depicted by Yugoslav medical teams rushing into Algiers to take over important medical establishments in the capital before their socialist competitors.

Resisting Socialist Collaboration: Medical Experts in Post-Colonial Algeria

Responding promptly to the urgent invitation of the new Algerian authorities, a group of 13 Yugoslav medical professionals arrived in Algiers on the evening of 1 August 1962. The team was ready to take over the surgical division at "Parnet", a hospital which had been vacated and partially shut down since the departure of the French personnel.³⁴ Albeit seemingly meticulously planned, the orchestration of the endeavour was precipitated by a decision rendered merely days before the arrival of the Yugoslav team. Contrary to the initial proposition, which presumed to integrate the Yugoslav medical contingent within an existing cohort of foreign physicians operating at an Algerian medical facility, the delegation dispatched from Yugoslavia with the task of coordinating the transition of their medical team concluded that a more potent confluence of political and professional impact could be achieved by preserving the unity of the Yugoslav doctors and nurses as a distinct national entity. An exhaustive evaluation by the delegation identified the conditions of a hospital located on the outskirts of the capital Algiers as exceptionally opportunistic for the Yugoslav medical corps; the presence of contemporary medical equipment facilitated the execution of intricate surgical procedures, while the availability of modern living quarters and a dining establishment in proximity ensured a comfortable sojourn for the Yugoslav medical staff.³⁵ With the deployment of medical personnel, the Yugoslav Red Cross provided a consignment of medical equipment, instruments, and pharmaceutical

nial Algeria (1962-1990). A Global Microhistory of East-South Relations, (Ph.D. dissertation, Bologna, 2023), pp. 45-46.

³⁴ *Jugoslavenski liječnici u Alžiru*, «Vjesnik», 2 August 1962.

³⁵ Report by Dr B. Radulović, Belgrade, 23 August 1962, AJ-731-468.

supplies.³⁶ One of the signs that exposed the choice of the institution was made at the last minute, was that the contents of the Yugoslav shipment were eventually left deposited in the hospital building since Parnet had already owned a robust inventory.³⁷ However, owing to a quick response and fast mobilization of medical staff, Yugoslavia became the first non-Arab country to dispatch a complete team of health experts to post-colonial Algeria. Only after a certain time, the Yugoslav venture followed socialist counterparts from Bulgaria, the USSR, China and Cuba. The last two national missions arrived only in May 1963.³⁸

While a prompt reaction was crucial to getting ahead of the competition, the Yugoslav medical mission's performance also left a favourable impression on the Algerian authorities and the local population, who symbolically referred to the hospital as «the Yugoslav hospital».³⁹ Algerian officials publicly acknowledged Yugoslavia's «efficient and active aid» and praised the efforts of its health workers at the hospital. Both Yugoslav and Algerian media referred to these workers as unofficial ambassadors, dubbing them «ambassadors in white coats»⁴⁰ or «ambassadors of friendship»,⁴¹ highlighting their role as citizen diplomats in strengthening bilateral relations. Despite some internal critiques from within the medical establishment towards the paramedical staff,⁴² FLN leaders frequently expressed gratitude and public praise for the medical team in front of both local and foreign media.⁴³ When Tito visited Algeria for the first time in 1965, his hosts commended the exceptional performance of Yugoslav experts, particularly the physicians and nurses.⁴⁴ Yugoslav politicians generally considered media coverage of aid gestures and deliveries essential for enhancing

³⁶ Galenika *dariva Alžirce*, «Vjesnik», 11 January 1963.

³⁷ Report by Dr B. Radulović, Belgrade, 23 August 1962, AJ-731-468.

³⁸ Y. Hong, *Cold War Germany*, p. 157.

³⁹ *Jugoslavenski liječnici u Alžiru*, «Vjesnik», 2 August 1962.

⁴⁰ *Ambasadori u belim mantilima*, «Borba», 1962.

⁴¹ *Iskreni dokaz prijateljstva*, «Vjesnik», 14 November 1962.

⁴² *Beleška sa sastanka za pomoć Alžiru*, 30 May 1959, AJ-731-468.

⁴³ P. Betts, *A Red Wind of Change: African Media Coverage of Tito's Tours of Decolonizing Africa*, in *Tito u Africi. Slike solidarnosti*, eds. P. Betts-R. Vučetić, Beograd: Muzej Jugoslavije, 2017, p. 72; *Priznanje jugoslavenskim liječnicima u Alžiru*, «Vjesnik», 1 February 1963.

⁴⁴ *Posjet jugoslavenskog predsjednika Alžiru*, «Vjesnik», 22 April 1965.

the country's image as a donor. For instance, following the Yugoslav Red Cross delivery of humanitarian aid in kind after the explosion of an Egyptian cargo ship in the port of Annaba in 1964, the Embassy in Algiers satisfactorily reported that the Algerian press placed visibly in the newspapers the article about the donation.⁴⁵

The diplomatic success of the mission proved catalytic as it stimulated Yugoslavia's commitment to sustain and broaden medical initiatives within Parnet and Algeria. Moreover, the determination to extend the quantity and geographic scope of aid was fuelled by the possibility of an intervention by other nations, which was seen as a threat to the slowly but steadily growing Yugoslav influence among the Algerian population and its political elites. Along the lines of these reasonings, the leader of the Yugoslav medical delegation suggested rapidly dispatching staff to other vacated divisions at Parnet to completely take over the administration of the hospital before the infiltration of other foreign actors.⁴⁶ Consequently, in April and May 1963, a new team from Yugoslavia arrived to take over the second surgical division at the hospital Parnet, counting another 13 healthcare workers. The team was dispatched under the leadership of a well-renowned cardiothoracic surgeon Vinko Frančišković, a university professor and affirmed surgeon with nearly 20 years of work experience.⁴⁷ Two of his colleagues from Rijeka joined the cardiothoracic surgical team, while the rest of the staff joined from other hospitals in Pula, Zagreb and Rijeka.⁴⁸ Even though working in already-established teams allowed for greater coordination, performance and further professional development, it was a challenge for one country to staff a complete department let alone an entire hospital.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ *Predaja poklon-robe za nastradale u Annabi*, Algiers, 29 September 1964, AJ-731-476.

⁴⁶ Report by Dr B. Radulović, Belgrade, 23 August 1962, p. 9, AJ-731-468.

⁴⁷ D. Primc *et al.*, *New contributions to the study of the life and work of Vinko Frančišković (1919-1984), pioneer of Croatian cardiothoracic and transplantation surgery*, «Acta medico-historica Adriatica», 15/1, 2017, p. 123.

⁴⁸ J. Ivanović, *Zamjena ekipe za bolnicu Parne, u gradu Alžiru*, 31 March 1964, Hrvatski državni arhiv - Republički zavod za međunarodnu znanstveno-tehničku suradnju, HDA-1727-346.

⁴⁹ For an account of the challenges of running a “one-nation hospital” see the following example of the hospital in Gharayan, Libya: B.C. Iacob, *The Hospital: Uncomfortable Proximities – Romania’s “One Nation Hospital” in Gharyan, 1974-1985*, in

That is why a hospital as a microcosm can be taken as a great example for studying the dynamics of socialist competition. Having to carry out labour activities with other foreign experts in Algeria, some Yugoslavs came across a multinational and multicultural working environment for the first time. The relations of Yugoslav experts with other socialist peers were defined by the top-bottom notion of “Yugoslav exceptionalism” which was a vital component of the Yugoslav self-image that the regime had carefully developed by pointing out the diametrical ideological differences against the other socialist actors.⁵⁰ The Yugoslav leader, Marshall Tito himself asserted this idea by stating that «Yugoslavia had ambitions to play an important role in the socialist world and needed to be treated differently from other socialist countries».⁵¹ This global imaginary, by which Yugoslavia’s international position entitled a privileged status to the country and its citizens in bilateral relations with the Global South, dispatched experts reproduced onto the micro-level. For the Yugoslav leadership, the arena of humanitarian and development aid was seen as a perfect opportunity to represent the country and reaffirm its status in the socialist world and beyond off the stage of high-level multilateral diplomacy.

No different from Yugoslavia, the competition for influence, political partnerships and economic opportunities, other socialist governments translated onto the micro-level through their citizens working within the bilateral technical cooperation programmes.⁵² That is why

Socialist Internationalism and the Gritty Politics of the Particular: Second-Third World Spaces in the Cold War, ed. K. Roth-Ey, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023, pp. 177-196.

⁵⁰ I elaborated on this phenomenon in the paper *A More Humane Alternative for the Continent: Self-Image of Yugoslavia in Africa (1950s -1960s)* presented at the workshop *A world without empires. Networks, encounters and imaginary of the communists at the time of decolonization in Africa* at Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa in March 2021.

⁵¹ As cited in: R. Niebuhr, *The Search for a Cold War Legitimacy: Foreign Policy and Tito’s Yugoslavia*, Leiden: Brill, 2018, p. 71.

⁵² Unlike the research of East European cooperants revealed, there is no indication that Yugoslav experts’ interactions with foreign workers or locals were supervised by their country’s secret police. B.C. Iacob-I. Vasile, *Agents of Decolonization?*, p. 146; Z. Body, *Opening up to the ‘Third World’ or Taking a Detour to the ‘West’? The Hungarian Presence in Algeria from the 1960s to the 1980s*, «HistGlob working paper», 4, 2021, pp. 3-34: 23-28.

Yugoslav workers generally considered experts from other socialist countries not as colleagues and partners in the joint project to assist in the post-colonial development but as “intruders” who endanger Yugoslav positions and interests in Algeria and the Global South. According to Nemanja Radonjić, Yugoslav experts were advised to refrain from confrontations and political agitations to affirm their image of political neutrality.⁵³ Instead of engaging in conflicts, experts were supposed to build a positive image of the country through their labour activities, expertise, discipline, commitment and finally, public display of achievements in socialist modernization, such as successfully performed surgeries and engineering works.⁵⁴

As previously mentioned, hospitals and medical centres were particularly intense contact spaces with their counterparts from Eastern Europe. In these cases, the lack of coordination and collaboration between experts of different national backgrounds came to the detriment of the local patients. From the letters of Yugoslav medical workers sent abroad, we can see that many of them explicitly refused or hesitated to work with their peers from socialist countries. For example, having to work hand in hand with Bulgarian physicians in the hospital in Orleansville, the leader of the Yugoslav team complained how it had not been possible «to fairly organize health service in the hospital because Bulgarian doctors worked according to their own system and under the management of their own people».⁵⁵ Along the lines of the discourse of exceptionalism, Yugoslav experts believed their expertise and technical knowledge far exceeded those of other Eastern Europeans, for whom they claimed to be «inexperienced people of a low educational level».⁵⁶ Furthermore, they spoke of Eastern European experts bearing «anti-Yugoslav sentiments» and conveyed impressions that the home authorities extolled Yugoslav experts over

⁵³ N. Radonjić, *Slika Afrike u Jugoslaviji (1945-1991)*, p. 181.

⁵⁴ *Priručnik za stručnjake međunarodne tehničke saradnje koji se upućuju na rad u zemlje u razvoju*, Beograd: Savezni zavod za međunarodnu tehničku suradnju, 1968, pp. 68-70; N. Radonjić, *Slika Afrike u Jugoslaviji Jugoslaviji (1945-1991)*, pp. 183-184, 205.

⁵⁵ Letter from B. Hameršak to the Director of ZAMTES, Orleansville (Chlef), 19 September 1963, HDA-1727-346.

⁵⁶ Letter from the married couple Bačić to Yugoslav consul P. Mijić, Sidi Brahim, 30 January 1983, AJ-731-465 (Savezni Zavod za međunarodnu naučnu, prosvetno-kulturnu i tehničku saradnju)-6561.

the rest of the cooperants («Algerian colleagues declare that we [Yugoslav experts] are the best of all cooperants».⁵⁷ While mostly focused on their socialist counterparts, Yugoslavs in the reports and letters also mentioned performances of other national groups in a similar vein – as jealous and ready to sabotage Yugoslav positions in the fierce competition in Algeria.⁵⁸

Despite extensive differences in the political and economic system, Yugoslav experts closely identified with the experts from the West rather than their counterparts from the East. While aiming to distinguish themselves from the Eastern European experts, Yugoslavs paralleled their skills and technical knowledge to the Western cooperants.⁵⁹ In fact, they represented themselves as a more humane alternative to Western specialists. In other words, the self-image of a Yugoslav expert was of one just as professional and skilled as its counterpart of capitalist provenience but at the same time carrying high moral qualities and human compassion. For example, in a report from a Yugoslav physician describing colonial practices of the French medical cooperants in Morocco during the early 1960s, we read that «[Yugoslav] doctors stand out with their expertise, and especially with their work and moral qualities and human attitude towards those who turn to them for medical help».⁶⁰

The pressure of the growing socialist competition, including the Soviets, the Cubans, the Bulgarians, the Polish, the East Germans and the Czechoslovaks,⁶¹ forced Yugoslavia to rethink and plan a permanent presence of its staff in Algeria. This occurred even though the government initially had not planned a systematic long-term campaign of medical experts' aid to Algeria, above all due to a shortage and high demand for medical personnel at home and pressure from the local institutions. The Federal Administration for International Technical Cooperation (*Savezni zavod za međunarodnu tehničku saradnju*;

⁵⁷ Report by V.M., Novi Sad, 22 August 1990, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Savezni Zavod za međunarodnu naučnu, prosvetno-kulturnu i tehničku saradnju, AJ-465-6557.

⁵⁸ Letter by V.J., Ain Oussera, 8 March 1981, AJ-465-6550.

⁵⁹ Tot, *The Engagement of Yugoslav Technical Cooperation Experts*, pp. 202-208.

⁶⁰ A. Kečkarovski, *Moji utisci i kratak osvrt na uslove života i rada naših stručnjaka u Maroku*, 20 September 1962, AJ-465-6551.

⁶¹ According to a 1964 Yugoslav news report, there were about 520 Bulgarian, 260 French, and 100 Soviet medical professionals. *Alžir mobilizira liječnike*, «Vjesnik», 31 May 1964.

ZAMTES), the central administrative body responsible for managing Yugoslav activities in bilateral and multilateral technical cooperation, faced serious difficulties in finding suitable personnel, predominantly due to the previously mentioned general lack of staff at home.

For illustration, in the early 1960s, Yugoslavia had a limited number of doctors, both general practitioners and specialists, despite a gradual annual increase in their absolute numbers. In 1962, Yugoslavia had approximately 1 doctor for every 1,400 inhabitants. In comparison, the Soviet Union had a much more favorable ratio of 1 doctor for every 497 inhabitants. Data from the Federal Institute of Public Health for 1964 reveal that SR Croatia and SR Slovenia had the best ratios in Yugoslavia, with 1 doctor for every 1,010 and 1,030 inhabitants, respectively. In contrast, the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, SR Bosnia and Herzegovina, and SR Montenegro had the lowest ratios, with 1 doctor for every 3,185, 2,180, and 1,860 inhabitants, respectively. These figures highlight that Yugoslavia did not have enough doctors to provide adequate health care, particularly in rural areas of these three regions. For example, in the municipality of Novo Brdo in AP Kosovo and Metohija, the ratio was as low as 1 doctor for every 29,000 inhabitants. According to the United Nations standards at that time, the minimum requirement for basic health care in developing countries was 1 doctor for a maximum of 10,000 inhabitants. This standard was not met in over half of the municipalities in AP Kosovo and Metohija, and in 10% of municipalities at the federal level.⁶²

Yet, in July 1963, Yugoslavia signed with Algeria the bilateral Agreement on Scientific and Technical Cooperation (*Accord sur la coopération scientifique et technique; Sporazum o naučno-tehničkoj suradnji*). While officially defined as an “exchange of experts”, the flow of highly skilled workforce was one-directional in practice whereby dispatching Yugoslav skilled cadres to Algeria and hosting Algerian students and trainees in Yugoslavia.⁶³ In turn, the formalization of technical cooperation by an official agreement gave Yugoslavia the priority to take

⁶² *Zdravstveni radnici sa medicinskom spremom u 1964*, «Jugoslovenski pregled», Jun 1965, pp. 11-12.

⁶³ Sporazum između vlade Jugoslavije i vlade Alžira o naučno-tehničkoj suradnji, *Službeni list SFRJ, Međunarodni ugovori*, 10, 1964; S. Jaramaz, *Zamjena ekipe za bolnicu Parne u gradu Alžiru*, 11 April 1964, HDA-1727-346.

over healthcare services in Algeria from their socialist competitors, as was the case with the Bulgarians in *wilaya* Orleansville.⁶⁴

On the same day of the signing of the Agreement, several Yugoslav general practitioners took their first workplaces in the region of Orleansville, while others joined them in the following months. After the initial dispatching of general practitioners to the municipal dispensaries, in September 1963, the mission under the leadership of neurosurgeon Boris Hameršak from Zagreb took over the hospital in Orleansville.⁶⁵ Concurrently, medical teams from Zagreb staffed hospitals in the cities of Miliana and Cherrhell. Generally, Croatian hospitals in Pula, Rijeka, and Zagreb supplied most healthcare workers to Algeria. This was because the Socialist Republic of Croatia and respective medical institutions had the most favourable healthcare picture in Yugoslavia, which, to an extent, made possible the temporary absence of medical cadres.⁶⁶

To show credibility, prove as a trustworthy partner and demonstrate adherence to the principles of solidarity, Belgrade strived to respond to Algerian demands for cadres. Until 1965, Yugoslavia kept in Algeria around 230 experts annually, predominantly medical staff. Afterwards, it significantly fell behind its competitors. In a few years since the first Yugoslav medical mission arrived in Algiers, the international healthcare landscape in Algeria significantly changed. The competitors, who they feared could jeopardise Yugoslav positions, steadily increased the number of their experts in Algeria,⁶⁷ while the Yugoslav ones decreased by approximately 60%. While Yugoslavia's capacities to perform this type of solidarity action were significantly more limited than those of its socialist Eastern European counterparts in terms of human resources, the inability of the government to systematically dispatch medical experts to Algeria was not the only matter in question. Namely, healthcare workers were also sent to other developing countries. Since 1961, hundreds of experts, particularly medical professionals, opted to work in the neighbouring oil-rich Libya, which provided more attractive

⁶⁴ Letter from B. Hameršak to the Director of ZAMTES, Orleansville, 19 September 1963, HDA-1727-346.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁶ P. Dovijanić, *Zdravstveni radnici sa medicinskom spremom u 1964*, «Jugoslovenski pregled», June 1965, pp. 11-14.

⁶⁷ *Alžir mobilizira liječnike*, «Vjesnik», 31 May 1964.

financial conditions.⁶⁸ By the end of the decade, there were over 700 experts in Libya, mostly doctors, nurses and technicians. During the 1980s, these numbers doubled and grew to impressive numbers – over 1,400 were stationed in hospitals across Libya yearly.⁶⁹ Moreover, the language barrier reduced the already narrow pool of potential candidates. Namely, only a limited number of candidates were fluent or acquainted with the French language, the *lingua franca* of Algeria. Concerning medical teams, the required proficiency in the French language concerned doctors, especially team leaders, while it was preferred that the rest of the personnel was acquainted with the language. In an attempt to improve their linguistic skills, ZAMTES organized language courses for the first groups of experts.⁷⁰ However, the practice was quickly abandoned. Instead, future experts were requested to take language courses individually or were encouraged to adopt self-learning methods which bore minimal or no results.

Another important factor negatively impacting the number of medical experts in Algeria was their motivation to embark on the mission abroad. While humanitarian and altruistic motives to some extent played a role in accepting employment in the international humanitarian and development sector, for most of them the decisive factor was financial. Initially, the Algerian Ministry of Public Health offered hefty salaries to foreign experts to attract them to the war-torn country and different cultural and social environment. While it is difficult to determine the salary ratio, one can estimate that wages in Algeria were, on average, four to five times higher than those offered for equivalent positions in Yugoslavia. Moreover, as an incentive, the Yugoslav government additionally subsidized the salaries of experts employed at hospitals Parnet and Douera, granting an extra amount in Yugoslav dinars equivalent to their previous monthly stipend at the home institution.⁷¹ Aware of strong monetary impulses, the Yugoslav

⁶⁸ Rodoljub Jemuović and Avguštin Lah, *Naučna, tehnička i kulturna saradnja Jugoslavije sa zemljama u razvoju* (Ljubljana: Center za proučevanje sodelovanja z deželami v razvoju, 1972), p. 107.

⁶⁹ ZAMTES, *PLATFORMA za razgovore jugoslavenske delegacije sa delegacijom Generalnog narodnog komiteta za zdravlje VSNLA Džamahirije o saradnji u oblasti zdravstva*, Belgrade, 3 May 1989, HDA-1727-411, pp. 1-2.

⁷⁰ *Foto vijest: Zdravstvena ekipa za Alžir*, «Večernji list», 3 September 1963.

⁷¹ Notification from ZAMTES to the Croatian branch office, 2 March 1963, HDA-1727-464.

authorities warned ZAMTES officials to pay special attention in the recruitment phase that the candidates were not driven to Algeria solely by financial reasonings but rather by «a desire to provide real help and contribute to the development of [bilateral] relations».⁷²

Yet, Yugoslav delegations regularly brought up financial terms of the engagement of Yugoslav experts in Algeria. It was because experts' income was not solely a matter of individuals' financial reward and motivation for work abroad. Rather, it was a marker of Yugoslavia's global status, especially within the socialist world. For example, the Assistant Director of ZAMTES, Ljubomir Reljić, claimed that «[...] the Algerian side classified Yugosl[av] experts together under the same treatment as all others from the socialist countries (Bulgaria, the USSR, etc.), which does not correspond to Yugoslavia's international position, nor is it in line with the policy of the SFRY [*sic*]».⁷³ In other words, the financial terms offered to its technical experts were to correspond to the international position, that is, Yugoslavia's non-aligned "in-betweenness". As ZAMTES officials often put it, a «fair price» for a Yugoslav expert was «greater than of Eastern European but less than of experts from capitalist countries». Wage level was not the only reference point for Yugoslavia's global positioning. Rumours that experts from certain countries were entitled to higher wage or hard currency transfers than Yugoslavs were presented as «a confirmation of discrimination against our experts».⁷⁴ While in Mozambique, for example, technical experts from different countries were entitled to different transfer rates, in Algeria, it was for the most part uniquely defined for all East European cooperants. On the other hand, Western cooperants were usually eligible for a higher wage or wage transfer.⁷⁵

Considering Yugoslavia as a part of the Eastern European market of highly skilled labour, the Algerian administration offered Yugoslavs financial terms equal to all other Eastern European cooperants. In fact, Algerian diplomacy adopted early on the practice of signing standardized bilateral agreements with partners from Eastern Europe.

⁷² The organization of technical assistance to Algeria, n.d., Arhiv Jugoslavije, Savezna Komisija za kulturne veze s inostranstvom, AJ-559-56, p. 3.

⁷³ Note from the meeting of representatives of ZAMTES branch offices, 28 December 1977, HDA-1727-346.

⁷⁴ Letter from ZAMTES Director M. Peševski to the Yugoslav Embassy in Algeria, 23 October 1987, AJ-465-6550.

⁷⁵ B.C. Iacob-I. Vasile, *Agents of Decolonization?*, p. 143-144.

For example, the content of the Convention on Scientific and Technical Cooperation signed with Yugoslavia in 1965 was based on the text of the analogous document that Algeria concluded with Bulgaria beforehand.⁷⁶ Once the Algerians reached a deal with the government providing the largest number of experts, other countries were left with significantly limited space for bilateral negotiations over the price of their personnel's services. Having largely decreased the number of its experts by that time, Yugoslavia was not in a strong negotiating position to demand an increase in its experts' salaries.

In contrast, socialist Eastern European countries maintained the continuity and stable development of technical cooperation throughout the years and even expanded the number of their people in Algeria. According to the Yugoslav Embassy's estimates in 1972, the USSR kept in Algeria around 2,000 experts, Bulgaria 850, Romania between 500 and 600, Poland over 200, Hungary around 120, and Czechoslovakia over 100. Two years later, those countries had raised the number of experts. The Yugoslav Embassy estimated that during 1974 there were 2,500 experts from the USSR, about 1,000 Bulgarians, approximately 600 Romanians, 300 to 400 Czechoslovaks, and an «undisclosed number of Hungarians».⁷⁷ Moreover, the Embassy reported on 300 Chinese occupying the health sector who were *pro bono* dispatched to Algeria.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, in 1972, Yugoslavia had kept 70 experts, while in 1974 only about 31, mainly in the sectors of agriculture, healthcare, and public works.⁷⁹

The Yugoslav delegates did not respond positively to the Algerian officials' assertion that their other partners had found «good solutions» for implementing technical cooperation agreements.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Information on the Algerian draft proposal of a new convention, 25 October 1965, AJ-465-6549.

⁷⁷ These estimates likely correspond to the actual numbers. For comparison, Z. Bódy cites 111 Hungarian technical experts working in Algeria at the end of 1972. Similarly to the Yugoslav Embassy's report, Hungarian accounts lack data for the year 1974. Z. Bódy, *Opening up to the 'Third World' or Taking a Detour to the 'West'?*

⁷⁸ Note the talks between K. Bulajić and A. Kesri, 22 January 1974, AJ-465-6572, p. 2.

⁷⁹ Report by the Yugoslav Embassy in Algiers on scientific and technical cooperation with Algeria for 1972, AJ-465-6572, p. 2.

⁸⁰ Report on Yugoslav-Algerian technical cooperation, Belgrade, January 1980, AJ-465-6545.

Although ZAMTES officials repeatedly claimed that Algeria had negotiated more favourable terms with other Eastern European partners, experts from these countries were also subject to the local “national payment treatment”, which involved a standardized salary system. The key difference was that experts from these countries received additional income from their home administrations, a benefit that was not provided to the Yugoslavs. Consequently, despite Yugoslav advisors coming at the same price, CMEA experts were considered a better deal because their remuneration was often covered from long-term loans by their home countries. Above all, the Algerian administration effectively capitalized on the lack of coordination and internal discord within the CMEA’s Commission for Technical Assistance to secure cheap expert labour from Eastern Europe. This fragmentation among socialist countries led to a reduction in the price of their experts as they were not able to stand united in front of Algerian delegates. With an increasing number of foreign experts and easy access to the Eastern European labour market, Algeria was able to steer the negotiations to its advantage. To obtain the best offers, Algerian delegates frequently went on «technical aid shopping tours» across Eastern Europe.⁸¹

In addition to dictating the terms and controlling the price of expert labour from the socialist East, the Algerian strategy of partnership diversification had another significant implication. By engaging multiple experts from competing foreign governments, the Algerian administration implemented what Max Trecker termed «a system of checks and balances».⁸² This strategy prevented any single national group from exerting excessive political control or economic influence. It also allowed the Algerians to indirectly supervise the foreign experts, as these individuals often reported any suspicious activities of their peers to local officials. Algeria’s adept manipulation of inter-socialist rivalries and strategic diversification of partnerships not only maximized the benefits of technical cooperation but also ensured a

⁸¹ E. Burton-J. Mark-S. Marung, *Development*, in *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonization*, eds. J. Mark-P. Betts, London: Oxford University Press, 2022, p. 97.

⁸² M. Trecker, *The ‘Grapes of Cooperation’? Bulgarian and East German Plans to Build a Syrian Cement Industry from Scratch*, in *Between East and South: Spaces of Interaction in the Globalizing Economy of the Cold War*, eds. A. Calori-A.-K. Hartmetz-B. Kocsev-J. Mark-J. Zofka, Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019, p. 45.

balanced distribution of influence among foreign experts, thereby reinforcing its sovereignty and control over domestic affairs.

Conclusions

Set in the context of a “humanitarian aid race” forged between socialist actors to win the hearts and minds of the Algerian population and the FLN leadership, the article aimed at exposing discrepancies between the ideas and practice of socialist internationalism and solidarity in the Third World. The paper focused on two cases of intra-socialist competition in Algeria between 1959 and 1965, which exposed the continuities of these practices in the period of transition from anti-colonial fight to post-colonial state-building and the translation from humanitarian aid into development assistance.

The concept of internationalism and its attendant principle and practice of solidarity with anti-colonial movements and post-colonial governments was an integral component of socialist ideology which had split into a multitude of brands after the Second World War. Yet, internationalism remained a common denominator, shared among ideological competitors within the socialist world. Though the Soviet Union, its junior allies and non-aligned Yugoslavia adopted a similar language of internationalism – regularly incorporating terms such as “solidarity” and “cooperation” in their official rhetoric, the application of the concept of socialist internationalism and its principles in the Global South was obstructed under agendas prioritizing national interests.

The paper demonstrated that the practice of socialist internationalism was in collision with the official rhetoric proclaimed by the governments engaged in the affairs of the Global South. Instead of taking cooperative actions and working together for the sake of promoting the well-being and development of their Third World partners and beneficiaries as a part of the greater fight against capitalism and imperialism, socialist actors were emersed in highly competitive practices. As those examples taken from the perspective of Yugoslav actors showed, in the highly competitive landscape of international aid, socialist governments opted for individual actions rather than joining their forces to assist the anti-colonial liberation movement and post-colonial government in the reconstruction and state-building process.

In light of this precedent, Yugoslavia devised a national strategy in the Third World that acknowledged and capitalized on the significant diplomatic advantage of being the first to provide aid. This effort be-

gan with the care of fighters. Anticipating its socialist counterparts, in August 1962, Yugoslavia became the first non-Arab country to dispatch a complete team of health experts to Algeria. This proactive approach was similarly evident in other early Yugoslav initiatives in Algeria, such as constructing the first Algerian factories and establishing rehabilitation centres in Nassen and Douera. The strategy was not only to be first but also to showcase socialist medical expertise. Therefore, the dispatched teams included renowned medical professionals selected to highlight Yugoslav achievements in medicine and demonstrate the success of the socialist development model through the lens of public healthcare.

Simultaneously, Algeria strategically diversified its aid sources, fostering competition among socialist nations vying to enhance their political and economic standing in the Third World by dispatching humanitarian aid and medical staff. Among foreign actors, Eastern European socialist countries were regarded as direct competitors in the “scramble” for the Algerian healthcare landscape. Under similar concepts of socialist solidarity and internationalism, Yugoslavia’s ideological rivals in the Global South mobilized their healthcare workers. The determination to extend the quantity and geographic scope of aid was fuelled by potential interventions from other Eastern European nations, which were seen as a threat to the gradually growing Yugoslav influence among the Algerian population and its political elites. The strategic manoeuvring of Algerians led to a shift in Yugoslavia’s initial plans, transforming what was initially envisioned as short-term emergency relief aid during wartime into a systematic, long-term medical assistance campaign, despite financial challenges and a chronic shortage of medical personnel at home.

DORA TOT



EUROPEAN
COMMUNISTS AND
THE REDISCOVERY
OF THE THIRD
WORLD

African Lessons for a European Alliance. The Role of Africa in the Relations Between the Yugoslav and Italian Communists

Introductory remarks

In the period between 1945 and 1980, the Yugoslav and Italian communist parties had a very intense and dynamic relationship.¹ The problems of international communism were in the focus of their collaboration. Therefore, Africa was never *per se* a topic in the conversations between the Yugoslav and Italian communists. The two parties discussed political developments in the continent only in the broader contexts of their ideological outlooks. Africa was mentioned mostly in discussions on problems of socialism in the Third World. Also, it was rarely spoken about its sub-Saharan part, as both parties were from Mediterranean countries and much more interested in this region. However, it is a topic that should not be undervalued. The LCY-PCI discussions on Africa help us understand how the LCY and PCI viewed the world, the International communist movement and the Soviet leadership in it.

This paper touches upon these issues by examining, in detail, what have the two parties said about Africa in their direct encounters. However, it also aims to highlight a certain Yugoslav paternalism. Namely, the Yugoslavs had a global socialist vision that was different from the Soviet one. These differences were evident in discussions on numerous issues. However, they were very clear-cut when discussing Africa, as the following pages demonstrate. Moreover, the Yugoslav sources show that the LCY wished not only to defend their African policies. In fact, the Yugoslavs hoped to influence their Italian comrades. Belgrade wished to undermine the Soviet dogmas and propose

¹ For the Yugoslav party I will use the abbreviation LCY, League of Communists of Yugoslavia (the official party name after 1952). For the Italian party I will use the Italian acronym PCI.

a different outlook on Africa, and on socialism globally. The history of such Yugoslav intentions is the core issue of this paper.

In order to contextualise the African discussions of the LCY and PCI, a brief summarization of the history of party relations is needed. Prior to 1945, not much can be said about their collaboration. After that period, with the ending of World War II, both parties emerge as important actors in the International communist movement. Firstly, they become conflicting actors. While Togliatti advocates collaboration with the capitalist West, the radical Tito propagates an imminent clash and armed struggle against capitalism. The tension between two opposing worldviews within the movement was resolved in 1948, when Stalin condemned Tito, and the Yugoslavs became the pariah of the movement. Such a blow radically changed the Yugoslav party. Despite his earlier radicalism, Tito adopted a foreign policy that can be labelled as reformist, with its focus on the Third World and left non-communist actors. Ironically, Yugoslavia became close to Togliatti's moderate foreign policy views – the same ones that caused friction in the interparty relations earlier. When in 1955 he renewed relations with the Soviets, Tito instantly made moves toward an alliance with Togliatti. Hence, in 1956, a new phase of LCY-PCI relations began. This second phase of relations featured many turbulences and mutual differences. But if we were to summarize it – after 1956 the two parties were brought together by a shared ideal. Namely, it was the principle of strengthening the autonomy of national parties in the communist movement. Hence, their alliance was a dissenting one, aimed at undermining the Soviet hegemony. Its pinnacle began in 1975, when Enrico Berlinguer visited Belgrade, and lasted until Tito's death, in 1980. Unsurprisingly, those were the years of the superpower détente in Europe, crucial in fostering the LCY-PCI alliance.²

² This brief summarization is based on my previous research and numerous publications of other authors. Four monographs, mostly by Italian authors, have been exclusively dedicated to the relations between the Yugoslav and Italian communists – E. Terzuolo, *Red Adriatic. The Communist Parties of Italy and Yugoslavia*, Westview Press, Boulder (Colorado), 1985; M. Galeazzi, *Togliatti e Tito. Tra identità nazionale e internazionalismo*, Roma: Carocci, 2005; M. Zuccari, *Il dito sulla piaga. Togliatti e il Pci nella rottura fra Stalin e Tito 1944-1957*, Milano: Mursia, 2008; P. Karlsen, *Frontiera rossa. Il PCI, il confine orientale e il contesto internazionale 1941-1955*, Gorizia: Libreria Editrice Goriziana, 2010. Besides these monographs, Saša Mišić and myself have dedicated several articles to this topic: S. Mišić, *Yugoslav Communists and the*

Following the above-described chronological dynamic of the relations between the two parties, this paper is structured into three narrative/chronological sections. The first part covers the period from 1956 to mid-1960s. Namely those were the final years of Togliatti's rule in the party, a period marked by an optimism of the Yugoslavs. Belgrade believed it could influence the PCI's outlook on Africa, and emancipate the Italian comrades from dogmatic Soviet views. The second part covers the period from 1967 to mid-1970s. In this decade the Yugoslavs became less optimistic. Togliatti's death led to a more cautious approach of the new PCI leadership, which was not prone to question the Soviet hegemony and policies. In this decade Africa was mentioned exclusively in the context of the Mediterranean. Finally, the third and final part of the paper depicts the second half of the seventies. More precisely, the period between Berlinguer's 1975 visit to Belgrade and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late 1979. It was the period in which the Yugoslav and Italian communists came to have almost identical views on Africa.

Part I: Yugoslav attempts to influence the PCI. 1956 – mid-1960s

As the Yugoslavs renewed their party contacts with the PCI in 1956, one idea was crucial for Belgrade. Namely, the Yugoslavs were keen to promote their dissenting outlook on the future of global socialism. This Yugoslav vision can be summed up to the claim that the socialist forces were not present exclusively within the Soviet-led camp. On the

Communist Party of Italy, 1945-1956, in *Italy's Balkan Strategies (19th – 20th Century)*, edited by V. Pavlović, Belgrade: Balkanološki institut SANU, 2015; F. Tenca Montini-S. Mišić, *Comunisti di un altro tipo: le simpatie filo-jugoslave in Italia (1948-1962)*, in *Acta Histriae*, 25 (2017) 3, Koper 2017; S. Mišić, *Обнављање односа између Савеза комуниста Југославије и Комунистичке партије Италије 1955-1956. године* [*The Renewal of Relations Between the League of Communists of Yugoslavia and the Italian Communist Party 1955-1956*], «Токови историје», 2, 2013, Belgrade: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2013. However, several other publications also give crucial insight into the LCY-PCI collaboration, although that topic was not the focus of their research: S. Pons, *L'impossibile egemonia. L'URSS, il PCI e le origini della guerra fredda (1943-1948)*, Roma: Carocci, 1999; Id., *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, Torino: Einaudi, 2006 (ebook); M. Galeazzi, *Il Pci e il movimento dei paesi non allineati 1955-1975*, Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2011.

contrary, they believed that the most vibrant socialist forces, crucial for the future of the ideology, were elsewhere. Hence, during 1956, the this was propagated by the Yugoslavs in their conversations with the Italian communists. The rare mentions of Africa were always in this context, as a continent in which Yugoslavia was active in collaborating with new socialist forces and actors.

Such propositions influenced Togliatti. After his visit to Belgrade in May 1956, the leader of the Italian communists wrote to Moscow, approving Belgrade's role as a bridge to the non-communist left in the world.³ Togliatti also defended Yugoslav foreign policy in talks with his party comrades. He depicted it as a policy of an independent country, that was not a part of the socialist camp.⁴

When a PCI delegation led by Luigi Longo visited Yugoslavia in October 1956, the Yugoslav leaders once again extensively talked about their global socialist vision. The Yugoslav president Tito spoke about the «socialist world».⁵ This was a concept he opposed to the Soviet dogma of the socialist camp. He viewed it as a flexible and more democratic path towards communism, where actors do not pressure each other. Tito wished to demonstrate how this was not only a theoretical notion. In fact, he presented it as a foreign policy Yugoslavia had already adopted and conducts with success. In order to illustrate it, he particularly highlighted Yugoslav relations with several countries, including two African ones. Namely, Tito spoke about Yugoslav contacts and impact in India, Burma, Ethiopia and Egypt. He presented them as countries that were socialist but not communist, thus great examples of successful socialist actors outside of the socialist block. The Yugoslav president was convinced that Belgrade would not be able to accomplish its mission, and influence such regimes, if it were a part of the socialist camp. Namely, he underlined serious doubts regarding USSR's foreign policy in the afore-mentioned countries. Tito shared these sceptical positions, stating that the Soviets do not believe in the strength of other socialist forces. However, his monologue was

³ S. Mišić, *Обнављање односа*, p. 136. M. Zuccari, *Il dito sulla piaga*, pp. 339-341.

⁴ G. Pajetta, *Le crisi che ho vissuto. Budapest Praga Varsavia*, Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1982, pp. 48-49.

⁵ It is worth noting that in a parliamentary debate on June 13th, 1956, just a month after his visit to Belgrade, Togliatti used that same expression while talking about Nehru and Sukarno and their inclination towards socialism – M. Galeazzi, *Togliatti e Tito*, p. 143.

ended with a conciliatory remark, as he concluded that Yugoslavia could help Moscow more by acting independently, than as a part of the camp.⁶

In his response Luigi Longo echoed Togliatti's views. He gave support to the Yugoslav foreign policy and its pillaring idea – the desire to remain outside of the socialist camp. For Longo it was important that the Yugoslav foreign policy was socialist in its essence, and its form was irrelevant.⁷

However, the talks with the second man of the LCY, Edvard Kardelj, showed that the Italian guests were not fully on board with the Yugoslav ideas. Kardelj focused on the Soviet thesis about “the capitalist surrounding of socialist states”. In his view, this was an obsolete notion due to significant changes within the capitalist countries. Primarily the rising state intervention in economy and the growth of socialist forces in capitalist countries. Still, the Slovene leader gave validity to certain PCI ideas opposite to his views. For instance, the Italians spoke about the priority of collaboration between communist parties and criticized social-democracy. Although validating such views, Kardelj still advocated collaborating with non-communist left actors. He underlined that such collaboration had to be on an equal basis, without imposing ideological models. As for the socialist camp, the Slovene approved this form of organizing socialist states only in a situation when socialism was under attack. However, according to Kardelj, the current global situation was completely different. Socialism was becoming stronger, and the socialist camp was a hegemonic factor. The camp tended to impose its solution on other socialist forces, thus scaring them away. Still, Kardelj had not managed to be convincing enough. The Italian guests remained firm in their beliefs, and spoke more about the relations between communist parties, and the bilateral form of those relations.⁸

Although the interparty relations deteriorated, due to the new clash

⁶ Arhiv Jugoslavije (Archives of Yugoslavia, AJ), 507/IX – 48/I-145, Bilješka o razgovorima sa članovima delegacije Komunističke Partije Italije na prijemu kod druga Tita [Note about the conversations with the delegation of the Italian Communist Party during the reception with comrade Tito].

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-145, Zabeleška sa razgovora delegacije CK KP Italije i CK SKJ 14-X-1956 [Note about the conversations between the delegations of the CC PCI and the CC LCY October 14th 1956].

between Belgrade and Moscow, occasional meetings occurred. One of them, in November 1960, was very important. Namely, Velio Spano visited Belgrade, hinting a swift improvement in the LCY-PCI relations. Besides interparty relations, Spano spent much time in talking about Africa. Veljko Vlahović was criticizing the Egyptian communist party and its defiance to Nasser, while Velio Spano clearly expressed his nonagreement. This conversation was generic – Belgrade stressed out that the bearers of socialism in Third World countries will not be the local communist parties. The Italian communists, on the other hand, insisted on the potential role of those parties. For Yugoslavia, the main hope for socialism in Asia and Africa were the new popular leaders. Those leaders were not communist but left leaning and more suitable for the local non-European context. Despite these differences, the Yugoslavs still had certain positive impressions. At the end of the visit, Spano had a gift for the hosts – his recently published book on Africa. Vlahović was pleasantly surprised by its content. The ideas presented in the manuscript were, in fact, very similar to Yugoslav perceptions of the continent. During the talks Spano even admitted that he would have presented such views more explicitly. However, the party censured the parts where he expressed pessimism about the potential of local communists and favoured other left movements.⁹

The new interparty rapprochement culminated in the final meeting between Togliatti and Tito, in 1964. It was Tito's idea that Togliatti should visit Yugoslavia once again. On November 25, 1962, the Yugoslav president wrote a letter to the PCI leader, urging him to meet and discuss crucial international issues. In the letter Tito particularly highlighted issues of socialism in Africa and Asia. As previously, he was adamant. The development of socialism in the new and emerging nations must be helped, and in doing so no one should impose their own revolutionary models.¹⁰

Mostly due to the 1963 Italian national elections, it took more than a year to finalise Tito's initiative. Once it was settled to have Togliatti visit Yugoslavia in January 1964, an interesting report was written in Belgrade. It explicitly underlined PCI's Third World policy as one of the weakest ideological points of the Italian party. From Belgrade's perspective, the PCI was too dogmatic in analysing the complex re-

⁹ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-234; M. Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il movimento dei paesi non allineati*, p. 60.

¹⁰ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-240.

alities of these continents, just like other communist parties. The Yugoslavs believed that their Italian comrades lacked in understanding non-European realities, thus stubbornly believing that help should be given to local communists, not the socialists-leaning nationalists. However, the report also noted that some PCI officials showed interest for Yugoslav policies. Due to such willingness to learn, and the growing activity of the PCI in Africa (for instance, contacts with the government in Algeria), the report ended on a positive note. Namely, it was concluded that the PCI has the potential to change its flawed perception of non-European realities.¹¹

The Yugoslav optimism that the PCI can be influenced was largely based on contacts with Togliatti. The Yugoslavs strongly believed that the party leader was more “progressive” than the rest of his organization. One such encounter happened on October 23, 1963, when Togliatti met with the Yugoslav ambassador Vejvoda. During the conversation, the PCI leader was criticizing Third World policies of the USSR and China. He stated that they have flawed strategies in opposing colonialism, based on bureaucratic information. Thus, he explained, the PCI was trying to enact a different strategy. Such was their policy in Algeria, where the PCI contacted Ben Bella and tried to include the Algerian communists in the popular struggle. As for Yugoslavia, Togliatti expressed his great respect for Tito’s expertise on the subject. Therefore, he looked forward to discussing these topics with Tito soon.¹²

When in January 1964 Togliatti arrived in Belgrade, he saw a country that had changed much since he last visited it. Yugoslavia’s new prestige was founded on the conference of Non-Aligned countries, held in Belgrade in 1961. Tito’s foreign policy in the Third World, his contacts and impact in the newly liberated countries, became Yugoslavia’s new international identity. As the PCI was interested in developing its Third World policy,¹³ meeting Tito was very important for the Italian party.

¹¹ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-259, 260.

¹² AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-266. Togliatti’s visit to Belgrade was followed by visits of Longo to Algeria and Ingrao to Cuba. Hence, they were all part of PCI’s intention to gather more information and be more active in the Third World. M. Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il movimento dei paesi non allineati*, pp. 90-100.

¹³ The PCI wished to accomplish two goals with its Third World policy. The first one was to bypass the isolation within the international communist movement. The

During the conversations in Belgrade Tito talked extensively about the situation in the Third World, with a particular focus was on the Arab countries.¹⁴ Namely, the Yugoslav president gave his perspective on the political developments in these countries, but also gave advice to Togliatti on how to approach the newly liberated countries and their regimes. The essence of Tito's lengthy monologues can be summed up in a few key points.

Tito highlighted that, although liberated and independent, the new nations and countries in the Third World were still treated as colonies, both economically and politically. All problems they were facing derived from this inequality. Hence, his advice was that someone who wants to approach them – must look at them as equals. Tito bragged that Yugoslavia achieved success in the Third World by following this simple principle. As he put it, he always treated the leaders of these countries with respect and got the same in return. But according to him, the problem with other communist parties was that they do not follow the same approach. In order to illustrate his claim, Tito underlined how, surprisingly, no socialist leader ever visited South America prior to him. The Yugoslav president found dogmatism to be the crucial problem. In his view, the socialist bloc understood the Third World in terms of classical Marxism. Their worldview was limited to applying models of European revolutionary struggle, without questioning their suitability in non-European scenarios. Hence, their support went to local communist parties, which Tito labelled as sectarian groups of intellectuals detached from local realities. His sympathies lied with other left-wing movements in those countries. He stated that although not Marxist in a classical sense, such movements applied left ideas but had a better understanding of the local political, social and economic conditions. Tito admitted they face problems and failures, but still viewed them as actors that were leading their countries towards socialism, something the local communist parties could never achieve. Therefore, Yugoslavia shifted its attention and support to such liberation movements and anticolonial leaders. Tito used an Af-

second one was to offer an alternative Mediterranean foreign policy, different than the one pursued by the Italian government, as this was a region of vital national interest. M. Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il movimento dei paesi non allineati*.

¹⁴ Reports on those conversations: AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-266; Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Archivio del Partito Comunista Italiano (APCI), Esteri, MF 0520, p. 1402-1420.

rican example, of Nasser and his regime, to prove his point. Although Nasser's repression against the communists was sometimes brutal, Tito claimed that the Egyptian leader was the future of socialism in the Arab world, not the sectarian communist parties in Egypt and Syria.¹⁵ In essence, Tito's advice was twofold, with a pragmatic and ideological lesson. The pragmatic advice was to treat the local leaders as equals and understand their problems with neocolonialism. The ideological notion was that the local communists are useless, while other left movements were building their nations' path to socialism.

When Tito and Togliatti discussed China, their common enemy in the communist movement,¹⁶ the Yugoslav president once again returned to his Third World policies. Namely, his critique of Beijing was focused on the Chinese wish to dominate Asia and Africa. Tito not only viewed this as the main cause of the Sino-Soviet clash, but also believed that the Chinese were undermining the global struggle for socialism with their radical approach. Once again Tito focused on one country, his ally, to illustrate his point. This time it was India. The example of Nehru was crucial for Tito. While Nehru was attacked by the Chinese, Tito strongly believed that he was the main anti-reactionary force in India, the only political actor who can lead this country to socialism. Therefore, he had Yugoslav support.¹⁷ The morale of Tito's story was that Yugoslavia was strengthening socialism globally with

¹⁵ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-266. Tito was right in asserting that the USSR does not have a profound understanding of the Third World, and that it acted dogmatically in that part of the world. The fact that Moscow had no experts on Africa is quite telling in this regard – S. Savranskaya-W. Taubman, *Soviet foreign policy, 1962-1975*, in *The Cambridge History of Cold War*, Volume II: *Crises and Détente*, edited by M. Leffler-O. A. Westad, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 151. However, Moscow learned from its mistakes, and soon followed the Yugoslav path. From the mid-sixties, the USSR became more involved with the nationalistic regimes, like the one of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt – S. Pons, *The Global Revolution. A History of International Communism 1917-1991*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 252-253.

¹⁶ Both parties were heavily criticized by Beijing. China viewed the LCY and PCI as revisionists, and they, in turn, strongly opposed the Chinese radicalism. Therefore, Aldo Agosti views China as the main topic of the conversations between Tito and Togliatti. A. Agosti, *Togliatti. A Biography*, London-New York: I. B. Tauris, 2008, p. 287.

¹⁷ The example of India clearly shows the differences between Belgrade and Beijing. For Mao, helping India and similar non-socialist countries was frustrating and he strongly condemned other socialist countries for doing so. O.A. Westad, *The Global*

its flexible approach, while China was only causing damage with its radicalism.¹⁸

Despite Yugoslav optimism that PCI's Third World policies can be impacted, this topic faded away in the aftermath of Togliatti's visit. The dramatic conflict between Moscow and Beijing was shaking the foundation of international communism, thus it became the dominant issue in the LCY-PCI relations.¹⁹ Still, Third World and Africa continued to be occasionally discussed. For instance, in July 1964, when the Yugoslav diplomat Anton Vratuša's visited Rome on his return from Africa. He spoke with several Italian politicians about Africa, including Luigi Longo. Longo briefly noted that the PCI should be more active in the continent and had several questions for the Yugoslav. He wanted to know more about the ideological nature of the political movements in Africa (i.e. he asked «how much socialist» they are) and about the scope of Chinese influence in Africa. Talking about PCI's policies in the southern Mediterranean, Longo expressed views similar to the Yugoslav ones. Namely, he stated that the communist parties in the region were sectarian, thus destined to be isolated. Like Togliatti earlier, he spoke about Algeria and PCI's attempts to influence the Algerian communists to join the liberation movement.²⁰

This conversation left a strong impression on the Yugoslavs. Thus, a Yugoslav report on the PCI from November 1964 noted and praised the growing interest of the Italian communists for the Third World. In general, the report was very positive, viewing the PCI as closer to the LCY than any other communist party.²¹ Such impressions were strengthened in December 1964, during conversations between Gian Carlo Pajetta and Tito. Pajetta led the PCI delegation to the LCY congress and met with the Yugoslav president. As Tito dedicated a significant part of his speech to non-alignment, Pajetta underlined that his party looked favourably on the Yugoslav involvement in the Third World. He even stated that the PCI was also trying to be more active in this regard, primarily in Egypt and Algeria. Naturally, Tito supported such PCI's intentions. He even stated that guiding the non-engaged

Cold War. Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 70.

¹⁸ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-266.

¹⁹ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-268.

²⁰ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-279.

²¹ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-288.

countries towards socialism should be the primary aim of the communist movement. While conversations with Tito paint an idyllic picture, Pajetta's talks with Kardelj were more sincere and illustrate certain differences. Namely, Pajetta asked Kardelj why Yugoslavia maintains relations with countries that do not have progressive regimes. This was an implicit but clear criticism of the Yugoslav policy of broad ideological collaboration with liberation movements. Kardelj responded that Yugoslavia does so in order to "emancipate" such regimes. He particularly highlighted Egypt (United Arab Republic), in his view an example of a successful "emancipation". Still, Kardelj wanted to prove that Yugoslavia has a sound socialist foreign policy and cannot collaborate with any regime. Hence, he stated that when a regime could not be emancipated Yugoslavia helped the progressive opposition. In illustrating this point, he took the examples of two African countries, Mali and Morocco.²²

During 1965 and 1966 the Yugoslavs continued to be optimistic. They believed that PCI's Third World policies were being influenced, as various party officials asked for Yugoslav advice. Vukoje Bulatović, the interparty liaison stationed in Rome, wrote several reports advocating a more concerned effort in this regard. However, despite Belgrade's optimism, it was evident that 1965 and 1966 were the years in which this topic was withering away from interparty conversations.²³ This can be partly attributed to a less active foreign policy of the PCI in the aftermath of Togliatti's death. More important was the upcoming European communist conference, crucial foreign policy preoccupation of the party. The PCI was trying to convince the Yugoslavs to participate in this summit, wishing to act together in an alliance aimed at strengthening the autonomy of the national communist parties.

One of the most important meetings held with this intention was in January 1967, when Longo visited Tito on the Brijuni Islands in the northern Adriatic. Although the meeting was rather cordial, Longo's mission was not successful. The Yugoslav leader showed no interest in participating at a multilateral communist summit. However, the positions Tito expressed deserve to be highlighted here. They not only reflect Yugoslav Third World policies. In fact, Tito's monologues depict the core of Yugoslav criticism of Soviet activity in the Third World,

²² AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-292.

²³ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-298; 305; 316; 317; 352; 364.

and demonstrate how Yugoslavia had not ceased with attempts to influence the PCI in this regard.

With similar points like in the 1956 conversations, Tito talked extensively about his global socialist vision. He started by explaining how it would benefit no one if Yugoslavia was to join the socialist camp. In his view, Yugoslavia was more useful to the camp with its autonomous activity in the Third World, as distrust of both blocs was harboured by most newly liberated countries in Asia and Africa. However, it was clear that Tito shared this distrust of the Soviets. He underlined how it was crucial not to evaluate are these newly liberated countries socialist or not, but to let them grow autonomously. Criticizing the Soviets for the lack of courage to do so and respect their independence, Tito even stated that this made the USSR look a lot like the USA. In short, the Yugoslav president viewed the Soviet activity in the Third World as limited to giving funds but lacking in active political help against the United States. In correlation to that, the communist parties of the Third World were also a target of Tito's criticism. He emphasized their inability to find a viable political line, thus the liberation movement progressed without them.²⁴

Part II: Yugoslav disillusionment and different Mediterranean strategies. 1967-1975

In 1967 an important shift occurred in LCY-PCI discussions on Africa. Namely, mentions of sub-Saharan Africa evaporated from their debates. Their focus was solely on the Mediterranean part of the continent. Such a shift was caused by two factors. Firstly, both parties were ardent participators in various initiatives to organize Mediterranean summits. In May 1967 Carlo Galuzzi visited Yugoslavia with the aim to promote the first initiative of that kind. He proposed convoking a Mediterranean conference of communist parties and "progressive" regimes (like the ones in Algeria and UAR).²⁵ Secondly, the Six-Day war imposed the need to discuss Middle Eastern issues. As a staunchly pro-Arab country, Yugoslavia closely followed the PCI's views on the Middle East in the following years.

One of the first LCY-PCI conversations focused on the Middle

²⁴ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-372.

²⁵ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-376.

East was in June 1967. Bulatović talked with Napolitano, Galuzzi and Boffa. The PCI officials focused on the Yugoslav-Soviet harmony and collaboration on this topic, viewing it as a strongly positive factor.²⁶ The Italians believed that it was, to a certain extent, their credit that the Yugoslavs and Soviets had a fruitful collaboration. Namely, at the European communist conference in Karlovy Vary they managed to persuade others not to condemn the absent communist parties. Hence, as the LCY refused to participate but was not criticized, this enabled Belgrade and Moscow to collaborate. Echoing earlier ideological distrust towards the nationalist leaderships of Arab countries, the PCI representatives asked the Yugoslavs to do their best to “move” the Arabs more to the left. In their vision of a united socialist front, which would support the Arab countries and influence them to adopt socialist policies, the only dissenting puzzle was in Bucharest. Namely, Napolitano and others criticized Romania for assuming a neutral position regarding the Middle Eastern conflict.²⁷

In his subsequent reports on the PCI’s reactions to the war, Bulatović wrote furtherly about the topics that were present in this conversation. He depicted the party’s position as pro-Arab, but with certain reservations. Namely, he underlined how the PCI insisted that the existence of the state of Israel must be guaranteed, that reactionary elements within Arab politics must be removed, and that the communist movement should influence the Arabs in this direction. Bulatović strongly disliked such views. In his view, it was a clear sign of distrust towards the liberation movements.²⁸

In August 1967 Longo visited Yugoslavia once again. As the European communist conference passed, the topics of discussion were

²⁶ Due to the conflict in the Middle East and shared pro-Arab positions, Belgrade got engaged in a close collaboration with Moscow. This process, unseen after 1948, was stopped only in 1968, when the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia separated the two parties and states once again. D. Bogetić-A. Životić, *Jugoslavija i arapsko-izraelski rat 1967* [*Yugoslavia and the Arab-Israeli War of 1967*], Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2010. The Six-Day war reshaped the Soviet policy in the region. It provoked a stronger pro-Arab policy of the USSR, as the Arab countries began to be perceived as an ideological ally against imperialism, embodied in Israel – E. di Nolfo, *The Cold War and the transformation of the Mediterranean, 1960-1975*, in *The Cambridge History of Cold War*, Volume II, pp. 245-246.

²⁷ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-389.

²⁸ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-389.

different than in January. Namely, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern issues came to the fore. Tito recently visited UAR, Syria and Iraq, hence the first topic of conversation were his impressions from the Middle East. The Yugoslav president spoke about his insistence on a peaceful and political solution which would include Israel's right to exist, but would not be a capitulation of the Arabs (i.e. Tito fully supported the request for Israel's retreat to the pre-war borders).²⁹ He viewed Nasser as the most rational of all the leaders he met, hence advocated helping UAR, a country on the front line of anti-imperialist struggle. As for the communist movement and its duty to help the Arab countries, Tito was opposed to convoking a global communist conference. In his view, such a summit would only isolate the movement, thus undermining the Arab cause. Longo focused more on the Italian context. He emphasized the pro-Arab positions of Fanfani and of the Catholic Church. Tito replied that «this situation with Fanfani» should be used. However, Longo also spoke about the pro-Israel side of the Italian political spectre. He underlined Nenni and Saragat as the most prominent exponents of such positions. In his view, both were instruments of US influence in the country, particularly important to Washington due to the upcoming renewal of the Atlantic pact.³⁰

In the next part of the conversation Longo and Tito discussed how the crisis in the Middle East could lead to a potential instability in Italy. According to the PCI leader, the crisis made Italy more important to Washington than previously. Thus, he left open the possibility of a "Greek scenario".³¹ In light of such a possibility, PCI's crucial goals were: to support the Arab countries; pressure the government to condemn Greece; preserve the territorial integrity and independence within NATO (notwithstanding PCI's opposition to membership in the alliance). Tito agreed that the political developments in Greece and Italy were intertwined with the crisis in the Middle East. He even agreed that a military coup in Rome was possible, if Washington allows it. In his view, an anti-Arab offensive of the US would endanger everyone in the region, Yugoslavia included. Hence, he underlined

²⁹ More about the visit in – A. Životić, *Jugoslavija i Bliski Istok u Hladnom ratu* [*Yugoslavia and the Middle East in the Cold War*], in *Jugoslavija u Hladnom ratu* [*Yugoslavia in the Cold War*], edited by A. Životić et al., Belgrade: INIS, 2010, pp. 52-53.

³⁰ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-383.

³¹ I.e. the military coup that happened in Greece in April of 1967.

that it was crucial to prevent Israel to succeed in its aggression, as the best way to stop the spreading of regional instability.³²

Only after thoroughly discussing the burning crisis in the Middle East, Longo and Tito moved on to other topics. One of them was an initiative for a Mediterranean conference. Longo fully supported the Yugoslav proposition of an ideologically broad Mediterranean conference. He spoke how Nasser also supported it, and how the Italian socialists and Catholics also showed interest in participating. His only request was that the Yugoslavs put up a formal initiative soon.³³ Longo then shifted the conversation to topics of international communism, which eventually led to discussing Yugoslav Third World policy. Namely, Mijalko Todorović, a leading Serbian communist, underlined how Yugoslavia does not want its Third World activity to be merely tolerated. They want the movement to accept it, as it must not be isolated from the broader democratic and progressive masses in the world. However, the Yugoslavs were not optimistic, as they believed that the USSR was organizing a global communist conference not to resolve problems, but to assert its leading role in the movement.³⁴

The initiative for a Mediterranean conference resurfaced in November 1967. Carlo Galuzzi met with several Yugoslav officials and the two parties seemed to be in sync on this issue. The seeming harmony is evident in Galuzzi's statement that the Yugoslavs «are the only ones we trust in this peculiar chaos».³⁵ However, this soon proved to be a divisive issue. The Yugoslavs insisted on having an open and public debate about the conference, while the Italians hesitated to speak publicly about the initiative.³⁶ Essentially, the two parties had opposing visions. The LCY wanted a broader conference, with ideologically diverse actors. The PCI aimed to propose a shorter list of participants, with less ideological diversity. The differences erupted at a meeting with Galuzzi, on January 8, 1968. The Yugoslavs believed that, with PCI's support, the French communists were doing the bidding of Mos-

³² AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-383.

³³ A Yugoslav report on the visit displays how Belgrade suspected that the PCI was acting as a Soviet proxy in the Mediterranean. Namely, the report states a belief that the communist movement entrusted the PCI with a special role in the Mediterranean. AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-383.

³⁴ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-383.

³⁵ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-387.

³⁶ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-393.

cow. Namely, the French had several conditions for their participation: that Gaullists must not be present; that the idea of non-alignment should not be propagated too much; and that the conference should be focused on the current political situation in the Mediterranean. Clearly, the crucial differences revolved around the perception of the USSR. Yugoslavia insisted on the principle of overcoming of blocs and criticized the presence of both superpowers in the Mediterranean. The Italian communists, and their French comrades to an even larger extent, were not willing to foster such criticism of Moscow.³⁷

In March 1968 the PCI sent Ugo Pecchioli to Belgrade to furtherly discuss this topic. Still, he made no progress. The differences were most explicit when Pecchioli proposed to focus primarily on the current political situation and the anti-imperialist struggle. The Yugoslavs viewed this as a Soviet idea, opposing to such limitations of debate.³⁸ Hence, it was no surprise that at the conference itself the two parties expressed divergent views. The PCI could not agree with Yugoslav critiques of USSR's presence in the Mediterranean. In their view, as the Arabs themselves viewed the Soviet fleet as their protection, no further debate on the topic was meaningful. The Yugoslavs, in turn, insisted that they do not equate the USSR and USA, reiterating how they wanted a broader and more ideologically diverse summit.³⁹

The Soviet invasion in Czechoslovakia radically changed the dynamics of LCY-PCI relations. The two parties were brought together by a shared opposition to the invasion. One of the earliest interparty contacts after the intervention happened on September 7, 1968. Galuzzi met with several Yugoslav officials, who linked the Soviet actions in Europe to the Third World and Africa. For them, the main morale of the invasion was that there was no room for French, Italian,

³⁷ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-394. Marco Galeazzi elaborately demonstrates how the Yugoslav criticism of both Soviet and US presence in the Mediterranean was the main divisive issue between the PCI and Belgrade. In a party meeting in February 1968 Berlinguer even stated that the PCI should be dedicated to «combating the Yugoslav positions» on this issue. Hence, the PCI was a defender of the Soviet military presence in the Mediterranean. Reflecting on the party's foreign policy in 1967, Galeazzi concluded that «the PCI seemed to be retreating back to defensive positions, thus risking being brought back to the proletarian internationalism of 1957-1960» – M. Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il movimento dei paesi non allineati*, pp. 173-185.

³⁸ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-403.

³⁹ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-410.

Asian or African communists.⁴⁰ Hence, Belgrade was going to focus on non-alignment. While in the prior years Belgrade tried to persuade its Third World partners that the USSR is a peaceful force, Moscow will not have a special position in the Yugoslav foreign policy anymore.⁴¹

Despite the rising affinities, the Yugoslavs were aware that the PCI viewed the Third World differently than them. According to a Yugoslav report from January 1969, the PCI saw non-alignment only as a foreign policy manoeuvre. Hence, the Italian communists supported the NAM solely when its actions were not irritating Moscow.⁴² It was a correct assessment, as evidenced in Giorgio Napolitano's internal report on the Yugoslav party congress held in March 1969. Napolitano criticized the Yugoslav elevation of non-alignment and disrespect for the socialist bloc. He underlined how Tito used «an ambiguous formula of *forces of imperialism and hegemony*». Obviously, Napolitano saw this statement as an implicit equalization of socialist and imperialist bloc and could not agree with it.⁴³

Hence it is no surprise that Africa and the Mediterranean were neglected during the interparty discussions in the following months. The only exception was in May 1969, when Vladimir Bakarić, a leading Croatian communist, visited the Gramsci Institute. In a conversation with Berlinguer, Bakarić returned to the issue of the Soviet presence in the Mediterranean. He explained how, despite welcoming their presence during the war in the Middle East, the Yugoslavs were adamant that the USSR must leave the region.⁴⁴ Due to such views, the PCI decided not to invite the LCY to participate in a meeting held in Palermo

⁴⁰ This statement needs to be analysed further, as it illustrates the Yugoslav world-view after the Soviet intervention. Namely, it shows how the Yugoslavs believed that the invasion revealed the crux of Soviet policy – preserving its hegemony within the socialist bloc. Based on that assumption, Yugoslavia expected that Moscow would not fight for the interests of socialism outside of the socialist camp. This perception revolved around a belief that there was an implicit agreement between Washington and Moscow. The deal would allow Moscow to use force within its sphere of influence, but at the price of respecting Washington's interests in the US sphere of influence. In such a scenario every party outside of the socialist camp, like the Yugoslav and Italian one, or socialist forces in Africa and Asia, would be sacrificed by Moscow.

⁴¹ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-416. APCI, Esteri, MF 0552, p. 1948-1954.

⁴² AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-425.

⁴³ APCI, Esteri, MF 0308, p. 1419-1425.

⁴⁴ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-436.

in December 1969. The meeting included various Arab parties and communist, or communist-leaning, organizations from Western Europe. The Yugoslavs were frustrated by this move.⁴⁵ Upon discussing it with PCI officials, the LCY concluded that the Palermo meeting was a bloc-oriented initiative. They believed it was an initiative influenced by the USSR, and that the PCI wanted to strengthen its role in the Mediterranean by being the representative of the international communist movement in the region.⁴⁶

During 1970 Third World topics continued to be seldomly mentioned in interparty contacts. The Middle Eastern crisis was only briefly touched upon when Enrico Berlinguer met with Tito for the first time, in May 1970. The Yugoslav president stated that the region was in an alarming situation. Berlinguer, in turn, responded that the PCI views the situation identically like Yugoslavia. The party's main aim was to contact various Arab actors and to influence the Italian government in a pro-Arab direction. He added that, unlike 1967, the PCI was not alone in defending the Arab positions. As Longo was worried about the military aspect, i.e. the capability of Arab armies to overcome at one point, Berlinguer posed this dilemma to the Yugoslav president. Tito responded that time was not working for Israel, since the Soviets finally provided substantial military aid and Nasser was being patient.⁴⁷

Although Berlinguer talked about the harmony of views regarding the Middle East, the two parties remained diverse in their views on

⁴⁵ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-443.

⁴⁶ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-447. As mentioned previously, Yugoslav suspicions that the Italian communists acted as Moscow's proxy in the Mediterranean were not new. More broadly speaking, the Yugoslavs had an ambiguous perspective of PCI's Third World policies. On one hand, they have not denied that the party made progress on this topic. The PCI was even occasionally praised for this improvement. Still, the Yugoslav reports regularly underlined how the PCI had an essentially dogmatic perspective on the Third World, similar to the positions of the Eastern bloc. This Yugoslav criticism was not unfounded. As Marco Galeazzi notes, the PCI saw itself as a bridge between European communism and non-alignment. Hence, the limit and scope of PCI's activity in the Mediterranean was profoundly shaped by Soviet interests. M. Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il movimento dei paesi non allineati*, p. 198. This comes as no surprise as it is noted that, in the late sixties, the bond with the USSR remained more important to the PCI than its activities in the Third World – S. Pons, *The Global Revolution*, p. 272.

⁴⁷ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-454.

the Third World. An example of that is a meeting from June 1970. Namely, while the Yugoslav representatives talked extensively about the preparations for the upcoming NAM Summit, the PCI officials, including Berlinguer, showed no interest. Pajetta even stated that non-alignment is one of the factors that undermine the resolution of the crisis in the Mediterranean.⁴⁸ Once the Summit was held, in Lusaka, the PCI press gave poor coverage to it. Not surprisingly, a Yugoslav report from November 1970 registered this issue, stating that the PCI was distancing itself from Yugoslavia and becoming disinterested in the principle of overcoming of the blocs.⁴⁹

In 1971 the situation slightly changed, as the topic of Mediterranean reappeared in interparty contacts. It was discussed on three different occasions: 1) when Miko Tripalo, a prominent Croatian communist, visited Italy in January 1971;⁵⁰ 2) when Pajetta visited Belgrade in February 1971;⁵¹ 3) when a PCI delegation visited Yugoslavia in June 1971.⁵² Pajetta and the PCI delegation spoke about their initiative to have a broad conference on «peace and justice in the Middle East», and about an Algerian initiative to have a meeting of Mediterranean communists and «progressive» Arab countries. This signalled a change in PCI's approach, which was now more inclusive towards the LCY.

Hence, it is safe to say that the PCI-LCY interactions on Third World topics were limited, and that the Yugoslavs had less hopes they could influence the outlook of Italian communists easily. However, it is interesting to note a monologue Veljko Vlahović had during an interparty meeting in June 1971. Namely, Vlahović underlined the national question in the Third World. In his opinion, the contemporary situation in non-European countries posed the need to revisit

⁴⁸ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-456.

⁴⁹ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-464.

⁵⁰ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-470. Like Bakarić previously, Tripalo criticized the USSR's military presence in the Mediterranean, although admitting that it protected the Arabs. Thus, he underlined, Belgrade tolerated it, despite Moscow limiting the Yugoslav influence in Cairo. Tripalo also criticized the Soviets for ignoring non-alignment, similarly to the way in which the United States did. Drawing on this analogy he concluded that the Soviets, when it comes to main global issues, were solely interested in having an inter-bloc agreement.

⁵¹ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-474.

⁵² AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-480.

and redefine the “classic” communist views on nationalism. The main incentive to do so, in his opinion, was an unprecedented entrance of masses in politics and the socialist aspirations of new national states in the world.⁵³

Two Yugoslav reports written in early 1972 furtherly demonstrate Belgrade’s pessimism regarding PCI’s Third World policies. The Yugoslavs were particularly disappointed by the party’s reluctance to question and overcome the bloc division of the world.⁵⁴ Hence, non-European topics have not been mentioned in interparty conversations prior to December 1972. Only then a meeting was held in Belgrade with the aim of discussing Mediterranean affairs. The two delegations spoke about several initiatives for multilateral regional meetings. The PCI was inclusive towards the LCY, but made it clear that they do not wish to provoke the Soviets. The Yugoslavs offered their perspective, focusing on the need to create regional unity, expel foreign interests from the region and become a subject of international affairs. The Italians agreed with those views, but focused more on the negative influence of American imperialism. Their fear was that after the failure in Vietnam the US could shift its focus on the Mediterranean. Although rhetorically agreeing with the Yugoslav principles of overcoming of the blocs and expelling foreign troops out of the region, the Italian communists made two substantial remarks. Firstly, Pajetta defended the presence of the Soviet fleet in the Mediterranean, as support to the Arabs. Secondly, although not questioning the need to overcome the global bloc division, he underlined that this should be done on anti-imperialist grounds.⁵⁵

The following year, 1973, brought no changes. African topics were touched upon rarely, and only in the Mediterranean context. More precisely, during 1973 there was only one meeting, in October, where African issues were discussed. Gian Carlo Pajetta and Rodolfo Mechini visited Belgrade and spoke with an LCY delegation about the new crisis in the Middle East, the Yom Kippur War. The LCY was represented by its new rising star, Stane Dolanc, a Slovene communist who gave Belgrade’s perspective on the war. He expressed the concern that Washington could trigger a broader conflict with Moscow. However, unusually for the Yugoslavs who previously reproached the PCI for

⁵³ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-480.

⁵⁴ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-490; AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-506.

⁵⁵ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-505.

criticizing Arab policies, Dolanc also had some criticism for the Arab countries. He stated that the Arabs need to «evolve politically» and resolve this issue in a constructive manner, not with the hitherto used policy of «throwing Israel into the sea».⁵⁶

The Yugoslav perception of PCI's Third World policy started to be more positive during 1974.⁵⁷ A Yugoslav report from May notes not only the wish to strengthen ties with the PCI, but to build this rapprochement on topics of Non-Alignment, Europe and the Mediterranean.⁵⁸ However, this optimism was not brought into fruition swiftly, as during 1974 the two parties focused exclusively on another issue. Namely, a European communist conference was in the making, and for the first time after 1948 Yugoslavia was seriously interested in participating at a multilateral communist meeting. A stronger collaboration on Third World topics materialized only in 1975. In February Pajetta discussed with the Yugoslav ambassador in Rome the idea to summon a Mediterranean conference, underlining how their primary partners in this endeavour will be Algeria and Yugoslavia.⁵⁹ Hence, a Yugoslav report from March 1975 echoed the Yugoslav perceptions of a substantial change in PCI's Third World policy. It was a positive report, underlining how the PCI was giving bigger attention to this issue. Still, there were certain critiques. One regarded Berlinguer's use of the term Fourth World, and the other regarded rare mentions of non-alignment in PCI's discourse.⁶⁰

Part III: A harmonization of views. 1975-1980

On March 29, 1975, Berlinguer visited Belgrade and met with Tito. This meeting proved to be one of the most important events, if not the most important one, in the history of LCY-PCI relations. The two leaders and parties became closer than ever before, initiating an era that was the historical pinnacle of their collaboration.

⁵⁶ APCI, Esteri, MF 046, p. 1231-1234.

⁵⁷ Sergio Segre's visit to Yugoslavia in February 1974 persuaded the Yugoslavs that the PCI was undergoing a substantial process of change. Namely, Segre spoke in detail about the stronger PCI activity in the Middle East. APCI, Esteri, MF 046, pp. 249-253.

⁵⁸ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-517.

⁵⁹ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-527.

⁶⁰ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-530.

As for African topics, they were mentioned in two contexts. Firstly, a large part of the conversations was dedicated to the situation in the Middle East. Namely, the Yugoslav president gave his detailed analysis of the issue. In short, he expressed his scepticism that the US would change their approach to the region, stated his belief that Sadat was not fully pro-American and underlined that strengthening the unity of Arabs was the main goal of Yugoslav foreign policy. Tito also mentioned how he believes in peace and collaboration between Israel and the Arabs, but on the precondition that Israel retreats from the occupied territories and accepts the forming of a Palestinian state.⁶¹

Secondly, Africa was mentioned in discussions on the future of the communist movement. It was the crucial moment of the conversation, as Berlinguer expressed views which were new and surprising for the Yugoslavs. In line with the policies Yugoslavia propagated to the PCI since 1956, Berlinguer criticized the communist movement for lack of ideological capability and flexibility. He believed that there was a strong expansion of revolutionary processes in the world and turmoil within the non-communist left in the West, which communists failed to understand and use to their advantage. He also criticized the monolithic tendencies and bloc mentality of global communism. Hence, the PCI decided to focus on collaborating with other political forces. Tito was thrilled to hear that, underlining that his party has been on the same path for a long time. Agreeing with Berlinguer that the movement failed to capitalize on certain global phenomena, Tito focused once more on the Third World and the Yugoslav alternative vision for socialism. He underlined how Yugoslavia, unlike other socialist states, did a lot to spread socialist ideas outside of Europe. In illustrating this point, he mentioned two African countries, Algeria and Egypt, reiterating that in both countries local communist parties were useless.⁶²

Although this was a paramount conversation, and the similarity of views between the two parties was on the rise, their Third World policies continued to differ. For instance, in May 1975, the Yugoslavs analysed the positions of the two parties on the upcoming European communist conference. Despite the general harmony between the two

⁶¹ AJ, KPR (837), I-3-a/44-59, Zabeleška o razgovoru Predsednika SKJ Josipa Broza Tita sa generalnim sekretarom KP Italije E. Berlinguerom, 29. marta 1975. godine u Beogradu [Note on the conversation between the President of the LCY Josip Broz Tito and the general secretary of the Italian CP E. Berlinguer, March 29th 1975 in Belgrade].

⁶² *Ibid.*

party, certain minor differences were noted. Namely, in their policy proposals for the conference, the Italian communists failed to mention non-alignment and focused on the political and military aspect of the détente. The Yugoslavs, in turn, not only gave bigger importance to non-alignment, but also focused more on the economic aspect of the détente and believed that more attention should be given to the issue of underdeveloped countries.⁶³ In LCY's own policy proposals emphasis was put on problems of the Third World, peace, détente, international collaboration, overcoming of the blocs⁶⁴ and the anticolonial struggle. Yugoslavs were adamant that European economic problems must not be solved on the extent of the European working class and of the Third World. While the French communists strongly criticized Yugoslav views,⁶⁵ the Soviets agreed that the contribution of the liberation movements and of non-aligned countries should be included in the conference document.⁶⁶

Despite these differences, the PCI became more interested in Yugoslav non-aligned foreign policy. Thus Augusto Livi, PCI's press correspondent from Belgrade, dedicated a lot of attention to non-alignment in his report sent to party headquarters in the final days of 1975. Livi described how the Yugoslavs often equated the two blocs, even claiming that the Non-Aligned movement is superior to the socialist bloc. He believed that the Yugoslavs were reiterating differences with other socialist country in order to preserve ties with non-aligned countries, whose importance rose due to the global oil crisis. Livi also underlined how Belgrade was aware that spreading non-alignment to other communist actors would cause a clash with Moscow. Hence, the Yugoslavs refused Romanian overtures in this direction. In Livi's view, Yugoslavia's goal was not only to evade a conflict with the USSR, but also to preserve its prestige in the Non-Aligned Movement. This prestige was based on Yugoslav ideological autonomy, hence introducing Roma-

⁶³ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-534. APCI, Esteri, MF 206, p. 412-415.

⁶⁴ At that point of the preparations, the LCY and the PCI stood out as parties that wanted the conference document to be solely a political analysis, with a strong emphasis on overcoming of the blocs. This demonstrated that the LCY-PCI alliance was growing and being consistent. S. Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, pp. 46-47.

⁶⁵ On May 17th, 1975, the PCF's newspaper *l'Humanité* criticized both the LCY and PCI, accusing the two parties of renouncing of the revolutionary perspective. B. Valli, *Gli eurocomunisti*, Milano: Bompiani, 1976, p. 44.

⁶⁶ APCI, Esteri, MF 206, 416-473.

nia into the movement would be seen by other members as imposing socialism.⁶⁷

The European communist conference, held in Berlin in June 1976, dominated the LCY-PCI relations in the first half of that year. African and Third World topics reappeared in inter-party contacts later, with Pajetta's visit to Belgrade in October 1976. The visit was dedicated to the Middle East and non-alignment. Both parties were pessimistic regarding the Middle East. Pajetta expressed his hope that Yugoslavia could do more in the region, but the hosts have not shared his optimism. As for non-alignment, the Yugoslavs analysed the recently held summit in Sri Lanka. In their view, it was a success, as two major threats to NAM were eliminated. Firstly, great powers aimed to cause a split within the movement, using certain divisive issues among the members. The Yugoslavs underlined how, with Tito's successful mediation, this was prevented. Secondly, certain members attempted to radicalize the movement and make it closer to the Soviets. Besides this, the Yugoslavs talked about NAM's economic policies, aimed at thwarting neo-colonialism, seeing this as the biggest strength of the movement. Pajetta, in turn, rhetorically praised NAM, but added that it is positive it has no bigger aspirations, as it would be difficult to directly intervene in a series of situations.⁶⁸

In January 1977 representatives of two parties readdressed the Middle East. This time certain differences regarding Mediterranean issues reappeared. The Yugoslavs declined the earlier PCI proposal to organize a multilateral Mediterranean meeting, once again finding problematic the list of participants proposed by the Italians. However, there was no clash between the two parties on this issue. Antonio Rubbi made no problem, stating that the initiative was not too important for the PCI anymore.⁶⁹ Six months later, a similar meeting with Rubbi was held, discussing Mediterranean issues. Both parties criticized Libya, PCI for its influence in Malta, and the Yugoslavs for including several external liberation movements at a regional conference. The Yugoslavs also criticized the Socialist International for undermining

⁶⁷ APCI, Esteri, MF 210, p. 779-782.

⁶⁸ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-550. Pajetta implied that the NAM should not become a military bloc, as such an orientation would make it face complex situations like the war in Lebanon.

⁶⁹ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-557.

the unity of non-aligned countries, a topic they furtherly mentioned in subsequent contacts.⁷⁰

Only a month later, in July 1977, Pajetta also visited Belgrade. The situation in Libya was discussed once more, as the Egypt-Libyan conflict erupted. Pajetta recently visited Tripoli, hence it was a topic of his personal interest. The PCI official criticized Sadat's role and urged the Yugoslavs to help in resolving this crisis. However, he mostly talked about his perception of Libya and described how the PCI changed its earlier stance on Gaddafi. Pajetta viewed Gaddafi as a mature and rational politician. He believed that the Libyan leader wanted to have a stronger contact with Western communist parties in order to counter-balance the American influence in his country. The Italian communist also noted that the country was prosperous, but still had some critical remarks. Namely, he was not in favour of the abolishment of the party system, and opposed the widespread idea to engage in terrorist attacks against Egypt. According to Pajetta, he personally managed to dissuade Gaddafi from such a scenario, underlining that it would only work in Sadat's favour. He also made comments regarding the actions of neighbouring countries. In his view, Boumediene and Arafat had a positive effect, as they were trying to mediate. Saudis, on the other hand, had a negative impact. Pajetta was convinced that Riyadh inspired Cairo to initiate the attacks. Finally, he concluded that the Arabs were strongly divided, which only worked in favour of Israel and of the United States.⁷¹

Non-European topics became neglected in the months after Pajetta's visit. However, they resurfaced in January 1978, when a PCI delegation led by Adalberto Minucci visited Yugoslavia. Although Yugoslav issues were in the fore, the hosts used this opportunity to level accusations against the Socialist International once again. Despite the Yugoslav insistence on this issue, Minucci underplayed it, responding that the SI does not have the power to create a split within the Non-Aligned Movement.⁷²

Just two months later, on March 1, 1978, there was an inter-party meeting of particular importance for the topic of this paper. Namely, it was the first time that the Yugoslav and Italian communists dedi-

⁷⁰ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-565. The Yugoslav report on the meeting emphasized how Rubbi has not understood this issue fully.

⁷¹ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-567.

⁷² AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-572.

cated a substantial amount of attention to political developments in sub-Saharan Africa. This discussion, between Pajetta and Grlićkov, had not revolved around the Middle East, non-alignment, or the Third World. In fact, they spoke mostly about the crisis in the Horn of Africa,⁷³ an issue that will be furtherly analysed in subsequent meetings. Both agreed that a peaceful solution, through direct negotiations, was the only way out. Pajetta bragged about PCI's contacts with the Somali president Barre. Their advice to him was to be more moderate towards the USSR.⁷⁴ On the other hand, Pajetta noted that his party expects that Ethiopia will be influenced towards a peaceful solution by both the USSR and Yugoslavia. Grlićkov fully agreed. He stated that Belgrade will do its best to mediate between the two states through the Non-Aligned Movement. After concluding the discussion on this topic, Grlićkov repeated the Yugoslav criticism of the Socialist International, due to its attempts to expand to Africa. He announced that Yugoslavia will initiate a counteroffensive and asked for a meeting with the PCI on this issue.⁷⁵

In March 1978, when a Yugoslav delegation visited Rome, Socialist International's activity in Africa was discussed once again. This time, the PCI officials gave more credit to Yugoslav views. They expressed concern that the SI was, truly, trying to create a split within the Non-Aligned Movement. However, there was a nuance in the stance assumed by the Italian communists. Namely, they underlined that many liberation movements were thankful that the SI was giving attention to

⁷³ The Soviet involvement in Ethiopia during 1977 and 1978 was a proxy war against the United States. The USSR became very engaged in African affairs in the second half of the seventies, trying to seize the vacuum of power and assert its influence and ideology. As in the case of the similar proxy war in Angola, the Soviets won, but eventually paid the price of victory with Washington's decision to end the détente. V. Zubok, *A Failed Empire. The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007, pp. 229, 249-252.

⁷⁴ Barre was a long-time Soviet ally and his country was in war with the neighbouring Ethiopia. When Ethiopia switched its international affiliation and became pro-Soviet, Barre started courting Washington. With that aim, in November 1977, he expelled the Soviet personnel from his country and broke relations with Cuba. N. Mitchell, *The Cold War and Jimmy Carter*, in *The Cambridge History of The Cold War*, Volume III: *Endings*, edited by M.P. Leffler-O.A. Westad, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 75-80.

⁷⁵ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-574.

them. Hence, the PCI thought it would be best not to conflict with the SI, but to engage in a coordinated and joint international action with the European socialists and social democrats. PCI officials even talked with Olof Palme, who proposed a joint action of the LCY, Swedish social-democrats and the Algerian FLN.⁷⁶

The Yugoslavs were not impressed by this PCI proposition. Hence, in April 1978, they complained to the PCI once again. However, this time Belgrade was not accusing only the SI of creating division within the Non-Aligned Movement. The same claim was levelled against the USSR. Segre was also critical of USSR's engagement in Africa. He stated that the PCI was worried by the double presence of the Soviets and Cubans in the continent. His criticism was, however, more directed towards Cuba. The PCI opposed its military presence in Africa, believing that it only legitimized the interventions of both blocs.⁷⁷ As for the USSR, the PCI remained unsure have the Soviets decided to spread communism in the continent now or not. Segre also talked about an upcoming Mediterranean meeting in Venice, stating that the USSR was putting pressure on the PCI regarding this initiative.⁷⁸

A few months later, in September 1978, the two parties returned to thoroughly discussing African topics once again. Grličkov and Pajetta discussed two African issues, one pertaining to the Mediterranean and other to the Horn of Africa. Pajetta firstly asked the LCY to support the Algerian initiative for a conference of progressive forces of the Mediterranean. Grličkov responded that out of the respect for them, and despite not participating at the earlier meetings, Yugoslavia leaves this option open. As for the Horn of Africa, Pajetta talked extensively about this topic, stating that the PCI had intensive contacts with regional actors. The Italian communists were convinced that, despite its current triumphalism, Ethiopia will resolve the issue of Eritrea. He also added that the Soviets should not isolate the Somali president Barre as he is, despite his weaknesses, the best protector of socialism in Somalia.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-576.

⁷⁷ Silvio Pons attributed these PCI positions to the Yugoslav influence. S. Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, p. 88.

⁷⁸ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-577.

⁷⁹ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-581. Such PCI advice on Barre and Somalia remained overshadowed by the events in neighbouring Ethiopia. Namely, Ethiopia gained vital importance for Moscow, as the most important Marxist transformation in Africa was taking place in this country. O.A. Westad, *The Global Cold War*, p. 251.

While the Yugoslavs were constantly unhappy by the way in which the PCI perceived non-alignment, the growing inter-party alliance resolved even this issue. In 1979 Belgrade finally became satisfied with PCI's view on this topic. An internal LCY report from April 1979 highlights how NAM was strongly supported during the PCI congress. It was quoted how Pajetta, despite his previous reservations towards non-alignment, underlined NAM's importance for the overcoming of the blocs and for the respect of sovereignty. He even publicly insisted that no one should try to create divisions or conflicts within this movement, thus giving strong support to the Yugoslav positions endangered by the Soviets and the Socialist International.⁸⁰

As the PCI became highly supportive of non-alignment, the Yugoslavs decided to keep them updated on the most important developments in the movement. Hence in September 1979, just days after the Havana Summit of the NAM, a Yugoslav delegation visited Rome. The Yugoslavs had an opportunity to talk with Bufalini, who showed that he was already acquainted with what happened in the Cuban capital. He praised Tito's positions at the summit, adding that the Yugoslav president left a very positive impression on the Italian public.⁸¹ As for the PCI, the party followed the conference closely and its conclusion was that Castro failed in shifting the movement's orientation.⁸² Bufalini also connected this topic to the recent conversations between

⁸⁰ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-594.

⁸¹ Just a few days later, on October 9th, Pajetta made a telephone call from Rome. He informed Belgrade that Oriana Fallaci wants to interview Tito. The PCI strongly supported this initiative, as the interview would strengthen the idea of non-alignment in the Italian public. AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-600.

⁸² The Non-Aligned conference held in Havana in September 1979 was, in fact, a clash between Yugoslavia and Cuba. It was crucial for the future orientation of the movement. Castro and the Cubans, aided from Moscow, aimed to steer the movement towards the USSR. In line with their previous positions and principles, the Yugoslavs wanted to preserve the movement's independence from both blocs. The conference ended with Tito's victory over Castro and the USSR, which turned out to be the last diplomatic success of the octogenarian Yugoslav president. D. Bogetić, *Jugoslavija između Istoka u Zapada* [Yugoslavia Between East and West], in *Jugoslavija u Hladnom ratu*, pp. 34-35; V. Petrović, *Havana 1979: Labudova pesma Titove lične diplomatije* [Havana 1979: Swan Song of Tito's Personal Diplomacy], in *Tito – viđenja i tumačenja* [Tito – Views and Interpretations], edited by O. Manojlović Pintar, Belgrade: INIS, 2011, pp. 416-436.

Berlinguer and Brezhnev.⁸³ Namely, he stated that while the Soviet leader said nothing about the NAM, Ponomarev underlined that the USSR is not opposed to it, that the movement was anti-imperialist and that it included certain revolutionary forces.⁸⁴

Josip Broz Tito's death, on May 4, 1980, signalled the end of Yugoslav diplomatic prestige and impact. However, Yugoslavia remained an important international actor even during the final months of Tito's life, particularly due to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.⁸⁵ Hence, this paper will also include a couple of interparty meetings held in the first months of 1980, prior to Tito's death.

The first one of them was in January 1980, when Bufalini and Mechini visited Yugoslavia and met with Aleksandar Grlićkov. The Italian guests expressed criticism of the USSR, particularly of various Soviet military interventions – in the Horn of Africa, South Yemen and Afghanistan. Grlićkov agreed that there was an alarming global crisis, which led to increased arming, strengthening of the blocs, interventions and attempts to divide the non-aligned countries. The Yugoslavs were uncertain as to what this was caused by, a real destabilization of the military balance between superpowers, which led the Soviets to feel stronger than the US and intervene in Afghanistan.⁸⁶ At one point of the visit, Berlinguer telephoned the PCI delegates and informed

⁸³ The visit was primarily motivated by the Euromissiles crisis, i.e. the intention of NATO to deploy new missiles in Europe. Despite the earlier tensions in PCI-CPSU relations, Berlinguer wanted to find an agreement on this issue with Moscow. S. Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, pp. 111-112.

⁸⁴ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-599.

⁸⁵ The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan eventually became the ultimate divisive point between Moscow on one side and the PCI and LCY on the other. Their strong opposition to the intervention in Afghanistan was not surprising, as it had a bigger impact on international relations than the one in Czechoslovakia in 1968 – V. Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, pp. 227-228.

⁸⁶ The Soviets were sucked into the conflict by various events, both in Afghanistan and in the international arena: the Sino-American rapprochement, installation of missiles in Europe, conflict with Washington regarding the Soviet troops in Cuba, etc. Hence, it was not a calculated decision, but fruit of a series of poor judgments and of Moscow's fear of the "other side". This led to catastrophic consequences for the USSR, both internally and in its foreign policy, ending the détente. V. Zubok, "Soviet foreign policy from détente to Gorbachev, 1975-1985", in: *The Cambridge History of The Cold War, Volume III*, 102-104.

them of an initiative they subsequently presented to the Yugoslavs. Namely, the PCI's General Secretary wanted to issue an appeal for peace. It emphasized sovereignty, independence, noninterference, and called for a redirection of the funds spent for arms towards Third World countries. Berlinguer wanted to issue this appeal together with the LCY and the Algerian FLN, due to their specific prestige.⁸⁷

The second meeting worthy of mentioning was in February 1980, when Pajetta met with Franc Popit, a prominent Slovene communist. The main purpose of the meeting was to inform the Yugoslavs of a harsh polemic between the PCI and the Soviet party. It was initiated by the Italian communists who reproached the Soviets for the intervention in Afghanistan.⁸⁸ One of PCI letters sent to Moscow touched upon African issues. Namely, they criticized Moscow for firstly supporting Idi Amin's regime, but later claiming that it was counter revolutionary. The PCI also repudiated Soviet claims that the countries who voted in the UN for their retreat from Afghanistan were *de facto* supporting the United States.⁸⁹ The Italians particularly gave support to the NAM, underlining how non-aligned countries voted according to their principles.⁹⁰

Concluding remarks

Two crucial issues need to be highlighted in summarizing the LCY-PCI discussions on African topics. Firstly, it should be reiterated that Africa was almost never a topic by itself. African political developments were discussed within the conversations on two other issues – the broader problem of expanding socialism to the Third World and

⁸⁷ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-603.

⁸⁸ The conflict between the PCI and CPSU regarding Afghanistan was one of the decisive moments in the history of their relations. It became the definitive point of rupture, as it led to the end of Soviet financing of the PCI. S. Pons, *The Global Revolution*, pp. 291-292; Id., *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, pp. 115-118.

⁸⁹ The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan led the United States to respond strongly to Moscow, drastically severing ties between the two states. After years of détente and complex relations between the two superpowers, this event imposed a return of pure bipolar relations, understood in Washington as a fight between good and evil. N. Mitchell, *The Cold War and Jimmy Carter*, pp. 83-86.

⁹⁰ AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-606.

the crisis in the Middle East. Hence, much more attention was given to the northern part of the continent, and the politics of sub-Saharan Africa were largely neglected. Secondly, it is evident that the discussions on Africa faithfully reflected the two parties' stances on the Soviet Union. Yugoslavia proposed a vision of socialist development in the continent that was conditioned on undermining Soviet hegemony and giving more sovereignty to the local actors. The PCI, on the other hand, had an ambiguous perspective of this issue, showing interest in Yugoslav ideas but also advocating Soviet positions. For instance, in the case of Soviet military presence in the Mediterranean. Hence, the two parties came to a harmony on African views only in the late seventies, when both strongly criticised the Soviet hegemonic influence in the continent, and the PCI fully supported the NAM.

Marco Galeazzi focused on PCI's perspective of this issue. He understood the party's collaboration with Yugoslavia as its slow but continuous path in emancipating Third World policies from Moscow.⁹¹ This paper expanded on his analysis, demonstrating how Yugoslavia clearly, explicitly and intentionally aimed to influence the PCI on this issue. The Yugoslav socialist proposition for the Third World was not only based on the wish to limit Soviet influence. Moreover, it was an ideological project completely diverse than the Soviet one, based on opposition to hegemony and Eurocentrism. Yugoslavia advocated a more flexible approach in building socialism in Asia, Africa and Latin America, premised on collaborating with non-communist actors. In a way, the Yugoslav foreign policy was one of cultural relativism, strongly focused on understanding cultural and political differences between Europe and other continents. Hence, the key Yugoslav advice was the one Tito give to Togliatti in 1964 – advocating support for nationalist liberation movements, and not the local communist parties, and underlining the need to approach them as equals, without any condescending illusions.

Finally, this paper poses the question of the level of Yugoslav influence on PCI's policy towards Africa, and on its foreign policy in general. The Yugoslav sources show that Belgrade wished to have an influence, and that the two parties eventually achieved a harmony of views. However, it would be an overstatement to conclude that Yugoslavia was crucial in PCI's path towards stronger criticism of the USSR. Other national and international experiences were undoubtedly more

⁹¹ M. Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il movimento dei paesi non allineati*.

important. Hence, the PCI evolved towards positions similar to the Yugoslav ones in an autochthonous manner. Still, Yugoslavia's role in evolution of PCI's foreign policy was not insignificant. The LCY was the only communist party that both had an extensive Third World experience and proposed an antihegemonic global socialist vision, based on undermining the Soviet domination. Thus, the Yugoslav experience in Africa and the Third World was highly relevant for the PCI. Yugoslavia was not only its ally in establishing contacts outside of Europe, but the Yugoslav combination of communism and non-alignment represented a foreign policy model attractive to the Italian communists.

BOGDAN ZIVKOVIC

An Impossible Symmetry? Anti-Colonialism and Anti-Imperialism in the Italian Communist Party (1956-1968)

Origins

Italian Communist Party (PCI)'s anti-colonialism evolved in response to shifts in Soviet policy, but without merely replicating them. It became consistent in the second half of the 1920s,¹ during what has been called the «Comintern's ecumenical period».² After the Comintern's 6th Congress in July-August 1928, following the shift imposed by Stalin, party documents began to emphasize the connection between social democracy and colonialism.³ However, even during these years, when the Comintern equated social democracy with fascism, key party figures highlighted the specific nature of fascist imperialism as destabilizing and aggressive.⁴ They linked it to Italian industrial development, identifying a connection between industrial expansion and the need for new markets outside Europe.⁵

The “class-based” interpretation of colonialism was downplayed during the Popular Front period. In the PCI's theoretical writings, the emancipation of colonial peoples was attributed not to economic-objective factors but to political-subjective processes, such as the rise of

¹ Apc, Fund 513, File 567, Notes for the PCI's colonial work (to be dated certainly after 1927), pp. 52-55.

² A. Drew, *We Are no Longer in France. Communists in Colonial Algeria*, London 2014, p. 45.

³ See: P. Spriano, *Storia del Partito comunista italiano. Gli anni della clandestinità*, Torino 1969, p. 179.

⁴ See: Apc, f. 513, f. 644, Report of Comrade Garlandi to the Commission of the Near East (14 July 1928), pp. 11-15.

⁵ See: L. Gallo, *Aspetti dell'imperialismo italiano*, «Lo Stato operaio», 6/4, April 1932, pp. 146-156. On the involvement of Italian big business in Fascist colonialism, see N. Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana*, Bologna 2002, pp. 157-159.

national consciousness.⁶ The Popular Front period coincided with the PCI's mobilization over Ethiopia. In response to events in this African country, the PCI put forward a conception of anti-colonialism that I will refer to in this paper as the "symmetrical canon". This canon assumed a natural convergence between communist internationalism and anti-colonial movements, based on the notion that the two shared common goals and enemies, while following autonomous paths. However, the Ethiopian War brought to light a central paradox of the symmetrical canon, as it revealed that the USSR was maintaining trade relations with the Italian fascist regime.⁷ The asymmetry between the Soviet Union's interests and those of international communism became evident.

Many of the Italian communists most active in the anti-colonial struggle had strong ties to the peasant movement, such as Romano Cocchi, Giuseppe Di Vittorio, Egidio Gennari, and Ruggero Grieco. This suggests that, for the PCI, the problems posed by the colonial world could not be reduced entirely to the traditional class struggle. Complementing this anti-colonialism was the PCI's anti-racism, which, in line with the Comintern,⁸ offered a predominantly socio-economic explanation of racial discrimination.⁹ This economic determinism also reflected the Italian communists' belief that the ideological dimension of racism was irrelevant. Adapting Adorno's critique of astrology,¹⁰ we might say that they viewed racism as a

⁶ See: E. Gennari, *Per una "coscienza coloniale" proletaria*, «Lo Stato operaio», 9/3, March 1935, pp. 205-207.

⁷ See: H. Weiss, *Global Ambitions, Structural Constraints and Marginality as a Choice: The International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers*, in *International Communism and Transnational Solidarity. Radical Networks, Mass Movements and Global Politics (1919-1939)*, ed. by Id., Boston 2017 p. 353. On the contradictions between anti-fascism and anti-colonialism, see Y. Béliard, *Labour, Empire and Decolonisation: Historiographical Landmarks*, in *Workers of the Empire, Unite. Radical and Popular Challenges to British Imperialism, 1910s-1960s*, ed. by Id.-N. Kirk, Liverpool 2021, p. 18.

⁸ See: H. Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919-1939*, Trenton 2013, p. 65.

⁹ See: *Against the racial struggle of fascism and for religious freedom. Declaration of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Italy*, «Lo Stato operaio», 12/14-15, 15 August 1938, p. 243. On the link between racism and labor exploitation, see: D.R. Roediger, *Class, Race and Marxism*, London-New York, 2017.

¹⁰ See: T.W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, Torino 2014 (1st Italian edition 1954), p. 296.

“metaphysics for idiots”, while applying a socio-historical approach to human affairs characteristic of Marxism.¹¹

After the end of the Second World War, the anti-colonialism of the 1920s and 1930s continued to be influential. Italian communists maintained a tendency toward economic determinism in their analysis of colonialism and decolonization. The PCI’s anti-colonial activism would also serve as a powerful identity marker for party militants and cadres. Moreover, with the exception of a brief postwar interlude, this anti-colonial commitment presented few ambiguities. Between 1944 and 1947, when the PCI was part of the government, the party adopted positions on Italy’s former colonies that did not entirely favor their immediate independence. This stance was rooted in the belief that a cooperative relationship with anti-fascist Italy was necessary for these colonies to eventually achieve full sovereignty.¹²

Decolonization, however, posed a far more problematic challenge to the PCI’s political culture than anti-colonialism. Decolonization multiplied the protagonists of international politics and, from at least the mid-1950s onward, called into question its binary structure centered on the superpowers. With decolonization, forms of internationalism other than the communist variety began to emerge, including some that the PCI regarded with cautious interest.

This paper will examine how the PCI grappled with the emergence and development of post-colonial states, focusing on the impact of this historical phenomenon (1) on propaganda and (2) communist culture. In particular, I will focus on how the rise of a non-European world became a theme in the PCI’s mass anti-imperialist mobilization and in the historicist Marxism of its intellectuals. The paper will then analyze (3) the relationship between the PCI and Africa during the final period of Togliatti’s leadership, when attention to the former colonial world grew alongside the recognition of a crisis in the unity

¹¹ See: Y. Peled, *From Theology to Sociology: Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx on the Question of Jewish Emancipation*, «History of Political Thought», 13/3, Autumn 1992, p. 479.

¹² See: A. Pasqualini-G. Siracusano, *Il PCI e le decolonizzazioni africane. Strategie internazionaliste e solidarietà*, in *L’Italia e il mondo post-coloniale. Politica, cooperazione e mobilità tra decolonizzazioni e guerra fredda*, ed. by D. di Santo-B. Falcucci-G. Mancosu, Firenze, 2023, pp. 57-58.

of communism.¹³ Finally, the paper will explore (4) how these connections developed in the years immediately following Togliatti's death.

Cold war anti-colonialism? decolonization in communist propaganda

After the Second World War, the national prominence of European communist parties did not correspond to their international significance. The PCI played a leading role in Italian politics but had no substantial international networks outside the socialist world,¹⁴ while the Communist Party of Great Britain – though marginal in national elections – hosted the 1947 Conference of the Communist Parties of the British Empire in London, attended by twenty-eight delegates from eleven countries.¹⁵ Even in the early 1950s, communist propaganda networks reflected this imbalance between national importance and international presence. For instance, the PCI's reports on the atrocities of colonialism – a constant theme for the European anti-colonial left¹⁶ – often relied on sources from smaller newspapers within the communist orbit, such as the *Daily Worker*.¹⁷

Decolonization became a theme of Italian communist propaganda before it became a focus for deeper cultural reflection or political strategy. The stylistic elements of this propaganda were borrowed from the binary frameworks of the cultural Cold War. The term “Third World” did not appear in *l'Unità* until December 1960, although the newspaper had cited Alfred Sauvy, the term's originator, on several occasions in the 1950s. For an Italian communist in the 1950s, the world was divided into two camps. By the middle of the decade, however, the

¹³ See: S. Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, Torino, 2021, pp. 184-185.

¹⁴ See: G. Sorgonà, *Fonti per la storia del comunismo italiano, il colonialismo e la decolonizzazione in Africa*, «Storicamente», 18/47, 2022, pp. 1-15.

¹⁵ See: E. Smith, *For Socialist Revolution or National Liberation? Anti-Colonialism and the Communist Parties of Great Britain, Australia and South Africa in the Era of Decolonisation*, in *Workers of the Empire*, pp. 252, 256.

¹⁶ See: Q. Gasteuil, *A Comparative and Transnational Approach to Socialist Anti-Colonialism*, *ibid.*, p. 136.

¹⁷ See: *L'atroce documentazione dei crimini inglesi in Malesia*, «l'Unità», 11 May 1952. The newspaper published a photograph of a British soldier holding the severed heads of two Malay guerrillas. On the «Daily Worker», see: Smith, *For Socialist Revolution or National Liberation?*, pp. 252, 256.

leaders of decolonization movements had already begun reshaping anti-imperialist propaganda and the identity of communist militants, providing them with a powerful arsenal of arguments against liberal-democratic universalism and its double standards.¹⁸

The PCI press portrayed colonialism as a betrayal of the European Enlightenment and claimed this tradition for itself.¹⁹ It frequently drew analogies between national liberation movements and the French Revolution, a comparison also common among non-communist anti-colonialists: Sauvy coined the term “Third World” in reference to the Third Estate, and the Bandung Conference embraced this analogy;²⁰ leaders of liberation movements often invoked connections with the European revolutions.²¹ *Vie Nuove*, a PCI magazine, used the same analogy in its coverage of the Bandung Conference, proclaiming that the time had come «for Africans and Asians [...] to sing the *Marseillaise*».²² Likewise, the NLF (Algerian National Liberation Front) was portrayed as the inheritor of the French legacy: «the Rights of Man [...] Voltaire, the Revolution of 1789, the Commune»²³ – a seamless sequence of historical references.

This analogy between the Enlightenment and anti-colonialism was accompanied by another that highlighted Europeans’ double standards: the dichotomy between fascism and anti-fascism was transformed into a dichotomy between European imperialism and anti-colonialism. In *Vie Nuove*, Uel Zem recalled Oradour; Port Said had been «coventrated»; the bombing of Sakiet was compared to Guernica and Marzabotto, the French action at Bizerte to «the Nazis in Warsaw»;²⁴ and the NLF to both the Italian Resistance and the French

¹⁸ See: F. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, Los Angeles 2005, pp. 113-142.

¹⁹ In 1949, Togliatti’s translation of Voltaire’s *Treatise on Tolerance* was published in Feltrinelli’s *Universale Economica* series.

²⁰ See: R. Niebuhr, *The Search for a Cold War Legitimacy. Foreign Policy and Tito’s Yugoslavia*, Boston 2018, p. 99.

²¹ See O. A. Westad, *The Global Cold War. Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, Cambridge 2005, p. 89.

²² J. Mèrigaut, *Il mondo visto dall’Asia*, «*Vie Nuove*», 1 May 1955.

²³ M. Mafai, *L’Algeria proibita*, *ibid.*, 28 June 1958.

²⁴ See: Guicciardino, *Dieci anni di massacri*, *ibid.*, 4 September 1955; R. Nicolai, *La strage di Porto Said*, *ibid.*, 15 December 1956; M. Mafai, *Il sangue di Sakiet*, *ibid.*, 22 February 1958; Ead., *L’ordine regna a Biserta*, *ibid.*, 29 July 1961.

Revolution.²⁵ This analogy was widespread not only in communist circles but also on the broader left, including the French and German left,²⁶ as well as in speeches by Enrico Mattei, the founder of the Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (ENI – National Hydrocarbons Board).²⁷

Narrating decolonization through European analogies and dichotomies (e.g., Enlightenment/imperialism, anti-fascism/fascism) conveyed a message that was immediately accessible to a broad audience. I will not dwell on the contradictions inherent in these dichotomies, the most glaring being that between the Enlightenment and colonialism. Instead, I will focus on the stylistic tools employed by this propaganda. Its most effective device was the depiction of violence against liberation movements. The narrative employed a variety of forms of expression – from photographic reportage to cartoons – and relied heavily on stark depictions of repression, a crude lexicon, and vivid photographic documentation.²⁸ The Algerian war introduced the issue of torture, which was described in detail. Accounts included graphic descriptions of summary executions, mass killings, and sexual violence inflicted on both men and women. These narratives were often accompanied by photographs depicting horrific details, from severed heads to bodies flayed by napalm: «the now classic weapon of imperialism»²⁹ that «views oppressed peoples in revolt as insects and their homeland as a territory to be ‘disinfected’».³⁰

The description of violence, understandably, served to reinforce the binary image of the conflict as one between the barbarism of imperialism and the spontaneity of liberation movements. In propaganda, decolonization was presented without complexity. Its depiction relied on clear moral dichotomies, emphasizing cases where the distinction between good and evil was self-evident. The case of Lumumba, a central figure in the PCI’s anti-colonial imagery, is exemplary. His portrayal followed a heroic narrative that highlighted virtues beyond

²⁵ See: M. Mafai, *L’Algeria proibita*, *ibid.*, 28 June 1958; C. De Simone, *Hanno vinto i fucili di legno*, *ibid.*, 15 November 1962.

²⁶ See: Q. Slobodian, *Foreign Front. Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany*, Durham & London 2012, p. 24.

²⁷ See: E. Bini, *La potente benzina italiana. Guerra fredda e consumi di massa tra Italia, Stati Uniti e Terzo Mondo (1945-1973)*, Roma 2013, p. 161.

²⁸ See: Guicciardino, *Dieci anni di massacri*, «Vie Nuove», 4 September 1955.

²⁹ G. Toti, *L’eredità di Massinissa*, *ibid.*, 11 March 1961.

³⁰ *Napalm!*, *ibid.*, 5 August 1961.

ideology: generosity, courage, and intelligence.³¹ This narrative was visually captured on the cover of *Libertà per il Congo (Freedom for Congo)*, a collection of Lumumba's writings and speeches published by Editori Riuniti in 1961. The cover, painted by Renato Guttuso, showed a tortured Lumumba, his forehead wounded, a noose around his neck, but defying his executioners with a determined gaze. A few years later, when *Rinascita* reprinted an article by Sartre on Lumumba that echoed this heroic portrayal, it was again accompanied by Guttuso's painting.³²

Through such narratives, anti-colonialism reinforced the Italian communists' anti-imperialism by positing a civilizational divide between capitalist societies and the rest of the world. This framing would remain consistent over the years, becoming a core element of the communist militants' identity. The influence of decolonization on the "high" culture of communist political thought was more complex, however, and ultimately created tensions with the PCI's Marxist historicism.

Marxist historicism and decolonization

The communist discourse on decolonization was born with inherent contradictions. Stereotypical representations were rare.³³ Instead, Italian communists often used a somewhat paradoxical argument. On the one hand, they rejected the notion that European culture was a universal model, emphasizing the African continent's contributions to civilization. On the other hand, when they praised liberation movements, they largely credited them with inheriting the best elements of European history. Communist intellectuals affirmed the end of Western primacy, but their analyses were shaped by European paradigms, which seemed to contradict their intentions.

Several cases exemplify this paradox. In 1948, *Società* – the most influential cultural magazine through which communist intellectuals expressed themselves – published a report by Cesare Luporini from the World Congress in Wrocław. The Marxist philosopher described it as «moving for us Westerners» to witness «men of a different skin

³¹ See: R. Ledda, *L'eroe dell'Africa*, *ibid.*, 25 February 1961.

³² See: J.P. Sartre, *Lumumba è l'Africa*, «*Rinascita*», 25 January 1964.

³³ This is the case with R. Morsucci, *Ode to Joe Louis*, «*Società*», 4/1, 1948, p. 91. in which the myth of the good savage is readapted for the American boxer.

color» draw upon the works of Machiavelli, Montaigne, Diderot, Voltaire, Hegel, and Marx as «powerful weapons of freedom and emancipation», thereby revitalizing a tradition that risked being reduced to mere «academic decorum».³⁴

There was no shortage of explicitly stadial analyses of decolonization within communist discourse. The convergence of African and European societies was often taken for granted, based on the eschatological notion that both continents were on a common path to socialism. Colonialism was accused, among other things, of having interrupted this parallel development between African peoples and the rest of the world. According to this view, it had deliberately delayed this convergence to sustain a specific form of capitalism – Euro-western capitalism – by preventing the formation of true African nations and striving to preserve tribal society for its own ends. Nevertheless, convergence was seen as inevitable: while colonialists sought to keep Africa in a “tribal stage”, like a chrysalis frozen in amber, the liberation movements were modernizing it by turning back the hands of history. As *Società* noted in 1956, the crisis of colonialism would give rise to an Africa «with the fundamental characteristics of European society»³⁵.

Two main interpretative frameworks dominated Italian communist thought on decolonization. One was a stadial conception, based on the idea that underdeveloped countries would eventually converge with developed ones. The other promoted a symmetrical view, emphasizing the autonomy and originality of the newly independent nations as distinct from European history. This latter perspective was evident, for instance, in Togliatti’s editorial introducing the 1958 special issue of *Rinascita* on the twilight of colonialism. In this article, the PCI secretary criticized European culture for its neo-Malthusian tendencies and advocated for an alliance between the colonized peoples and the labor movement, citing their common anti-capitalist goals.³⁶

The tension between rejecting Europe as a standard of civilization and using European history as a paradigm for the development of decolonized countries was a recurring theme. In his review of *Movimenti religiosi di libertà e di salvezza dei popoli oppressi* (*Religious Movements of Freedom and Salvation of Oppressed Peoples*, Feltrinelli,

³⁴ C. Luporini, *Esperienze e prospettive di Wroclaw*, *ibid.*, no. 3-6, pp. 297-298.

³⁵ A. Franza, *Il risveglio dell’Africa*, *ibid.*, 12/4, August 1956, pp. 720, 732-733.

³⁶ See: P. Togliatti, *Guardando il futuro*, «*Rinascita*», 15/11-12, November-December 1958, pp. 691-693.

Milan, 1960) by the ethnologist and historian of religions Vittorio Lanternari, Mario Spinella argued that the liberation of colonized peoples required «a profound cultural revision». He added that only by recognizing the historicity of these peoples could the cultural foundations of racism and colonialism be dismantled.³⁷ Spinella's essay reflected a shift in communist anti-racism that was renewed by acknowledging the cultural, not just the economic, roots of racist thought – a shift pioneered by Ernesto De Martino in the early 1950s.³⁸

The denial of Africa's historicity, Spinella continued, had served to legitimize the conqueror's «right» to exploitation and the missionary's «right» to «the conquest of souls». These insights demonstrated a clear intention to avoid assimilating former colonial nations to European models. Moreover, Spinella offered a nuanced interpretation of comparative paradigms, recognizing their congruence with the civilizing claims of colonialism.³⁹ But when Spinella turned to the future of the post-colonial world, however, he again fell back on the standards of European civilization. He described the struggle against witchcraft waged by independent African nations as «an obvious reflection of the overwhelming need to move beyond tribal organization to broader and more modern 'national' structures».⁴⁰ This analysis closely mirrored the role Hegel attributed to monotheistic religion in

³⁷ See: M. Spinella, review of V. Lanternari, *Movimenti religiosi di libertà e di salvezza dei popoli oppressi*, Milan 1960, «Società», 16/6, November 1960, pp. 1000-1002, 1005.

³⁸ De Martino had called the opposition between ethnology and history «one of the sources of racism». E. De Martino, *Intorno a una storia del mondo popolare subalterno*, *ibid.*, 5/3, 1949, p. 424. Commenting on De Martino's research in 1950, Luporini had stated that «the 'naturalism' dominant in the various schools and tendencies of ethnography and folklore» was «a cultural circumstance», not just «a fact of class». C. Luporini, *Intorno alla "storia del mondo popolare subalterno"*, *ibid.*, 6/1, 1950, pp. 96-97. A few years later, the historian Roberto Battaglia linked the fascist racial laws to the ideology of fascism «rather than to the desire to rob the property of Jews in Italy». R. Battaglia, *Le premesse della Resistenza*, *ibid.*, 8/3, 1952, p. 416. Racism is one of the «ideologies of contemporary irrationalism» in *L'incapacità congenita*, *ibid.*, 16/5, September-October 1960, pp. 897-898.

³⁹ On the comparativism-colonialism nexus, see: C. Ginzburg, *La lettera uccide*, Milan 2021.

⁴⁰ M. Spinella, review of *Movimenti religiosi*, pp. 1000-1002, 1005.

the formation of modern nations⁴¹ – an idea likely familiar to a Marxist scholar like Spinella, who was educated at the prestigious Scuola Normale Superiore.

The paradoxes within communist culture must be understood in context. Similar contradictions ran through the national liberation movements themselves.⁴² Other Italian Marxist traditions – such as the founding experiences and texts of *operaismo* (workerism), from *Quaderni Rossi* to *Operai e capitale* – also focused predominantly on Europe.⁴³ Italian communism, on the other hand, had a more global conception of its role. Its symbolic universe was also constructed through references to Africa and the Third World, and continuously expressed in street demonstrations, solidarity initiatives, the press, and even in publications for children.⁴⁴ Militants were encouraged to identify with the heroic biographies of those who martyred themselves in the struggle against empires, expanding the boundaries of an internationalism that would remain unrivaled on the left until 1968.⁴⁵

The coexistence of this “global” predisposition with classically European historical and cultural references became even more problematic in the early 1960s. During this period, the PCI engaged with a new generation of militants who were shaped by the Italian revival of anti-fascism and captivated by the anti-imperialism of the liberation movements. It was these young activists who filled the PCI’s protest demonstrations when Moïse Tshombe was received by Aldo Moro in 1964. Beginning in the early 1960s, the catalogues of left-wing publishing houses showed a significant increase in authors who glorified the revolution-decolonization nexus⁴⁶ and were more radical in their

⁴¹ See: R. Kroner, *Hegel’s Philosophical Development*, in G.W.F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, University of Pennsylvania, 1996 (1st ed. 1971), p. 3.

⁴² See: S.C. Dunstan, *Race, Rights and Reform. Black Activism in the French Empire and the United States from World War I to the Cold War*, Cambridge 2021, pp. 41 ff.

⁴³ See, for example, the derisory relevance of the Third World in A. Negri, *Pipe-Line*, Torino 1983.

⁴⁴ «Il Pioniere» organised a campaign to send clothes and toys for Algerian children and published reports on the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa. See the issues of 22 and 29 January 1961.

⁴⁵ See: M. Fincardi, *I simboli*, in *Il comunismo italiano nella storia del Novecento*, ed. by Silvio Pons, Roma 2021, pp. 245-246.

⁴⁶ After Alleg in 1958, Einaudi published A. Mandouze, *La rivoluzione algerina nei suoi documenti*, (1961), F. Fanon, *I dannati della terra* (1962) and *Sociologia della rivo-*

anti-imperialism than the PCI itself. Communist discourse continued to oscillate between recognition of the uniqueness of these movements and a tendency to Europeanize them. One example was the reception of Frantz Fanon's work, which was praised through an anti-fascist lens, with reviewers drawing analogies between his writings and the literature of resistance to fascism,⁴⁷ even though they agreed that the former colonies had to follow a different path from Europe's. This is evident in the July 1962 *l'Unità* review of *The Wretched of the Earth*, which concluded: «Do we care about our civilization? It is up to us to change it so that it may survive and coexist with those that will emerge, newer ones».⁴⁸

Decolonization both challenged and exposed the stadial thinking that permeated the European left. The Italian Communists absorbed this legacy almost reluctantly. In the political culture of the PCI, the concepts of centrality and peripherality had been relativized from the outset. One example of this was the importance of Gramsci's *Note sulla questione meridionale* (*Some Aspects of the Southern Question*).⁴⁹ In the republican era, communist southernism did not regard the industrialized North as a model for the agricultural South,⁵⁰ distinguishing itself from the liberal left. Similarly, the Africa that emerged from decolonization was not seen by Italian communists as a continent that needed to develop by imitating Europe. The title of *L'Espresso*'s⁵¹ investigation into southern Italy, *L'Africa in casa* (*Africa at Home*),⁵² would have been unthinkable for Italian communists. Not only because the investigation depicted southern Italy as an absolutely back-

luzione algerina (1963), and G. Pirelli, *Lettere della rivoluzione algerina* (1963). See: N. Srivastava, *Italian Colonialism and Resistance to Empire (1930-1970)*, London, 2018, p. 216.

⁴⁷ See: M. Rago, *Premiato Jeanson*, «l'Unità», 29 April 1962.

⁴⁸ M. Galletti, *I dannati della terra*, *ibid.*, 31 July 1962.

⁴⁹ See: F. Giasi, *I comunisti torinesi e l'«egemonia del proletariato» nella rivoluzione italiana. Appunti sulle fonti di «Alcuni temi della questione meridionale» di Gramsci*, in *Egemonie*, ed. by Angelo d'Orsi, Naples 2008, pp. 147-186.

⁵⁰ See: P. Bevilacqua, *La questione meridionale nell'analisi dei meridionalisti*, in *Lezioni sul meridionalismo. Nord e Sud nella storia d'Italia*, ed. by S. Cassese, Bologna, 2016, p. 25; G. Sargonà, *Il contributo a «Cronache meridionali»*, in *Rosario Villari. Storiografia e politica nel secondo dopoguerra*, ed. by L. Rapone, Roma 2022, pp. 58-59.

⁵¹ «L'Espresso» was the main magazine of the Italian liberal left.

⁵² See: «L'Espresso», 17 April 1959.

ward land,⁵³ but also because it reflected a primitive image of Africa that the PCI press labeled as racist. In 1960, for example, *Vie Nuove* criticized the approach of the Festival dei Popoli (Festival of the Peoples) in Florence, arguing that the documentaries shown at the festival were indifferent «to the changing reality of these countries, which are bursting into modern civilization and undergoing great social and political upheavals». The documentaries were accused of favoring interpretations of Africa that oscillated between ethnological depictions of primitivism and neo-positivist sociology.⁵⁴ Similarly, Romano Ledda's investigation of central Africa in May 1961 used the coexistence of different eras within the same space as a narrative framework, emphasizing the economic development of the former colonies. The photographs in the reportage showed children in rags, illuminated streets, modern markets, and movie posters.⁵⁵ To understand whether the emphasis was on continuity (backwardness) or discontinuity (development), we need to compare this reportage with the broader context of the continent: in the early 1960s, Africa had 946,291 km of roads, less than 10% of which were paved, 16% of children between the ages of 5 and 19 had received formal schooling, and 7-8% of the population lived in cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants.⁵⁶

However, economic determinism remained one of the main pillars in the assessment of decolonization in Africa – an attitude, moreover, shared by intellectual traditions far removed from communism. One sign of this curious convergence in Italy was seen in the translation and reception of *Things Fall Apart*. Chinua Achebe's novel, a seminal work of the new African literature, famously told of the encounter between Africans and Europeans. Achebe did not dwell on the geopolitical or economic aspects of imperialist domination, but rather focused on the collapse of a world where nature and spirituality were deeply intertwined. *Things Fall Apart* was published in Italy by Mondadori in 1962 under the title *Le locuste bianche* (*The White Locusts*).

⁵³ See: Sorgonà, *Il contributo a «Cronache meridionali»*, pp. 49-68.

⁵⁴ See: C. De Lipsis, *Gli ultimi cannibali*, «Vie Nuove», 9 January 1960. The critique of the anthropological paradigm is a theme of the contemporary debate. See: Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, pp. 36-37.

⁵⁵ See: R. Ledda, *Batte il cuore dell'Africa*, «Vie Nuove», 13 May 1961.

⁵⁶ See: A. Adedeji, *The Economic Evolution of Developing Africa*, in *The Cambridge History of Africa*, Vol. VIII: *from 1940 to 1975*, ed. by J. Donnelly Fage-R. Oliver, Cambridge 2008, pp. 223-226.

This title, drawn from a passage in the novel, evoked the comparison between the white settlers and the biblical plague that devastates crops in the Book of Exodus. In Achebe's story, however, the locusts – green rather than white – are actually a much-anticipated source of food in the village where the story is set.⁵⁷ Achebe's narrative thus transcended the framework of communist culture: *l'Unità* condemned the novel's «excessive lyricism» and dismissed it as «very uncertain in identifying the responsibilities of British colonialism».⁵⁸

In summary, between the second half of the 1940s and the early 1960s, that is, between the first and second waves of decolonization, communist culture and propaganda were predominantly convinced of the convergence between decolonization and socialism. The desired outcome was considered feasible, probably because of the hopes raised by this immense phenomenon of self-determination. Communist intellectuals repeatedly stated that the development of former colonial nations should not be a mere copy of the European experience. At the same time, the idea of a future convergence between new and old forms of anti-imperialism reinforced the stadial elements of communist thought, which were difficult to reconcile with the emphasis on national self-determination. Beyond this contradiction between a global outlook and a European mindset, Italian communist political culture faced other paradoxes that emerged when moving from theoretical elaboration to political action. These paradoxes concerned (i) the relationship between internationalism and the nation in post-colonial states and (ii) the relationship between the labor movement and internationalism.

(i) The world that emerged from decolonization proved impossible to reconcile with an optimistic teleology. Historiography has often highlighted the difficulties encountered in the international institutionalization of the national aspirations of post-colonial states.⁵⁹ Even more improbable, if not impossible, was the reconciliation of these aspirations with the bloc logic supported by the Italian communists, at least until 1968. The symmetrical canon – the idea of a joint march, albeit along different paths, between communism and decolonization – clashed with a far more diverse and complex reality, even though the

⁵⁷ See: C. Achebe, *Le cose crollano*, Milan 2016 (1st ed. 1958), p. 59.

⁵⁸ L. Ca., *Le locuste bianche*, «l'Unità», 22 August 1962.

⁵⁹ See: F. Cooper, *Africa Since 1940. The Past of the Present*, Cambridge 2009 (1st edition 2002), pp. 80, 102-104, 184.

notion of a closer interconnection between decolonization and the socialist world was not without foundation. The liberation movements were resolutely opposed to empire, but for them empire was not the holistic subject outlined by communist anti-imperialism, despite their opposition to the US-led West after 1945. When Foster Dulles called non-alignment «immoral and short-sighted» in 1956,⁶⁰ it was because he saw it as hostile to his own camp. Yet, even the post-colonial states most aligned with the socialist world proposed an internationalism independent of the two blocs – though not equidistant between the US and the USSR. This internationalism was based on a claim to self-determination rather than the pursuit of socialism.

(ii) Communist culture postulated the convergence of the self-determination of peoples and the interests of the European labor movement. However, the reconciliation of national and international demands remained a core issue in the history of the labor movement. Modern democracies were founded on the principle of citizen equality and the integration of subaltern classes through political representation and the recognition of social interests. Communists extended this principle of equality to a global level, which is why they criticized the Second International for having a nation-state-centric horizon. But even for communists in industrialized countries, the internationalization of the principle of solidarity remained unresolved – especially when the interests of the working class came into conflict with the labor force in former colonial nations.

The Pci and Decolonization: Parallel Diplomacy and Anti-Imperialism in Togliatti's Party

The PCI's foreign policy toward Africa began to take shape in January 1957. At this crucial moment, Longo met Khrushchev in Moscow, and during their dialogue he emphasized the importance of the Arab countries and North Africa, asking whether it was the Italians or the French who should take the lead in engaging with these regions.⁶¹ This question can be interpreted in several ways that are not necessarily contradictory. Decolonization opened up spaces for action for Italian

⁶⁰ J.J. Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution. Algeria, Decolonisation and Third World Order*, Oxford 2016, p. 7.

⁶¹ See: Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, pp. 149-169.

communists, who were eager to intervene, given the distrust aroused by the French Communist Party's stance on Algeria.⁶² Alternatively, the Italians sought to address this issue in coordination with the USSR as part of an international strategy. Indeed, their interest in the Mediterranean was consistent with the bloc perspective, as the region was a key strategic area in international politics. However, bloc loyalty alone does not explain the PCI's international policy, which was also influenced by other factors. These included Togliatti's skepticism of Khrushchev, whom he blamed for failing to coordinate the socialist camp. The Soviets' vague response to the Italians in January 1957⁶³ may have reinforced this feeling. The PCI's secretary envisioned more advanced balances for his party, as reflected in the polycentrism proposal put forward after the 20th Congress,⁶⁴ although he did not yet articulate a grand design for a new internationalism, which could only emerge with greater autonomy from Moscow.

The PCI's political approach to Africa could be distinguished along two axes. The first was anti-imperialist and focused on establishing networks with political movements that were seen as ideologically aligned. The second was less ideologically driven and can be defined as a form of parallel diplomacy, aimed in particular at Mediterranean countries with close ties to Italy. With regard to the first axis, the political actor most closely aligned with the PCI was the Algerian liberation movement. The Foreign Section made contact with the NLF in Tunis as early as the summer of 1957,⁶⁵ just a few months after the Moscow meeting mentioned above. The PCI was the only European communist party present at the Congrès anticolonial des pays de la Méditerranée et du Moyen Orient (Athens, November 1-5, 1957). The Italian delegation's leader, the socialist Lucio Mario Luzzatto, convinced the organizing committee, which was initially reluctant to accept communists. The audience and the ideological framework – support for the right to political and economic self-determination – were well received by the Italian communists. In a note to the Secretariat, the conference was described as a potential «starting point for

⁶² See: Drew, *We are no longer in France*, pp. 110-111 *et passim*.

⁶³ See: Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, p. 170.

⁶⁴ See: *ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

⁶⁵ See: M. Galeazzi, *Il Pci e il movimento dei paesi non allineati*, Milan 2011, pp. 50-53.

political action of the highest interest». ⁶⁶ It was hoped that these contacts would secure «broad support in Italy, even beyond our political sphere of influence, strengthening ties with British Labour and Arab nationalists». ⁶⁷ This approach was reminiscent of the pacifist mobilizations of the early 1950s: ⁶⁸ dialogue with other leftist forces was seen as possible, thanks to demands that were difficult to contest – then peace, now an end to the «massacres in Algeria», negotiations for «the independence of this country», and «a fair solution to the problem of the Arab refugees from Palestine». ⁶⁹ The PCI also approved the expulsion of Messali Hadj's Mouvement National Algérien, a decision that led to the withdrawal from the conference of the French delegation, ⁷⁰ which opposed the participation of Italian communists. The PCI's involvement in the Congress revealed multiple ambitions: to make contact with the leading figures of the anti-colonial struggles, to explore the possibility of establishing relations with European leftist parties, and to reestablish relations with the secular and Catholic left that had been broken in 1956. The focus on decolonization was not only strategic, but also led to a shift in discourse, including the adoption of the term “neo-colonialism” beginning in 1957. This term quickly became synonymous with a new form of “imperialism” in which economic and commercial dominance was far more important than the direct imposition of Western rule by force.

Traces of parallel diplomacy emerged in relations with newly independent nations. In Tunisia, for instance, institutional issues came into play that reflected changes in Italian foreign policy since the second half of the 1950s. At this turning point in Italy, relations between the majority and the opposition on issues of national interest became more fluid. For Italian governments, this was the season of “neo-Atlanticism”, a trend aimed at building a bridge between the West, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East. ⁷¹ The report of a Communist

⁶⁶ See: FG, Apc, Foreign Affairs, mf. 452, Congrès anticolonial des pays de la méditerranée et du Moyen Orient, pp. 508-512.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, note for the Secretariat, 11 November 1957, unsigned, pp. 584-585.

⁶⁸ See: M. De Nicolò, *Emilio Sereni, la guerra fredda e la pace partigiana*, Roma 2019, pp. 257-291.

⁶⁹ FG, Apc, note for the Secretariat, 11 November 1957, unsigned, pp. 584-585.

⁷⁰ See: Q. Gasteuil, *A Comparative and Transnational Approach to Socialist Anti-Colonialism*, p. 159.

⁷¹ See: V. Ianari, *L'Italia e il Medio Oriente dal “neatlantismo” al peace-keeping*, in

delegation's visit to Tunisia in April 1959, for example, focused on trade and commercial conflicts in the Mediterranean.⁷² It is important to note that Maurizio Valenzi, the leader of the delegation, had written an article a few months earlier supporting the interest of Italian industry in exporting capital goods to the «underdeveloped countries of Asia and Africa». Valenzi also stressed the importance of establishing a dialogue with those sectors of the government majority that were dissatisfied with the pro-Atlantic foreign policy. This possibility was suggested by the positions of journals such as *Mondo Economico*, *Collaborazione Mediterranea*, *Civiltà degli Scambi*, *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali*, and *Rassegna del Banco di Napoli*.⁷³

The parallel diplomacy developed through bilateral relations, mainly focused on North African countries.⁷⁴ Relations with liberation movements had a broader scope, extending as far as sub-Saharan Africa,⁷⁵ and carried deeper ideological implications. These relations gave rise to a debate among the cadres of the PCI's foreign section, particularly with regard to the attitude to be adopted toward the Non-Aligned Movement. The preparatory meetings for the Third Anti-Colonial Conference of the Mediterranean and Middle East, held between 1958 and 1959, are evidence of this debate. Luzzatto, a left-wing socialist sympathetic to the non-aligned, confirmed the Algerian Liberation Front's interest in strengthening relations with the PCI. Luzzatto also sought to establish relations with an Egyptian delegate, referred to as "Khaled Moheyeldin",⁷⁶ who was attempting to avoid harsh criticism of Nasser, despite the severe restrictions on communists' political

L'Italia repubblicana nella crisi degli anni Settanta. Tra guerra fredda e distensione, ed. by A. Giovagnoli and S. Pons, Soveria Mannelli 2003, p. 386.

⁷² See: FG, APC, Foreign Affairs, mf. 465, note by Valenzi on his trip to Tunis, 10 April 1959, pp. 1152-1155.

⁷³ See: M. Valenzi, *Per una politica mediterranea del commercio estero italiano*, «Rinascita», November-December 1958, pp. 848-851.

⁷⁴ See: D. Melfa, *Rivoluzionari responsabili. Militanti comunisti in Tunisia (1956-93)*, Roma 2019, pp. 156-158.

⁷⁵ See: G. Siracusano, "Pronto per la rivoluzione!". *I comunisti italiani e francesi e la decolonizzazione in Africa centro-occidentale (1958-1968)*, Roma 2022.

⁷⁶ This could be Khaled Mohieddine, an Egyptian intellectual and politician, one of the participants in the 1952 coup d'état, with a controversial relationship with Nasser, who had him arrested in 1959 after the failure of the Arab nationalist uprising against 'Abd al-Karīm Qāsim that broke out in Iraq in March of that year.

rights in Egypt.⁷⁷ In contrast, the Italian communist Giuliano Pajetta was skeptical of non-alignment during the preparations for the third conference. He described the situation as «unfavorable» and dismissed the Egyptian delegation as mere «agents of Nasser». Regarding «Labour politician Brockurey» (*sic*, Brockway⁷⁸), Pajetta remarked that he was «neither authoritative nor representative», and criticized the decision to hold the conference in Belgrade.⁷⁹ His judgment was probably influenced by the crackdown on Egyptian communists,⁸⁰ but more importantly by his strict bipolar view of international relations. On the other hand, Dina Forti's notes from July 12-20, 1959, during her trip to Egypt,⁸¹ were skeptical of news from the Egyptian communists but open to strengthening ties with Nasser. In her meeting with Saiza Nabarawi,⁸² founder of the Egyptian Feminist Union, Forti discussed the dire conditions of political prisoners but harshly criticized the Egyptian Communist Party, calling it «a collection of groups that are still quarreling».⁸³

The repression of communists in Egypt revealed deep ideological tensions. Italian communists had long faced an apparent contradiction between contributing to Italian democracy and aligning themselves with a bloc in which civil and political liberties were systematically violated.⁸⁴ The regimes that emerged from decolonization were gen-

⁷⁷ See: FG, Apc, 1959, Foreign Affairs, international meetings, Mf. 465, Information from Luzzatto on preparatory meetings for the Third Mediterranean and Middle East Anti-colonial Conference, 12 June, pp. 2172-2180.

⁷⁸ Fenner Brockway, an influential figure in the history of European socialist anti-colonialism. See: Q. Gasteuil, *A Comparative and Transnational Approach to Socialist Anti-Colonialism*, pp. 138-162.

⁷⁹ See: FG, Apc, 1959, Foreign Affairs, international meetings, mf. 465, notes by Giuliano Pajetta on the Committee against Colonialism, pp. 2187-2188.

⁸⁰ See: A. Hilger, *Communism, Decolonisation and the Third World*, in *The Cambridge History of Communism*, Vol. II: *The Socialist Camp and World Power 1941-1960s*, ed. by N. Naimark-S. Pons-S. Quinn-Judge, Cambridge, 2017, p. 327.

⁸¹ See: FG, Apc, 1959, Foreign Affairs, Egypt, mf. 465, Dina Forti's notes on her trip to Egypt from 12 to 20 July, pp. 9-21.

⁸² Referred to as Cesa Nabarawi.

⁸³ FG, Apc, 1959, Foreign Affairs, Egypt, mf. 465, Dina Forti's notes on her trip to Egypt from 12 to 20 July, p. 15.

⁸⁴ See: F. De Felice, *Introduzione*, in *Antifascismi e Resistenze*, ed. by Id., Annali VI, Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Roma, 1997.

erally authoritarian⁸⁵ and exhibited traits incompatible with the PCI's attempt to combine communism with political pluralism. The democracy/decolonization dilemma resurfaced at the Foreign Section meeting on Arab countries held on March 1, 1960. At this meeting, Valenzi noted that these regimes were not compatible with the political culture of the PCI, stating that their concept of democracy was not «what we understand by it».⁸⁶ Nasser provoked conflicting reactions in Italy: he was detested by the liberal left and appreciated in neo-fascist circles, which paradoxically included some of the staunchest defenders of the European presence in Africa.⁸⁷ For the PCI, Nasser was a problematic figure – he was both an ally of the USSR and a leading figure in the Non-Aligned Movement, yet also the responsible for the persecution of Egyptian communists. Positions oscillated between those, like Dina Forti, who emphasized the positive aspects of his actions, and others, like Ruggero Gallico, who argued that failing to denounce Nasser's authoritarianism would «lend an instrumental aspect to our defense of freedom in Italy»⁸⁸ – a thinly veiled reference to the double standards within communist culture.

The most striking contradiction, however, was between the PCI's expectations of decolonization – namely, the emergence of a second front in the anti-imperialist camp – and the way the Non-Aligned Movement approached international relations. The Italian communists, at least until 1968, maintained a binary conception of international relations, despite Togliatti's elaboration of polycentrism, based on the belief that the East–West divide was inadequate, especially in a world in which the Global South was gaining prominence. Their internationalism remained less pragmatic than that embraced by non-aligned countries such as Algeria and Yugoslavia.

The PCI's anti-imperialist hopes had been bolstered in the late 1950s by the Algerian war of liberation, the coup that overthrew the pro-British monarchy in Iraq, the Cuban Revolution, and the

⁸⁵ See: Cooper, *Africa since 1940*, p. 88; C. Gertzel, *East and Central Africa*, in *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 8, pp. 407-408.

⁸⁶ FG, APC, Foreign Affairs, Mf. 468, meeting of March 1, 1960 to discuss the PCI's policy toward Arab countries, pp. 2295, 2299, 2301.

⁸⁷ See: G. Sorgonà, *La scoperta della destra. Il Movimento sociale Italiano e gli Stati Uniti*, Roma 2019, p. 19.

⁸⁸ FG, APC, Foreign Affairs, Mf. 468, meeting of March 1, 1960 to discuss the PCI's policy toward Arab countries, pp. 2295, 2299, 2301.

birth of seventeen new African states, including Lumumba's Congo. However, the networks between the newly independent nations soon proved fragile, particularly with regard to the expectation of a unified convergence between anti-imperialism and decolonization. This was tragically demonstrated by the Lumumba affair. The role of the superpowers in the Congo crisis reinforced the conviction among the elites of the newly independent countries that their fate was tied to new international networks, with which they engaged pragmatically. An example of this was the flexible attitude of many non-aligned countries toward peaceful coexistence: their leaders did not oppose it, but approached it cautiously, having matured politically under and in opposition to empires, aware that those empires had expanded during periods of détente and contracted during world wars.⁸⁹

Within the PCI, on the contrary, peaceful coexistence was warmly welcomed. It was interpreted as a strategy that could expand both national and international avenues for action: in other words, as a fundamental premise for the development of the party's political line. Only the party's left wing disagreed, seeing peaceful coexistence as insensitive to the revolutionary potential of the Third World and instead embracing an interpretation of North–South relations shaped by Maoist China's criticisms of Soviet internationalism.⁹⁰

Independent Algeria, whose foreign policy did not take on radical anti-imperialist tones, was considered by the PCI to be a fertile meeting ground between socialism and decolonization. In the early 1960s, empathy for the NLF was reflected in the PCI Foreign Section's assessment of the Algerian and French communists. The party kept an unsigned 1961 memo accusing the Algerian Communist Party (ACP) and the French Communist Party (PCF) of overestimating the role of the workers' movement in Algerian cities.⁹¹ The memo criticized both parties for adhering to the «current interpretation in the North African Communist Parties of Stalinist theses» and for conceptualizing the

⁸⁹ See: Cooper, *Africa since 1940*, p. 87.

⁹⁰ See: R. Rossanda, *La ragazza del secolo scorso*, Torino 2006.

⁹¹ On the “workerist” character of the Algerian Communist Party, see: Drew, *We Are No Longer in France*, pp. 253, 274, who, however, emphasizes the significant differences between Algerian and French communists on the question of independence in Ead., *Comparing African Experiences of Communism*, in *The Cambridge History of Communism*, p. 530.

Algerian nation according to Western standards.⁹² The pro-socialist tendencies of the Algerian liberation movement revived the PCI's hopes for a joint path between decolonization and internationalism. However, Algerian foreign policy also revealed the difficulty of maintaining this convergence within a bipolar framework. Independent Algeria sought to engage with the US in order to diversify the economic networks that still tied it to France. Rapprochement with the socialist bloc was facilitated by Western opposition, Algeria's interest in a state-centered economy at a time when «statehood was a requirement for engaging with the global economy»,⁹³ and the socialist bloc's support in the war against Morocco.

Algeria, moreover, was one of the few islands in a continent where the difficulties of penetrating the socialist camp soon became apparent. The ideological clash between the Soviet Union and China exacerbated this sense of impasse. The assessment of the trajectory of sub-Saharan countries, as expressed in a series of Foreign Section reports from 1963 onward, revealed an early recognition of this crisis. It was not surprising that for a pro-Soviet figure like Giuliano Pajetta, «the situation of the African and Arab countries» was a pressing issue for the international communist movement. Pajetta added that «the one-party system» had displaced the communists, while «the ideal influence of the socialist world is either waning or leading to pro-Chinese positions».⁹⁴ The journalist Emilio Sarzi Amadè – who observed the Third World with less bias and served as *l'Unità's* correspondent in China until 1961 and later in Vietnam – expressed similar concerns in his report on the Third Solidarity Conference. He attributed marked characteristics of «under-development» to the African delegations and accused them of being influenced by the Chinese through rudimentary means, ranging from ostentatious displays of wealth to what he called the «less dignified plan of the bribe». This «rather depressing»⁹⁵ impression was consistent with the reports of Soviet

⁹² See: FG, APC, Foreign Affairs, Algeria, 1961, Mf. 483, On the NLF and the ACP. Notes on historical precedents, pp. 2387-2388, 2391.

⁹³ Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution*, p. 169.

⁹⁴ FG, APC, Foreign Affairs, 1963, mf. 489, note by Giuliano Pajetta on the situation and prospects of our international work, pp. 2723, 2728-2729.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, report by Emilio Sarzi Amadè for the PCI leadership on the Third Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference, 11 February, pp. 2731-2733, 2735-2737.

diplomats regarding Chinese methods of penetration in Africa.⁹⁶ Valenzi, who focused on Mediterranean politics and was certainly less orthodox than Pajetta, did not deny these tendencies, but used them to regionalize the PCI's foreign policy, directing it even more toward North Africa. His notes on the Yaoundé Convention emphasized that it would cost Italy «no less than 68 billion lire for the 18 black African [*sic*] countries associated with the European Economic Community (EEC)». This solution, he argued, would be detrimental to the areas of interest to Italy, with which it was preferable to establish «a policy of *peaceful commerce* [...] *ever-wider trade* [...] *and cultural and diplomatic prestige*».⁹⁷

The communists' skepticism about the existence of an African political subjectivity became apparent in a context where the idea of a pan-African government was becoming increasingly isolated, while economic relations between independent countries and former empires were being reinforced.⁹⁸ Algeria thus became an almost obligatory interlocutor for the PCI in its attempts to expand dialogue with the non-aligned. Difficulties and reasons for concern were not concealed. In July 1963, Ben Bella's political experiment was the focus of a report by Rossana Rossanda, a left-wing member of the PCI who had been in charge of the party's cultural section for a few months. Her report highlighted the agrarian reforms and the internationalist foreign policy, but also noted the sclerosis within the socialist camp, which was stuck on the notion of «aid» and lacked a vision for an «international division of labor». She also expressed worry about the results of the one-party system, which strengthened the role of the army.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ See: Westad, *The Global Cold War*, pp. 163-168.

⁹⁷ FG, APC, Foreign Affairs, 1963, mf. 489, notes by Maurizio Valenzi for a discussion on Italy's policy toward the Third World, pp. 2766-2769. Another sign of the loss of confidence in the Third World comes from «Critica Marxista», in an article that draws on Charles Bettelheim's *L'Inde indépendante* (Paris 1962) to provide a critical assessment of the Indian experience. See D. Forti, *La questione coloniale*, «Critica marxista», 1/4, July-August 1963, pp. 150-157.

⁹⁸ See: I. Duffield, *Pan-Africanism since 1940*, in *The Cambridge History of Africa*, pp. 111-118.

⁹⁹ R. Rossanda, *Problemi e prospettive dell'Algeria indipendente*, «Rinascita», 13 July 1963. Rossanda's articles are included in the files prepared by Longo for her trip to Algeria in January 1964. FG, APC, 1964, s. Estero, mf. 520, Algeria, Documentation and notes by Luigi Longo concerning Algeria.

Longo's visit to Algiers in January 1964, almost simultaneously with Zhou Enlai's trip to Africa¹⁰⁰ and Togliatti's visit to Belgrade,¹⁰¹ was a fundamental step in the pursuit of this dialogue. The trip of the deputy secretary of the PCI seemed to confirm the intention to establish networks with the key players of an internationalism that transcended the socialist camp. This happened at a time when Togliatti viewed Khrushchev's leadership as tarnished and inadequate, prompting the PCI not to place itself outside the socialist camp but to relaunch its internationalist policy.

Longo's visit to Algeria marked the first time that the two strands of the PCI's foreign policy – support for new internationalist networks and parallel diplomacy – intersected. In his dialogue with the Italian delegation, Ben Bella made explicit his intention to reopen «the page of relations with the workers' movement in Western Europe». This «page» had been open with the PCI for seven years, and Ben Bella's statement likely served to underscore the distance between Algeria and other communist parties. Indeed, the PCI was asked to fill the void left by the Algerian and French communists: «We would have preferred others to be our communist interlocutors, but it is not our fault that this was not possible». The relationship with the Italians also had broader implications, since Ben Bella mentioned «contacts for the sale of oil to ENI» that had been established «before Mattei's death» but had been interrupted by «French blackmail».¹⁰² These demands were echoed in the delegation's meeting with the Italian ambassador in Algiers, Gian Lorenzo Betteloni, who lamented the difficulty of «putting the Italian capitalist groups [starting with FIAT] into contact with the Algerian government». The ambassador also inquired whether «the leadership of the North African national liberation movements had passed from the French Communist Party to the PCI».¹⁰³ Beyond the proconsular role attributed to the Italians by Betteloni, the mention of FIAT brought to the surface the multiple levels of PCI action: an internal level within the socialist camp, and a second level

¹⁰⁰ See: P. Borruso, *Il Pci e l'Africa indipendente*, Florence: 2009, p. 25.

¹⁰¹ See: Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, pp. 178-179.

¹⁰² ENI was negotiating with the Algerian government for a concession and had decided not to propose the creation of «a joint company, as it feared that it would demand a 51% shareholding». Bini, *La potente benzina italiana*, p. 186.

¹⁰³ See: FG, APC, Foreign Affairs, 1964, Algeria, mf. 520, Information from Maria Antonietta Macciocchi on the trip of the PCI delegation to Algeria, pp. 124-156.

intersecting with Italian foreign policy. In those years, Algeria seemed to be a bridgehead in Africa because of its proximity to the socialist camp in international politics. At the same time, the importance the PCI attached to Algeria as a means of gaining influence in Italy, especially with the Italian Socialist Party in the government, should not be underestimated.

Shortly after Longo's visit, *Critica Marxista* devoted an in-depth article to Algeria in its *Colonial Question* column. The article encapsulated the hopes placed in the Algerian government and the unresolved contradictions of communist political culture. It assumed that decolonization marked a watershed moment in human history that could not be interpreted according to European standards. The lack of attention paid to independent Algeria by European Marxist was attributed to the Western observers' classificatory mentality. For these observers, it was much easier to relate to an overt anti-imperialism like that of Cuba. Algeria was therefore a test for the «traditional intellectual frameworks» of European culture, from which assessments of the «extremely complex reality of the new countries» were made. The article condemned the skepticism of European observers about a potential authoritarian transformation in Algeria, a concern fueled by factors such as «the support of the army, the one-party doctrine, [and the weight of] the Arab-Islamic component». *Critica Marxista* pointed out that the army had not been placed under bourgeois command, nor had the Arab-Islamic component «ever assumed extremist forms», but rather served as a means of gaining popular support for the anti-colonial struggle. Nevertheless, by renewing the contradiction between global intentions and continental perspectives, the article stigmatized aspects of the Algerian experience that were alien to European canons. For example, it questioned whether «the problems associated with a peaceful transition to socialism» in an underdeveloped country could take on «the simplified form of a peasant revolution», a statement that revealed the urban bias within communist culture.¹⁰⁴ Contrary to its premises, this approach revealed clear stadial elements: Algeria was a country to be supported and accompanied in its challenge to «neo-colonialism» because «the maturation of a revolutionary consciousness

¹⁰⁴ See in this book the chapter by Giovanni Gozzini, *Nationalities' Policy and Land Reform in African Communism*.

among the peasant masses had thus far been much slower and more uncertain»¹⁰⁵ than expected.

The aporias and contradictions within communist culture served as a litmus test for the difficulties facing the party's internationalism. It was caught between a globalized politics that transcended the PCI's bipolar framework and the crisis of communist unity. It was at this crossroads, between the global expansion of politics and the fragmentation of the communist world, that Togliatti's final reflections emerged – abruptly interrupted by his death in Yalta. The *Memorandum* he wrote during his stay in Crimea was a critique of Chinese extremism, but also an indictment of Khrushchev. The inadequacy of the East-West divide seemed to be one of Togliatti's grievances, although he continued to view the world as shaped by a clash between two competing visions of modernity. The *Memorandum* revived the idea of polycentrism, a concept that surfaced only to sink again between 1956 and 1964 due to Soviet hostility, while regionalist perspectives such as “unity in diversity” served as its surrogates. It was no coincidence that the *Memorandum* was dismissive of Western Europe within the global horizon of Togliatti's thought.¹⁰⁶ But by the middle of the decade, this horizon was far gloomier than it had appeared six years earlier, when, in *Rinascita*, Togliatti had linked the twilight of colonialism to the impending crisis of Western hegemony.

Conclusions

To sum up, decolonization primarily reveals the aporias within the political culture of Italian communism. One of the key contradictions emerges in the intellectual debate, where two often conflicting tendencies become apparent. The first tendency can be described as the “symmetrical canon”, which emphasizes the unique characteristics of decolonization and advocates for autonomous development paths for newly independent nations that differ from European models. The second tendency instead promotes a stadial view of the historical development of post-colonial countries, synchronizing their progress with that of the industrialized world.

¹⁰⁵ A.L., *La questione coloniale*, «Critica marxista», 2/2, March-April 1964, pp. 190-194.

¹⁰⁶ See: Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, pp. 181-186.

The success of one approach or the other partly depended on contextual factors. When revolutionary hopes in the Third World seemed more realistic, the symmetrical canon tended to prevail. In times of disillusionment or crisis, however, the stadial readings of decolonization and its key figures gained traction. For instance, after Togliatti's death, Italian communists tempered the optimism that had marked the early 1960s. By this stage, the Third World had become embroiled in coups, interstate conflicts, and civil wars. The Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 had already foreshadowed the deepening national tensions between Asia's "giants," later confirmed by the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965.¹⁰⁷ African countries, too, were consumed by internal strife, as evidenced by the overthrow of Nkrumah and the Biafra War.¹⁰⁸ The proliferation of anti-communist regimes throughout Africa and South America dashed any hope of the PCI making inroads in critical countries such as the Congo and Brazil.¹⁰⁹ In Indonesia, the 1965 coup led to the rapid extermination of hundreds of thousands of communist militants and sympathizers.

Disillusionment with the revolutionary potential of the Third World solidified the PCI's shift toward stadial interpretations and strengthened the conviction – shared by the party's right wing and its leaders, including Giorgio Amendola and Giorgio Napolitano – that its international relations should be primarily oriented toward the European left. This trend is clearly evident in the analysis of archival records and the communist press. The classically European nexus of anti-fascism and nationalism was increasingly applied as a key to understanding the non-European world, with the dichotomy of fascism versus anti-fascism repeatedly invoked to describe the struggle between liberation movements and the remnants of European colonialism. But even more significant was the fact that descriptions of postcolonial countries now tended to highlight their anachronisms and backwardness in comparison to Europe. An assessment of Algeria provides insight into this shift in communist cultural orientation. In a Foreign Section report, a few months before the 1965 coup, Algeria's prospects

¹⁰⁷ See: Westad, *The Global Cold War*, p. 108.

¹⁰⁸ See: Cooper, *Colonialism*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁹ On Latin America, see: O. Pappagallo, *Verso il nuovo mondo. Il Pci e l'America Latina (1945-1973)*, Milan 2017, pp. 179 ff. In Congo, the PCI supported rebels who were eventually defeated by the government forces. See: Siracusano, *Pronto per la rivoluzione!*, pp. 135-138.

were deemed precarious because of the fragility of its social base, particularly the large presence of a «very numerous lumpenproletariat». Whereas Fanon viewed this group as the revolutionary force of the Third World, Italian communists saw it as a limitation. The language used in the analysis was drawn from European experiences, where socialism was linked to organized social classes led by party vanguards. Recommendations on how to counter Chinese influence, especially among the youth and intellectuals, reinforce this impression, with the document advising a return to Leninist classics such as *Left-Wing Communism* and the writings on peaceful coexistence.¹¹⁰

Ironically, by the latter half of the decade, Italian communists began displaying the same performative attitudes they had previously criticized in their French and Algerian counterparts. Judgments about African decolonization increasingly reflected the belief that it had occurred without the necessary political and social “maturity” leaving post-colonial states vulnerable to neo-colonialism.¹¹¹ This notion of immaturity brought to the fore interpretative frameworks that were not far removed from the paternalism that the PCI had once condemned in the reformist left. Complex political motivations were attributed almost exclusively to Western actors, as evidenced by the interpretation of the Nigerian Civil War as a clash between American and British interests, rather than a conflict driven by local forces.¹¹²

Despite the prevalence of these staid views, they continued to coexist with a contrasting approach that rejected the notion of “underdevelopment” and questioned the idea that development in the post-colonial world should follow the model of European modernity. In 1966, in *Critica marxista*, Cesare Luporini, a Marxist philosopher aligned with the left wing of the PCI, challenged the idea «that all peoples (and especially those affected by Western colonialism, and today misnamed under-developed) should pass through the same stages of development as Western peoples –, albeit more rapidly (thanks to the help, however self-interested, of the ‘civilized’ and capitalist peoples,

¹¹⁰ See: FG, APC, Foreign Affairs, 1964, Algeria, mf. 520, note by L. Gallico, October, pp. 213-215. See also *ibid.*, F. Calamandrei’s memorandum for the PCI Secretariat on the concluding talks with the NLF delegation, 20 October, p. 223.

¹¹¹ See: *ibid.*, Guinea-Cape Verde 1967, mf. 545, Report by Romano Ledda on his trip to Africa, March-April 1967, pp. 2008-2016.

¹¹² See: R. Ledda, *Problemi della lotta politica e sociale nell’Africa nera*, «Critica marxista», 5/2, March-April 1967, pp. 77-100.

including the working class)». He criticized this as a «mechanistic idea», one «common to all the ‘Marxism of the Second International’»,¹¹³ But similar observations also emerge when looking at PCI sources intended for a broad audience. When the PCI press launched its critique of the film *Africa Addio*,¹¹⁴ Gualtiero Jacopetti’s film was condemned for its racism, particularly its focus on the continent’s underdevelopment. What has just been noted This reaction highlighted the aporetic nature of communist culture, which also harbored contradictory perspectives that were never fully debated. For instance, in the second half of the 1960s, discussions of international economic relations were still based on an assumed convergence of interests between the Western working class and the former colonial peoples.¹¹⁵

The key question that decolonization raised for the PCI, therefore, concerned the nature of its internationalism. It was characterized by two distinctive features: first, it was based on the idea of the complementarity of social interests between the Global North and South; second, it was framed within the context of the socialist bloc. By contrast, the internationalism being experimented with in the Third World was grounded in national self-determination, with social interests that did not necessarily coincide with those of the European working class, and which could not be reduced to the bipolar logic of the Cold War. These were different forms of internationalism that could dialogue with each other but did not fully overlap – in fact, they could even come into conflict.

After Togliatti’s death and until the repression of the Prague Spring, this hope for dialogue did not disappear, but it became more narrowly

¹¹³ C. Luporini, *Realtà e storicità*, «Critica marxista», 4/1, January-February 1966, p. 78. Similar observations can be found in P. Santi, *Il dibattito sull'imperialismo nei classici del marxismo*, *ibid.*, 3/3, May-June 1965, pp. 86-120.

¹¹⁴ See: David, *addio?*, «l'Unità», 6 August 1966; *David privato per Jacopetti*, *ibid.*, 7 August 1966; g.c., *Premi e consigli*, *ibid.*, 8 August 1966; Rizzoli *invoca la censura per difendere Jacopetti*, *ibid.*, 10 August 1966. G.f.p., *Cineasti siciliani alla ricerca dell'Africa vera*, *ibid.*, 9 April 1967 praised instead the emergence of young film-makers committed to «portraying an Africa engaged in a great effort of liberation, emancipation, and construction of a future of peace and progress». For the controversy sparked abroad by *Africa Addio*, see Slobodian, *Foreign Front*, pp. 136-146.

¹¹⁵ See: S. Levrero, *La questione dell'energia nei rapporti euro-africani*, «Critica Marxista», 4/1, January-February 1966, pp. 218-236. Id., *Comunità europea e Stati africani associati*, *ibid.*, 5/2, March-April 1967, pp. 102-131.

focused on certain interlocutors, for reasons largely beyond the PCI's control. During these years, the PCI's involvement in Africa focused on countries still struggling for independence, such as the Portuguese colonies, or on regions such as North Africa, where its efforts often met with limited success. The relationship with Algeria continued after Ben Bella's ousting, although Boumediene's regime no longer seemed to offer a bridgehead for the spread of socialism. Instead, Algeria became a bastion in a continent increasingly dominated by "neo-colonialism". Relations with Egypt were less successful, as the PCI's attempts to establish direct contact met with little interest from Egyptian counterparts.¹¹⁶

The Italians' zone-based interventions were consistent with the Soviet strategy toward the Third World after Khrushchev.¹¹⁷ By the end of the 1960s, the PCI's internationalism had not been affected by decolonization to the extent that it abandoned a binary reading of international relations. The PCI did not move in the direction of overcoming the Cold War blocs and even criticized the Yugoslavs for their orientation toward such a course.¹¹⁸ These coordinates were seriously challenged in the 1970s, when *détente* – often misunderstood by contemporary observers as a gateway to dialogue and openness – soon revealed its underlying aim of stabilizing the superpowers' spheres of influence. At this point, the PCI redefined its internationalism in a more inclusive way, at odds with the logic of the Cold War blocs. This shift further isolated the PCI within the communist movement, particularly as Cold War dynamics intensified within the very forces ac-

¹¹⁶ See: APC, Foreign Affairs, Egypt, mf. 527, Report of the PCI delegation to the U.A.R. (10-12 February 1965), pp. 2326-2329, 2333; *ibid.*, Mf. 536, Giuliano Pajetta, *Information on a short stay in Egypt*, 28-31 March 1966, 5 May 1966, pp. 1830-4. In the months leading up to Togliatti's death, «Rinascita» had already published a series of articles on Nasser's regime by Luciano Romagnoli, emphasizing its socializing and progressive aspects. See: L. Romagnoli, "Democrazia sociale" nell'Egitto di Nasser, «Rinascita», 30 May 1964, p. 10; Id., *L'eredità del passato*, *ibid.*, 13 June 1964, p. 14; Id., *Il nazionalismo arabo*, *ibid.*, 4 July 1964, p. 10. Luciano Romagnoli, a member of the secretariat from the farmers' trade union movement, passed away prematurely on February 19, 1966.

¹¹⁷ See: Hilger, *Communism, Decolonisation and the Third World*, pp. 333-336.

¹¹⁸ See: APC, Foreign Affairs, Yugoslavia, 1967, mf. 545, Ledda's note on the Belgrade meeting of 19-20 December 1967, pp. 2151-2153; *ibid.*, 1968, mf. 552, meeting in Belgrade on 6 September 1968, pp. 1948-1951.

tive in the Global South, such as the Cuban and African communists. But in navigating this narrow path, the Italian communists arrived at an innovation in their political culture, reflected in the increasing importance of the Global South in Berlinguer's political vision and in the dialogue with the Non-Aligned Movement around the proposal of the New International Economic Order.

GREGORIO SORGONÀ

Between Marxism-Leninism and Gallocentrism. The French Communist Party and the Anticolonial Revolutions (1950-1968)

Introduction

In this article I will reconstruct French communism's interpretations and representations of the anti-colonial revolutions. The analysis will focus on the independence of the French colonies in sub-Saharan and Northern Africa as viewed through two leading journals in the FCP cultural apparatus: *Les Cahiers du communisme*, the theoretical journal of the FCP Central Committee, and *Démocratie Nouvelle*,¹ the journal of international politics directed by Jacques Duclos.

These two periodicals were chosen with the goal of looking at both the "official" interpretations of decolonization by the party's leadership group (*Les Cahiers du communisme*) as well as those which were the product of a dialogue with other communist parties and other currents of the international workers' movement (*Démocratie nouvelle*) and which aimed at dialogue with what moved outside the militant body.

My analysis will cover the period 1950-1968, divided into three chronological phases:

1950-1954, the end of the most acute phase of the Cold War, the beginning of the international thaw and the collapse of the French colonial empire in Indochina;

1955-1962, from the Bandung Conference to African independence, passing through Suez, the 20th Congress of the CPSU, the Algerian War and the Sino-Soviet split;

1963-1968, the crisis of African socialism, the coups d'état and the national reconfiguration of the FCP's strategy after the fall of Khrushchev, the stabilization of bipolarism along the axis of détente in Europe/competition and conflict in the global South.

¹ All the articles from FCP's journals are available on the web site of Maison des Sciences de l'Homme – Burgundy University, <https://pandor.u-bourgogne.fr/>.

To date, studies that have addressed French communism's relationship with decolonization have made the interpretive key of "Gallocentrism" central.² The category of Gallocentrism made it possible to highlight the FCP's relative inability to interpret the national revolutions in the colonies as independent and antagonistic processes with respect to the metropolis, especially regarding the revolutionary processes that characterized the end of the French colonial empire in Africa. In fact, for the FCP the emancipation of the colonies should have taken place starting from a revolutionary process that developed from the center towards the periphery. In short, a revival of France's revolutionary (and civilizing) mission, in which the communists, as the legitimate representatives of the legacy of the Great Revolution, should have been the vanguard.

This article is based on that reading, and in particular on recent studies related to the FCP's policy in Africa, its role in the socialist camp, and to the action of the other large communist party of the Western world, namely the Italian party.³ From here I will try to relate Gallocentrism to the transnational ideological-cultural universe of communism in the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, the evolution of this set of representations and interpretive keys, which are linked to the dynamics of the Cold War and decolonization, strongly conditioned the representations that the French communists produced both about their action within the national space as well as in the socialist camp, and consequently the way in which they thought about France's role as a colonial, and former colonial, power in Africa, internationalism and socialism.

1950-1954 The Cold War and Anti-colonialism

At the beginning of the 1950s, after the communists' victory in China and the end of the Korean War, and in the midst of the Indochina War, the question of the end of colonialism is at the center of international public debate. During this phase, the French communists

² A. Ruscio, *Les communistes français et la guerre d'Algérie*, in *Le Parti communiste français et l'année 1956*, Bobigny : Fondation Gabriel Péri, 2006, pp. 79-89.

³ For western communism's action in Africa see F. Blum-M. Di Maggio-G. Siracusano-S. Wolikow (eds), *Les partis communistes occidentaux et l'Afrique. Une Histoire mineure ?*, Paris : Maisonneuve & Larose/Hémisphères Editions, 2021.

rework a series of theoretical-ideological paradigms for their cultural universe which had been formed in the preceding period. These become the basis for their way of conceiving the theme of the anti-colonial revolutions, the social and political systems which emerge from them, and their relationships with both the socialist camp and with the project of a France governed by the left. The evolution of the Cold War context, the communist movement, and the process of decolonization will determine the weight and the way each of these paradigms is expressed.

The first of these paradigms is the FCP's claim of its historical role in the anti-colonial struggle and its contribution to the training and defense of the colonies' revolutionary leaders from repression. The FCP declares its unyielding opposition to the imperialist expansionism of the bourgeoisie and big national capital and the fight against the chauvinist positions of the socialists in the French workers' movement, as demonstrated in the 1920s by the strategy of uniting the mobilizations against colonial expansionism on the southern shore of the Mediterranean and those against the occupation of the Ruhr valley. It played this role throughout the colonial empire: in Indochina, where the communists led the war of liberation, but also in Africa, since the Rif War in 1924.⁴

Starting from this action, founded on the principles of communist internationalism and anti-imperialism, the party developed a unified strategy between the popular masses of the metropolis and the peasant masses of the colonies. The party had always focused on the fight against the haute bourgeoisie and the parasitic classes that were the guarantors of colonial domination in overseas territories. Starting in the 1930s, this strategy took on a clear anti-fascist function, first to counter Italian expansionism in Africa and Japanese expansionism in Asia, and subsequently to contribute to the people's fight against Nazism and Vichy collaboration, the latter being the most reactionary expression of the interests of the French colonialist bourgeoisie.⁵

The lens through which the historical role of French communism in the anti-colonial struggle is described is therefore that of a Marxism-Leninism expressed in a frontist and anti-fascist key, where the

⁴ A. Marty, *La guerre d'Indochine et les traditions du mouvement ouvrier français*, «Les Cahiers du communisme», 3, 1950, p. 22.

⁵ L. Feix, *La tradition de lutte du Parti communiste français contre le colonialisme et l'impérialisme*, «Les Cahiers du communisme», 12, 1950, p. 105.

national – the Gallocentric – element is embodied precisely by anti-fascism, the starting point from which to build an alliance between the French working class and the peasant masses of the colonies. Both the legacy of the French Revolution and that of October are recalled in this unitary construction. In fact, the resolution of the national question in the colonies should have taken place following the example of the liberation of the nationalities oppressed by the Tsarist empire and by Lenin's Bolsheviks, and taking inspiration from the model of coexistence among the peoples of Stalin's Soviet Union.

The legacy of the French Revolution does not take on the chauvinistic function of a civilizing mission that was typical of the colonialist bourgeoisie and the socialists. It is instead translated into the spirit of 1917 and Soviet-led communist internationalism as the true engine of the fight against colonialism.⁶ In this framework, the Chinese revolution is seen as an enormous historical caesura. The birth of the People's Republic in 1949 constitutes the definitive passage of the revolutionary message of 1917, which spread through Europe to the colonial world with the fight against Nazi-fascism. This passage, as the Indochina war shows, marks the beginning of the end of colonialism.⁷

The role of the working class and of French communism lies within this system, from which a linear conception of the advance of socialism emerges. The way in which the colonial question is related to the liberation from Nazism, the birth of the 4th Republic, the outbreak of the Cold War and the exclusion of the FCP from the government in 1947 is indicative from this point of view.

The anti-fascist constitution of 1946 and the *Union française*, the new political-administrative entity that regulated relations between France and its colonies, were in fact conceived of as the first step in the construction of a new model of coexistence between metropolises and colonies that was opposed to the neo-imperialism of the British Commonwealth. In fact, the unity of the popular classes of the metropolis and the colonies under the guidance of the working class and the communists, and within the framework of an anti-fascist government, should have progressively built an experiment in advanced democracy, coexistence and the development of nationalities. This

⁶ É. Mignot, *Le Marxisme et la Question Nationale et Coloniale' par Joseph Staline*, «Les Cahiers du communisme», 3, 1950, p. 109; G. Coignot, *Sur la voie de l'émancipation*, «Démocratie Nouvelle», 5, 1951.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

experiment, inspired by the Soviet example, would gradually overcome the relationship of subordination between metropolitan France and its overseas territories.⁸ This process was interrupted in 1947, with the beginning of the Cold War and the alliance between American imperialism and big French capital which, with the complicity of the Catholics, Socialists and Gaullists, moved from collaborationism to Atlanticism, recovering the anti-communist and imperialist impulses of fascism.⁹

Considering this, in the context of the isolation and repression of the Cold War, the FCP must continue its internationalist policy of opposing French imperialism. In addition to its opposition to the Indochina war, its priority objective is the fight against the projects for European integration.¹⁰

Faced with the crisis of colonialism and the loss of Asia, imperialism takes aim at Africa and the asymmetrical economic integration between the two shores of the Mediterranean. The European Coal and Steel Community and the European Defense Community, but also the return to vogue in Western circles of discourses about Eurafrika – which are defined as “neo-Hitlerian” – are nothing more than attempts to subjugate France to the interests of American imperialism and its West German standard bearers. The USA, in fact, in addition to profiting from the raw materials on the African continent, wants to make Africa a fundamental piece of its military structure. For this reason, it supports Adenauer and De Gasperi’s projects, which are meant to bring the FRG and Italy back into the ranks of the imperialist powers through Europeanism and investments in the French colonies disguised as development aid.¹¹

The insistence on the construction of a true *Union Française* fits into this context; a project of coexistence between nationalities linked to France, and a subject of peace to be placed alongside the socialist camp. French imperialism, thrown into crisis by the struggles of the metropolitan workers’ class, by the war in Asia and by the increasingly strong demands for independence in Africa, becomes prey to

⁸ J. Mitterrand, *La mensonge de l’Union française*, «*Démocratie Nouvelle*», 5, 1951.

⁹ L. Feix, *La tradition de lutte du Parti communiste français*, «*Les Cahiers du communisme*», 12, 1950, p. 107.

¹⁰ G. Lisette, *Le Plan Schuman contre l’Afrique*, «*Démocratie Nouvelle*», 8, 1950; M. Egretaud, *Eurafrique, formule hitlérienne*, «*Démocratie Nouvelle*», 11, 1953.

¹¹ L. Feix, *L’Afrique en marche*, «*Démocratie Nouvelle*», 4, 1951.

dominant and ascendant imperialisms (USA and FRG). The crisis of national colonialism makes France the weak link of imperialism, to be broken through the revival of the frontist formula, the struggle for peace and support for Soviet policy.¹²

Thus, the Gallocentric paradigm comingles with the Marxist-Leninist and Soviet-centric one in this connection between frontism, anti-fascism and Marxism-Leninism. The events of 1955-1956 will reconfigure this balance.

1955-1961. From Bandung to the African National Revolutions

The Bandung Conference is interpreted by the FCP both as a point of arrival and a historic turning point.

It is a point of arrival because a line of continuity is identified that starts from 1917, was clarified at Baku in 1920 and was then decisively strengthened in Beijing in 1949, now arriving at the Indonesian city.

Bandung also witnesses a turning point in the history of oppressed peoples: for the first time, unity between Asian and African peoples is born based on the idea, confirmed by the Chinese example, that imperialism and colonialism are not invincible. The French communists emphasize the Chinese delegation's key role, and how Chou En Lai's action was fundamental in building the unity that guaranteed the success of the conference around the ideas of anti-colonialism and the struggle for peace. As the declarations of the progressive nationalist leaders Nehru and Sukarno demonstrate, the USSR and the socialist camp are now a model and a support for modernization projects in the newly independent countries, and a guide in the liberation struggles, whose development is inseparable from the fight against imperialist aggression.

For the French communists, China becomes the trusted and brilliant architect of the hegemony of the Soviet-led communist movement over the anti-colonial movements. Bandung therefore reinforces the frontist paradigm of unity between the communist movement

¹² *Volcans Coloniaux*, «*Démocratie Nouvelle*», Special Issue, 5, 1951; L. Feix, *Le mouvement de libération nationale des peuples d'Afrique du Nord*, «*Les Cahiers du communisme*», 11-12, 1953, p. 1169; M. Egretaud, *Afrique, dernière chance...*, «*Démocratie Nouvelle*», 1, 1954; L. Ordu, *Où en est en Afrique du Nord?*, «*Démocratie Nouvelle*», 10, 1954.

and progressive nationalism, within what seems to be an inexorable process of convergence between the anti-colonialist movements and the socialist camp.¹³

The French scenario also confirms this perspective. In fact, two governments fall in 1955 after the defeat in Indochina: first with the vote of no-confidence in the government led by Mendes France at the beginning of 1955, and then 11 months later, when the FCP plays a decisive role in the fall of Edgar Faure. The government led by the radical-socialist exponent receives a vote of no-confidence following the impetuous growth of demonstrations for independence in Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, accompanied by those of the extreme right, which is hostile to decolonization.

Elections for the National Assembly are held on January 2, 1956. The result is a clear affirmation of the left, with the FCP obtaining 25.4%. On January 31, the communists vote to grant confidence to the government of socialist Guy Mollet, and on March 12 they vote for full powers to be given to the head of the government regarding the Algerian crisis. In the meantime, the process that will quickly lead to the independence of Morocco and Tunisia has been set in motion.

Therefore, at the beginning of 1956, the Bandung Conference and the strengthening of the climate of thaw between the two blocs seem to favor the French communists' emergence from isolation. Mollet's socialist government seems determined to move forward with the resolution of the problem of the colonies in North Africa and to oppose the positions calling for an all-out defense of French Algeria present in public opinion and in the army. The belief is that the international dynamic of convergence between anti-colonial movements and the socialist camp also favors the revival of the frontist perspective in France. The FCP once again aims at relaunching the real *Union Française*, especially for Algeria, but also for the French colonies of sub-Saharan Africa. As regards Algeria, considered a nation in formation since the immediate post-war period, the FCP identifies the Algerian communist party as an interlocutor which should assure the support of the

¹³ P. Hentges, *Bandoeng et l'accélération de la crise du colonialisme*, «Les Cahiers du communisme», 6, 1955, p. 706; G. Thevenin, *La lutte libératrice de peuples coloniaux*, «Les Cahiers du communisme», 11, 1955, p. 1359; L. Salini, *A Bandung les « muets du monde » ont parlé*, «Démocratie Nouvelle», 6, 1955.

colony's working class for the frontist strategy and the prospect of an independent Algeria's membership in a renewed Union.¹⁴

Referring to the Indochinese tragedy, where the desire to maintain colonial domination had created a rift with the popular masses and made it impossible to maintain any link with France, the communists paint the continuation of the war as a national shame brought about by big capital and the fascist sectors of the nationalist petit bourgeoisie.¹⁵ The role that the communists of the metropolises claim in the sub-Saharan colonies consists of promoting the organizational strength and influence of the various sections of the *Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* and the trade union movements, where – according to the FCP – the role of the communist vanguards has been growing.¹⁶

Therefore, until the beginning of 1956, the paradigms with which the FCP addressed the issue of decolonization remained unchanged: belief in the growing hegemonic capacity of the USSR-led socialist camp, with China as the main interpreter of the directions coming from Moscow; and the possibility of a new frontist unity among the democratic forces both on the international and national level, in which the communists would play a leading role. These paradigms form a coherent and linear reading, which ensures internal cohesion and an optimistic vision of the French party's role at home, in the colonies and in the socialist camp.

The first things to modify this picture are the Suez Crisis, the 20th Congress of the CPSU and the escalation of the Algerian crisis. In addition, there is the Hungarian Revolution and its repression, which fuels anti-communism in France.

The first effect of the Suez crisis and the 20th Congress is a push towards reconsideration of the autonomy of the national liberation movements in the strategy and discourse of international communism. For the FCP, Suez represents first and foremost a great victory for the Soviet Union, which becomes an example of modernization and a fundamental support to the progressive movements of

¹⁴ *Asie-Afrique et la paix*, «Démocratie Nouvelle», Special Issue, 5, 1955.

¹⁵ E. Micheli, *La lutte des peuples opprimés: les événements du mois d'août en Afrique du Nord*, «Les Cahiers du communisme», 9, 1955, p. 1006; M. Egretaud, *Reconnaître le fait national algérien, c'est l'intérêt de la France*, «Les Cahiers du communisme», 6, 1956; Id., *Négocier vite en Algérie*, «Démocratie Nouvelle», 2, 1956; J. Duclos, *Guerre d'Algérie et politique française*, «Démocratie Nouvelle», 7, 1956.

¹⁶ L. Ordu, *Le RDA et le peuples d'Afrique*, «Démocratie Nouvelle», 6, 1955.

the colonial world for thwarting the aggressive aims of imperialism. At the same time, the Egyptian political victory and the defeat of French and British colonialism are seen as a defeat of American imperialism, the true architect of the Anglo-French military enterprise.¹⁷

Beyond its alignment with the directions coming from Moscow about the role of progressive nationalism, the FCP, in a state of shock caused by the secret report and the Hungarian crisis, shows little ability to discern the contradictions and conflicts within the Western camp and the changes in the international framework that emerge from the rigid schemes of Marxism-Leninism.¹⁸ The worsening of the Algerian crisis between the end of 1956 and 1957, and the strengthening of the demands for independence in sub-Saharan Africa accelerate the confusion. What has fallen is the main pillar of the strategy of the French communists: the frontist strategy on a national level. The deterioration of the crisis in Algeria pushes the FCP to denounce the weakness of the socialists and the government in the face of pressure from the right, the supporters of colonialism and American imperialism.

Furthermore, at the time of the Treaties of Rome there is firm and radical opposition to European integration projects, which continue to be described as the last resort of imperialism. The colonialist bourgeoisie and the socialists intend to use Europeanism and Euro-Africanist ideologies to sell out the interests of the nation to big US and West German capital, which is ready to support – and to replace – the French colonialists in Africa.¹⁹

During the crisis of May 1958, the FCP calls for an anti-fascist unity

¹⁷ *La leçon de Suez: la guerre n'est pas inévitable*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 10, 1956, p. 955; *Sur les conséquences économiques de la guerre d'Égypte et d'Algérie*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 12, 1956, p. 1323; H. Chauveau, *Sur divers aspects de la question nationale et coloniale à notre époque*, *ibid.*, p. 1393.

¹⁸ R. Martelli, *1956 communiste. Le glas d'une espérance*, Paris: La Dispute, 2006; M. Di Maggio, *Il Partito Comunista Francese, lo "choc" del 1956 e il movimento comunista internazionale*, in F. Chiarotto-A. Hobel (eds.), *Il 1956, un bilancio storico e storiografico*, Torino: Accademia University Press- Biblioteca di Historia Magistra, 2022, pp. 111-123.

¹⁹ J. Berlioz, *De Suez à la relance européenne*, «Démocratie Nouvelle», 11, 1956; G. Coignot, *Nasser et le progrès*, *ibid.*; J. Duclos, *L'Européanisme des aventuriers de Suez*, «Démocratie Nouvelle», 2, 1957; G. Badia, *Bonn Relance l'Eurafrrique*, *ibid.*; L. Casanova, *À propos de la guerre d'Algérie, l'internationalisme prolétarien et l'intérêt national*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 4, 1957, p. 467; M. Dufriche, *Le fait national*

government meant to repress the military revolt and open negotiations with the Algerian independence movement, with respect to which the communists were beginning to acknowledge their modest role. For this reason, De Gaulle's return is denounced as a fascist coup d'état, with the sole aim of maintaining colonialism through war and the subjugation of France to the interests of the American and German haute bourgeoisie.²⁰ The 1958 referendum, which granted the colonies the possibility of choosing to be part of the new *Communauté française*, amounts to a form of extortion, in which the people of the African colonies are forced to decide between the continuation of colonial domination or the withdrawal of any type of aid. The choice in Guinea is judged to be a true act of revolutionary courage resulting from the popular will.

The collapse of the 4th Republic and the return of De Gaulle are severe defeats for the FCP. Recent studies have brought to light how, together with the 20th Congress and the Hungarian crisis, these events triggered a process of decline that would conclude at the end of the 1970s.²¹ All the conditions that had allowed the FCP to interpret the processes of decolonization through the scheme that integrated the Gallocentric paradigm within the Marxist-Leninist framework immediately weakened.

With De Gaulle's opening to the independence of the colonies, the FCP has to radicalize its position with respect to the struggles for liberation in order to reconfigure its opposition against what is defined as the "personal power" of the General. The first effect of this forced change of perspective is the progressive abandonment of the discussion about a renewed *Union française*, which is no longer a prospect for the future but instead represents the space through which the FCP is able to spread an anti-imperialist consciousness in the colonies. The model of coexistence between peoples represented by the Soviet example can no longer be called upon to support the project of unity between metropolitan France and its former empire. However, it is recovered in the context of some timid openings to African Unity projects, which are opposed at every turn by the maneuvers of impe-

algérien, *ibid.*, p. 515; M. Thorez, *Pour la paix en Algérie*, *ibid.*, p. 622; J. Gaçon, *Les Chances de l'Occident*, «Démocratie Nouvelle», 4, 1957.

²⁰ J. Duclos, *Pour regrouper la gauche française*, «Démocratie Nouvelle», 4, 1958.

²¹ R. Martelli-J. Vigreux-S. Wolikow, *Le Parti rouge. Une histoire du Pcf, 1920-2020*, Paris : Armand Collin, 2020, pp. 153-171.

rialism. This new reality is accompanied by a clear reconsideration of progressive nationalism, starting with the movement led by Sekou Touré. Despite the Gaullist blackmail, Guinea becomes an example of an experiment in advanced democracy and unification of the popular classes through the action of a mass party. Thus, greater importance begins to be attributed to the original forms of the liberation movements which, stimulated by the communist movement's opening to national paths to socialism, vary depending on the specific situations. The consequence is a relativization of the centrality of the working class (which is admittedly inconsistent in economically backwards contexts) and the communist parties (recognizing their minority character and above all their relationship with the nationalists, which was not always one of collaboration and unity).²²

Regarding these themes (the originality of the forms of construction of advanced democracy, the role of the communists and relations with progressive nationalism), a difference in emphasis also begins to emerge between the official interpretation of *Les Cahiers du Communisme* and the one that takes shape in the pages of *Démocratie Nouvelle*. In fact, the latter is more attentive to the specificity and autonomy of the liberation movements and seems to attribute greater importance to the conflicts that decolonization produces in the Western camp. These are the first manifestations of a fissure in the ideological unity within the party, the timid expression of an internal differentiation that was destined to deepen and to include other central elements of communist ideology and strategy.²³

While the national liberation movements in sub-Saharan Africa are presented as parts of a large anti-imperialist movement led by the socialist camp, Algeria continues to represent a source of contradictions and difficulties. For the FCP, De Gaulle's first openings towards dialogue with the Algerian liberation movement are not so much the result of popular struggle but rather of the impetus of the USSR-led policy of coexistence. The FCP is cautious about recognizing the merits of the FLN, and criticizes, in the name of Leninism, those who

²² *Afrique*, «Démocratie Nouvelle», Special Issue, 6, 1958; J. Duclos, *De Gaulle fait la Guerre en Algérie*, «Démocratie Nouvelle», 8, 1958; R. Barbe, *Gaullisme et colonialisme*; L. Feix, *Frères africains, nous répondrons: présents!*, «Démocratie Nouvelle», 9, 1958.

²³ M. Di Maggio, *The Rise and Fall of Communist Parties in France and Italy. Entangled Historical Approaches*, Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, p. 1.

desert the French army engaged in Algeria. This attitude is owed to its difficulty in countering the movement's radicalization against the colonial war at home, which gives rise to the new French left.²⁴

The fixed point remains the exaltation of the Soviet model and the socialist camp's role in the end of colonialism and the modernization of the newly independent states, through solidarity and the promotion of a model of advanced democracy that was adaptable to the different scenarios of underdevelopment. In the FCP's view, a change in the global balance of power in favor of socialism has now been achieved with the independence of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The imperialist camp is on the defensive.

The socialist camp's and the great Sino-Soviet unity of purpose around Khrushchev's policy of peaceful coexistence remains the main reason for this new perspective of victory for oppressed peoples. Thus, the French leadership group is even more radical than the Soviets in formulating the accusation of revisionism against those who are beginning to call for a polycentric reorganization of the world revolutionary movement and relations between the socialist camp and the liberation movements (the Italian and Yugoslavian communists).²⁵ Therefore, between 1959 and 1960, the French communists have a hard time repositioning themselves with respect to the Gaullist foreign policy of openness to the independence of the sub-Saharan colonies, to a France that is the protagonist of a policy of national independence in the Atlantic and European sphere, and they begin to feel the pressure from the movement to their left in the political space. For this reason, they try to defend the one certainty of the traditional ideological framework: Sino-Soviet unity and the leadership of the USSR in the anti-imperialist struggle.²⁶

²⁴ M. Dufriche, *L'Afrique noire face au projet gaulliste*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 9, 1958, p. 1352; G. Thevenin, *Une seule issue en Algérie: la négociation*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 11, 1958, p. 1544; M. Lafon, *L'Afrique et la Guinée après le référendum*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 12, 1958, p. 1554; J. Vermeersch, *Le problème algérien et l'intérêt national*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 6, 1959, p. 155; Denis, «Le « consortium des blancs » et l'internationalisme prolétarien», *Les Cahiers du Communisme*, *ibid.*, p. 637.

²⁵ M. Di Maggio, *The Rise and Fall*, pp. 1-13.

²⁶ A.P. Lentin, *La Communauté sous le signe du néo colonialisme*, «Démocratie Nouvelle», 8, 1959; J. Duclos, *Le dégel atteint la France*, «Démocratie Nouvelle», 12, 1959; J. Berlios, *Les conditions du libre choix algérien*, *ibid.*; Noirrot, *De Gaulle et*

The session of the UN General Assembly in October and the conference of the communist parties in Moscow in November 1960 are seen in a single perspective. The Assembly, in which many newly independent African states participate for the first time, marks the achievement of maximum prestige for the Soviet Union. Khrushchev becomes the champion of the fight against colonialism and the promotion of an equitable development model for the former colonial countries. There is an unprecedented change in the balance of power at the United Nations, which becomes one of the forums for defusing American aggression, advancing decolonization, and supporting the economic independence of the former colonial states.

The Moscow Conference, which in reality is a last, vain, attempt at maintaining the unity of international communism through a compromise between the Soviet and Chinese positions, is nonetheless celebrated as the triumph of unity against all revisionism.²⁷

The independence and birth of the new African national states are part of the great movement of struggle against imperialism. Peaceful coexistence, to be supported through the mobilization against war in the West, is the essential condition for dismantling the projects of imperialism, which is determined to use armed conflict to thwart the development of projects of advanced democracy supported by the socialist camp in what begins to be called the "Third World".

1962-1964. Algerian Independence, the Sino-Soviet Split and Neocolonialism

The Conference in Belgrade, which sees the formal establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement, takes place at the beginning of September 1961. Unlike what it had done six years earlier for Bandung, the FCP offers a less triumphalist analysis of the event, underlining

l'équilibre mondial, *ibid.*; M. Lafon, *L'Accès du Mali à l'indépendance*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 1, 1960, p. 124; *Algérie et le fascisme*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 2, 1960, p. 147.

²⁷ *L'ONU et l'esprit de notre temps*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 10, 1960, p. 1475; M. Bourjot, *L'Afrique et l'ONU*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 10, 1960, p. 1592; J. Denis, *Pays socialistes et pays impérialistes devant le problème colonial*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 11, 1960, p. 1683; J. Suret-Canale, *L'Afrique à l'heure de l'indépendance et la 'communauté renouvelée'*, *ibid.*, p. 1735.

the differences of positions among the participants. Belgrade is not a new Bandung, primarily due to the failure to invite Soviet and Chinese delegations, even as observers. The unanimous anti-imperialism and opposition to any type of war is appreciated, but mistrust is expressed about the presence of equidistant positions between the two blocs.

At the beginning of the 1960s the French communists are looking for a new political and ideological balance after the radical change in the national context created by the crisis of the colonial empire, the shock of de-Stalinization and a rapidly evolving international scenario. The FCP continues to rely on the centrality of the Soviet-led communist movement as the fixed point for both its international political initiative and its ideology. This is why the first manifestations of disagreement between Moscow and Beijing are dismissed as fabrications of imperialism. Once again, events will demonstrate the FCP's difficulty in dealing with the effects of the fragmentation of the communist movement and a context where Africa has become a conflict zone, both between the two blocs and between the two communist powers and their models of socialism.

The Sino-Soviet split thus constitutes yet another harsh blow to the party's internal balance, also because, at least until the Moscow conference, the French had not concealed their preference for the Chinese revolutionary interpretation of internationalism to the reformist and reforming approach of the Italians. The end of international communism's political and ideological unity has a direct impact on the FCP, because it overlaps with the difficult situation the party finds itself in after the end of the 4th Republic and the Algerian crisis. The resources the party had always used to ensure internal unity – internationalism, the myth of the USSR, the frontist perspective and anti-imperialism – are no longer viable in their previous forms.

Furthermore, the arguments that the Chinese use to attack the Soviet policy of power in the Third World overlap with and fuel the positions of those who criticize the FCP at home, where it is accused by the left of having taken a nationalist attitude about decolonization. This one of the reasons that the focus of the French communists' response is to condemn the thesis according to which the vanguard of the fight against imperialism would now be the peoples of the southern hemisphere and the national liberation movements.²⁸

²⁸ G. Siracusano, *“Pronto per la rivoluzione!” I comunisti italiani e francesi e la decolonizzazione in Africa centro-occidentale (1958-1968)*, Roma: Carocci, 2022, pp. 158 ff.

The fundamental issue, as the independence of the French colonies in sub-Saharan Africa shows, is that national liberation does not necessarily have to take place through violence. What is instead necessary is the struggle for peaceful coexistence. Averting war and fighting for disarmament within international institutions such as the UN is also necessary to defeat the imperialist camp. In fact, peace would allow the achievement of communism in the USSR and would consequently increase the socialist camp's ability to support the development of Third World countries – support without which the newly independent states would fall under new forms of imperialist domination.

The experiments of advanced democracy in Africa can only resist the pressure of imperialism by adjusting and adapting the socialist planning model to the specific contexts of underdevelopment. The FCP accordingly supports and actively participates in the material, technical and cultural assistance programs run by the socialist camp and the communist movement.²⁹ The French communists thus reaffirm the hierarchical relationship between the struggle for socialism and the struggle for liberation from colonialism, against the criticisms of the Chinese and the nascent third-world movements. This reaffirmation involves a reconfiguration of the relationship between the Gallocentric paradigm and the Marxist-Leninist system. The last act of the Algerian national revolution also contributes to this reconfiguration.

As we have seen, since 1958 the FCP had attacked De Gaulle as a representative of the most extremist and reactionary sectors of the colonialist bourgeoisie and had continued to describe the general as wholly subservient to the interests of US imperialism. The Gaullist foreign policy and the strategy of liquidating the colonial empire that reached its conclusion in July 1962 with Algerian independence threw this representation into crisis. So much so that an internal crisis broke out within the leadership in 1961 that would end with the marginalization of organization secretary Marcel Servin and the head of the intellectuals, Laurent Casanova. The two leaders, until then very close to Maurice Thorez, had developed positions that were close to Togliatti's polycentrism, which identified Gaullist foreign policy towards the Third World, and in the European context, as a contradiction in the Western camp and the expression of a relative weakening of

²⁹ G. Lachenal, *Le continent africain poursuit sa marche irrésistible vers l'indépendance*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 3, 1961, p. 585; B. Loret, *Après l'assassinat de Patrice Lumumba*, *ibid.*, p. 597.

American dominance. Within this framework they proposed considering the possibility of using such contradictions to develop an independent FCP initiative in the context of peaceful coexistence, and that its privileged relationship with the liberation movements and the newly independent states that had emerged from the French empire be defined on new bases.

Starting in 1962, attention is focused on the development of experiments of national socialism in the newly independent African countries. From this point of view, differences were growing between the official positions of the leadership expressed in *Les Cahiers du communisme* and *Démocratie nouvelle*, even after the defeat of Casanova and Servin.³⁰ The Central Committee's journal offered an interpretation focused on the paradigm of subordinating the success of African socialist experiments to the support of the socialist camp, the true architect of the gradual construction of models of society of abundance based on socialist humanism. In this context, the FCP must take responsibility for promoting relations with the progressive governments of the former colonies to combat Chinese influence and contribute to the broadest possible unity around the Soviet policy of peaceful coexistence.

Démocratie nouvelle is attentive to lines of thinking that go beyond this approach. Several special issues of the journal are published featuring exponents of African socialism and the liberation movements. The series tries to highlight the problems and limits of the experiences of constructing advanced democratic regimes and the contradiction of liberation movements, which is attributable to the class composition of the various countries and regions of the African continent. Though the context of the struggle for peaceful coexistence in support of the socialist camp and against the Chinese positions remains fixed, an effort is made to provide a less linear picture of the relationship between African socialism and the socialist camp. In addition, the journal pays a certain attention to cultural issues and ideological representations of colonialism and the anti-colonial revolutions, such as religion, racism, ethnic issues and schooling.³¹

³⁰ M. Di Maggio, *The Rise and Fall*, pp. 34-38.

³¹ R. Ledda, *Gizenga m'a parlé de l'avenir du Congo*, «*Démocratie Nouvelle*», 7, 1961; R. Maria, *Lectures critiques sur la crise congolaise*, «*Démocratie Nouvelle*», 8-9, 1961; Id., *Lectures critiques sur la crise congolaise*, «*Démocratie Nouvelle*», 10, 1961; J. Couland, *ibid.*; Hegballe-Dimbun, *Au Cameroun la guerre fait rage*, *ibid.*

From this perspective, it is interesting how Chou En Lai's famous African tour in 1964 is analyzed. The Central Committee's periodical judges the trip to be a substantial failure because, despite the diplomatic recognition it obtained, China was unable to obtain a favorable position from the African progressive states, which, with the exception of Guinea, all signed the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty so violently criticized by Beijing.³² *Démocratie Nouvelle* highlights the contradictory nature of the Chinese proposal for a new Bandung conference, which many of the countries it had visited endorsed. Despite China's prestige in Africa, many countries preferred to follow up on the results achieved with the Belgrade Conference of 1961, which had firmly rejected the thesis of the inevitability of war. Thus, the conference in Belgrade and the birth of non-aligned movement, judged by the FCP with reserve three years prior,³³ is now reevaluated in the name of a more diplomatic attitude, in line with the evolution of the context of peaceful coexistence after the Cuban crisis and the stabilization of the blocs in Europe.

These passages show how the Sino-Soviet split and the end of the unity of the communist movement, the anything but linear evolutions of the anti-colonial revolutions, and trouble in the national context pushed the French communists towards a less unitary reading in which the anti-colonialism/socialism equation disappears. This diplomates relations with the African progressive regimes, which at least until 1965-1966 appear designed to support the intervention of the socialist camp and the USSR in the Third World and to compete with the dynamism of the Italian Communist Party.³⁴

This approach is also clarified by the analysis of imperialism's action in postcolonial Africa in which the aforementioned elements intertwine with the needs of the party's national strategy: opposition to Gaullism, the attempt to relaunch the frontist strategy, and the fight against those internal sensibilities that, influenced above all by

³² R. Garaudy, *Où nous conduiraient les thèses des dirigeants chinois?*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 10, 1963, p. 3; M. Dufriche, *Le mouvement de libération nationale et le socialisme*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 12, 1963, p. 39; *Sur la position idéologique du Parti Communiste Chinois*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 3, 1964, p. 77; J.E. Vidal, *Chou Enlai en Afrique*, «Démocratie Nouvelle», 3, 1964.

³³ G. Lachenal, *La Conférence de Belgrade et la lutte contre le colonialisme et pour la paix*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 10, 1961, p. 1571.

³⁴ G. Siracusano, *Pronto per la rivoluzione!*, pp. 259 ff.

the ICP, but also by the Chinese, call into question the strategy and identity of the FCP.

The two main categories upon which the analysis of imperialism is based are “neocolonialism” and “collective colonialism”. The first, which is well-known, and became established during the process of decolonization to indicate the policies of European powers to maintain forms of control over their former colonies, is given a broadened meaning. The French communists use the term to define the forms of economic, political and military control exerted by capitalist countries over former colonies. All relations between capitalist countries and Third World countries are included under the category of “collective colonialism”: economic cooperation, development loans, direct investments, military aid, direct or indirect military intervention, corruption and links with the old local ruling classes are seen as part of an organic unit. The actors in this scenario, the Western countries with the United States at the top, pursue a strategy which, beyond any particular points of friction, is characterized as externally directed by the dominant imperialism, that of the USA, and functional to the interests of the big international trusts. The category of “collective colonialism” affirms the absence of fundamental contradictions between the processes of regional transnational integration in the Western bloc, such as that in Europe, and the strategy of American imperialism. This interpretation is functional to theoretically justifying the fight against the Chinese, and in general positions, even within the communist movement, that are beginning to demand moving beyond international bipolarism. As regards the Third World countries, this justifies unconditional support for the strategy of the socialist camp and the forms of support that it extends to the African progressive regimes.

From an external point of view, the notion of “collective colonialism” justifies the promotion of bilateral relations which, especially in the second half on the 1960s, characterize the FCP’s initiative towards the African progressive governments and parties.³⁵

In February 1965, *Les Cahiers du Communisme* publishes an extensive account of the trip to Algeria taken by a party delegation led by Secretary Waldeck Rochet to meet the government of Ben Bella.

³⁵ J.P. Meynard, *Le tiers-monde entre la guerre froide et la détente*, «*Démocratie Nouvelle*», 2, 1964; M. Egretaud, *Le néo-colonialisme français et l’Afrique*, «*Les Cahiers du Communisme*», 3, 1963, p. 127; 1963, 2; *Socialisme et question coloniale*, (Special Issue), «*Démocratie Nouvelle*», 5, 1964.

Its appreciation for modernization processes based on an original connection between state planning and self-management, interpreted as an original form of national socialism, is filled with optimism. The delegation's trip is presented as part of the FCP's strategy to re-establish friendship between the two peoples after the tragic break of the war. The party presents itself as the main interlocutor for an FLN decidedly aligned among the forces of peace and socialism.³⁶ During those same months support is given to the progressive governments of sub-Saharan Africa with the same determination, with the objective of making the FCP a valuable support for the Soviet policy of peaceful coexistence, but also of presenting itself as an effective interlocutor in the construction of fair relations with the former French colonies.³⁷

1966-1968. The Coups d'état in Africa and the New Frontist Balance of the FCP

The way that the FCP treats the Havana Tricontinental Conference of 1966 confirms an orientation that increasingly privileges bilateral relations and tends to downplay a more radical reading of the processes of decolonization, while tending to insert every experience within the framework of the advance of socialism and the inexorable and imminent defeat of imperialism. In the context of the lack of attention the event received, the tendency is to highlight the far from unanimous consensus around the Chinese positions. The FCP particularly appreciates the importance attributed to the fight against the repression of progressive and revolutionary movements, as well as the criticisms made by different delegations of those who would like to make guerilla warfare a method that can be generalized to all Third World contexts. Once again, the FCP's attempt to stabilize the paradigms through which it tries to establish its relationship with African socialisms is called into question by events: both by coups d'état that

³⁶ W. Rochet, *Pour une large coopération franco-algérienne, L'Algérie nouvelle en marche*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», Special Issue, 2, 1965, p. 40; R. Guyot, *Solidarité renforcée entre les deux peuples*, *ibid.*, p. 46; G. Frischmann, *Problèmes économiques et perspectives socialistes*, *ibid.*, p. 54.

³⁷ *Le Parti communiste français et la lutte anticolonialiste*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 2, 1964, p. 3; P. Juquin, *Le Parti Communiste et la grandeur française*, *ibid.*, p. 41; S. Turé, *La chemin de la paix vu d'Afrique*, «Démocratie Nouvelle», 1, 1964.

overturn or redefine the internal political balances and foreign policy of progressive regimes in Africa and beyond, and by the emergence of the first failures in the adoption of the modernization model and the aid and development programs provided by the socialist camp.

The interpretation that emerges from the Central Committee's journal is that the coups d'état in Africa are the result of a global imperialist strategy aimed at modifying the balance of power in the Third World in its favor. However, the coups d'état are not due solely to the clash between socialism and imperialism, but are also dictated by internal factors, in particular by the failures of post-independence governments. The central issue is the absence or weakness of parties that are capable of guiding processes that, from independence to attempts to build socialism, have been managed through improvisation or personalism. According to the French communists, a new class composition will be progressively built within the processes of modernization through social struggles, and with the support of socialist countries. Within this framework, the working class will have to be able to build unity with the other popular sectors. In short, this is yet another reassertion of the frontist paradigm, which does not question the limits of the aid provided by the socialist camp or the errors in the application of the socialist development model.³⁸

For *Démocratie Nouvelle* the key to understanding the African coups d'état is also that imperialism is trying to break down the rising tide of the liberation struggles by force. The weakness of these movements, however, lies in the illusion, shared by both Nkrumah and Ben Bella, that a classless socialism can be built in the context of national unity, and that the independent states of Africa are moving towards a linear path of progress towards socialism.³⁹

The thesis is that in the aftermath of independence, the myth of so-

³⁸ Comité Central, *Coup d'État et mouvement populaire en Algérie*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 7-8, 1965; Comité Central, *Répression en Algérie*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 10, 1965; Comité Central, *Contre la répression en Algérie*, *ibid.*; G. Fournial, *Sur la Conférence de La Havane*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 2, 1966; *À la Conférence de Solidarité des Peuples d'Afrique, d'Asie et d'Amérique Latine (PCF, 24 décembre 1965)*, *ibid.*; *L'affaire Ben Barka (20 janvier)*, *ibid.*

³⁹ *Tiers Monde*, «Démocratie Nouvelle», 1, 1966; Y. Benot, *Contrerévolution au Ghana*, «Démocratie Nouvelle», 3, 1966; A.P. Lentin, *La tricontinentale à la recherche d'une stratégie globale (II)*, *ibid.*; G. Lachenal, *Les coups d'État militaires en Afrique*, «Les Cahiers du Communisme», 4, 1966, p. 73.

cialism spread in Africa among the masses and among many of those who had led the struggles for independence. This is a confused expression of the understanding that only the construction of socialism can bring these states out of the underdevelopment and backwardness in which the colonial plunder had left them. The coups d'état marked the defeat of this illusion. An optimistic forecast is formulated nevertheless: the defeat will only mark an elevation of the political consciousness of the classes that are interested in the revolution's progress, starting from the awareness of the need to build true vanguard parties. Thus, the coups d'état in Africa, the worsening of the Sino-Soviet conflict, and the new Third World strategy of Brezhnev's USSR definitively put an end to the possibility of the FCP tracing its international initiative back to the scheme of pro-Soviet internationalism and the concept that there is a single container uniting the socialist camp and the anti-imperialist movements.

Starting with the presidential election of 1965, which sees François Mitterrand reach the second round against De Gaulle with the support of the FCP, dialogue between socialists and communists in France is reactivated. In this context, the FCP accelerates its political and ideological *Update* under the banner of *Voie française au socialism*.⁴⁰ Interpretation of and relations with the Third World begin taking on a new guise, with greater attention being paid to problems such as hunger and economic underdevelopment resulting from neocolonial exploitation and the legacy of colonialism. An opening to development aid is found in the context of the discussion of a left-wing governing program, and great attention is given to the role of international institutions in regulating forms of equitable economic cooperation between developed and underdeveloped countries. A new openness and appreciation towards the action of the Catholic Church in the Third World also emerges, despite the fact that until then the Church had been branded as the fifth column of neocolonialism.

Within the process of the breakdown of the unitary framework represented by Soviet-led communist internationalism, French communism focuses on independent initiatives and the development of bilateral cultural and political relations with the governments of the countries from the former colonial empire. This process will be accentuated by the movement of 1968, where on one hand the communists

⁴⁰ M. Di Maggio, *Les intellectuels et la stratégie communiste. Une crise d'hégémonie* (1958-1981), Paris : Les Editions Sociales, 2013, pp. 107 ff.

will have to fend off the criticisms of the third-world and pro-Chinese left, and on the other hand the internal dissent that will arise with the repression of the Prague Spring, which once again will take as its reference the international policy and the attempt to reform internationalism promoted by the Italian Communist Party.

In the context that will lead to the electoral and programmatic alliance with the socialists sanctioned in 1973 by the Common Program, the policy of the French communists towards Africa abandons a systematic reading. It is based on the denunciation of imperialism, on solidarity with the liberation movements, and on the attempt to maintain bilateral relations both with the progressive postcolonial governments and with the pro-communist parties and trade unions of French-speaking Africa. The FCP bets everything on a reversal of the balance of power at the national level that would determine a new foreign policy for France, in such a way as to fundamentally modify relations with the countries of the former colonial empire and stimulate a new socialist wave on the African continent. At the end of the cycle that began in the early 1950s, Marxist-Leninist and pro-Soviet internationalism remains a resource for identity and material support, but the center of the French communists' conception is now fundamentally national, and Gallocentric.

MARCO DI MAGGIO

Antifascism, Anticolonialism and Internationalism in the Portuguese Communist Party¹

During the 1930s, the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) adopted a very unusual position compared to the international communist movement's traditional anti-colonialism. In the aftermath of the Italian aggression against Ethiopia, both the Comintern and the main European communist parties emphasized the close link between Fascism (encompassing all authoritarian states and nationalist movements) and imperialism.² In contrast, the PCP embarked on a tortuous and problematic path of reappropriating colonialism in a paradoxically nationalistic and anti-Fascist sense. After a fifteen-year period of uncertainty and ideological adjustment, by the mid-1930s the Portuguese communists had adopted a stance José Neves has termed «progressive colonialism».³

This essay traces these different phases up to the threshold marked by the 1957 turning point, when the PCP repudiated then colonialism. It focuses mainly on the political culture of the PCP, leaving aside the details of mobilization by colonial subjects, political relations with the colonies, and interactions with Moscow and other European parties.

Origins

The Portuguese Communist Party was founded in March 1921 by activists coming mainly from revolutionary syndicalism and the

¹ I'm grateful to Anna Shapovalova, whose researches in Moscow allowed me to use the archives of the Comintern. The following acronyms are used in the text: FMSMB: *Fundação Mário Soares e Maria Barroso*; RGASPI: *Rossijskij gosudarstvennyj archiv social'no-političeskoj istorii* (The Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History).

² G. Procacci, *Il socialismo internazionale e la guerra d'Etiopia*, Roma 1978; N. Srivastava, *Italian Colonialism and Resistances to Empire, 1930-1970*, London 2018.

³ J. Neves, *Comunismo e nacionalismo em Portugal*, Lisboa 2008, p. 186.

anarchist movement.⁴ It was thus difficult to establish a political culture marked by Third-Internationalist Marxism in the initial years. Despite exchanges and meetings with exponents of other national parties (starting with the Spanish party), periods spent in Moscow by its leaders (Caetano de Sousa and Pires Barreira in 1922, Carlos Rates in 1924), and regular visits by Comintern delegates, especially between 1923 and 1925, relations with Moscow developed slowly. On several occasions, the Comintern criticized the PCP for its lack of a Marxist background.⁵

This directly affected the development of the PCP's position on the colonial question, particularly in building relations with African colonies. The political culture of the ruling group was characterized by a mechanical application of Leninist theory on imperialism and a stadial conception of historical development. The former led to a general critique of colonialism that did not address the specificities of the Portuguese Republic and its overseas possessions, nor did it conceive of the fight against imperialism as existing independently of the destruction of capitalism. This stadial vision shared many similarities with the conception of the "civilization" process of "backward" populations proposed by liberals and republicans. It interpreted the socio-economic condition of the colonies through a clearly hierarchical lens of more or less "civilized" societal models. There was only one path to development in this view, the one modelled on European capitalism, and "backward" populations were posited as being at various stages along this path. No alternative trajectory was considered possible; only catching up to and chasing the European forerunners. As Chakrabarty has observed, «it was through recourse to some version of a stagist theory of history – ranging from simple evolutionary schemas to sophisticated understandings of "uneven development" – that European political and social thought made room for the political modernity of the subaltern classes».⁶ However, this theory also led the party to fail to recognize the subjectivity of colonized peoples, their "otherness", and autonomy.

⁴ A. Cunha, *The anarchist origins of the Partido Comunista Português (PCP)*, «Investigaciones Históricas, época moderna y contemporánea», 42, 2022, pp. 981-1018.

⁵ J. Madeira, *História do PCP. Das origens ao 25 de Abril (1921-1974)*, Lisboa 2013, pp. 17-27.

⁶ D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, New Edition, Princeton 2008, p. 9.

Consistent with this view, on a political level the PCP took a stand on the side of the struggles of the “colonial proletariat” exploited by the Portuguese bourgeoisie, but said nothing about Africans as Africans within their society and historicity. It expressed support for the economic demands of colonial peoples but saw them as incapable of achieving true independence and self-determination until the communist transformation to come, thus making self-determination conditional on future socialism in Portugal (see, for example, the draft statutes for the Socialist Republic of the Soviets of Portugal, 1925).

Relations with the colonial territories were essentially absent, even though significant instances of mobilization had been taking place in the Portuguese colonies for some time. Newspapers and associations had sprung up in Angola and Mozambique; notable among these was the workers’ association in Lourenço Marques (now Maputo) and its newspaper *O Emancipador*. In Mozambique, organized activities linked to the traditions and cultures of the workers’ movement in the early 1920s were undergoing significant development.⁷ All these instances of agitation were deeply influenced by syndicalism, however, with a preponderance of anarcho-syndicalist ideas and strong sympathy for the revolutionary trade union *Confederação Geral do Trabalho* and newspaper *A Batalha*, much more than for the PCP and the theses expressed by the Comintern. In Mozambique, only one trade union leader declared himself a communist in this period: Faustino da Silva. However, his political and ideological links were not with the Portuguese Party, but with the Communist Party of South Africa where he had gone into exile in 1925 to evade police pursuit for participating in a railway workers’ strike.⁸

Under the dictatorship

On 28 May 1926, a military coup overthrew the First Republic and established a military dictatorship. This was the start of an authoritar-

⁷ N. Khouri, J. Pereira Leite, *Les Indiens dans la presse coloniale portugaise du Mozambique 1930-1975*, «Lusotopie», 15, 2008, <http://journals.openedition.org/lusotopie/581> (accessed 28 August 2024).

⁸ See J. Many, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais et la Question Coloniale 1921-1974*, Thèse pour le doctorat en Science politique, Université Montesquieu-Bordeaux IV, Bordeaux 2004, p. 133.

ian turn that involved António Oliveira de Salazar rising to the head of the government two years later and culminated in the establishment of the *Estado Novo* in 1933. Democratic guarantees and spaces for participation were progressively eliminated, and within a few years a political regime based on systematic violence, police repression, and mass regimentation had taken shape.

The authoritarian shift extended to the colonial territories as well. In 1930, before the proclamation of the *Estado Novo*, the Colonial Act declared the colonial possessions an integral part of the state and established the «regime of the *indigenato*» that imposed a strict distinction between Portuguese («civilized»), assimilated, and «indigenous» people. The Salazar dictatorship eliminated the freedoms that African elites in Angola and Mozambique had enjoyed before 1926.⁹ This reduction of the already limited system of rights and guarantees led to a drastic worsening of conditions for the colonial population, as they were subjected to harsh treatment and fierce exploitation in the labour sphere.¹⁰ In parallel, colonial propaganda became incessant, consolidating an imagery that portrayed the empire as the heart of national identity and the vehicle of a civilizing mission abroad.¹¹

With all spaces for freedom closed, the PCP like all other democratic parties was forced into clandestinity.¹² The first years of the Salazar government coincided, in the international communist movement, with the start of what is called the “Bolshevization” process of the national parties.¹³ This turning point profoundly affected Portuguese communists: the PCP adopted the ideological and political stances demanded by Moscow, embracing the “class against class” political line that led to a break with bourgeois and social-democratic forces. However, the conditions imposed by the coup d’état complicated rela-

⁹ J. Derrick, *Africa’s ‘Agitators’. Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918-1939*, New York 2008, p. 435

¹⁰ Id., *Africa’s ‘Agitators’*, p. 373.

¹¹ E.W. Sapega, *Consensus and Debate in Salazar’s Portugal. Visual and Literary Negotiations of the National Text, 1933-1948*, University Park 2021.

¹² J. Pacheco Pereira, *Problemas da história do PCP*, in *O fascismo em Portugal. Actes du colloque de la Faculté de Lettres de mars 1980*, Lisbonne 1982, pp. 280-281. An initial assessment of the repression appears in RGASPI, Comintern, 495-179-23. *Relatório do comité central do Partido comunista português*, december 1927.

¹³ S. Wolikow, *L’Internazionale comunista. Il sogno infranto del partito mondiale della rivoluzione (1919-43)*, Roma 2016, pp. 95-126.

tions between the leaders remaining in Portugal and the delegation in Moscow, also hindering relations with the Russian leadership.¹⁴

This set of changes – the establishment of dictatorship, colonial authoritarianism, clandestinity, and Bolshevization – profoundly impacted the way Portuguese communists related to overseas possessions. Overcoming the uncertainties of the first five-year period, the PCP adopted a resolutely anti-colonialist position from the second half of the 1920s onwards, distinguishing itself from the pro-colonial positions of republican and socialist politicians and intellectuals. This new stance was systematically defined in the early 1930s, once the party had reorganized itself after the coup d'état and was equipped with a new press organ, *Avante!*. The turnaround was fully articulated in a June 1931 text titled *A Ditadura do Proletariado e a Expropriação dos Expropriadores* [*The Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Expropriation of the Expropriators*]. This new line was reiterated in 1934 with *Pontos Fundamentais do Programa do Governo Operário e Camponês* [*Fundamental Points of the Programme of the Workers' and Peasants' Government*]. The Portuguese communists thus took a stand against Salazar colonial policy, contesting the expansionist orientations of the Colonial Act especially in terms of the economic exploitation of territories and populations. They thus called for «the immediate and complete liberation of the colonies, the self-determination of the archipelagos of Madeira and the Azores, including the recognition of the right to secede from Portugal».¹⁵

Unlike in previous years, they now supported the liberation of the colonies even before undergoing their socialist transformation. This new line was fully consistent with the “class against class” tactics promoted by the USSR and Comintern at the time. The PCP adopted a distinctly anti-Fascist profile, positioning itself as a force radically opposed to the Portuguese power system, including its imperial dimension. It differentiated itself from other political forces: from the republicans, who fully embraced the legacy of the Republic, defended the colonial administration that had existed before the coup d'état,

¹⁴ RGASPI, Comintern, 495-179-24. *Rapport du Comité central du parti portugais à l'Exécutif de l'Internationale communiste*, Lisbonne, 1 march 1928; RGASPI, Comintern, 495-179-23. *Confédération générale du travail unitaire. Secrétariat Internationale a Secrétariat de l'Internationale Communiste*, 27 april 1927.

¹⁵ *Pontos fundamentais do programa do governo operário e camponês*, «Avante!», série II, 2, octobre 1934, p. 6.

and upheld the principle of colonization itself; and from the anarcho-syndicalists, who were relentlessly declining, increasingly marginalized, and focused on other issues and battles. This alignment was directly urged and promoted by Moscow, and indeed it intervened on several occasions.¹⁶ Despite this, however, the Comintern leadership continued to express doubts about the PCP and did not fully trust it due to its ideological weakness, anarchist origins, and the political fragility of its cadres.¹⁷

The anti-colonial battle itself highlighted the PCP's difficulties in fully converging with the Comintern's positions. A radically critical stance towards the imperial system was not matched by effective efforts to forge meaningful links with militants in the colonies, whether African or white, as demanded by Moscow.

Conditions were certainly difficult. Colonial liberation movements were in their infancy (the *Liga Nacional Africana*, founded in 1929, and some associations had appeared abroad). Moreover, clandestinity made communication between the metropolis and the colonies difficult for Portuguese communists. However, peasant uprisings in the African colonies were reported in the Comintern press, indicating the beginnings of a much wider struggle against imperialist domination in Africa.¹⁸ Dramatic and well-documented denunciations of the conditions of the populations (especially workers) in the colonies also circulated.¹⁹

For the PCP, however, anti-colonialism remained a secondary issue, developed mainly in a theoretical or agitational manner without translating into concrete engagement. This was due in part to the strong influence of nationalism on the party. In a 1931 letter to the Political Secretariat of the Latin Office of the Comintern, a party leader noted that within the PCP there persisted «a chauvinism that is unconscious, but which nevertheless remains a chauvinism».²⁰ This weakness would facilitate a change of discourse in the following years.

¹⁶ A. Marty, *Indications sur «texte définitif de la lettre directive au PCP adoptée par le Secrétariat politique du 19 octobre 1932»*, pour le Secrétariat roman, p. 18, quoted in J. Manyà, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais*, pp. 210-211.

¹⁷ J. Pacheco Pereira, *Álvaro Cunhal, uma biografia política*, vol. II, 'Duarte', o dirigente clandestino, Lisbonne 2001, p. 149.

¹⁸ E.T. Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa before World War II*, New York 1974, p. 180.

¹⁹ G. Padmore, *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*, London 1931, pp. 39-45.

²⁰ *Lettre de Tulio pour le Secrétariat de la Commission centrale exécutive du PCP au*

The turning point

In the mid-1930s, Fascist regimes began expanding their influence, starting with Italy's invasion of Ethiopia. This event catalysed discussions among communist and anti-colonial groups, who argued that Fascist imperialism revealed the true, oppressive nature of European colonialism of "non-white" populations. In early 1936, amid Italy's war against Ethiopia, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois published an article in *Foreign Affairs* asserting that Fascism exposed the reality of Europe's exploitative relationship with the rest of the world:

The probabilities are that Italy, by sheer weight of armament and with the complaisance of Europe, will subdue Ethiopia. If this happens it will be a costly victory, both for Italy and the white world. There will be not only the cost in debt and death, but the whole colored world [...] all that vast mass of men who have felt the oppression and insults, the slavery and exploitation of white folk, will say: «I told you so! They do not believe in Christianity and they will never voluntarily recognize the essential equality of human beings or surrender the idea of dominating the majority of men for their own selfish ends» [...] Economic exploitation based on the excuse of race prejudice is the program of the white world. Italy states it openly and plainly. [...] The world, or any part of it, seems unable to do anything to prevent the impending blow, the only excuse for which is that other nations have done exactly what Italy is doing²¹.

These reflections were not mirrored in the thinking of Portuguese communists. They viewed the Ethiopian war as further evidence, akin to Germany's remilitarization, of the Fascist regimes' trajectory toward a new world conflict.²² The global impact of the event on anti-colonialism was not fully understood.²³ At that time, the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) was more influenced by the Spanish Civil

Secrétariat politique du Bureau latin de l'IC, Lisbonne, 21 août 1931, p. 5, quoted in J. Manya, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais*, p. 210.

²¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Inter-Racial Implications of the Ethiopian Crisis*, «Foreign Affairs» 14, 1935, pp. 86, 92.

²² RGASPI, Comintern, 495-179-11. Partido comunista portugues, *Circular. Directivas para a preparação da jornada do primeiro de maio*, 11 april 1936, p. 2.

²³ Regarding the reaction of the anti-colonialist movements to the aggression against Ethiopia, see G. Procacci, *Dalla parte dell'Etiopia. L'aggressione italiana vista dai movimenti anticolonialisti d'Asia, d'Africa, d'America*, Milano 1984.

War, perceived as a direct threat to Portugal, and the strategic changes in the international communist movement initiated by the 7th Congress of the Comintern. This congress drew the participation of a Portuguese delegation including Secretary Bento Gonçalves, Manuel Roque Júnior, Gilberto de Oliveira, Álvaro Cunhal, and Francisco de Paula Oliveira “Pavel”, the permanent representative of the Comintern’s Latin section.²⁴

With the advent of the Popular Front, to which the PCP leadership quickly and enthusiastically adhered,²⁵ the PCP’s focus shifted from differentiating themselves from other anti-Salazarist forces to collaborating with such forces, starting with the *reviralthistas* (the liberal republican movement aimed at overthrowing the authoritarian regime). Simultaneously, the process of nationalizing communist parties intensified, and the PCP was no exception. The party’s leadership became increasingly determined to challenge Salazar regime’s monopoly on national sentiment.

Building a closer relationship with national culture and history could take various forms: the French Communist Party drew on France’s revolutionary tradition to reconcile the working class with patriotic symbolism; the Italian party, under Togliatti, linked nationalization with the development of socialist politics in the West, culminating in the proposal of “progressive democracy”.²⁶ The PCP, isolated from society and with limited intellectual resources, adopted a more traditional patriotic discourse, including an affirmation of the country’s imperial role. They aimed to be seen as the true interpreters of the nation’s interests and identity, in contrast to the regime.

This new direction was clearly articulated by Secretary Bento Gonçalves. After returning to Portugal from Moscow where he attended the 7th Congress, he was arrested again by the political police and subsequently transferred to a prison in the Azores. During his 1936 trial before a military tribunal, alongside two other leaders, José de Sousa and Júlio Fogaça, Gonçalves prepared a defence statement. In this document, he not only countered the accusations against him but also outlined the Party’s strategy and vision. Specifically, abandoning classist rhetoric, he accused the *Estado Novo* of pursuing policies

²⁴ J. Neves, *Comunismo e nacionalismo*, p. 127.

²⁵ *Acaba de se constituir a Frente Popular Anti-Fascista*, «Avante!», series II, no. 16, February 1936, p. 1.

²⁶ S. Wolikow, *L’Internazionale comunista*, pp. 139-143.

that did not serve the country's interests. Furthermore, Gonçalves positioned the PCP as the only «authentic defender of the nation».²⁷

The defence of Portuguese national interests was asserted without distinguishing between national and colonial issues. The Portugal championed by the communists was progressively framed as coinciding with the Portuguese empire, considering the colonies an integral part of the country. In a short span of time, anti-colonialist slogans and calls for the right of dominated populations to separate from the Portugal disappeared from the PCP's arguments. The new line instead developed around three objectives that were closely linked to the evolving international framework.

The first objective was to defend Portugal's independence from external threats. Starting in 1936, faced with German expansionism and the Spanish Civil War perceived as potential direct threats to the country, the communists advocated for a comprehensive defence of Portugal's independence and territorial integrity. To bolster national unity, traditional patriotic rhetoric began to appear in documents published by *Avante!*: «We [communists] love Portugal, we love our beautiful land, which has natural wonders like Sintra, the Algarve with its almond trees, and the verdant and flourishing Minho. We love our people, to whom we proudly belong». However, the Portuguese did not see themselves as an exception in the international movement: everywhere, they claimed, communists «are the best defenders of national independence, in concrete and not in fiction», as «is shown to us by the Spanish and Chinese communists who occupy the front lines in the fight against the invaders of their countries».²⁸ The Salazar regime was accused of a «betrayal of the nation», being subordinate to foreign powers with hostile interests (the United Kingdom and then, more threateningly, Germany). For example, an article in *Avante!* from June 1937 stated: «Portugal is a country that has long felt the shameful weight of foreign domination. [...] Fascism, which hypocritically calls itself “nationalist”, has buried Portugal's independence more and more every day».²⁹ In the same year, a propaganda pamphlet «invites

²⁷ See J. Manyà, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais*; J. Neves, *Comunismo e nacionalismo*, pp. 127, 433.

²⁸ *Os comunistas e a Nação*, «Avante!», series II, no. 59, 3^o semana de Novembro 1937, p. 3

²⁹ *Os internacionalistas são os mais fervosos partidários da independência de cada povo*, «Avante!», série II, n^o 37, 1^{ère} semaine juin 1937, p. 3.

all Portuguese to unite to free Portugal from foreign oppression and its traitorous agents».³⁰ The anti-colonial discourse was thus reversed, identifying Portugal not as a colonizing power but as a country in danger of being colonized, first by the British³¹ and then by the Germans: «Portugal does not want to be a German colony!» is a slogan used on several occasions.³² This reversal was justified by the theoretical thinking of the international communist movement. In his text *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), Lenin had considered Portugal a «dependent» country due to its close ties with England. In the second half of the 1930s, the Comintern's analyses qualified Portugal as a «semi-colony», emphasizing its dependent relationship with the United Kingdom. This interpretation, proposed mainly by Evgenij Varga, gained wide acceptance among Portuguese communist leaders.

The second objective was to defend the colonies from German expansionism. The fragility displayed by Portugal and threats to its independence primarily affected the survival of the empire. The alarm was raised by Hitler's desire, especially after Italy's conquest of Ethiopia, to redraw the borders of Germany's African holdings in the future. The PCP's press and internal documents granted ample attention to this issue, making use of the idea that the Salazar regime had perpetrated a «betrayal» of its country and was a «lackey» of Hitler.³³ The PCP managed to extend its network of internal alliances around this campaign, involving exponents of conservative and monarchical circles. One of these was Paiva Couceiro, former governor-general of Angola (1907-1909), opponent of the Republican troops in 1910, and beginning in the early 1930s also opposed to the *Estado Novo* (which had initially tried to integrate him).³⁴

³⁰ *A caminho da guerra e da dominação estrangeira. A política de traição nacional do governo fascista de Salazar*, novembro 1937, p. 15, quoted in Manyá, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais*, p. 220.

³¹ RGASPI, Comintern, 495-179-11 CPP, *Directivas para a preparacao da jornada do Primeiro de Maio*, 11 abril 1936, p. 3.

³² *Portugal já é uma colónia alemã*, «Avante!», no. 49, setembro 1937, p. 3; *Portugal não quiere ser uma colónia de Hitler!*, «Avante!», no. 73, março 1938, p. 1.

³³ *Angola já é Alemão?*, «Avante!», série II, n° 58, 2a semana de novembro 1937, p. 1.

³⁴ *Está em perigo a integridade nacional*, communiqué du Secrétariat du PCP, fin 1937. RGASPI, Comintern, 495-179-17, *Carta de Paiva Couceiro em defesa de Angola*, 31 outubro 1937.

Finally, the third objective of the PCP's new strategy was to propose a new relationship with the colonies. This relationship was once again subordinated to an anti-regime stance, and its condemnations of the harsh conditions imposed on African populations was framed within this context. The Salazar regime was accused of failing to promote the development of the colonies and administering them archaically, thus creating the risk of foreign domination.³⁵ Above all, the *Estado Novo* «today enslaves not only the natives but also its own children who go to the colonies to seek the work that the metropolis refuses them».³⁶ In criticizing Salazar, the PCP also re-evaluated the situation of the previous years, especially the First Republic (1910-1926) now cast as employing a «mild and humanitarian system of colonization».³⁷ In opposition to the existing empire, the PCP proposed its idea of «progressive colonization», focusing on breaking with the *Estado Novo* administrative system and governance practices and eliminating all forms of exploitation of the subjugated populations. The basic idea was that, while rejecting the «policies of colonial imperialism», colonialism would be morally acceptable because it could help «other, less civilized peoples, so that they can gradually integrate into the international system until they have achieved the conditions for their complete autonomy». This idea was stated in the 1936 program of the *Frente Popular*, the alliance of communists, socialists, and republicans.³⁸

Formulated in this way, the communists' proposal fully converged with that of the republicans and liberals. Echoed in these speeches was the suggestion of "Lusotropicalism", the theory developed by Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre to describe the distinctive features of Portuguese imperialism, framing the Portuguese as better colonizers than other Europeans. Lusotropicalists argue that, due to their warmer climate, geographical proximity to Africa, having been visited by Romans, Visigoths, Moors and many other cultures in pre-modern times, and being poorer than other colonizing nations, the Portuguese

³⁵ *A escravatura ainda existe no 'império colonial'*, «Avante!», série II, n° 48, 4ème semaine de agosto 1937, p. 3.

³⁶ *O paraíso fascista em Angola*, «Avante!», série II, n° 71, 3a semana de fevereiro 1938, p. 3.

³⁷ *O paraíso fascista em Angola*, «Avante!», série II, n° 71, 3a semana de fevereiro 1938, p. 3.

³⁸ *O Programa da Frente Popular Anti-Fascista, 1936*, in *A Frente Popular Antifascista em Portugal*, ed by L.H. Afonso Manta, Lisbon 1976, p. 64.

were more humane, friendly, and adaptable to other climates and cultures. Lusotropicalism was opposed by Salazarism in the 1930s – although it partly adopted themes and suggestions from the regime’s colonial propaganda – mainly because Freyre claimed that the Portuguese were more inclined than other European nations to mixing (in the 1950s, however, there were explicit and significant openings).³⁹

In the analytical and rhetorical scheme proposed by the Portuguese communists, a critique of the racist basis underlying the social hierarchies operating in the colonial territories was completely absent. On the contrary, the discourse they proposed implied the permanence of a clear racial hierarchy. It is true that the PCP in this period, unlike the previous decade, tried to raise awareness – through its press – about the harsh living conditions of the «poor blacks»;⁴⁰ it is also true that this commitment was supported by the increased attention of international public opinion. However, the Portuguese communists did not call for the African masses to be organized politically or through trade unions. The aim was instead to push the white colonists to lead the native populations and work side by side with them in a common effort against the Salazar regime. An example of this can be seen in an appeal to the «white» colonists of Angola: «Whites of Angola! [...] there is more affinity of interests between you and the Blacks than between you and your white exploiters. Join the Blacks, enlighten them, and fight together for the defence of your interests!».⁴¹ The communist propaganda continued to be addressed to the Portuguese colonists and not the African populations. As part of this perspective, PCP rhetoric also alluded to the advantages of a race-based division of labour. The document just quoted above denounced as a highly negative situation the fact the diminishing of white people, forced to perform the kind of highly menial tasks rightfully reserved to the native populations: «Due to the permanent emigration of the native labour force, whites

³⁹ In relation to Luostropicalismo, see C. Castelo, “O Modo Português de estar no Mundo”. *O luso-tropicalismo e a ideologia colonial portuguesa (1933-1961)*, Porto 1999; Gilberto Freyre: *Social Theory in the Tropics*, ed by P. Burke-M.L.G.Pallares-Burke, Oxford 2008.

⁴⁰ *A escravatura ainda existe no ‘império colonial’*, «Avante!», série II, n° 48, 4ème semaine d’ agosto 1937, p. 3.

⁴¹ *Império colonial, império da fome*, «Avante!», série II, n° 49, 1ère semaine de setembro 1937, p. 2. Italics mine

find themselves little by little doing the hardest work, the government gives them the same living conditions as it gives blacks».⁴²

The absence of relations with the native populations and lack of an organized network of active communist militants in the colonies certainly contributed to the development of this strategy. However, the main factors fuelling this line were internal political concerns: it derived from the PCP's commitment to creating a united anti-Fascist front within Portugal. Abandoning the goal of full independence for the colonial territories meant removing an element of division with other opposition forces, as republicans and democrats did not favour independence for the colonies. Internationally, the conditions of the Portuguese colonies also attracted less attention in the 1930s. Compared to the aggressive colonial expansion of Fascist Italy and threats from Hitler's Germany, Portugal – which did not join the Axis – was considered much less of a threat.⁴³

This policy of internal alliances brought with it growing isolation from the rest of the international communist movement. The Comintern quickly intervened to rein in a PCP that was excessively “nationalist” and completely misaligned with official positions on colonialism. The loss of contact with the Comintern led leaders and activists to cling even more closely to a new value: the nation.⁴⁴

The «reorganisation»

From 1940 to 1942, the PCP underwent what is known as its “reorganisation” phase. The arrest of its key leaders necessitated a significant overhaul of the party's organizational structure. During this period, the PCP transformed from the agitation and propaganda group it had been in the 1930s into a politically entity of national significance, even if still obliged to operate clandestinely.⁴⁵

The years of “reorganisation” were profoundly influenced by the ongoing war. On one hand, Salazar's government intensified its

⁴² *Império colonial, império da fome*, «Avante!», série II, n° 49, 1ère semaine de setembro 1937, p. 2.

⁴³ J. Derrick, *Africa's “agitators”*, p. 373.

⁴⁴ J. Many, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais*, p. 195.

⁴⁵ F. Rosas, *Os três caminhos de Álvaro Cunhal. Notas breves sobre a historia do PCP*, in *Álvaro Cunhal. Política, história e estética*, ed by J. Neves, Lisboa 2013, p. 47.

exploitation of colonial economies and tightened control over local populations to meet the global demands of the war economy. On the other hand, fears stemming from German expansion in Europe and Africa heightened concerns that Portuguese colonies might fall under the control of the Third Reich, thereby jeopardizing Portugal's national independence.⁴⁶

However, the threats to Portuguese territories were not limited to Germany alone. Since the onset of the conflict, major powers had been showing interest in Portuguese territories, particularly the Atlantic archipelagos (Azores, Madeira, and Cape Verde) and Pacific colony of East Timor. Initially, the PCP staunchly supported Portugal's "territorial integrity". The German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 precipitated a significant shift, however. With the formation of a broad anti-Fascist coalition and the Soviet Union aligning with democratic powers, the PCP changed its stance. It publicly endorsed the United Kingdom's occupation of the Azores (eventually carried out in 1943), aimed at establishing a naval base in the Atlantic to counter potential German advancements. This strategic shift prioritized the anti-Fascist struggle over strict adherence to territorial integrity and revived accusations against Salazar for allegedly aligning Portugal with Germany under a guise of neutrality. These accusations were further bolstered in 1942 when Japan occupied the entire island of Timor, leading to renewed condemnation of Salazar as a traitor and «the foremost enemy of the Portuguese people».⁴⁷ This stance implied that the occupation of any Portuguese overseas territory equated to an attack on Portugal itself.⁴⁸ As noted by Judith Manyá, the PCP's approach to Timor criticized Salazarism and its alliances rather than focusing on broader internationalist anti-colonial principles.⁴⁹

During the war years, Portuguese communists went beyond mere repetition of nationalistic slogans. The "reorganisation" phase also marked a crucial period of theoretical refinement. Two texts were particularly instrumental in this regard. The first was the document titled

⁴⁶ M. Newitt, *The Portuguese African Colonies during the Second World War*, in *Africa and World War II*, ed by J.A. Byfield-C.A. Brown-T. Parsons-A.A. Sikainga, New York 2015, pp. 220-237.

⁴⁷ *Política de traição nacional. Em Timor entregue ao Japão*, «Avante!», VI série, n° 27, 2a quinzeina de fevereiro 1943, p. 3.

⁴⁸ J. Manyá, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais*, p. 268

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

A nova divisão administrativa de Portugal, deliberately misnamed to facilitate underground circulation. This text explored the concepts of nationhood and internationalism, building upon analyses from the latter half of the 1930s but placing them within a more comprehensive theoretical framework. In keeping with Stalin's conception of the nation as articulated in *Marxism and the National Question* (1913), the document defined a nation not merely as a sentimental bond among individuals, as theorized by Ernest Renan and others, but as a complex unity encompassing stability among people, shared language, territory, economic life, and psychological unity. Consequently, it rejected racial interpretations of nationhood, particularly in the case of Portugal: «The Portuguese nation does not derive from the convergence of individuals belonging to a single race; rather, the Portuguese population has its origins in diverse racial backgrounds, including Iberians, Celts, Lusitanians, Romans, Goths, Arabs, and others».⁵⁰

The development of nation-states, according to the document, introduced imbalances where some nations dominate others. In response to such oppression, it advocated for a «national movement» transcending class boundaries and representing the entire national community.⁵¹ For Portuguese communists, this national struggle was viewed as a transitional phase toward the eventual realization of socialist internationalism, acknowledging its often necessary but temporary nature.

Regarding the specifically Portuguese context, the document characterized Portugal as a semi-colonial nation akin to South American or Balkan countries. Despite maintaining formal political sovereignty, it was economically, financially, and diplomatically dependent on external powers. Notably, Portugal both exercised imperialism through its colonies and experienced subordination to other imperialist powers. Until a few years prior, «British capitalism almost exclusively exploited the Portuguese nation and some of its colonies. However, after

⁵⁰ FMSMB, *Arquivo Mário Soares, Antes de 25 de Abril de 1974, Oposição clandestina, Organizações PCP*, Pasta 02597.001. *A nova divisão administrativa de Portugal*, Editorial Avante, s.d., p. 3.

⁵¹ FMSMB, *Arquivo Mário Soares, Antes de 25 de Abril de 1974, Oposição clandestina, Organizações PCP*, Pasta 02597.001. *A nova divisão administrativa de Portugal*, Editorial Avante, s.d., p. 9.

the establishment of the Salazar dictatorship, significant concessions were made to German and Italian imperialism».⁵²

Given this situation, the document emphasized the communists' role in advocating for national independence while steadfastly adhering to internationalist principles. This dual commitment underscored their strategy for navigating the complexities of colonialism, imperialism, and national liberation within the broader framework of socialist goals:

We are internationalists because the ultimate victory of socialism, our ideal, is only possible on an international scale, requiring the collaboration of workers from all countries [...]. However, our internationalism does not mean we are detached from our nation. We love our country, one of the most beautiful in the world, and we are proud of its past, its history, and its significant contributions to civilization and human progress [...]. We take pride in the traditional Portuguese love for freedom and independence [...]. Yet, we do not dwell solely on the golden moments of the Portuguese nation. We demand the defence and guarantee of our independence and territorial integrity, which are threatened by foreign aggressors and a government guilty of national betrayal. We insist that Portugal return to its role as a promoter of civilization and progress.⁵³

Applying the criteria derived from Stalin's text – nation as a stable community defined by language, territory, economy, and psychic life – the document implicitly concluded that the overseas colonies could not be considered nations. Each of them lacked one or more of these fundamental characteristics. Therefore, if the driving force of change must be the nation – closely cooperating with the workers' movements – the fact that there was no nation among these possessions meant that any notion of independence had to be considered premature.

These analyses were developed by Álvaro Cunhal in 1943, at the party's first clandestine congress. Cunhal, who emerged as the party's undisputed leader (though he formally became secretary in 1961), proposed what he called «the first contribution to the exact communist

⁵² FMSMB, *Arquivo Mário Soares, Antes de 25 de Abril de 1974, Oposição clandestina, Organizações PCP*, Pasta 02597.001. *A nova divisão administrativa de Portugal*, Editorial Avante, s.d., p. 7.

⁵³ FMSMB, *Arquivo Mário Soares, Antes de 25 de Abril de 1974, Oposição clandestina, Organizações PCP*, Pasta 02597.001. *A nova divisão administrativa de Portugal*, Editorial Avante, s.d., pp. 15-16.

definition of the national-colonial problem in our country».⁵⁴ His intervention is thus of particular significance. After recognizing the peoples of the colonies as «natural allies of the proletariat», he pointed out the party's almost total disinterest in the fate of the Portuguese colonial peoples. He stated that the «Party has never even defined its position on the problem of the Portuguese colonies». Portugal is the fourth colonial power in the world, however, and «this shows the great importance of the colonial problem for the workers' movement in our country».

The conclusions drawn were clear and unequivocal: recognition of the equality of rights of nations and the equality of the colonial peoples with the Portuguese people; rejection of any form of differentiation between the rights of «blacks» and «whites» or between the «backward» peoples of the Portuguese colonies and the enslaved masses of the metropolises; and active support of the Portuguese proletariat in waging national and resistance movements against the exploitation and violence of the colonizers and the Portuguese imperialist bourgeoisie. This entailed a commitment to building an alliance between the Portuguese workers and the workers of the colonies, recognizing the right of colonial peoples to constitute themselves as independent states.

At the same time, Cunhal pointed out that the colonies were not yet ready for independence due to their economic and political backwardness: «No Portuguese colony constitutes a nation. The vast majority of the indigenous population is not yet grouped into nations. In each colony, there are many tribes and proto-national groupings». The national movements in the colonies had not yet acquired an organized form, partly due to the hatred and terror that pitted “blacks” against “whites”.

Recognition of the right of colonial peoples to establish themselves as independent states was tempered by the belief that these peoples, «not developed in all respects, are not capable by themselves, in the present circumstances, of guaranteeing their independence». The solution could not be a “concession” from the Lisbon government; indeed, these territories, insufficiently developed politically and economically, would risk falling under the domination of another imperial power once liberated. According to Cunhal, what was needed was a radical change in the Portuguese political system: «The abolition of the yoke of Portuguese and foreign imperialism in the Portuguese col-

⁵⁴ Á. Cunhal, *A aliança com os povos coloniais*, apresentado ao I Congresso Ilegal do Partido Comunista Português, 1943. The document is reproduced in full in J. Manyá, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais*, pp. 692-697.

onies, although totally impossible under a capitalist regime, can still be partially solved within the framework of capitalism, under a broadly democratic regime».

Cunhal's statement strongly rejected any legitimization of colonialism based on the idea of a «civilizing mission» – an idea still echoed in the previous document, *A nova divisão administrativa de Portugal* – and expressed a clear rejection of racism in all its forms. At the same time, however, the struggle for the independence of the colonies and liberation of the subjugated populations was postponed to an indefinite future, because of both those territories' «backwardness» and the generally adverse «circumstances». Anti-colonialism continued to be subordinated to anti-Fascism.

During the Cold War

The political strategy developed in the latter half of the 1930s was not abandoned after World War II. At the second clandestine congress in 1946, the colonial issue was secondary. Cunhal admitted that «in none of the Portuguese colonies has the work of the party been able to develop in a sufficiently organized manner», attributing this to both the political isolation of the colonies and numerous misunderstandings and mistakes in the party's dealings with those territories.⁵⁵ The congress's resolution reiterated that the regime was operating counter to national interests. Salazar, previously accused of enslaving Portugal to the United Kingdom and Nazi Germany, was now accused of subservience to the United States.⁵⁶ He was labelled as being «against the nation» and accused of «facilitating the infiltration of Anglo-American imperialism into the Portuguese colonies». The Communist Party thus aimed to form a new democratic government as the sole defender of national interests.⁵⁷ This discourse persisted

⁵⁵ FMSMB, *Arquivo Mário Soares, Antes de 25 de Abril de 1974, Oposição clandestina, Organizações PCP*, Pasta 02597.003, *Organização informe do Comité Central ao 2º Congresso Ilegal do Partido Comunista Português*, elaborado pelo «Camarada Duarte» (Álvaro Cunhal), 1946, pp. 46-47.

⁵⁶ FMSMB, *Arquivo Mário Soares, Antes de 25 de Abril de 1974, Oposição clandestina, Organizações PCP*, Pasta 02597.001, PCP, *O Governo está levando Portugal à bancarrota*, agosto 1947.

⁵⁷ FMSMB, *Arquivo Mário Soares, Antes de 25 de Abril de 1974, Oposição legale e*

throughout the 1950s, linked to broader anti-Americanism, criticizing both the United States' international role and the spread of its mass culture.⁵⁸ The immediate liberation of the colonies was sacrificed to maintain alliances with other anti-Fascist forces. This frontist stance was bolstered by the 1943 formation of the *Movimento de Unidade Nacional Antifascista* [Movement of National Antifascist Unity] (MUNAF), the clandestine front of the oppositions, and *Movimento de Unidade Democrática* [Movement of Democratic Unity] (MUD) in 1945, a semi-legal platform in which the PCP was very active.

However, significant developments emerged in the general context. First, a reflection on the link between colonialism and Fascism grew among anti-imperialists, highlighting Europe's historical responsibilities. Du Bois's 1936 analysis underwent new and significant developments, particularly in his 1947 work, *The World and Africa*, where he wrote: «There was no Nazi atrocity – concentration camps, wholesale maiming and murder, defilement of women or ghastly blasphemy of childhood – which the Christian civilization of Europe had not long been practicing against colored folk in all parts of the world in the name of and for the defense of a Superior Race born to rule the world».⁵⁹ Similar views were expressed in Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, published in 1950:

Yes, it would be worthwhile – Césaire's wrote – to study clinically, in detail, the steps taken by Hitler and Hitlerism and to reveal to the very distinguished, very humanistic, very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century that without his being aware of it, he has a Hitler inside him, that Hitler *inhabits* him, that Hitler is his *demon*, that if he rails against him, he is being inconsistent and that, at bottom, what he cannot forgive Hitler for is not *the crime* in itself, *the crime against man*, it is not *the humiliation of man as such*, it is the crime against the

semilegal, Documentos 50º MUD Juvenil, Pasta 02597.003.019, II Congresso Ilegal Do Partido Comunista Português. Resoluções, 1946, pp. 1-2. See also *Só o governo è responsável pela desastrosa situação que o país atravessa*, «Avante!», VI série, no. 124, 1st quinzina de outubro 1948, p. 1; *A penetração imperialista nas colónias e a política antinacional do colonialismo*, «Avante!», VI série, no. 125, 2nd quinzina de outubro 1948, p. 2.

⁵⁸ *Os governos fascistas de Salazar e Franco ao serviço dos imperialistas americanos*, «Avante!», VI série, n. 177, maio 1953, p. 5; *As colónias portuguesas campo de manobra do imperialismo estrangeiro*, «Avante!», VI série, n. 198, abril 1955, p. 2; J. Neves, *Comunismo e nacionalismo*, pp. 148-151.

⁵⁹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa*, New York 2007, p. 15.

white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the “coolies” of India, and the “niggers” of Africa.⁶⁰

Hannah Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, also identified the imperialism and racism of colonial conquests as the precursors of Nazism.⁶¹ In light of these positions, the PCP’s stance appeared increasingly anachronistic and dogmatic.

Beginning in the late 1940s, the national and international political landscape changed profoundly. The Cold War redefined Portugal’s international role. After an initial phase of isolation, from 1948 onwards the regime aligned itself within the bipolar opposition, joining the Atlantic alliance system. Portugal participated in the second phase of the Marshall Plan and joined NATO. The *Estado Novo* thus positioned itself alongside the great Western democracies. Propaganda shifted away from explicit references to Fascism to instead emphasize anti-communism and highlight a dual threat: externally, the expansion of the Red Army to the Pyrenees, and internally, the “communist danger”. This led the government to outlaw the MUD at the beginning of 1948, amid internal fractures caused by the Cold War, and implement an even more repressive clampdown on the PCP.⁶²

The colonies and colonial policy of the *Estado Novo* underwent significant changes in the post-war period. First, there was substantial migration to the two main colonial holdings, Angola and Mozambique, with the presence of Europeans there increasing approximately sixfold between 1940 and the final years of the empire.⁶³ Additionally, the Portuguese government modernized the imperial system, introducing changes in legislation, administrative structures, development policies, and social policies. The declared aim was to economically and politically integrate the motherland and the possessions into a kind of “pluricontinental nation”. References to the colonies gradually disappeared; with the constitutional revision of 1951 that revoked the

⁶⁰ A. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, New York 2000, p. 36.

⁶¹ H. Arendt, *The origins of Totalitarianism*, New York 1951.

⁶² N.S. Teixeira, *The Portuguese at War. From the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day*, Brighton-Chicago-Toronto, 2019, pp. 109-117.

⁶³ C. Castelo, *Colonial Migration to Angola and Mozambique: Constraints and Illusions*, in *Imperial Migrations. Colonial Communities and Diaspora in the Portuguese World*, ed by E. Mourier-Genoud-M. Cahen, New York-London 2013, p. 115.

Colonial Act of 1930, the term “colonies” was replaced by “overseas provinces”. These reforms and semantic revisions aimed to incorporate the empire into a post-imperial world and facilitate Portugal’s entry into the United Nations. This policy in the colonies resulted in a system of government based on developmentalist projects that exerted strong pressure on the labour force, alongside repression and separation between different ethnic groups.⁶⁴

The PCP, however, essentially repeated its arguments of previous years. It denounced the state of backwardness in the colonial territories and intense exploitation of the workers, blaming the regime for these conditions. In other words, it continued to focus on a problem defined not so much as colonialism itself, but as the reactionary and “Fascist” variant of colonialism implemented by the *Estado Novo*, characterized by ruthless repression and «bloody and brutal exploitation».⁶⁵

The most significant new element of the post-war period – and the one that should have most seriously challenged this line of “progressive colonialism” – was the emergence of the first anti-colonial movements in African possessions. According to Nuno Severiano Teixeira, «in line with the modern definition of the concept, resistance against colonisation and the formation of anticolonial movements at the Portuguese colonies began with the shaping of African elites in the second half of the forties and the emergence of independence movements in the fifties and sixties»⁶⁶. Numerous leaders were able to secure an intellectual and political education after World War II, with many of them attending Portuguese universities in the metropolises and participating in the MUD Juvenil, the MUD’s youth movement. In the second half of the 1940s and the 1950s, several leaders of future liberation movements were students in Lisbon and other universities, taking advantage of the services offered by the state to African students from the colonies. This cadre included, among others, Amílcar Cabral and Vasco Cabral from Cape Verde, Agostinho Neto, Lúcio

⁶⁴ M.B. Jerónimo, *Ordering Resistance. The Late Colonial State in the Portuguese Empire (1940-1975)*, «Political Power and Social Theory», 33, 2017, pp. 109-128; M.B. Jerónimo-J.P. Monteiro, *Empire and Decolonization in Portuguese Africa*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Portuguese Politics*, ed by J.M. Fernandes-P.C. Magalhães-A.C. Pinto, Oxford 2023, pp. 70-87.

⁶⁵ *O povos coloniais são poderosos aliados na nossa luta pela paz e pela independência*, «Avante!», VI série, no. 182, novembro 1953, p. 6.

⁶⁶ N.S. Teixeira, *The Portuguese at War*, p. 146.

Lara, and Mário Pinto de Andrade from Angola, and Marcelino dos Santos from Mozambique.

In many cases, militants from the colonies joined the PCP. However, the relationship was not straightforward. After taking part in organizations opposing the dictatorship in Portugal, from the mid-1950s these students began to set up their own autonomous organizations. Simultaneously, they started participating in international meetings as representatives of their territories. At the Student Congress for Peace held in Bucharest in 1953, Agostinho Neto represented Angola, Marcelino dos Santos represented Mozambique, and Vasco Cabral represented Guinea and Cape Verde. Thus began the movements for the independence of the Portuguese colonies.⁶⁷

Communists opposed the self-organization of young people in the colonies and the formation of political groups on a national basis. They supported political initiatives, but believed these should be carried out within existing Portuguese organizations, starting with the PCP itself. They did not understand the motives driving young activists from the colonies, neither their desire to create autonomous political organizations nor the importance they placed on national identity. Throughout the 1950s, therefore, the party progressively lost the influence it had once exerted over these young people.⁶⁸ It later attempted to regain some ground by proposing the creation of autonomous communist parties, a project that only succeeded in Angola.

In general, the depth of the divide between militants from the metropolis and those from the colonies eluded the communist leadership. As Judith Manyà has asked, should this position be seen as the result of an awareness, by default, of African otherness, or the expression of a certain paternalism?⁶⁹ These elements are not mutually exclusive, and indeed both were intertwined in the theoretical formulations of the party in previous years. The Portuguese communists thus struggled to grasp the emerging novelty of the first post-war decade: the formation of anti-colonial militants and groups aiming for independence.

Throughout the first half of the 1950s, the PCP leadership was incapable of understanding the specific features of the anti-colonial movements and the impossibility of fitting them into the interpretative grids

⁶⁷ D.C. Mateus, *A luta pela independência: A formação das elites fundadoras da FRELIMO, MPLA e PAIGC*, Mems Martin 1999, p. 86.

⁶⁸ J. Manyà, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais*, pp. 454-460.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 480.

of 1930s orthodox communism. The party press followed the conflicts in Asian and African territories – Korea, Burma, Indonesia, India, Egypt, Kenya, Tunisia, and especially revolutionary and post-revolutionary China – with increasing interest.⁷⁰ In general, support for self-determination and independence for the colonies intensified. In 1953, *Avante!* highlighted with enthusiasm that «in the dark continent the answer to the imperialists begins to resound: “We demand freedom! Africa for the Africans!”». Attempts to delegitimize and prevent the struggle of dependent peoples will not save the regime of colonial slavery that history has condemned.⁷¹ However, these were mostly rhetorical speeches without real political effects. Indeed, in terms of the Portuguese empire, the PCP continued to subordinate anti-colonial struggles to the goal of overthrowing the dictatorship and bringing about political change in the metropolis. The defeat of the regime was considered the «only way to realize the common aspirations of the Portuguese people and the colonial peoples subjugated by Salazarism».⁷²

The PCP's position began to change after the first post-war decade, mainly due to two decisive developments. The first was the eruption of intense conflicts for the independence of Goa, Daman, and Diu, so-called “Portuguese India”. The PCP expressed support for these peoples fighting for freedom, no longer seeing these struggles as conflicting with the integrity of Portugal.⁷³ Instead, it directed its attacks at the military intervention ordered by the Lisbon government and the repression carried out by Portuguese troops. This marked its first step towards accepting the immediate surrender of part of the country's possessions.⁷⁴

The second event was the Bandung Conference, considered a «vigorous overthrow of the colonial system of imperialism and the plans for world domination» pursued by the Americans. The conference was also seen as a valuable contribution to peace and collaboration

⁷⁰ Exemplifying this is *O povos chines marcha firmemente para o socialismo*, «Avante!», VI série, no. 182, novembro 1953, p. 6.

⁷¹ *Os povos coloniais pronunciam-se pela sua liberdade e independência*, «Avante!», VI série, no. 177, maio 1953, p. 6.

⁷² *A paz vencerá a Guerra. Os povos coloniais são poderosos aliados na nossa luta pela paz e pela independência*, «Avante!», VI série, no. 182, novembro 1953, p. 6.

⁷³ *Queremos a solução pacífica do caso de Goa, Damão e Diu!*, «Avante!», VI série, no. 191, setembro 1954, p. 1.

⁷⁴ *A VI reunião ampliada do comité central pela paz e pela negociação em Goa! Resumo da intervenção do camarada João*, «Avante!», VI série, no. 204, setembro 1955, p. 4.

between peoples, particularly economic and cultural cooperation between Asia and Africa. Bandung involved Portugal directly: the Portuguese government's policy towards the rebellions in the Indian colonies of Goa, Daman, and Diu was condemned.⁷⁵ From that moment on, the idea that the Bandung Conference marked a significant shift became widespread among communists. It was expected that international attention towards the colonies would increase along with awareness on the part of the colonized populations, making it unlikely for the Salazar regime to resort to the ruthlessness employed in the past to suppress revolts.⁷⁶

The definitive and official shift away from any wait-and-see attitude towards the independence of the colonies took place in 1957. In the context of full alignment with Khrushchev's platform and in the wake of the events in Goa, the 5th Congress revolutionized party policy. The report on the colonial question by Jamie Serra ("Freitas") constituted the main political contribution of the Congress. It not only put the issue back at the centre, but also made a genuine break with the discourses of the previous twenty years. There were two thematic axes. The first was the condemnation of Portuguese colonialism in general, in its essence and not just in terms of specific manifestations. In previous years, the PCP had criticized Portuguese colonialism in its Salazarist version, vaguely suggesting there could be a different, progressive colonialism. At this point progressive colonialism was no longer considered a realistic or desirable option. The second axis was a recognition of the strength gained by the anti-colonial movements and the growing link between decolonization and the advance of the socialist camp.⁷⁷ This marked the beginning of a completely new phase, which was followed in 1961 by the onset of armed movements in the Portuguese colonies.⁷⁸ The PCP abandoned the exceptionalism that had characterized its position in relation to the international

⁷⁵ *Os povos da Ásia e da África manifestam-se contra o colonialismo e pela paz*, «Avante!», VI série, no. 199, maio 1955, p. 6.

⁷⁶ J. Neves, *Comunismo e nacionalismo*, p. 141.

⁷⁷ FMSMB, *Documentos Souto Teixeira*, Pasta: 04435.791, Freitas, *Sobre o problema das colónias*, in *Ve Congrès du PCP*, edições «Avante!» 1957, pp. 112-121. See also J. Many, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais*, pp. 426-429.

⁷⁸ G. Strippoli, *Anticolonialismo e antifascismo nelle guerre coloniali portoghesi (1961-1974)*, «Passato e presente», 38, 2020, n. 110, pp. 65-80.

communist movement, and the anti-imperialist struggle became central to its ideology and strategy.

The cultural roots of «progressive colonialism»

The PCP's "progressive colonialism" stance was driven by political reasons. As we have seen, the party aimed to assume a fully national profile and participate in the united front opposing the Salazar regime, in line with the strategy dictated by the 7th Comintern Congress. The party's distance from the populations of the overseas possessions and delay in forging relations with the first forms of anti-colonial mobilization were also consequences of its clandestine condition and resultant organizational delays.⁷⁹

Political and tactical factors were undoubtedly decisive. Nevertheless, the strategy of "progressive colonialism" also reflected the cultural fragility that the PCP exhibited from its origins, as we have seen. The repression by the Salazar regime and isolation of militants and leaders in the country exacerbated this situation: as late as September 1928, the party's central committee wrote to Comintern secretary Jules Humbert-Droz stressing the difficulty they had in accessing not only the Comintern's discussion materials but also fundamental theoretical texts.⁸⁰

This strategy was thus tied to the specificities of the political culture and analytical framework of Portuguese communists.

The first of these specificities was its stadial conception of historical development. In this evolutionary theory, history is conceptualized as a succession of transformations through universal, hierarchically defined stages, each corresponding to a specific level of productive forces. It implies a Eurocentric view, identifying the most advanced levels of development with the industrialized West as the goal towards which the rest of the world should aspire. The idea that history

⁷⁹ The harshness of the repression and its intended effects on political activity are illustrated in a lengthy document from the party leadership intended for internal circulation: RGASPI, Comintern, 495-179-11. PCP-Le Secretariat, *Circulaire confidentielle. A toute l'organisation. Il faut porter une plus grande attention au travail conspiratif*, 28 março 1936.

⁸⁰ RGASPI, Comintern, 495-179-24. Partido comunista portuguese - C.C., *au camarade Humbert Droz, du B.E. de l'I.C.*, Lisbon, 10 septembre 1928.

proceeds in successive stages along a linear path was well-rooted in socialist and communist thought. It originated from Marx's positivist and "vulgar" interpretation, legitimized by some of his writings (e.g., the "orientalist" articles on India) and Engels' theory of "peoples without history". This concept was developed by Kautsky, Plekhanov, and Bukharin, among others, and influenced Lenin's theory of imperialism, particularly in the formulation of it offered by Evgeni Varga in the interwar years.⁸¹ The linear, progressive, Eurocentric vision also derived culturally from liberalism and the Enlightenment. As Neves notes, some of Portugal's communist leaders were educated within networks of relationships directly linked to the republican movement that emerged in the early 20th century.⁸² Through the national liberal tradition, some central concepts of the Enlightenment – such as the idea of civilization – entered into the cultural baggage of Portuguese communism to constitute, in some ways, one of the underlying assumptions of that political culture. Significant traces of this culture are found in the Portuguese communists' references to colonialism's supposedly progressive function: in the period under examination, this progressiveness was seen as a factor that could accelerate the development of the colonies. The overthrow of the dictatorship and construction of a democracy in Portugal were held up as preconditions for effective political independence.

Closely linked to this conception was the idea that profound, structural differences exist between Africa and Asia in terms of historical development and anthropological assumptions. This idea was already present in the PCP in the 1920s, but it remained at the margins of the party's intellectual framework until the 1950s. A journal such as *Sol nascente* [*Rising Sun*], an anti-Fascist publication allied with the communists, reveals an attitude prevalent in intellectual circles close to the PCP: it included both tributes to China, its history, and culture, and stances in favour of Indian independence. The argument was clear: Indians «are by no means a savage people who need imperialism to be civilized... They have their own culture, their own civilization,

⁸¹ Regarding the PCP's reception of Marxism, see A.P. Pita, *O Marxismo na Constituição Ideológica e Política do Partido Comunista Português*, «Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais», 40, 1994, pp. 89-108.

⁸² J. Neves, *On Communism and the Nation. Notes from the History of the Colonial Question in the Portuguese Communist Party*, «e-Journal of Portuguese History», 4, 2006, n.1, p. 5.

whose children are Tagore and Nehru. They already know what they want and where they will march». ⁸³ India and China were considered heirs of great civilizations. Africa, in contrast, was still seen as lying outside the path of history, dominated by backward and rigid social and cultural structures. For these reasons colonialism in Asia was not justified, while in Africa it was seen as potentially playing a historical role in supporting development. In the 1950s, this view became explicit. With the rise of the movement for the liberation of Goa and independence of India, PCP analyses reiterated the maturity of Asia in contrast to the immobility of Africa. ⁸⁴ It was only after Bandung, as Jaime Serra declared at the 1957 congress, that this opposition came into crisis and was replaced instead by support for an alliance between the two continents. ⁸⁵

Another factor influencing the PCP's ideology was its conception of rurality and peasants. To strengthen the national discourse during the party's reorganization, its leaders incorporated the notion of "love of the land" into their rhetoric (a sentiment also expressed by Cunhal, as noted earlier). They portrayed the countryside and rural populations as the repositories of the nation's soul. ⁸⁶ However, beneath this rhetoric lay a belief in the superiority of industry and the industrial proletariat – seen as the emblem of economic development – over the agrarian economy and the peasantry.

The party frequently declared the necessity of an alliance between the working class and the peasantry. The document approved at the 1946 congress explicitly states that «a broad and strong national unity movement must be based on the unity of the working class». ⁸⁷ This was not an alliance of equals, however. At the 1943 congress, Cunhal stated that «the most powerful ally of the proletariat is the peasantry». He clarified that the term «peasant» encompassed all social strata (agricultural wage earners who only own their labour power, rural workers with small plots of land but who are still impoverished, ten-

⁸³ *India*, «Sol nascente», 3, 1939, n. 41, p. 17.

⁸⁴ J. Manyá, *La «question d'Orient» dans l'imaginaire colonial du Parti communiste portugais*, «Lusotopie», 7, 2000, pp. 161-173.

⁸⁵ J. Neves, *Comunismo e nacionalismo*, p. 142.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁸⁷ FMSMB, *Arquivo Mário Soares, Antes de 25 de Abril de 1974, Oposição legal e semilegal, Documentos 50º MUD Juvenil*, Pasta 02597.003.019, II Congresso Ilegal Do Partido Comunista Português. Resoluções, 1946, p. 2.

ant farmers, and small landowners) «whose interests oppose those of the big agrarian lords» and who are «interested in abolishing feudal domination in the countryside and the agricultural monopoly brought about by Salazar's corporatism». ⁸⁸ However, he emphasized that «this is not an alliance of equals; the peasants are necessary but subordinate to the proletariat and specifically the working class». ⁸⁹

This worker/peasant dichotomy was paralleled by the modernity/aristocracy dichotomy. The term “peasant” encompasses a variety of social figures, but more generally we can apply Dipesh Chakrabarty's observations about India to the Portuguese context:

I should clarify that in my usage the word “peasant” refers to more than the sociologist's figure of the peasant. I intend that particular meaning, but I load the word with an extended meaning as well. The “peasant” acts here as a shorthand for all the seemingly nonmodern, rural, nonsecular relationships and life practices that constantly leave their imprint on the lives of even the elites in India and on their institutions of government. The peasant stands for all that is not bourgeois (in a European sense) in Indian capitalism and modernity. ⁹⁰

This hierarchy influenced the conception and representation of the relationship between metropolis and countryside. In Portugal – which was also portrayed as a semi-colony and a nation expressing “love for the land” – the industrial proletariat was firmly established, whereas the colonies were characterized as exclusively rural societies. The hierarchies within the empire thus reflected different levels of development and evolution. In light of these considerations, the Portuguese communists' idea of “progressive colonialism” appears not as a mere oddity but as a paradoxical and unsettling consequence of a schematic yet coherent cultural framework.

ALESSIO GAGLIARDI

⁸⁸ FMSMB, *Fundo Isabel do Carmo/Carlos Antunes Duarte*, Pasta: 09700.013, Duarte [A. Cunhal], *Informe político do Secretariado do Comité Central ao I Congresso Ilegal do PCP*, in *Unidade da Nação Portuguesa na Luta Pelo Pão, Pela Liberdade e Pela Independência*, 1943.

⁸⁹ J. Neves, *Comunismo e nacionalismo*, p. 54.

⁹⁰ D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p. 11.

LABOUR, POLITICAL
AND CULTURAL
NETWORKS IN THE
1960s

Pan-Africanism, National Cause and Socialism. The Transnational Path of Deolinda Rodrigues, Leader of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA)

Deolinda Rodrigues. Political training and subjectivity of an Angolan leader

This paper focuses on the itinerary of Deolinda Rodrigues (1939-1967), a leader of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and of the Organization of the Angolan Woman (OMA), with the aim of highlighting the transnational dimension of her anti-colonial militancy in the national liberation movement.

The creation of the MPLA came back to late 1956. At that time, anachronistically vis-à-vis the process of decolonisation following the Second World War, the Estado Novo, led by António de Oliveira Salazar, firmly maintained its belief in the continuation of its colonial empire. The Colonial Act of 1930, incorporated into the Estado Novo Constitution of 1933, had enshrined the «historic function of owning and colonising ultramarine domains and civilising the peoples within them».¹ Although the constitutional revision of 1951 went on to define the colonies as Overseas Provinces, it was still considered that «it is the organic essence of the Portuguese nation to perform the historical function of colonising the lands of the discoveries under its sovereignty, and of communicating and disseminating to the existing populations the benefits of its civilisation».² After the Second World War, Salazar had in fact cultivated international alliances – first with England, then with the United States – in carving out a role for himself in the “second colonial occupation” to revitalise the economies of the metropolises.³ When the struggle for national independence began,

¹ See the Colonial Act in the Constitution of 1933: <https://www.parlamento.pt/Parlamento/Documents/CRP-1933.pdf>

² See the *Fundamental Principles of the Portuguese Overseas*: <https://www.parlamento.pt/Parlamento/Documents/Lei2048.pdf>

³ P. Aires de Oliveira, *Live and Let Live: Britain and Portugal's Imperial Endgame (1945-75)*, «Portuguese Studies», 29/2, 2013, pp. 186-208.

the UN had already condemned the Estado Novo for maintaining the colonial empire, stubbornly prolonged by Salazar, who even mobilised the colonial army in a thirteen-year colonial war.⁴ OMA was born in 1962 within the MPLA with two main objectives: the liquidation of the Portuguese colonialism and the recognition of equality of women in Angolan society.⁵ At that time, the colonial war had already begun – on February 4, 1961, the day of the assault to São Paulo prison and others in Luanda, according to MPLA, or on March 15, 1961, the day of the insurrection in the North of Angola, according to FNLA/UPA.⁶

Rodrigues died in 1967 at the age of 28 with other four female comrades, killed by a rival group of MPLA, UPA.⁷ She left a diary that covers almost ten years, from 1956 to 1967. The diary, supposedly found in Congo in 1974 by Roberto de Almeida, Deolinda's brother, was published at the beginning of 2000 by the Angolan publisher Nzila.⁸ The diary recounts her revolt against the Portuguese settlers, her feelings concerning *nguetas* (white people), her affiliation to MPLA, the foundation of women's organization OMA, her life and thoughts concerning women's role, and her role in these organisations and in the revolution.

The few existing studies on Rodrigues have focused on the diary to show how her ideological thought has been concerned with religion, class, race and gender, and have underlined the potential subversive effect of Rodrigues' diary toward the hegemonical ideas and practices of MPLA. Paredes has shown how Rodrigues has challenged the principles, traditions and hierarchies of Methodist and MPLA families, to

⁴ On the role of the UN in the decolonization process in the former Portuguese empire see: A. Almada Santos *From "Weak Presence" to Fait Accompli: The United Nations and the Portuguese Decolonization*, «Estudos do Século XX», n. 18, 2018, pp. 116-133.

⁵ Sobre a coordenação das actividades do MPLA e da OMA. Associação Tchiveka de Documentação (ATD), Archive Lúcio Lara, 0078.000.012.

⁶ On the "paternity" of the beginning of the war see: J.-M. Mabeko Tali, *Guerrilhas e Lutas Sociais. O MPLA Perante Si Próprio. Ensaio de História Política*, Lisbon: Mercado de Letras 2018, pp. 136-141.

⁷ The main groups in Angola were MPLA, UPA/GRAE (afterward FLN, whose leader was Holden Roberto) and UNITA, whose leader was Jonas Savimbi.

⁸ D. Rodrigues, *Diário de Um Exílio sem Regresso*, Luanda: Nzila 2003. See also the second edition: Ead., *Diário de Um Exílio sem Regresso*, Luanda: Mayamba Editora 2017.

become a revolutionary and a feminist.⁹ Alfieri has argued that her legacy has transcended the intentions of the dominant narrative by the Angolan government, which strove to making Rodrigues a «national heroine»; her figure, Alfieri shows, has been received as a symbol of a broader, intersectional, anti-capitalist, anti-sexist, feminist struggle and in support of the LGBTI movement.¹⁰ By mobilising other sources, which include Rodrigues' correspondences, documents produced by OMA and MPLA, and the memories of the Cuban leader Limbânia Jiménez Rodríguez – “Nancy”¹¹ this paper will enlarge this perspective by foregrounding the transnational dimension of her militancy in the socialist arena. In so doing, I thus aim at contributing to those studies that, during the last decade, have focused on the global dimension of communism and the articulations – and contradictions – between the USSR, the international communist movements, the national parties and movements and the individual paths of men and women.¹²

Studies on MPLA have shown that, despite the Marxist influence and the material support by Cuba and the Soviet Union, the MPLA was not communist *tout court* during the colonial war.¹³ In fact, MPLA did not follow the “classical” practice of communist parties: for instance, its leaders, *in primis* Agostinho Neto, have manifested reticence and ambiguity in defining the ideological belonging of MPLA.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the MPLA was a left wing, anti-colonial and revolution-

⁹ M. Paredes-D. Rodrigues, *da Família Metodista à Família MPLA, o Papel da Cultura na Política*, «Cadernos de Estudos Africanos», 20, 2010, pp. 11-26.

¹⁰ N. Alfieri-D. Rodrigues, *entre escrita da história e escrita biográfica*, «Abriu», 10, 2021, pp. 39-57

¹¹ L. Jiménez Rodríguez “Nancy”, *Heroínas de Angola*, Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1985. See the interview realized in 2010 by P. Lara in Luanda, at Tchivewka Association. ATD, 9001.001.001. Nancy (Las Villas, Cuba, 1936), member of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (Revolutionary Armed Forces) where she obtained the licence of lieutenant coronel and founder of the Cuban Communist Party.

¹² S. Pons, *The global revolution. A history of world Communism 1917-1991*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014; C. Donert, *Feminism, Communism and Global Socialism: Encounters and Entanglements*, in J. Fürst-S. Pons-M. Selden (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Communism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2017, pp. 399-421.

¹³ D. and M. Ottaway, *Afrocommunism*, New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers 1981, p. 103.

¹⁴ J.-M. Mabeko Tali, *Rótulos Atribuídos, Rótulos Assumidos. Memórias e Identi-*

ary movement that shared with Communist parties the reference to Marxism and the ties with the Eastern bloc. OMA participated in the anti-fascist Women's International Democratic Federation, led by left wing and Communist women. For these reasons, it seems to me that Rodrigues' path contributes to studies on Communism in Africa,¹⁵ on women and female consciousness in Africa,¹⁶ and on communist women in global perspective.¹⁷

In what follows, I will recall Deolinda's political and biographical path to show how her conception of revolution combines the struggle for the national cause with internationalism and Pan-Africanism, the codes of communist parties with subjective feelings, the sacrifice for the collective good with the very intimate level of her thoughts and feelings. It has been noted that for other African women activists the ties with the communist world «were first and foremost a political tool for defending the right to national self-determination and women's rights».¹⁸ In the case of Deolinda (or *Langidila*, her guerrilla fighter name¹⁹), I would argue that her militancy in the MPLA and in the OMA shows that the ties with communist world, socialist and left wing movement have provided a transnational political itinerary and have been multifaceted, being for some aspects considerable "classical" (a young woman who followed a political training, manifested her discipline and her loyalty to the MPLA), while being for other characteristics unique (her subjectivity) and showing a strong intersection

dades Políticas em Angola. Da luta armada anticolonial ao 27 de Maio de 1977 (1960-1977), Lisboa: Guerra & Paz 2023, p. 55.

¹⁵ A. Drew, *Communism in Africa*, in S.A. Smith (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, Oxford: 2013, pp. 285-302; F. Blum et al. (eds.), *Socialismes en Afrique = Socialisms in Africa*, Collection histoire, sociologie, anthropologie 54, Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2021) ; F. Blum, *Marx en Afrique francophone*, in J.-N. Ducange, *Marx, une passion française*, Paris: La Découverte, 2018, pp. 320-329.

¹⁶ A. Drew, *Female Consciousness and Feminism in Africa*, «Theory and Society», 24 (1) 1995, pp. 1-33 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/65791>).

¹⁷ F. de Haan (ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Communist Women Activists around the World*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan 2023.

¹⁸ P. Barthélémy-O. Rillon, *Aoua Keita (1912-1980): Anti-Colonial Activist, Nationalist Politician, and Feminist in Mali (West Africa)*, in F. de Haan (ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Communist Women*, pp. 475-493.

¹⁹ In Kimbundu *Langidila* means "vigilant"; "sentinel".

between the concerns of class, race and gender. There are numerous traces of the transnational character of Rodrigues' political path, attested by her diary, her published correspondences,²⁰ the sources produced by MPLA and OMA and now kept by the Portuguese and Angolan archives,²¹ and the sources produced by the WIDF.

"I've been accepted in the movement". Rodrigues' involvement in MPLA

Deolinda was born in Catete, on 10th February 1939, third of five children of two elementary school teachers. As the father was also an evangelical pastor, Deolinda grew up in an environment strongly characterized by the methodist Church and its activity, including activities in anticolonial resistance and struggle. The region of Catete, in Deolinda's childhood, was characterized by popular revolts against cotton companies, forced labour and colonial exploitation, repressed with violence, deportation and death. Thanks to her parents' profession, she had a school education before entering school in Luanda, where she had to move while her parents travelled in different regions of Angola to teach. She, her brothers and sisters lived in Luanda with an aunt, Maria da Silva, mother of Agostinho Neto, who in her house hosted lot of kids who grew up together. Deolinda and the rest of the family stayed together during school vacations, and during this time she helped them in teaching and agricultural work.

Deolinda was also involved in the organization of youths in the evangelical Church. Under the umbrella of the Church's diversified activities (sport, music), Deolinda and others also organized political activities, such as conferences by Amílcar Cabral, Eduardo Mondlane, Américo Boavida. The Church's mission also allowed Deolinda to publish her poems and writings, which she started to compose since she was very young and whose topics were the condition of oppressed Angolan people and the revolt against the Portuguese colonialism. According to Nancy's biography, Deolinda used to talk with students to explain the social economic impacts of colonialism on Angolan territory: she

²⁰ D. Rodrigues, *Cartas de Langidila e Outros Documentos*, Luanda: Nzila 2004.

²¹ In Portugal, the sources were collected by the regime's organisms. The main funds are PIDE archive at National Archives and the archive of the so-called Overseas Minister, now Historical Diplomatic Archive. In Angola, the Tchiveka association holds the main archive.

organized meetings of young people and students at home, at school, at the church. Nancy underlined her militant inspiration in organizing meetings in Luanda and outside the city and in publishing her texts full of indignation against the colonial oppression, the presence of the political police in Luanda, the violence against the poorest citizens who lived in the *musseques*²² of Luanda, the daily effects of colonialism on Black people. She joined MPLA soon after its foundation (1956), with the tasks that young people had: above all, that of organizing sessions where young people received explanation on MPLA's principles of struggle and translating texts from English to Portuguese and vice versa. In fact, Deolinda opens the diary with the moment in which she joined MPLA, on 9th September 1956, in connection with the consciousness of gender discrimination: «it seems like they accepted me in the nationalist movement, although Mr. Benje and other old people are scared because I am a woman». And on 16th September she confirms her inclusion: «Mino has brought me a memorandum to be translated and typed. So, this is the signal that I've been accepted in the movement». At the beginning of 1957, Deolinda referred in the diary a Pan-African meeting and her work of translating the sections concerning Angola of *The African Awakening* by Davidson.²³ Moreover, during the Pan-African meeting, she wrote that Kreps (a US Methodist missionary in Angola, player and trainer of Benfica baseball team in Luanda) introduced her to a woman, a doctor from Ghana. In that occasion, Deolinda penned down a significant example of the contacts existing among women before and after the independence of former colonies, showing how African and gendered-concerned consciousness benefited from women's encounters: «just by seeing her, I am feeling another woman, more African. She is nice, full of consciousness».²⁴ The concerns about being an African woman are a fil rouge in the diary and in her correspondence, evident at the point that the ouverture of the book of the correspondence is a short text signed by Deolinda sent to a friend: «My friend. Would God help you in everything you do. Remember that you are a woman and a black woman».²⁵ In September 1957, when the UN commission visited Sub Saharan Africa, Deolinda took part in the organization of demon-

²² Only in part "informal settlements", *musseques* were the peripheral and poorest areas of the city.

²³ B. Davidson, *The African Awakening*, London: Jonathan Cape 1955.

²⁴ *Diário de um Exílio*, p. 27.

²⁵ *Cartas de Langidila*, p. 42.

strations to denounce colonialism, forced labour and oppression from white settlers. In her diary, she noted that, for the first time, she could see the circulation of educated African people, who could go everywhere, with naturalness and dignity, wearing their traditional clothes. She also recorded that political police PIDE had been present and had been spying. For the first time in her diary, she refers to the atrocity of colonialism and by *nguetas*, something which will become a recurring topic in the diary, as repression and oppression were part of the daily life. In April 1958 her diary recorded an episode: she met in the street two students arrested after a police raid and she intervened, explaining the police they were just students; the police, however, intimidated her to leave the place. Reflecting on the episode her conclusion is: «what are we here in Luanda? Everything but human beings. And how long will last this shitty life?». More episodes like this are reported in these months of 1958, for instance when Deolinda wrote about an Angolan being beaten by a white settler: the beaten man and others froze, even though the perpetrator was neither bigger, nor stronger than them. Deolinda asked again about the meaning of life, referring she was thinking about suicide. Another time, at school, she recounts having been insulted by students and her self-control to not react violently. In fact, the year 1958 is ended, after yet another mention of an episode of violence, by the notation that their lives were full of humiliations. During these years, Deolinda shows an already articulated consciousness about the multiple layers of colonial oppression. She clearly focused on the role of Portuguese political police PIDE, that in fact was watching over the MPLA activists, including Rodrigues.²⁶ On the other hand, her anticolonialism and reflections on race discrimination show at least two dimensions: the consciousness of violence of colonialism and the antagonism between white settlers and black people oppressed by them, in Fanon's perspective, whose texts Deolinda knew.²⁷ The second dimension concerns her

²⁶ The PIDE, International and State Defence Police, was created in 1945, aiming at preventing and protecting Portugal from the so-called crimes against the State. The National Archives of Portugal (ANTT) hold the sources collected by the police. Concerning Deolinda Rodrigues see the following sources: ANTT/PIDE, Delegação de Angola, processo individual GAB n.º 812, NT 8054; ANTT/PIDE, Delegação de Angola, Cabinda, processo individual SR n.º 1120, NT 6446. On the role on PIDE in the former colonies see: D. Cabrita Mateus, *A PIDE/DGS na guerra colonial*, Lisboa: Terramar 2004.

²⁷ M. Paredes-D. Rodrigues, *da Família Metodista à Família MPLA*, p. 17.

personal feelings, what she felt in her body, the rage and revolt and the necessity of dominating her instincts.

The development of the Pan-Africanist perspective. Deolinda Rodrigues' life in Brazil and in the United States

In January 1959, thanks to the evangelical Church, Deolinda got a fellowship to study sociology in Brazil. In the diary she mentions the party MPLA organized for her some days before the departure and her feelings about leaving the country in those conditions: «how much it costs me to leave Angola where I have always lived! If only the situation was normal. But my people will suffer, and I will save myself, I will leave them. It is so difficult to leave such dear family, friends, everyone in the clutches of the *nguetas*. What a betrayal!»,²⁸

In Brazil she spent one year and a half, before Portugal and Brazil signed a diplomatic agreement of extradition, which forced her to leave the country. She moved to the United States of America for some months to continue her studies. From Brazil, she maintained some correspondence with comrades in Angola, where she wrote news about her studies and activities abroad, but also her concerns about PIDE's repression and prisons in Angola: «How will we help our comrades in prison? Here, when I wake up, when I sleep, when I eat, I just think: how did they sleep? What did they eat? Have their relatives already been killed by *tugas* [Portuguese]?»,²⁹ The stay in the USA provided her contacts with other African students and she noted that some of those from African countries politically close to Angola (*nações irmãs*) did not know about the Angolan reality. She also notes that MPLA leaders were doing a good work in finally getting African people in the USA aware of the Angola situation.³⁰ From the diary and from the correspondence (some particularly relevant letters have been sent to her comrade Ismael Martins, then Angola ambassador at the UN³¹), two main issues regarding her experience in the USA emerge: she developed a strong consciousness and work aiming at

²⁸ *Diário de Um Exílio*, p. 34.

²⁹ *Cartas de Langidila*, p. 59

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³¹ Embaixador Ismael Martins. <https://news.un.org/pt/tags/embaixador-ismael-martins>

Pan-Africanism and she reflected about the reality of the USA. Moreover, she expressed her mixed feelings about studying abroad to then being useful to the revolution or coming back and struggling against colonialism.³² On the one side, she participated in meetings of African students representing more than ten African countries, a good experience in her words, because she had the occasion to talk about the situation in Angola. In this perspective, she asked for images from Angola, aiming at receiving moral comfort, and because she was putting together an album of people and region «from AFRICA».³³ Between 1960 and 1961 her anti-Americanism was manifested in the diary and in the correspondence. In a letter dated December 1960 she described the United States as «authentically rot», the country of the «survival of the white people in the world», where even the supposedly progressive and democratic people were in fact defending the white privileges – the latter included, according to her, the privileges of white Portuguese people, who could not live without the colonies. This consciousness had two consequences: a political reflection and a more subjective impression. The political level concerned what Angolan people had to do, since they could not expect anything from the USA: «We must stick to the Afro-Asian bloc tooth and nail».³⁴ The more subjective feeling concerned religion. In the USA she was in contact with people belonging to the Protestant Church and she was disappointed by their false “democracy” concerning colonised people. She wrote in a letter that, while she had arrived in the USA as a Protestant and she would now change religion, for animism or another African religion.³⁵ The diary recorded the same impressions. In April 1961 she wrote in the diary that another student, finding her too critical toward the US society, had asked her why she was still staying in their country: Deolinda recorded that in fact she was feeling out of place.³⁶

Deolinda wrote a letter to the Cairo’s Afro-Asian Women’s Conference (January 1961) when she was in the USA. The Conference was followed by the US intelligence services (CIA), which controlled the

³² The issue of the alternative between studying and fighting for the Revolution will return in the diary. See for instance September 27, 1964, and her feelings related to her wish to study medicine and the need of armed fight for the revolution.

³³ *Cartas de Langidila*, p. 81.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

³⁵ *Ibidem.*

³⁶ *Diário de Um Exílio*, p. 39.

activities of the Afro-Asian People Solidarity Organisations (AAPSO), and provided information and political comments about it, for instance about disagreements and harmony between the forces that composes the secretariat, the Soviet delegation, the Chinese one and the representative of the United Arab Republic (UAR). In reporting about the Cairo Conference of Women, USA services described that, though at the preparatory meeting, the women's conference had shown the potential of addressing economic-social and cultural problems of women, the final resolutions «were indistinguishable from the usual anti-imperialist, anti-neo-colonialist statements issued from international Communist meetings». To prove this statement, the CIA document reported some excerpts from the final resolutions. CIA's appreciation was focused on watching over the renewed force of the AAPSO and most of all to unifying the major events of that year (1960-1961) to the Communist influence. The document is dedicated to stress how international communism was functioning in equalizing all the events related to the AAPSO.³⁷

Not only was the relevance of Deolinda's letter not captured by CIA's restricted perspective, which did not notice the novelty and transformative politics of women's meetings. But it is also something more than a formal letter from OMA to other women's organizations, aiming at showing presence and solidarity on the occasion of the transnational conference. Deolinda considered both the national and the transnational level in addressing the issue of women oppressed by Portuguese colonialism. She described that African women had been and were being decimated, oppressed, exploited, and maintained in the ignorance by Portuguese colonialism. She also stated: «we are mothers, wives and youths to whom Portuguese colonialism denies the inalienable right to happiness, the right of living, thinking and progressing in our own countries».³⁸ The right to happiness is more in line with the claims for women's rights, which have been among the characters of the global feminist movement in the sixties, than with pre-established communist formulas as stated by the CIA. Moreover, the letter established a relationship between the national and transnational levels. Deolinda stated that the Afro-Asian Conference was

³⁷ The Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization from April 1960-April 1961: <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp78-00915r001300050007-5>

³⁸ *Mensagem de Deolinda Rodrigues à Conferência afro-asiática da mulher*, ATD, Archive Lúcio Lara, 0029.000.015.

working for the prosperous future of «our own Homelands» and in doing so they were working for the prosperous future «of the whole world». Her words connected African women's struggle against colonialism to the future of African countries, and to the future of the entire world, thus demonstrating a broader political perspective.

She was in the USA at the moment of the revolt of 4th February 1961 (the beginning of national liberation according to the MPLA) and also at the end of the year, when she met a delegation of MPLA to the UN in New York. From the USA, she planned to participate in the Rabat Conference of the International Union of Students, as a representative of Angola. But she could not travel to Morocco due to bureaucratic obstacles and then she decided to come back to Africa.

Facing the internal fractures within the Angolan people and experiencing transnational connections as OMA delegate. Rodrigues' return to Africa and her travels abroad

At the beginning of 1961, she finally left the USA and – via Amsterdam, where she had some troubles with the police, which was about to give her to the Portuguese authorities – she came back to Africa. She spent some months in Conakry and then joined the headquarters of MPLA in Leopoldville (Kinshasa), to join the CVAAR, Voluntary Angolan Corp of Assistance to Refugees, because almost 3 thousand Angolans were living there. She had the occasion to reflect and express her political position about the differences between the members of the MPLA and UPA, and those between the people that were living in Angola and had experienced the beginning of the war and the activists living abroad. Her thoughts reflected the divide between «internal and external dynamics in the global national Angolan process». ³⁹ In the diary, she described the refugees' conditions of poverty and lack of everything. From there, she also contributed to the foundation of OMA and to its projection at the transnational level, working on the relationships with other women's groups in Africa and outside, and to the connections with the WIDF (1945). In 1962 she joined the direction of MPLA. At that moment, the relationships between UPA and MPLA were already compromised and for Deolinda the differences were so deep that no agreement was possible, while on other occasions

³⁹ J.-M. Mabeko Tali, *O MPLA Perante si Próprio*, p. 97

she had demonstrated her belief in the need of working together with UPA and the other forces against the Portuguese.⁴⁰ In 1963 Zaire's government obliged the MPLA to move to Brazzaville. In her diary, Deolinda wrote about the recognition of Holden Roberto's leadership by Adoula Cyrille, then prime Minister of Congo. Deolinda's letters and diary's pages are, from this moment on, very clear about the role of Holden Roberto in boycotting MPLA, about the impossible negotiations with Portugal because of MPLA's «communist tendency» and the role of Portuguese government in trying to divide Angolan people.⁴¹

From Brazzaville, Deolinda continued her work, also in the radio programme *The Voice of Fighting Angola* (*A Voz de Angola Combatente*). In the diary there are many references to how she was missing her family. And in December 1963 she wrote that «Christmas without family is not just Christmas: it's Torture-Christmas».⁴² At the beginning of 1964, she celebrated her birthday – «I'm 25 today, I am old»⁴³ – thinking about being alone, far from her family and writing about the «drama of solitude», which for her started in 1959.⁴⁴ She makes further reference to white USA people (“*ianqui*”), calling them not sincere and analysing their attitudes toward Black people, considered to be “good boys” when they did not interfere, and “communists” when they are aware of their condition of Black people in a country dominated by white settlers. In March 1964, the diary recorded the presence, in MPLA, of “*mulatos*” and Black people inclined to a “universalistic” perspective, but also her incapacity to consider Portuguese, rich, or North Americans as good people: «they do not have anything in common with me, relating to our objectives».⁴⁵ In fact, she

⁴⁰ *Cartas de Langidila*, p. 102.

⁴¹ *Diário de Um Exílio*, p. 43.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁴⁴ The aspect of loneliness is very present in Deolinda's diary. On 31st July 1964 she also noted that after the Revolution (she was convinced about the realization of the Revolution) she would make something for lonely people, mostly children. She wrote that the worst thing was being alone.

⁴⁵ *Diário de Um Exílio*, p. 50 refers to March, 6, 1964. See also March 14, 1965 (p. 97) when Deolinda criticised the Portuguese and mestizos sympathetic with MPLA for the different conditions of life and aims of struggle. See also April 4, 1965 (p. 103) and the question of racial differences and privileges within MPLA.

was affirming that as long as they would not have equal conditions, she could not avoid thinking about violence and hate. She added an important note about her pride of being an African and her right to comb her hairs, to wear her clothes and to eat her food despite the comments of the Portuguese.⁴⁶ And she continued during the following days and months, demonstrating a deep consciousness of the effects of colonialism, not only in the Portuguese colonies: «what hell they have made the whites of our Africa. The whites have castrated our human personality. Despite all this, I do not want revenge: I want our revolt, the return of our dignity. Their punishment will come from them. The Black man, for the *ngueta*, is an angel as long as he acts like a baby and never like an adult individual».⁴⁷

Beyond racism, she also wrote about other feelings and experiences, the daily life, for instance the first time she went to the stadium for a football match, the precautions against insomnia, or her sadness for the death of comrades. In June, for the first time, she delivered to her diary a feeling of revolt against women's treatment within MPLA. There was the occasion to accomplish a mission in Ghana for the MPLA and Deolinda was supposed to go, then something happened, and she reacted: «they told me I will not go to Ghana because I am a woman and Bardem does not respect women. This discrimination because of my gender revolts me. If I am outside this erudite and masculine MPLA, I will not return in short».⁴⁸ In other parts of the diary Deolinda attested her impatience against machismo inside the movement and her consciousness as a woman.⁴⁹

Another recurring element in Deolinda's diary is self-criticism, related to her attitude in the movement. For instance, in August 1964 she assumed her faults to be individualist and that she used to speak too much, also noting the possible path to be a better militant.⁵⁰ The diary, in the same year, remembers the return of eleven comrades who

⁴⁶ This section referring to clothes, food, hair style, that Deolinda relates to her will to live in Africa and her love for Africa, refers do March 6, 1964, in the second edition of the diary: D. Rodrigues, *Diário de Um Exílio*, 2017, p. 61.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁴⁹ See for instance September 17, 1964, p. 64. See also June 6, 1966 (p. 140) when she affirms her perspective about a "revolutionary" MPLA did not need women cooks.

⁵⁰ See August 8 1964 (p. 61); August 28 1964 (p. 62); October 22, 1964 (*Diário de Um Exílio*, pp. 73-74)

had been studying in Europe (one of the traces of the transnational connections through study)⁵¹ and the work of the OMA. From the end of September 1964, she writes about her stay in OMA's house, referring to her «good intentions» concerning her attitude towards the other women living in the house.⁵² OMA's activity increased from that moment on, as the group had their meetings and congresses.⁵³

In the following months, she penned in the diary the difficulties of living together,⁵⁴ but also the daily life amid the war, and its effects, like suffering hunger (during these years Deolinda was living in Congo, before in Leopoldville and then in Brazzaville).⁵⁵ Deolinda also mentioned transnational connections, including those not strictly political, for instance in the day when she wrote the emotions felt when an Italian woman sang them the song *Non ho l'età*.⁵⁶

In July 1965 she travelled to Accra as OMA's delegate for the Day of African Woman,⁵⁷ where she met other women from other countries, including a nice Mexican woman and Marta from Hungary. Deolinda relates these women's discourse to race more than class, or gender. Deolinda wrote that Marta had not been happy when she commented in negative terms about the European weather and for Deolinda this was a sign that the *nguetas* were convinced that all Black people (*ngunhis*) «could die for being *oiropas* (Europeans) and for being white».⁵⁸ She penned in the diary the material obstacles of travelling in Africa and the ignorance African women had on their own countries; she also showed her impatience concerning the fact that, because of their ignorance, African women were like guest in their own countries.⁵⁹ On this occasion, Deolinda met women from Africa, Cuba, Europa and noted her meeting at Grand Hotel of Accra with women from

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁵³ In 1965, Deolinda wrote «solemn opening of OMA seminar: humble but significant» (October 10, 1965) and this resume her conception of dignity.

⁵⁴ See November 7 and 24, 1964 or January, 31, 1965 when she noted «what a desire to disappear!».

⁵⁵ See December 24, 1964, and January 4, 1965.

⁵⁶ *Non ho l'età*, by Gliola Cinguetti, 1964.

⁵⁷ See on the event the reference in journal *AWA La revue de la femme africaine*, n. 13, October 1965.

⁵⁸ *Diário de Um Exílio*, p. 122.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

URSS, Yugoslavia and WIDF.⁶⁰ Deolinda testified about transnational connections not only in occasion of official meetings, but also in her daily life, for instance when she met three tanks being driven by Cubans and reflected about their militancy in putting their lives danger in solidarity with Angolan cause.⁶¹

In April 1965 she took part to OMA's delegation to China together with Lucília Neto, Maria Carneiro e Amélia Alfeu.⁶² In October 1965, she travelled to Bulgaria and then Moscow. The lines in her diary are impressive and synthetic and speak of her personal views more than the communist codes. She wrote: «big parade in the Red Square. Missiles, lots of people and Italian journalists. I saw Pimentel by chance».⁶³ And, one week after, another synthetic impression: «I finally left the USSR. I did not like the weather and the people at all. In some respects, I prefer the Chinese women».⁶⁴ This and other notations are in line with Deolinda's critical gaze on herself and on the reality: her perspective on the MPLA and on OMA relates to the daily reality, with obstacles and relational problems, with her conflicts inside the movement and the organization.⁶⁵ The intimate thoughts and feelings, and the self-reference to her personality and to her body (in more than one place Deolinda refers about her menstruations) continue also in 1966, when the rhythm of the diary changes, as she starts to refer the war and the daily struggle of men and women involved in the guerrilla: their material necessities, the losses, the Portuguese actions, the military actions, and so forth. Sometimes, Deolinda's writing pinpointed all these elements in synthetic and expressive way: she mixed political principles of the revolutionary MPLA – including democratic decision, honesty, rejection of abuse of power, with reference to supplies – with her body's pains and sensations.⁶⁶ Although the general tone of

⁶⁰ See for instance the reference she wrote on August 1st, 1965. In other moments of the diary there are references to her works for the WIDF (always referred in the French form: FDIF). See, for instance, June 5, 1966.

⁶¹ *Diário de Um Exílio*, p. 128.

⁶² Delegação da Organização da Mulher Angolana – OMA (MPLA) na China, ATD, Archive Lúcio Lara, 1004.004.001.

⁶³ *Diário de Um Exílio*, p. 134.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁵ See the hypothesis on being suspended by the MPLA's direction reported on June 2, 1966.

⁶⁶ *Diário de Um Exílio*, p. 166 for the reference to bugs and diseases and other ma-

her diary is in line with her faith in the revolution and in the victory, and despite the consciousness of the importance of her work for the MPLA, in the OMA and for the WIDF, her feelings were at times not positive: «I am discouraged».⁶⁷

At the end of 1966 Deolinda and other five women met Nancy, the Cuban leader, who was in Congo-Brazzaville as part of the Cuban political direction. With another instructor, she stayed in Congo for the exams of Cuban soldiers. Invited by Agostinho Neto, the Cuban government had sent military instructors to train fighters for two *esquadrões* of one hundred and fifty fighters each (*columna Camilo Cienfuegos* and *Kamy*). The training included physical and political preparation, guerrilla tactics, use of weapons. Deolinda was part of this second squadron that received its training in Congo in October and November 1966. Other four women took part in the Kamy column: Engácia dos Santos, Lucrecia Paim, Irene Cohen and Tereza Afonso.

Nancy met the Camy column in Congo and decided to interview Deolinda Rodrigues and the other women for the journal *Mujer*, (Woman) the journal of the Organization of Cuban Women. In *Heroínas de Angola* she wrote about the effect of Portuguese violence, on the struggle of Angolan people, on the OMA and then focused on individual biographies of the five women.⁶⁸

«I've kissed the ground». The return to Angola after 8 years and her final words.

In 1967, the diary started with Deolinda's return to Angola: «I came back to Angola after 8 years. I've kissed the ground».⁶⁹

From this moment on, it is a guerrilla diary with meticulous records of marches, territory, advances, stops, offensives of the Portuguese army, MPLA deaths, ways to feed, political clarification sessions and self-criticism of the soldiers in the conduct of the fight. All her life is now absorbed by her role in the guerrilla: referring to her birthday, she wrote that the best present would be crossing the Mbridge without ac-

terial daily conduction of the guerrilla against the Portuguese army. In 1966 the references to year and months disappear.

⁶⁷ *Diário de Um Exílio*, p. 171.

⁶⁸ For the biographies see: *Heroínas de Angola*, pp. 15-35.

⁶⁹ *Diário de Um Exílio*, p. 1771.

cidents.⁷⁰ Some moments of discouragement, due to physical pain, are present: «what life is this and until when».⁷¹ The recurrent key words in these pages refer to the military language of march, and expedients of the guerrilla like camouflage and resistance in the very difficult conditions for sleeping and eating. In one of the last pages, she invoked her mother (a constant presence in the diary) telling: «dear mother, even though it is already a lot to have got this far, what a struggle, without orientation and without anyone who knows the way well».⁷²

In fact, in January 1967 the Kamy column entered in Angola. The mission of the squadron was to reach the “First Region” and the Cienfuegos column, in the perspective of the liberation of North Angola from colonial army. The column encountered countless difficulties: orientation, internal conflicts, rain, animals, suffered many losses and split into two groups of soldiers in February 1967. Thus, one group decided to cross the Mbridge river, while another group – which included Deolinda and the other women – returned to Congo. The first group, reduced to about twenty soldiers, would end its mission on 1 April 1967, after suffering attacks by the FLNA. The second group was attacked by the FNLA on the Congo border. The five women and other soldiers were imprisoned in the prison of Kakokol, Kamula, at the border with Congo, Leopoldville, which at that time was controlled by UPA. They were afterward transferred to the concentration camp of Kinkuzu.

Deolinda wrote other letters when she was already in prison with other comrades, in December 1967, in Kinkuzu. She started by informing the «Dear Comrades» that they were always anxious for receiving information from them, and then she passed to inform the Committee about the health conditions of the Angolan prisoners. Then she addressed political and organizational issues, asking – but also giving instructions – about the need of transmission of information from MPLA to Angolan people: «we ask that you inform the Angolan people via radio that it is the MPLA that is arming them», since UPA and the Portuguese settlers were spreading a lot of confusion. Then she asked about the truthfulness of the sparse information they received regarding MPLA’s struggle, and information about an escape plan. The second part of the letter wishes the comrades force and perseverance in the struggle and demonstrates her spirit in the struggle

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁷¹ *Ibidem.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 207.

for national liberation: «so no discouragement. If one day we get out of here, great, if not, may the Angolan people know how to win, despite the pain of losing us, many other combatants have gone through this and perhaps others will, unfortunately». Then she asked as a soldier waiting for superior orders: «what should we do if they oblige us to work for them: hunger strike, suicide?». The question does not sound rhetorical, being more a real doubt in Deolinda's words. She added: «a simple refusal shouldn't mean anything. We are ready [she used the adjective in the feminine form, *prontas*] to do whatever the MPLA wants and tells us. We are waiting for guidelines. Don't worry too much about us». In the following lines she changed another time the tone of the letter, and we can imagine her smile as she was asking who was the young man that had been recently speaking at the MPLA radio, because his voice sounded unknown. And she added, like a justification for having addressed the question: «female curiosity, even from prison!». I have read this expression as self-ironical, and then not in contradiction with Deolinda's consciousness of women's rights and claims, and with her attention to women's problems and subjectivity and to her awareness of opportunity of struggling against machismo existing in Angolan society, including in the MPLA.

Rodrigues' conception of the revolution.

The different issues and tones co-existing in the correspondences and in the diary contribute to sketch the multilevel conception of struggle and revolution in Deolinda's thought. She conceived the revolution as the national liberation of Angolan people, as an armed struggle against Portuguese colonialism, in Pan-African perspective. As the means to liberate African women from oppression and exploitation, striving for the transformation of the whole world. She expressed her consciousness about being a revolutionary woman in a male-dominated political organization; she assumed a gendered perspective in referring both her subjective feelings (and sufferance) and the importance of political work to be done to transform women's condition and the perception of women's role in Angolan society.

The book by Nancy is prefaced by Cuban Vilma Espin De Castro, who, in turn, was leader of the Organisation of the Cuban Woman, member of CC of Cuban Communist Party and vice president of Women International Democratic Federation (WIDF). In the preface, Vilma Espin De Castro refers a letter received from Deolinda Rodri-

gues, where the latter sent her wishes for the consolidation of socialism in revolutionary Cuba. By reading her diary and the correspondence I can argue that, in Rodrigues' mind, a revolutionary country in socialist perspective would be a country liberated from colonialism, antiracist, progressive against the traditionalism of Angolan tribalism, in which women, liberated from colonialism and from machismo – the national one and the machismo existing within the MPLA – will have the right to think, to live and to express their right to happiness. In sum, she conceived the socialist revolution to be a whole revolution. In her militancy within the MPLA she shown characteristics that bring her closer to the experiences of communist members, as self-criticism, loyalty and obedience to the Party. Moreover, her experience as leader of OMA and her participation in the WIDF's meetings bring her closer to activist women in the socialist world. Her awareness of the power relations between white and Black people and her consciousness of being, beside an Angolan activist, a Black woman, approximate her to a political and epistemic perspective that we could today define as postcolonial feminism. This articulation shows how Rodrigues' path was rich. She contributed to a revolutionary ideal and struggle against colonialist oppression, for an African continent free from the conditioning of white privilege, where women had their rightful place, and claimed their right to better living conditions and happiness.

GIULIA STRIPPOLI

Les relations entre l'Union syndicale panafricaine et la Fédération syndicale mondiale (1961-1973) / *Relations between the All-African Trade Union Federation and the World Federation of trade Unions (1961-1973)*

La question de l'affiliation des centrales africaines aux fédérations mondiales représente un enjeu identitaire majeur des relations ouvrières en contexte de guerre froide. Ce type de lien organique renvoie dans l'imaginaire des partisans de la thèse autonomiste à une représentation négativiste. Parce que l'affiliation internationale est perçue comme le support de transposition des querelles idéologiques exogènes dans le champ syndical africain. Elle passe donc pour un facteur de fragilité. Pour cette raison, la désaffiliation est devenue le préalable exigé dans la mise en place des projets unitaires au niveau panafricain portés par l'élite se réclamant de la tendance autonomiste. Ainsi, du processus de création de l'UGTAN en 1957 à la constitution de l'USPA en 1961, cette question fondamentale est demeurée le point d'achoppement des divergences. L'intransigeance doctrinale affichée sur le principe dénote d'une volonté ferme de bâtir l'autonomie syndicale panafricaine sur la rupture des liens de subordination avec les centrales mondiales adossées aux deux blocs idéologiques.

Cependant, quand bien même, au prix d'une certaine intransigeance, ce pari ait été atteint lors des congrès fondateurs, il s'est avéré impossible par la suite de se démarquer des liens rompus. Ainsi, pour les autonomistes de l'USPA, la non-affiliation théorisée s'est commuée dans la pratique certes en une ouverture à toutes les centrales, mais qui cache une proximité particulière avec la FSM. Ce paradoxe pousse donc au questionnement. Comment s'explique la proximité quasi-indissoluble entre les dirigeants de l'USPA et la FSM ? Sous quelles formes s'analyse-t-elle et quels en sont les incidences sur les rapports que l'USPA entretient avec les autres acteurs africains de la guerre froide ? Pour résoudre ces questions posées par la problématique, nous avons recours comme sources principales au Fonds FSM des archives de Bobigny (Seine Saint-Denis), ainsi qu'aux archives syndicales de la CFDT et de l'Institut d'Histoire sociale-CGT de Paris. Elles sont complétées par des ouvrages et articles scientifiques portant sur l'analyse des rivalités idéologiques qui traversent le champ syndical africain durant la bipola-

risation. L'exploitation des données collectées est faite selon l'approche thématique. Les résultats de la recherche sont rendus en trois axes. La première articulation présente les facteurs explicatifs de la proximité entre les deux fédérations (1), la seconde analyse les cadres formels du partenariat (2) et la troisième, ses incidences sur les rapports entre l'USPA et les autres acteurs africains de la guerre froide (3).

1. *L'USPA : une centrale unitaire dévolue de fait à un arrimage à la F.S.M*

Dans la lecture liminaire du rapport d'orientation et de doctrine que prononce Mahjoub Ben Seddik lors du congrès de création de l'union syndicale panafricaine le 25 mai 1961, le principe de non-arrimage est explicitement posé comme condition d'adhésion aux responsables des centrales présentes. Après l'étape de validation de ladite injonction dans les discussions en commission, un délai de dix mois est fixé à toutes les centrales pour rompre le lien d'affiliation avec leur tutelle au niveau mondial. Sur les 38 organisations syndicales nationales présentes à Casablanca 7 seulement acceptent de constituer l'USPA dans ces conditions.¹ Nonobstant ce fait, un ensemble d'indicateurs à la fois organiques et conjoncturels prédestinait la centrale panafricaine à un arrimage à la FSM, la faitière syndicale des pays socialistes.

1.1. *La conférence syndicale panafricaine, un projet initié par les pays socialistes du continent*

L'idée initiale d'unifier au niveau panafricain les centrales nationales de travailleurs, qui a abouti à la naissance de l'USPA, tire sa source d'une résolution adoptée par la première conférence des peuples africains d'Accra de décembre 1958. Pour en construire la légitimité auprès des destinataires, cet appel a été relayé par divers acteurs et assises syndicales durant l'année 1959. Il s'agit entre autres du Congrès de l'UGTAN organisé à Conakry du 16 au 18 janvier 1959, du deuxième congrès de l'Union Marocaine du Travail réuni à Casablanca les 24, 25 et 26 avril 1959, et de la conférence annuelle des syndicats des pays arabes au Caire du 24 au 28 avril 1959, qui se prononcent toutes en faveur de la conférence syndicale panafricaine. La même année, une déclaration commune est publiée dans ce sens à Lagos par les Confé-

¹ G. Fontenau, *Histoire du syndicalisme en Afrique*, Paris : Karthala, 2004, p. 67.

dérations des travailleurs du Ghana et du Nigéria. Pour engager les démarches préparatoires de manière active, le secrétaire général de la conférence des peuples africains, Kwamé Nkrumah, a donné mandat à John Tettegah, le secrétaire général du *Trades Union Congress* (Ghana) « de lancer les invitations en vue de la réunion à Accra du 30 octobre au 4 novembre d'une commission préparatoire ». ² En somme, qu'il s'agisse du cadre où est formulé l'appel à l'unité panafricaine du syndicalisme, comme de la qualité de l'émetteur du mandat engageant le processus de sa réalisation, l'initiative est le fait d'acteurs idéologiquement rattaché au bloc socialiste.

Ce marqueur idéologique est doublement matérialisé par le choix de Casablanca pour abriter la conférence fondatrice et la liste des pays d'origine des centrales qui adhèrent à la création de l'USPA. En effet, le contexte géopolitique et les débats qui ont prévalu avant la création de l'OUA en 1963 ont divisé la scène africaine en deux blocs géopolitiques. Se limiter à analyser cette situation au prisme de la guerre froide, nous conduirait à soutenir qu'elle reproduit mécaniquement les divisions idéologiques internationales. Mais au-delà des facteurs exogènes, elle traduit aussi l'état des contradictions entre deux approches du panafricanisme. Le courant modéré défend le postulat d'un panafricanisme de coopération interétatique contre le courant révolutionnaire prônant la démarche fédérative. L'objectif visé par le dernier bloc était de réaliser l'unité africaine du Cap à Bizerte et d'Accra à Zanzibar. La rencontre qui formalise la création de ce bloc d'Etat a lieu du 5 au 7 janvier 1961 à Casablanca au Maroc. Il rassemble Kwamé N'Nkrumah du Ghana, Sékou Touré de la Guinée, Modibo Keita du Mali, Gamal Abdel Nasser de l'Égypte, le représentant personnel du roi Idris Ier de Libye, Ferhat Abbas de l'Algérie, et Mohamed V, roi du Maroc. ³ L'appel à l'unité syndicale panafricaine lancé à Accra par la conférence des peuples africains s'explique donc par la volonté d'élargir au milieu syndical la vision unitaire initialement exprimée dans son acception territoriale par le projet de création des Etats-Unis d'Afrique. Ainsi, et la ville choisie pour abriter la conférence de création de l'USPA, et les centrales pionnières qui adhèrent à ses statuts, tout traduit une convergence parfaite avec le bloc de Casablanca. Cela

² Archives CFDT : 6H 232, Trade Union Congress, *Lettre circulaire aux organisations syndicales d'Afrique*, 15 octobre 1959.

³ Y. Zerbo, *La problématique de l'unité africaine: (1958-1963)*, « Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains », 212, 2003, pp. 113-127.

dit, le constat de l'orientation de ces pays socialistes démontre que même s'ils se prévalent du non-alignement, leurs axes de relations internationales se renforcent en direction des pays de l'Est. En partant donc du postulat de que l'alignement des trajectoires de coopération des centrales nationales fondatrices de l'USPA sur est fonction du positionnement international de leur gouvernement respectif, le rapprochement avec la FSM paraît relever de l'ordre naturel des choses.

1.2. *Le profil idéologique du personnel des syndicats nationaux membres de l'USPA*

Le noyau constituant le personnel syndical des centrales affiliées à l'USPA est formé, en ce qui concerne l'Afrique francophone, par des anciens Cégétistes dont la culture idéologique est marquée par la doctrine marxiste transmise dans l'immédiat après-guerre par les missions de formation de la faitière française. Il s'agit, pour ceux de l'Afrique noire francophone, des membres de l'UGTAN constitués essentiellement par la CNTG guinéenne, l'UNTM malienne, et pour l'Algérie, par l'UGTA.⁴ Selon les chiffres du Bureau International du Travail publiés en 1956, environ 79% des syndicalistes impliqués dans le processus de création de l'UGTAN sont issus de la tendance ouvrière d'obédience marxiste-communiste.⁵ Cette surreprésentation des cégétistes a eu un impact par la suite sur le positionnement idéologique de l'UGTAN. Même si cette centrale, comme l'USPA à sa suite, a pareillement défendu dans ses textes le principe de non affiliation, sous le contrepoids de sa tendance majoritaire, elle a développé durant les 4 années de son existence des relations denses avec la FSM et le bloc de l'Est. L'UGTA algérienne, « créée en 1956 sur injonction du Front de libération nationale »⁶ illustre le triomphe du nationalisme sur le corporatisme, à la l'instar des TUC ghanéen et égyptien, qui se retrouvent assujettis à la cause supérieure et aux choix des leaders nationaux. Ainsi, le profil idéologique des cadres syndicaux marxiste

⁴ Union générale des travailleurs algériens.

⁵ P. Dewitte, *La CGT et les Syndicats d'Afrique Occidentale Française (1945-1957)*, « Le Mouvement Social » 117, 1981, p. 26.

⁶ E. Gobe, *Les syndicalismes arabes au prisme de l'autoritarisme et du corporatisme, dans les autoritarismes démocratiques*, « Démocraties autoritaires au XX^e siècle », pp. 267-284, mise en ligne sur cairn.info le 01/04/2010, <https://doi.org/10.3917/dec.dabem.2008.01.0267>.

et leur arrimage au nationalisme conditionnaient une certaine la trajectoire de l'USPA.

1.3. *Une convergence doctrinale avec la FSM sur la lutte contre les monopoles*

La césure des indépendances marque la fin d'une ère et le début d'une autre. Pour la rhétorique syndicale, elle pose en toile de fond la question de la nécessaire révision du discours doctrinal, qui se devait de s'adapter à la disparition de la forme politique et institutionnelle du colonialisme, symbolisant la contradiction principale. La liquidation de ce système d'injustice sociale et d'exploitation de la force de travail dans sa forme initiale, imposait un réajustement du discours fédérateur qui a motivé la lutte contre le colonialisme. Au niveau des centrales internationales, cet exercice d'exégèse a produit deux postures et approches. La CISL revendiquait une lecture fragmentée de la situation africaine. Elle consistait en clair pour elle à promouvoir le libéralisme économique dans les pays où l'accession à l'indépendance était actée, et dans les autres où persistaient les formes résiduelles de la dépendance tutélaire, à afficher une condamnation ferme du colonialisme. Si les deux centrales partagent la même lecture concernant les territoires portugais encore sous domination coloniale, elles divergent dans leur lecture du système économique à promouvoir dans les espaces décolonisés. Les relations économiques que la CISL associe à un libéralisme économique en construction, la FSM l'identifie comme un système de monopole représentant un legs colonial. Marcel Bras, secrétaire général de la FSM, lève le voile sur cette rhétorique anti-monopoliste dans le discours prononcé lors du congrès fondateur de l'USPA le 25 mai 1961 quand il explique en substance qu'« après la victoire sur le colonialisme, un grand nombre de pays font face au difficile problème de la décolonisation économique, de l'indépendance complète ».⁷ Cette lecture épouse celle des nationalistes africains, du milieu syndical ou politique. Il en est résulté la mise en place à Leipzig en 1963 d'un comité syndical mondial de consultation et d'unité d'action anti monopoliste auquel participe des représentants de l'USPA. Du 27 au 28 novembre 1963, elle tient sa première conférence plénière qui se renouvellera chaque année par la suite. La lutte contre les monopoles et le fait d'établir une distinction entre indépendance po-

⁷ Archives CFDT : 6H232, *premier congrès syndical panafricain Casablanca*, 25-29 mai 1961.

litique et indépendance économique compte au nombre des facteurs ayant favorisé le développement d'une forte synergie entre la centrale panafricaine et la FSM.

2. Les formes de la " coopération sans affiliation " entre la FSM et l'USPA

La coopération sans affiliation formelle est le concept de non-alignement défendu par l'USPA dans ses relations avec la FSM. Elle s'analyse à travers les axes de collaboration développés entre les deux organisations que ce point se charge de présenter. Comme expliqué dans le point précédent, le rapprochement repose sur une histoire commune des deux organisations qui remonte à la décennie 1940, et qui a fini par établir une compatibilité idéologique et opérationnelle en mesure de faire vivre la relation sans lui imposer de liens formels. Dans les actes, elle se traduit sous les formes d'une coopération classique dont l'armature centrale a consisté à bâtir un réseau de solidarité et d'action commune.

2.1. Le réseau de solidarité internationale et d'action commune

Les rapports de coopération entre la FSM et l'USPA se développent dans la double perspective de la solidarité internationale entre organisations ouvrières non-alignées et dans l'optique de construction d'un plan d'action commune autour d'objectifs partagés. Le discours cadre prononcé par le secrétaire de la centrale mondiale lors du congrès fondateur de l'USPA donne un aperçu de ces deux grands axes autour desquels se structure leur rapport par la suite. Marcel Bras annonce les couleurs quand il explique que « la FSM aujourd'hui comme hier assure de son soutien total, c'est-à-dire de l'appui de la solidarité ouvrière internationale, dont, sans prétendre à aucun monopole en la matière, elle demeure même en raison de ses origines, un vivant symbole ». Il décline en substance la force et la dimension de son réseau de solidarité internationale comme étant celle « des millions de travailleurs des pays capitalistes et socialistes qui la constituent ».⁸ Toutefois, selon le développement qu'en fait chacune des parties, on peut déduire en fonction des attentes exprimées, deux acceptions complémentaires mais nuancées de la notion de solidarité internationale. Pour les

⁸ Archives CFDT : 6H232, *premier congrès syndical panafricain Casablanca*, 25-29 mai 1961.

centrales africaines affiliées à l'USPA, s'intégrer dans un réseau de solidarité internationale représente un canal d'assistance et d'aide face aux pressions et contraintes endogènes qui fragilisent leur action. Les dirigeants de la CNTG expriment ces attentes à la délégation FSM de passage à Conakry pour une mission du 11 au 14 septembre 1973. Selon leur perception, la réponse aux « grandes pressions idéologiques » visant à détourner le mouvement syndical africain de son but et aux « grandes répressions de la part du patronat et de certains Etats » était de lui accorder « une sollicitude particulière et jouir de la solidarité internationale de la FSM, qui doit aider davantage ».⁹ Il existe conjointement à cette première attente, une conscience réelle de la nécessité de s'appuyer sur le réseau de solidarité internationale pour briser l'isolement de l'USPA. Car par son choix du non-alignement, elle s'est auto-reléguée à la périphérie des circuits de coopération développés par les autres organisations alignées. Mais la question de l'aide et de l'assistance technique garde une place particulière dans les attentes exprimées à chaque tournée africaine des missions FSM.

Ce besoin de l'USPA de s'appuyer sur le réseau international de son partenaire mondial existe aussi dans le sens inverse. Depuis sa création en 1947, la FSM a toujours entretenu des connexions africaines visant à s'assurer une représentation de sa ligne doctrinale sur le continent, comme elle l'est dans les autres espaces. Aussi, depuis l'expérience de l'UGTAN, le choix de la désaffiliation de ses alliés africains au motif d'affirmer leur non-alignement la desservait dans le principe. Même si elle accepte et s'accommode de la ligne reprise en deuxième essor par l'USPA, cette conception du non-alignement n'est pas l'acceptation que la centrale mondiale défend dans les débats. Elle préfère la thèse d'affirmer le non-alignement à travers l'affiliation à une centrale mondiale non-alignée. Mais l'imposition de l'approche défendue par les autonomistes africains l'a mise dans l'obligation de trouver des moyens de contournement. Travailler à la construction de liens alternatifs revêt pour la tendance qu'elle incarne d'un enjeu de sauvegarde de sa représentation sur le continent. Quelle qu'en soit la forme, la FSM se devait, à travers le maintien du réseau de solidarité avec l'USPA et ses centrales affiliées, de garantir en Afrique la survie de l'internationalisme qu'elle porte. Cela relevait d'un défi d'autant plus important que plusieurs circulaires de l'union panafricaine mentionnent l'activisme de la CISL pour retourner les centrales locales.

⁹ Archives Seine Saint-Denis : FSM 983, *Compte rendu de la mission en Afrique*, 1974.

Au-delà du besoin de construire dans les deux directions un réseau internationaliste de solidarité, la construction d'une action commune constitue le second axe autour duquel se structure les relations entre les deux organisations. Là aussi le principe est clairement posé dans le discours de Casablanca prononcé par M. Bras, où il définit les dix objectifs clés de la coopération. Dans le prolongement de Casablanca d'autres rencontres clés permettent de poursuivre la réflexion et les efforts de construction des bases de l'action commune. On peut citer à ce propos les directives de la réunion de Sofia de janvier 1966 et la conférence syndicale Afro-européenne de Conakry, du 18 au 21 mars 1969. Au titre de la coordination structurelle, en plus de la mise en place d'un comité de liaison USPA-FSM, un représentant de la centrale panafricaine siégeait au sein du comité exécutif et du comité anti-monopoliste de la FSM. Les deux organisations travaillaient également de pair également au sein du BIT pour assurer le contrôle de l'application des normes et conventions sur le travail.

2.2. *La FSM comme alternative aux dysfonctionnements de l'USPA*

La question de la léthargie des instances l'USPA a très vite constitué un sujet de préoccupation après sa création. Elle s'explique d'abord par la fragilisation structurelle entraînée par le nombre réduit de centrales adhérentes. Si en théorie, elle est panafricaine et est supposée revendiquée une implantation à l'échelle continentale, sur la trentaine de centrales africaines présente à Casablanca, seulement sept ont franchi le cap de l'adhésion. Ce quasi échec a entraîné le désintérêt des acteurs politiques des Etats dits progressistes, avec les incidences matérielles que cela suppose. Par la suite, non seulement l'USPA n'a pas été en mesure de se doter d'un siège social fixe, mais elle a été aussi dans l'incapacité de tenir ses engagements auprès des centrales affiliées. Il en résulte que son fonctionnement se limite à la dimension administrative et bureaucratique. Toute chose qui explique sa difficulté à remplir ses obligations vis-à-vis des centrales affiliées. Les dysfonctionnements de l'USPA ont redirigé les attentes vers la FSM. Elle a dû faire face à une tendance des centrales nationales africaines à demander une affiliation directe à ses instances, en contournant l'USPA. Sur cette question sensible, la FSM a donné la position suivante :

Lorsqu'elles demandent leur affiliation, nous attirons leur attention sur le fait que nous ne voudrions pas que cela crée des difficultés avec l'USPA. Si malgré

tout les centrales maintiennent leur désir de s'affilier, nous n'avons aucun moyen de leur interdire. Ce serait contraire à nos statuts.¹⁰

C'est dans des conditions pareilles que le 6 juin 1969, Pierre Gensous adresse au nom du comité exécutif de la FSM une correspondance d'acceptation de la demande d'affiliation à la Confédération Syndicale Congolaise. La demande avait été exprimée le 2 mai 1969 au congrès des 27, 28, 29 et 30 mai 1969. Il en est pareillement de l'Union syndicale des travailleurs voltaïques (USTV) ainsi que de bien d'autres centrales nationales qui, en raison de l'inertie constatée des instances de l'USPA, ont fait également le choix d'une affiliation directe à la FSM. Du côté des responsables de l'union panafricaine, la lecture qui est faite de la situation démontre un certain refus d'admettre la pertinence de cette raison. Selon eux « c'est pour des raisons matérielles que les centrales veulent s'affilier à la FSM ».¹¹ Elle dénonce en somme une démarche intéressée, notamment par les opportunités d'appui matériel que pouvait procurer les liens direct avec la centrale mondiale.

3. *Incidence du partenariat sur les relations entre l'USPA et les acteurs africains de la guerre froide*

Si la coopération sans affiliation entre l'USPA et la FSM s'est globalement résumée à des relations d'assistance et d'échanges administratifs, elle a été plutôt assimilée par les Etats africains intégrés au bloc capitaliste et la centrale rivale, la Confédération Syndicale Africaine (CSA) à une coopération idéologique de type communiste. Dans la suite logique de cette lecture, l'USPA et la FSM se trouvent étiquetés comme deux acteurs de la guerre froide engagée dans un projet commun d'instrumentalisations du syndicalisme à des fins politiques. Ce qui a fortement influencé les rapports de l'USPA avec ses interlocuteurs africains.

3.1. *L'attitude de défiance des Etats capitalistes*

Les suspicions des Etats africains intégrés au bloc capitaliste envers la FSM ont été fortement influencées par les conditions du renversement du président congolais Fulbert Youlou. Cet événement a joué un rôle de tournant décisif dans la mesure où même si le concept du

¹⁰ Archives Seine Saint-Denis : FSM 938, Afrique général, 1964-1973.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

« complot communiste » existait avant, il a fourni une preuve factuelle de la capacité supposée de déstabilisation des centrales en relation avec la FSM. Le lien est rapidement établi dans la mesure où la CGAT¹² qui s'est retrouvée en première des événements du 15 août 1963 était affiliée à la FSM. Son secrétaire général Julien Boukambou en était même membre du comité exécutif. Aux termes des mobilisations ouvrières des 13, 14 et 15 août 1963, ralliées par l'armée et l'Eglise, autour de revendications économiques, le président démissionne sous la pression du comité de fusion syndicale. Ce coup d'Etat a alors été perçu par les chefs d'Etat africains comme le produit d'une instrumentalisation des acteurs syndicaux congolais par une filière internationale. Cette lecture est fortement alignée sur le dernier discours prononcé le 14 août par Fulbert Youlou, qui y dénonce un complot syndicaliste contre la sûreté de l'Etat.¹³ Le fait que les manifestations aient été précédées quelques mois plus tôt, le 25 février 1963, par une mission à Brazzaville de la FSM, renforce cette conviction des chefs d'Etats africains. Mais bien avant l'année 1963, le gouvernement démontrait déjà une certaine méfiance envers la CGAT-FSM, dans la mesure où les demandes de visa pour participer aux assises internationales organisées par Prague étaient systématiquement rejetées. Ce fait est d'ailleurs mentionné par le secrétaire de la FSM I. Zakaria dans un courrier en date du 25 septembre 1963 qu'il adresse aux responsables de la CGAT pour les inviter à la première réunion du comité syndical mondial de consultation et d'unité d'action anti-monopoliste à Leipzig les 27 et 28 novembre 1963.¹⁴ Donc, quand après tous ces antécédents, le président est emporté par une mobilisation portée par des syndicalistes affiliés à la FSM, le lien est vite établi. Par effet induit, cette étiquette politique associée à la FSM justifie l'ostracisme manifesté par plusieurs Etats africains envers l'USPA et les centrales locales qui entretiennent des relations avec elle.

3.2. *L'impossible unité avec la CSA*

Dans la perspective de réunification du mouvement syndical africain, une rencontre commune entre la Confédération syndicale

¹² Confédération générale africaine des travailleurs.

¹³ E. Terray, *Les révolutions congolaise et dahoméenne de 1963 : essai d'interprétation*, « Revue française de science politique », 14-15, 1964, p. 921.

¹⁴ Archives Seine Saint-Denis : FSM-450 J998, *CGAT et CSC : Rapports avec la FSM, 1962-1964*.

africaine affiliée à la CISL et l'USPA proche de la FSM s'est tenue à Dakar du 17 au 19 octobre 1963. Elle représentait l'aboutissement d'une initiative de Mahjoub Ben Seddik, président de l'USPA, qui par voie de correspondance a proposé l'idée à Hamed Tlili président de la CSA. Les deux parties à travers la rencontre de Dakar semblaient avoir épousé l'idée et trouvé un point d'accord sur la question de la non-affiliation internationale. Mais la fusion escomptée a avorté dès l'année suivante en raison de l'anticommunisme militant du bloc formé par la CSA et la CISL. A la suite des premières négociations entre les secrétariats des deux centrales, la date du 24 mars 1964 a été retenue pour une seconde rencontre, qui n'a pu se tenir dans ce délai. L'USPA l'explique comme une manœuvre de sabotage de la CSA dont le président après deux reports a pris la décision unilatérale « de renvoyer aux calendes grecques une rencontre dont il avait proposé lui-même la date ».¹⁵

Après quelques années de tension et d'accusation mutuelles autour de cet échec, le processus est relancé les 22 et 23 mai 1968 à Dakar. Le compte rendu de cette nouvelle rencontre fait par les délégués de la CSA rapporte que :

Le ton des échanges montait quelque peu car certains des délégués de l'USPA reprochèrent à ceux de la CSA de n'être pas suffisamment libres et indépendants. A cette affirmation, il fut trop facile de répondre. En effet, le secrétaire de la FSM rentrait de Prague où il avait tenu une réunion avec le secrétariat de la FSM. On peut lire dans le communiqué USPA-FSM les décisions suivantes : « Les deux secrétaires de la FSM et de l'USPA décident de renforcer la collaboration constante des deux organisations (...) Les deux secrétaires se sont félicités de l'amitié et de la fraternité qui ont présidé à leur rencontre et qui témoigne de l'identité de leurs idéaux et de la communauté de leur lutte ».¹⁶

On peut déduire de ces propos, que la CSA justifie son refus de se soumettre à l'injonction de désaffiliation posée comme condition préalable au congrès de réunification, par la collusion évidente entre l'USPA et la FSM. Elle représente pour elle la preuve que les rapports de tutelle avec une centrale mondiale ne dépendent en rien de l'affiliation formelle. En sorte que la proximité entre les deux centrales a servi

¹⁵ Archives CFTD : 30 CFD 76 - UNTS, *Déclaration sur l'unité syndicale africaine*, 21 mars 1964.

¹⁶ Archives de la CFTD, 10 P 72, USPA-CSA : Réunion CSA-USPA à Dakar, 1968.

finalement de justification aux actes d'obstruction à la réalisation de l'unité syndicale sous les conditions proposées par l'USPA.

Conclusion

L'USPA est une organisation initiée à l'origine et animée par des acteurs syndicaux issus de pays africains proches du bloc socialiste. L'homogénéité idéologique de son personnel syndical, nonobstant son positionnement en tant qu'organisation sans affiliation, favorise le rapprochement avec la FSM. Mais, dans le contexte de guerre froide, marqué par le cloisonnement des rapports entre blocs, cette proximité avec la centrale mondiale est perçue par la majorité des Etats affiliés au bloc capitaliste comme potentiellement porteuse de germes de destabilisation. Cette représentation mentale qu'elle induit dans l'imaginaire de ces gouvernants, a contribué à une certaine fragilisation de l'USPA. La conséquence directe a été dès lors pour plusieurs organisations africaines de rechercher l'affiliation directe à la FSM, dans le but de contourner la quasi-léthargie de la faitière panafricaine. Ainsi la relation de proximité et de coopération existant entre l'USPA et la FSM a été ponctuée dans bien de cas par des frictions liées aux conditions directes ou indirectes de l'affiliation.

N'GORAN GÉDÉON BANGALI

Overcoming Eurocentrism in the Classroom? Trade Union Education for Africans within the Communist-led World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), 1959-1968

Introduction

The “revolutionary”, communist-dominated WFTU was, after the “reformist”, liberal, and social-democratic trade union centres from North America and Western Europe left the international trade union federation in 1949 in order to establish the ICFTU, the representative of the communist world in the world of organized labour. The WFTU had affiliates in Eastern Europe, Western Europe (the French *Confédération Générale du Travail*, CGT and the Italian *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*, CGIL), Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In terms of membership and finance, the strongest WFTU affiliates were the Soviet Union’s All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (AUCCTU), the All-Chinese Trade Union Federation (which later left the WFTU as part of the Sino-Soviet split¹), and the Indonesian, Polish and East German national trade union centres.² As a federation of trade unions dedicated to class struggle, the WFTU defined itself as «a mass-based class organization, democratic and united” which aimed to struggle against fascism and capitalist monopolies, as well as for the liberation of colonial peoples, better living conditions, and world peace».³

¹ L.M. LÜTHI, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World*, Princeton 2010, pp. 167-174; S. PONS, *The global revolution: a history of international communism, 1917-1991*, Oxford 2014, pp. 231-242.

² O.R. LIESS, *Weltgewerkschaftsbund, Internationales Gewerkschaftshandbuch*, ed by S. Mielke, Opladen 1983, pp. 10-20; V. HEARMAN, *Indonesian Trade Unions, the World Federation of Trade Unions and Cold War Internationalism, 1947-65*, «Labour History», 111, 2016, pp. 27-44.

³ D. GANGULI, *History of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) : Yesterday - Today - Tomorrow*, New Delhi 2000, 11, quote from 12. I thank Johanna Wolf for providing me with access to this book.

This chapter makes an important contribution by showcasing how Afro-European interactions acted as agents of change, utilizing archived reports of the college principals at the trade union college in Conakry run by UGTAN and WFTU as well as from the FDGB college in Bernau. It will be demonstrated that feedback, discussions, and correspondence with African course participants and graduates of trade union colleges led, when taken seriously, to a number of key innovations and adaptations that can be read as avenues escaping from Eurocentrism and paternalism. At the same time, I argue that the WFTU's ability to play a key role in Africa's organised labour movement in the 1960s was severely limited due to a lack of financial resources, literature and language skills – not to mention paternalistic, dogmatic positions that failed to grasp the complexity of labour and trade unions on the African continent. The invasion of the CSSR by Warsaw Pact troops in 1968 damaged the reputation of the WFTU in the eyes of many African trade union officials; from the perspective of the WFTU and its affiliates, several anti-socialist coups in Africa (e.g. Ghana 1966, Mali 1968) caused trade union organisations to increasingly focus on Asia and Latin America.

In the links and early contacts of the WFTU with the African continent, the factor of the respective colonial power played a decisive role: While the WFTU had hardly any affiliates in the British colonies of Africa after 1949, and WFTU officials and “communist” literature and programs were banned by the colonial regimes, the communist CGT was the strongest trade union organization among Africans in the federations of West and Central Africa. Similar to the situation in the British colonial territories, but even more restrictive, was the situation for the WFTU and Marxist-inspired trade unionists, politicians, and freedom fighters in the Portuguese colonies: Contacts between the WFTU, its national affiliates, and the trade unions and parties of Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau were in most cases established and maintained from exile, for example from Congo and Guinea-Conakry.⁴

⁴ A. MOLEDO, *The Quest for the Solidarity of the World's Working Class: Luso-African Liberation Movements and the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) during the 1960s and early 1970s, Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and Africa*, ed by C. Saunders, H.A. Fonseca, and L. Dallywater, Berlin 2023, pp. 81-102; I.R. HARISCH, E. BURTON, *The Missing Link? Western Communists as Mediators Between the East German FDGB, the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), and African Trade*

Since the mid-1950s, the “forces of Bandung” in the form of Afro-Asian solidarities, non-alignment, and Third-Worldism increasingly came to influence Africa’s organized labour movements. The Pan-West African *Union Générale des Travailleurs d’Afrique Noire* (UGTAN) was founded in 1957 and the Pan-African All-African Trade Union Federation (AATUF, founded in 1961) aimed to represent an African trade union *internationale* – independent of the “Eastern”, communist WFTU and the “Western” capitalist ICFTU.⁵ In such a dynamic setting, in the midst of the decolonizing process and new ideas of worldmaking,⁶ as a global communist project in the world of organized labour, European WFTU officials, as well as national affiliates from both Eastern and Western Europe, were judged by Africans not only in terms of ideological proximity but by other traits and pitfalls: dogmatism, paternalism, and, in a broader sense, “Eurocentrism”.

«Eurocentrism», according to Egyptian political economist Samir Amin whose 1989 publication coined the concept, can be traced back to the Renaissance period, was massively expanded and solidified during European colonial conquest and subjugation, and «is expressed practically in all areas of social thought».⁷ While ethnocentrism is a common human tendency in past and present, power and power asymmetries make Eurocentrism an important factor in shaping historical relations.⁸ One key characteristic of Eurocentric thought and attitude is that non-European concepts, ideas, and modes of thought are not taken into account and an imbalance in the capacity to think and solve problems is created and then maintained by the Northern hemisphere at the expense of other regions of the globe. Put simply, «in the long run Europeans always know best».⁹

The specific relation between Marxism(s) and Eurocentrism(s) is

Unions in the Late 1950s and Early 1960s, «International Labor and Working-Class History», 103, 2023, pp. 292-311.

⁵ I. GEISS, *Gewerkschaften in Afrika*, Hannover 1965, chap. 6 and 7.

⁶ A. GETACHEW, *Worldmaking after empire: the rise and fall of self-determination*, Princeton 2019.

⁷ S. AMIN, *Eurocentrism: modernity, religion, and democracy: a critique of Eurocentrism and culturalism*, New York 2009, p. 255.

⁸ M.J. WINTLE, *Eurocentrism: history, identity, White man’s burden*, Abingdon 2021, p. 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

complex, contradictory, and is shaped by specific spatial, temporal, and cultural constellations. On a general level though, in his seminal 1983 study *Black Marxism*, Cedric Robinson has argued that «at base, that is at its epistemological substratum, Marxism is a Western construction – a conceptualization of human affairs and historical development that is emergent from the historical experiences of European peoples mediated, in turn, through their civilization, their social orders, and their cultures».¹⁰ European Marxists are criticized by Robinson to have, overall, claimed that their analytical presumptions, concepts and modes of thought are expressions of «world-historical development» while actually they «have mistaken for universal verities the structures and social dynamics retrieved from their own distant and more immediate pasts».¹¹ The assumption that the “laws” of social development could be predicted found expression in crude mechanisms such as successive stages of development, which ignored specific local, regional, and cultural factors.¹²

In order to examine to what extent the trade union education and training provided by the WFTU for Africans during the 1950s and 1960s was hampered by Eurocentric thought, the chapter will proceed as follows. The first part will offer an outline on WFTU relations with African trade unionists and their organizations from the late 1940s until the late 1950s, when the WFTU started to massively expand its provision of union education. This section will further explore paternalism and Eurocentrism within the communist organized labour movement – both the WFTU and its European national affiliates – and its relations to Africa. The main part will offer a close-up analysis of a number of meetings and conferences of trade union education guided by the WFTU and its affiliates in West Africa and Eastern Europe. Often termed as “Exchange of Experiences”, these discussions typically involved leading officials and college principals who were engaged in the field of union education and training – a field that was considered of huge importance for the future development and professionalization of trade unions in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Overall, this research traces and connects key meetings in the orbit of the WFTU which were based on reflecting on mistakes

¹⁰ C.J. ROBINSON, *Black Marxism: the making of the Black radical tradition*, Chapel Hill 2020².

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹² *Ibidem*.

and successes in trade union education for Africans (as well as Asians and Latin Americans).

Expansion

It was only in the late 1950s that the WFTU and its national affiliates undertook a massive expansion of educational programs for Africans. Earlier courses provided by the WFTU for around 160 African, Asian, and Latin American unionists, had been run in Budapest between 1953 and 1955.¹³ The expansion was fuelled by the rivalry with the ICFTU, which had established its African Labour College in the British protectorate Uganda in fall 1958.¹⁴ In fall 1959, the WFTU founded a central trade union college for African, Asian, and Latin American trade unionists in Budapest.¹⁵ The WFTU college was led for some time by the French metalworkers unionist and CGT official Jean Marilliert.¹⁶ The East German FDGB had begun offering courses for African and Asian unionists in Bernau in the spring of 1959 (and soon later in Leipzig too), before establishing a Foreigners' Institute at the Fritz Heckert trade union college in Bernau in 1960.¹⁷ In the summer of 1961, the Czechoslovak Revolutionary Trade Union Movement (ROH) set up an institute in Prague to train African

¹³ Speech of Chleboun in "Probleme des Inhalts der Ausbildung afrikanischer Gewerkschafter [...]," Bernau, 20 June 1963, Federal Archives, German Federal Republic, Berlin-Lichterfelde, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR (SAPMO BArch), DY 34/3291.

¹⁴ Y. RICHARDS, *Labor's Gendered Misstep: The Women's Committee and African Women Workers, 1957-1968*, «*International Journal of African Historical Studies*», 44, 3, 2011, pp. 415-442.

¹⁵ W. KOLARZ, *Budapest and Kampala*, speech manuscript archived in ICFTU/ITUC Archives, International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam, 3981.

¹⁶ A. NOVEMBER, *L'Évolution du Mouvement Syndical en Afrique Occidentale*, Paris 1965.

¹⁷ I.R. HARISCH, *Great Hopes, False Promises. African Trade Unions in the World of Organized Labor. Institutions, Networks, and Mobilities during the Cold War 1950s and 1960s* (Doctoral Dissertation), University of Vienna, 2023; I.R. HARISCH, «*Mit gewerkschaftlichem Gruß!*» *Afrikanische GewerkschafterInnen an der FDGB-Gewerkschaftshochschule Fritz Heckert in der DDR*, «*Stichproben: Vienna Journal of African Studies*», 18/43, 2018, pp. 77-109.

trade unionists in ten-months courses;¹⁸ and in October 1961, the Soviet Trade Union Council opened its ten-month program for trade unionists from the Third World.¹⁹ Bulgarian trade unions also began offering courses with a duration of one year for African trade unionists at a union college in Sofia in 1963.²⁰

On the African continent, West African trade union officials had already reached an agreement with the WFTU on the UGTAN University (soon to become the African Workers' University) in late 1959, and the first courses commenced in February 1960. The African Workers' University, as a joint educational project between UGTAN (later succeeded by the Guinean *Confédération Nationale des Travailleurs de Guinée*, CNTG) and the WFTU, soon radiated beyond Guinea's borders, inspiring the Malian *Union Nationale des Travailleurs du Mali* (UNTM) to found a trade union college in Bamako (also with WFTU support) in 1962. The CGT functionary and PCF member Gilbert Julis helped to run the college between 1962 and 1967, with the WFTU and the Italian affiliate CGIL sending lecturers to the college.²¹

This massive expansion of trade union colleges in Africa as well as in Europe demonstrates that education was highly valued by both national trade union centres and international federations during this particular period. It was also fuelled by the Africans' achievement of political independence with more than a dozen new African nation-states gained political independence in the "Year of Africa" 1960. On September 13 and 14 that year, an important meeting was held at WFTU headquarters in Prague. Union officials discussed ways

¹⁸ R. BASS and E. BASS, *Eastern Europe, Africa and the Communist World* ed by Z. Brzezinski, Stanford 1964, 106.

¹⁹ C. KATSAKIORIS, *Students from Portuguese Africa in the Soviet Union, 1960-74: Anti-colonialism, Education, and the Socialist Alliance*, «Journal of Contemporary History», 56, 1, 2021, p. 149.

²⁰ "Probleme des Inhalts der Ausbildung afrikanischer Gewerkschafter auf dem Erfahrungsaustausch des WGB am 17. und 18.4.1963", Fakultät für Ausländerstudium an der Hochschule der deutschen Gewerkschaften Fritz Heckert, Bernau, 20 June 1963, SAPMO BArch DY 34/3291.

²¹ G. SIRACUSANO, *Trade union education in former French Africa (1959-1965): ideological transmission and the role of French and Italian communists*, «Third World Quarterly», 42, 3, 2021, p. 494; Id., «Pronto per la Rivoluzione!»: i comunisti italiani e francesi e la decolonizzazione in Africa centro-occidentale (1958-1968), Roma 2022.

to strengthen and expand the activities of the WFTU and its national affiliates toward African trade unions. The meeting was attended by WFTU secretaries Casadei, Berezine and Bras, as well as the Sudanese trade union official Ibrahim Zakaria, who headed the WFTU's Africa section in the Prague headquarter. National trade union confederations affiliated to the WFTU, such as the East German FDGB, the Soviet AUCCTU, the Italian CGIL, the French CGT, and the All-China and All-Korean confederations, also sent representatives. Zakaria's speech at the meeting demonstrates how much the WFTU was concerned about the increasing activity of ICFTU affiliates on the African continent. He was convinced that a better coordination of WFTU activities in Africa would be absolutely crucial in achieving the successes required to "catch up" with the ICFTU in the field of union education. A precondition for effective work, he declared, was more knowledge of the trade union movement in Africa:²² this the WFTU largely lacked due to its banishment from African territories by the Western colonial powers since the 1950s, especially the British and Portuguese colonies in East and Southern Africa. In this respect, he pleaded with the WFTU's national affiliates to supply the WFTU offices with country reports and records pertaining to any valuable experiences. The French CGT was particularly crucial in this regard.²³

This contribution is concerned with the question to what extent Eurocentric approaches and attitudes dominated these encounters of union officials from different parts of the world. I argue that communist trade union officials from Eastern Europe initially tended to have little knowledge of the specific contexts in different regions, especially in East and South Africa – the structure of enterprises, wage bargaining mechanisms and wage levels, working conditions without wages, the role of the subsistence economy, the role of women in production and distribution, and so on. French *cégétistes* had

²² Sekretariatsinformation, "Beratung am 13. und 14.9.1960 beim WGB in Prag über die Verstärkung der Tätigkeit des WGB und der Landesorganisationen nach Afrika," Abt. IV [International Relations Department], Berlin, 20 September 1960, SAPMO BArch DY 34/16600, 291. The important role of French communists for the WFTU's activities in Africa are highlighted in G. SIRACUSANO, *Trade union education and I.R. HARISCH-E. Burton, The Missing Link?*.

²³ A.-C. WAGNER, *The Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) in West Africa: The Difficulties of Constructing Trade Union Internationalism, Trade Unions in West Africa*, ed by C. Phelan, Oxford 2011, pp. 23-44.

considerably more theoretical knowledge and practical experience. However, a committed orientation towards dogmatic Marxist theories could easily reverse these advantages in the eyes of African trade union officials working with the WFTU and the CGT. The particular narrow-mindedness of Marxism-Leninism's Stalinist variety, which was quite widespread in the CGT, must be clearly understood as an obstacle to a deeper understanding of the African labour movement.

As I am able to show with the protocols of the meetings as the one in Prague 1960, these exchange of experiences demonstrate the great hopes and importance which the WFTU placed on union education. This educational mission of the WFTU thus needed to take place simultaneously both in Africa and in the socialist countries where WFTU affiliates were located.²⁴

The director of the Conakry College, Maurice Gastaud (who had been delegated by his national federation, the French CGT) emerged as a key actor within the WFTU's union education meetings in the years to come. Gastaud explained that his experience in Guinea – where the first courses under his lead had started in February 1960²⁵ – clearly showed that it would be necessary to adapt the curriculum and course content specifically to the problems of each country.²⁶ This call for a more nuanced and knowledgeable approach to African labour movements clearly entailed a need for a better understanding of all their constituent components, including their historical, economic, sociological, and cultural aspects.

However, as Françoise Blum and Gabriele Siracusano have convincingly shown in their research, the lessons at the African Workers' University under principal Gastaud (1960-1965) remained largely Eurocentric in character.

²⁴ Sekretariatsinformation", "Beratung am 13. und 14.9.1960 beim WGB in Prag über die Verstärkung der Tätigkeit des WGB und der Landesorganisationen nach Afrika," Abt. IV [International Relations Department], Berlin, 20 September 1960, SAPMO BArch DY 34/16600, 291.

²⁵ Speech of Gastaud in "Probleme des Inhalts der Ausbildung afrikanischer Gewerkschafter [...]," Bernau, 20 June 1963, SAPMO BArch DY 34/3291.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

*Curriculum of the December 1960 course at the African Workers' University*²⁷

I. General Discipline: Courses

Evolution of the Various Types of Societies
 Colonialism and the Anti-imperialist Struggle
 The State
 Neo-colonialism
 Conferences
 Pre-colonial Societies in Black Africa (Suret-Canale)
 Current Societies in Black Africa (Suret-Canale)
 The Revolution in Algeria (Dr. Fanon, delegate of the Algerian government)
 The Guinean Experience (Boyer, press attaché to the presidency)

II. Economics and Politics: Courses

Capitalism and its Development: Imperialism
 Value and Prices
 Capitalist Surplus Value and Exploitation
 The National Income and the State Budget (Capitalist and Socialist)
 The Law of Harmonious and Proportionate Development and Problems of Planning
 Conferences
 Money and its Phenomena (Gastaud)
 The Three-year Plan in Guinea: Its Foundations, Its Goals (Cauche, technician at the Ministry of National Economy)

III. Union Issues: Courses

The Union, Its Character, Its Role
 Organizational Issues and Management Methods
 Wages (Text Study)
 Accounting and Treasury Matters
 Union Propaganda
 Social Security
 Conferences
 History of the Trade Union Movement in Black Africa (Seydou Diallo)
 International Organizations and Problems of Unity (Gastaud)

²⁷ Taken from F. BLUM, *Une formation syndicale dans la Guinée de Sékou Touré: l'université ouvrière africaine, 1960-1965*, «Revue historique», 667/3, 2013, pp. 689-690. Translation mine.

The Role of Trade Unions in Socialist Countries: The GDR (Kamfer) [sic! Kampfert]
 Discussion on Worker Profit-sharing (Gastaud)
 Competition[?], Its Bases, Its Means, Its Goals (Wilke)
 Party and Union (Sékou Touré)
 Practical Work
 Finance (Preparation and maintenance of a cash book and a collector's notebook)
 Written Propaganda: Writing a Flyer and a Poster
 Oral Propaganda: Writing and Reading of 5min Speeches
 The Role of a Chair and How to Guide and Direct a Discussion

Stage theory figured prominently in the lectures of Gastaud – who taught the absolute majority of classes at the Conakry College. This type of stage theory, which was also quite heavily represented in the early curricula of the FDGB's Bernau college, often proved itself unable to adequately explain the specific conditions which confronted African workers and the African labour movement. Additionally, the degrees of “free” and “unfree” labour, the level of development of industrial production and spread of manufacturing outlets, as well as the overall dominance or weakness of a formalized waged labour sector, varied considerably from region to region. Despite this teeming diversity of geography, population density, modes of production, available raw materials and cash crops, social structure, languages, and the relative size of the waged labour sector, the specific historical trajectory of the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union's corresponding social and industrial development was taken as a model, which might be applied elsewhere without much further adaptation. In this sense, Yves Benot has argued that Soviet Stalinism had reduced Marxism «to a formula that was easy to grasp, certainly, but difficult or impossible to apply in different conditions».²⁸ In her assessment, also, Blum has criticized the overly schematic and intellectually incurious orientation of the curriculum, as the course participants would inevitably «learn about the transition from primitive communities to feudalism and then to capitalism and socialism, without ever mentioning the African case».²⁹

²⁸ Y. BENOT, *The Impact of Stalinism on Radical African Socialists, African Social Studies. A Radical Reader*, ed by P.C.W. Gutkind, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1977, p. 325.

²⁹ BLUM, *Une formation syndicale*, pp. 677-678. Translation mine.

Consolidation

The April 1963 conference *Problems of the Content in the Training of African Trade Unionists within the Framework of the WFTU's Exchange of Experiences* signalled an assessment of the expansion of the WFTU and its national affiliates in the field of union education. While the discussions at the conference encompassed union education for people from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, as the title demonstrated, Africa was at the centre of attention. This reaffirms the particularly great hopes and importance the WFTU assigned to the African continent. It was a truly international meeting with pictures showing male and female trade unionists from Africa, Asia, and Europe.³⁰



Figure 1. Union Officials at a Conference in Bernau, undated [1963]³¹

³⁰ Note the pictures at the beginning of the file “Probleme des Inhalts der Ausbildung afrikanischer Gewerkschafter auf dem Erfahrungsaustausch des WGB am 17. und 18.4.1963,” Fakultät für Ausländerstudium an der Hochschule der deutschen Gewerkschaften Fritz Heckert, Bernau, 20 June 1963, SAPMO BArch DY 34/3291.

³¹ Untitled, undated photograph, at beginning of the file “Erfahrungsaustausch mit WGB über Ausbildung afrikanischer Gewerkschafter am 17./18.4.1963,” Abt. Internationale Verbindungen, Sektor Afrika [FDGB International Relations Department, Sector Africa], SAPMO BArch DY 34/3291.

Although the protocols extant are fairly detailed it is not clear, however, whether the entire two-day discussion took place publicly in the main hall, or whether the hall – shown in Figure 1 – hosted only the opening and closing ceremonies, with more specific discussions taking place in more discrete settings. In a number of instances the tone and wording in the minutes gives the impression that the “Exchange of Experiences” conference was a meeting concerned with *African* trade union education presided over by predominantly *European* male trade union officials behind closed doors.

Moreover, according to the minutes, except for Sudanese WFTU Secretary Ibrahim Zakaria, the speakers at the podium remained all white men: Karl Kampfert, principal of the Fritz Heckert trade union college and Wilhelm Wilke,³² deputy principal of the Foreigners’ Institute at the Fritz Heckert college, both FDGB; Czechoslovak citizen Edvín Chleboun, Secretary of the WFTU based in Prague; the three French CGT officials Maurice Gastaud, principal of the African Workers’ University in Conakry, Gilbert Julis, principal of the WFTU-supported trade union college of the Malian UNTM in Bamako, and Jean Marrilier, former principal of the WFTU trade union college in Budapest; two officials from the Czechoslovak ROH, František Převorovský and Oldřich Štelclain, who spoke as principal of the trade union college in Prague and as an official from ROH’s International Relations Department respectively; Borodin, deputy principal at the trade union college of the Soviet trade unions in Moscow; and Stefanow, principal at the trade union college Sofia.³³ Jaroslav Těhle, another Czechoslovak WFTU employee, was also an important actor in making preparations for the Exchange of Experiences conference, but it seems he did not speak at the event. The discussion was guided by translators and equipped to work simultaneously in four languages: German, French, English, and Russian.³⁴

³² Principal Heinz Deutschland was part of a FDGB delegation that travelled to North and West Africa during that time and believed that Wilke, as his deputy, had prepared the statement and presented it at the conference. Email correspondence with Heinz Deutschland, 22 October 2022.

³³ In the German transcripts of the speeches available in the archives, the speaker’s name is usually not apparent, so it required a careful reading to reconstruct who contributed which speech at the 1963 Exchange of Experiences conference. See I.R. HARISCH-E. BURTON, *The Missing Link?*

³⁴ The union officials and school principals usually spoke in their language of

The position of Gastaud oscillates between being attentive to the complexities in Africa's organized labour movement and the differing conditions and forms of work in various parts of the continent and a racist-paternalist stand informed by Eurocentric models and superiority. Informing his colleagues about his experience at the Conakry College, Gastaud was able to give not only detailed insights into the college's curriculum, but also elaborate on aspects of work and unions' tasks in Guinea, covering issues such as productivity, norms, wages, private versus state sector, social security, etc. if one reads through the minutes, expressions of European superiority are a common trope, for example when Gastaud asked his comrades (rhetorically) how to find ways to disseminate Marxism-Leninism among workers and working people who do not have similar working conditions, living conditions, not the same «level of development» in their societies – «you have to remember that in many cases of Africa, we are not only 300 years behind, but we are many more hundreds of years behind».³⁵

A principally undogmatic willingness expressed by the French communist union official to enrich and dynamize typically static materialist analysis with contextualized anthropological studies – calling for «a deep understanding of the situation» – is then tainted by another racist remark based on European superiority: Idealist *termini*, he makes it clear, would hardly be understood «by a person who practically has the same level as a pupil».³⁶ Although not explicitly racialized, Gastaud here equates African adults («person») with children («pupil») in terms of knowledge and capacity for understanding, following an old colonial trope infantilizing Africans. When talking about his experiences in the classrooms at Conakry College, Gastaud was dedicated to defend “scientific socialism” against attempts of African course participants at the Conakry trade union college in the classroom – as he was convinced he knew better. This included heated discussions with Algerian course

origin, while the Czechoslovak and Bulgarian representatives had to speak either English, German, or Russian.

³⁵ Speech by Gastaud, “Erfahrungsaustausch mit WGB über Ausbildung afrikanischer Gewerkschafter am 17./18.4.1963,” Abt. Internationale Verbindungen, Sektor Afrika [FDGB International Relations Department, Sector Africa], SAPMO BArch DY 34/3291.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

participants on the issue of non-alignment and a third way beyond the two conventional blocs of the Cold War.³⁷

The FDGB's representative at the Exchange of Experiences praised proletarian internationalism as the guiding spirit of the WFTU's mission, with the aim to instill a class consciousness and class perspective among the African unionists who attend courses of the WFTU and its affiliates. The initial statements reflect a general and dogmatic approach, highlighting the «general validity of Marxist-Leninist theory for the working-class movement of all countries and continents».³⁸ After the introductory Marxist formulae had been delivered, the presentation became more complex. The approach at the FDGB's college in Bernau was specified: Since the African trade unions would lead the struggle against imperialism on a different front, the curriculum would have to be constantly adapted. It was admitted that it was only in the first long-term course (18 months, from autumn 1961 to spring 1963) that the national liberation movement on the African continent was dealt with in greater depth for the first time. This required extensive theoretical study on the part of the staff to broaden their knowledge and approaches and to be fit to teach the African course participants in the classroom.³⁹

Indeed, the extant documentation of the FDGB's Foreigners' Institute in the mid-1960s reveals that the approach there alternated between adherence to dogmatic views and the development of unorthodox innovations. Acknowledging the Soviet Union's leading role, in the curriculum at the Bernau college African course participants were urged to understand the world socialist system as «a decisive factor in social development» and to recognize the decisive role of the USSR as a promoter of «peaceful coexistence».⁴⁰ The final conclusions of the evaluation report in the aftermath of the fourth course in April 1965, however, left ample room for independent theory and practice and

³⁷ BLUM, *Une formation syndicale*, 674.

³⁸ Speech of Wilke [?] in "Probleme des Inhalts der Ausbildung afrikanischer Gewerkschafter [...]," Bernau, 20 June 1963, SAPMO BArch DY 34/3291. Translation mine.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ "Analyse der Arbeit im 4. Lehrgang für Gewerkschafter aus Asien und Afrika (1.9.1963 – 30.3.1965)," Fakultät für Ausländerstudium [Draft], Bernau, 28 April 1965, SAPMO BArch DY 79/443, 5-6.

readily acknowledged the African trade unionists', workers', and political thinkers' own expressions of socialist thought and action:

d) Friendly and fraternal relations are only possible on the basis of equality and mutual respect of both partners [European and African trade unionists]. This includes mutual recognition, respect, and appreciation of the national and world historical achievements of the other partner and its current role in the struggle for social progress. *For us Marxist-Leninists, this also means recognition and appreciation of the achievements that non-Marxists have made in the field of the theory and practice of socialist construction in their countries under their specific conditions.*⁴¹

The quote here underlines the effort of the staff of the Institute to actually break away from rigid Marxist-Leninist thinking in order to recognize the thoughts and achievements of the socialist projects in Africa within their own specific conditions and backgrounds. The above assessment was the result of almost five years of teaching and research at the Bernau College – five years of constant interaction with African trade unionists, and adjustments made in the light of newly acquired knowledge.

My main goal here is to highlight the processes of dialectical learning and self-reflection of Eurocentric attitudes that began among the college staff as they taught trade unionists from across Africa – a hybridization brought about by an underlying process that we might call the “Africanization” of (European-led) institutions and the questioning of Eurocentric perceptions of Africa’s organized labour movement. Confrontation with the complex realities of African labour movements in the plural, as well as greater acquaintance with the specific conditions of the regions and countries, led the Bernau faculty to conclude that the Marxist-Leninist theoretical toolkit they were familiar with, primarily developed and steered by the Soviet Union, was in many respects limited. It might therefore be extended or perhaps modified “even” by non-Marxists from around the world if their theories seemed plausible for the practice of socialist construction.

Advocating a less rigid Marxist-Leninist worldview was no small feat for the East German staff in Bernau. Not only did such a position risk being easily attacked as “misguided” or even “reactionary” by FDGB and/or SED party stalwarts, it also required staff to leave their familiar

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 9. Translation and emphasis mine.

ideological terrain and embark on a journey to discover new territory. Thus, when dealing with topics such as national liberation movements in Africa, staff members honestly admitted that «presenting theoretical problems that had not yet been generalized in textbooks» demanded a great deal of courage from them. Because of the lack of German-language Marxist literature on the subject of organized labour in Africa, many of the faculty had turned to studying primary materials to better understand Africa's labour movements, with the goal of «making teaching more practical and providing a possible answer to many new questions posed by our African colleagues».42 The staff's research findings in their academic qualification papers were crucially supported by classroom interactions and discussions with African trade unionists, primary materials (labour laws, newspapers, periodicals) sent to the college from their home countries by African graduates, and delegation visits to African countries by FDGB officials and staff.43 Building on these materials, a number of lecturers at the Institute defended doctoral dissertations on the African labour movement in the mid- to late 1960s.44

The presence of African trade unionists studying in Bernau and the exchange of letters with graduates was therefore vital both to the

⁴² *Ibid.*, 7. Translation mine.

⁴³ A detailed analysis of the contributions of one African graduate, the Ghanaian J. A. Osei, is provided in: I.R. HARISCH, *Nkrumahism, East Germany, and the South-East Ties of Ghanaian Trade Unionist J.A. Osei during the Cold War 1960s*, «International Journal of African Historical Studies», 54, 3, 2021, pp. 309-332. By the mid-1960s, staff members of the Bernau College had published a number of edited volumes and monographs on the subject, often based on their doctoral research, e. g. H. DEUTSCHLAND, W. WILKE, G. POWIK, *Afrikas Arbeiter im Kampf. Die Gewerkschaften Afrikas im Ringen um die nationale Unabhängigkeit*, Berlin 1964; W. WILKE, *On some Questions of Relations of National Democratic Parties to Trade Unions in Guinea and Mali*, in Minutes of the Scientific Conference held at the Faculty for Foreign Students on June 11-12, 1965, Bernau 1965, pp. 86-95.

⁴⁴ See, for example, G. POWIK, *Bedingungen und Entwicklungsetappen des Kampfes um die panafrikanische Gewerkschaftseinheit*, PhD thesis, Karl-Marx-Universität Leipzig, 1965; W. WILKE, *Theoretische Probleme des Verhältnisses zwischen der Demokratischen Partei Guineas und den Gewerkschaften im Kampf für die nichtkapitalistische Entwicklung (1958-1965)*, PhD Thesis, Karl-Marx-Universität Leipzig, 1966; H. DEUTSCHLAND, *Die Anfänge der afrikanischen Arbeiter- und Gewerkschaftsbewegung (1918-1945)*, PhD Thesis, Karl-Marx-Universität Leipzig, 1967.

production of knowledge in the field of African studies in the GDR as a whole, and also to the constant recalibration of what lessons and experiences would actually be useful to African trade unionists.⁴⁵

New Openings and Closures

The second consultative conference (exchange of experiences) on the “Problems in the training of trade union officials from developing countries” took place on the 30 and 31 August 1966, hosted by the Secretariat of the WFTU in Prague. The FDGB was represented by Heinz Franke (Deputy Leader of the FDGB’s Department of International Relations), Gerhard Powik (Principal of the Foreigners’ Institute at Bernau), and Max Lamprecht (currently adviser at the Tanzanian trade unions).⁴⁶ The Soviet national center, the AUCCTU, was represented by the Leader of Africa Sector in the Department of International Relations and the Principal of the Trade Union College in Moscow. The ROH of the CSSR, the Bulgarian national center and the CGIL were all represented by the principal of their trade union college, while the CGT was present with a principal and a number of “propagandists” who were working for the WFTU in developing countries. As the only non-European national center, the Chilean CUT was represented by the personal responsible for union education in Latin America.⁴⁷

Czechoslovak WFTU Secretary Edvín Chelboun held the opening speech, emphasizing that «we have all gained new and rich experience and encountered many new problems».⁴⁸ He highlighted trade union education and training as «one of the most effective forms of

⁴⁵ I.R. HARISCH, *Gewerkschaftshochschulen als Wissenszentren. Ein Fokus auf afrikanische Kursteilnehmer*innen als (Ko-)Produzent*innen von Wissen während der 1960er-Jahre des Kalten Krieges*, «Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften», 2023, pp. 101-117.

⁴⁶ SAPMO BArch DY 34/6630. On Max Lamprecht’s role as adviser for trade unions in Zanzibar and Tanzania see E. BURTON, *Kindred by Choice: Trade Unions as Interface between East Africa and East Germany, Socialist Internationalism and the Gritty Politics of the Particular. Second-Third World Spaces in the Cold War*, ed by K. Roth-Ey, London 2023, pp. 197-216.

⁴⁷ SAPMO BArch DY 34/6630.

⁴⁸ Edvín Chelboun, “Einführender Bericht über die Probleme der Ausbildung von Gewerkschaftskadern in den Entwicklungsländern,” SAPMO BArch DY 34/6630, 1.

solidarity» of the international labour movement and made the case for a «differentiated training according to the conditions in different countries».⁴⁹ Communist union officials of the WFTU thus came to realize by the mid-1960s that “one-size-fits-all” solutions were *not viable*. Yet, on a practical level, what which approaches and structural changes were necessary to achieve a more differentiated approach in union education programs?

Chleboun noted that funds would have to be increased, trade union organizations need to be better informed, and lectures better trained and qualified. Overall, the dialogue between the national and the international framework, the exchange of knowledge not only between national trade union centers but also between them and the WFTU was considered paramount – a position that had already been put forward at the 1963 Exchange of Experiences in Bernau. Since then, the CGT’s cooperation with the WFTU was key for the latter’s involvement in educational programs on the African continent; the Soviet, French, and Italian national centers cooperated with WFTU officials in providing a «highly qualified» team of lecturers for an international seminar on social security in Leningrad in cooperation with the ILO. The FDGB was praised by Chleboun for its willingness to exchange materials on African trade unions and engage in consultations.⁵⁰

At a general level, the 1966 meeting shows that the WFTU and its national affiliates changed the training courses for African trade unionists from generalised courses with Africans from different parts of the continent, with different language backgrounds, different positions, different occupations and ranks, to more specialised courses for different regions (e.g. Anglophone East Africa, Francophone West Africa) or with a focus on similar occupations or ranks (e.g. only for leading trade union officials). The long-term Courses should continue predominantly in the socialist countries that offer them, primarily the USSR, GDR, and Bulgaria. While it was fiercely debated in 1963 whether these courses were useful, at the 1966 meeting it was agreed that these courses were absolutely necessary, but should be reduced to 10 months. In terms of language, the FDGB had to give up its “*Sonderweg*” with German-language instruction, as WFTU officials and representa-

⁴⁹ Id., “Einführender Bericht über die Probleme der Ausbildung,” SAPMO BArch DY 34/6630, 1.

⁵⁰ Id., “Einführender Bericht über die Probleme der Ausbildung,” SAPMO BArch DY 34/6630, 2.

tives of other national centers made clear that in none of the colleges of the other WFTU affiliates the host language is the teaching language. In all these institutions the language of instruction was either French, English, or Arabic, usually with the help of interpreters.⁵¹

In terms of incorporating new developments and experiences into the curricula and overall approach, Chleboun was convinced that the time was ripe for a more «differentiated approach taking into account the concrete conditions of African, Asian, and Latin American countries» which would raise the quality of the courses. Alongside with this insight it would be paramount to «differentiate strictly» between those countries which have opted for a «non-capitalist path of development» and those which follow a capitalist path and/or are still under colonial rule. For example, basic education and training in countries with a «non-capitalist path of development» would require a combination of lecturers from different backgrounds both from unions of capitalist and socialist European countries in order to take into account union work in companies with different forms of ownership.⁵²

One of the main structural-organisational limitations of the WFTU in overcoming Eurocentric assumptions was the lack of stored printed knowledge about Africa in general and the labour movement and perspectives of African workers in particular. Chleboun was convinced that a better-equipped library and offices of the WFTU in Prague and its regional offices would further allow the federation to better train its lecturers, and thus facilitate a more professional approach in the WFTU's internationalist agenda.⁵³

The WFTU's severe lack of specialist knowledge on Africa becomes apparent in the autobiographical account of Peter Waterman, a British Marxist and member of the British Communist Party who graduated from a two-year course at Ruskin College and later Oxford University before taking up a position as a «well-paid but lowly functionary within the significantly tiny Solidarity and Education Department of the WFTU» from 1966 until 1969.⁵⁴ He had specialized on labour history, «worked in journalism, spoke French, and had been recommended

⁵¹ SAPMO BArch DY 34/6630, p. 3.

⁵² E. Chleboun, "Einführender Bericht über die Probleme der Ausbildung," SAPMO BArch DY 34/6630, 5.

⁵³ SAPMO BArch DY 34/6630, p. 5.

⁵⁴ P. WATERMAN, *From Coldwar Communism to the Global Emancipatory Movement. Itinerary of a Long-Distance Internationalist*, Helsinki 2014, pp. 102-103.

by the London representative of the WFTU, Tom McWhinnie». ⁵⁵ His field within the WFTU's Solidarity and Education Department was labour education in Anglophone regions of the 'Third World' with a special focus on Africa. According to Waterman, the WFTU was a large, bureaucratic colossus, but his department was lacking materials and publications:

I had expected, on arrival [in 1966], to find a large, efficient, international Communist bureaucracy. Large and bureaucratic, yes; efficient, no. I asked the African Department for access to their library and documentation on Africa. They offered me the three books written by Jack Woddis (1960, 1961, 1963). Woddis was currently Secretary of the International Department of the British Communist Party, a one-time WFTU employee. He was a self-educated working-class bloke of impressive energy and productivity. His Africa trilogy therefore represented a remarkable achievement. The books were both readable and inspiring. But, *given that Jack was an orthodox Communist*, they had also been written in the heroic and optimistic mode, during the equally heroic and optimistic period of African independence struggles. *They were hardly adequate for guidance to post-independence African unionism and a period of increasing complexity and difficulty.* ⁵⁶

While praising Woddis – who played an important role in the WFTU's educational endeavours for Africans (as well as Asians and Latin Americans since the mid-1950s) and who was present at a number of WFTU meetings and exchanges of experiences ⁵⁷ – for his formidable energy and pioneering works, Waterman (as a much less Eurocentric Marxist as the course of history showed) perceived Woddis' works as inadequate for the specific contexts and complexities of postcolonial African unionism and workers' struggles. ⁵⁸ Worse than that, a French full-time employee, not mentioned by name, was experienced by Waterman as «a boastful, loud-mouthed, empty-headed, one-time resistance fighter, who had been dumped in Prague to prevent him doing further damage to our French affiliate, the CGT. In his attitude to Francophone Africa he was also a French chauvinist, if not an open racist». ⁵⁹

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁷ I.R. HARISCH-E. BURTON, *The Missing Link?*.

⁵⁸ J. WODDIS, *Africa. The Roots of Revolt*, London 1960; IDEM, *Africa. The Lion Awakes*, London 1961.

⁵⁹ P. WATERMAN, *From Coldwar Communism*, p. 103.

If that was not enough to cause hesitation among many leading African union officials and politicians, the Soviet-led invasion of Prague on 21 August 1968 marked a significant watershed for the WFTU with its headquarters in the Czechoslovak capital. One week later, at the first full meeting of the WFTU Secretariat, the international federation of the communist world met the «military intervention» with disapproval, expressed its full solidarity with the workers and people of Czechoslovakia, and declared that such an act would contrast «with the fundamental principles that form the basis of the life of the WFTU».⁶⁰ The invasion of Czechoslovakia not only paralysed the WFTU's work in Prague «for half a year», as Waterman writes, but in view of many African trade union officials and also Eurocommunists tarnished the reputation of the Soviet camp, leading to severe alienation within the communist-led internationalist labour movement that took time to heal – if it ever healed.

Conclusion

This contribution was concerned with the inherent Eurocentric limitations of the WFTU's provision of education and training for African trade unionists, and the extent to which Afro-European interactions have acted as agents of change to overcome certain biases. As has been shown, personal and organizational efforts at the 1960 meeting to look more closely at African contexts and specificities were limited by the lack of knowledge and experience across much of East and South Africa. The chapter has demonstrated that while the “Exchange of Experiences” conferences were undoubtedly important in terms of mapping the field, exchanging ideas, and, to a certain extent, harmonizing approaches, they were much less successful in initiating a constant, sustainable exchange of materials and knowledge between the national affiliates such as CGT, CGIL, FDGB and the WFTU in Prague. The sharp criticism and distancing from the WFTU by former educator Peter Waterman in his autobiography must of course be read with caution and in the light of the times. Yet, his findings are largely consistent with my findings from the archival material and oral history interviews that demonstrate the importance of an actor-centred approach. The degree of Eurocentrism, chauvinism or even racism depended very much on the individuals in question. Some of the actors analysed in this chapter

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

were prepared to shed parts of their Eurocentric, dogmatic attitude due to their travel, teaching and reading experiences. For them, this meant «recognition and appreciation of the achievements that non-Marxists have made in the field of the theory and practice of socialist construction in their countries under their specific conditions».⁶¹ While such an assessment by European communists was a great leap forward towards overcoming Eurocentrism, the national affiliates and even more so the WFTU were «large and bureaucratic» organizations which were on the whole not able to accommodate these new insights in order to change course.

IMMANUEL R. HARISCH

⁶¹ “Analyse der Arbeit im 4. Lehrgang für Gewerkschafter aus Asien und Afrika (1.9.1963 – 30.3.1965),” Fakultät für Ausländerstudium [Draft], Bernau, 28 April 1965, SAPMO BArch DY 79/443, 9. Translation and emphasis mine.

Memories of the Future. Decolonisation, the Algerian War of Independence, and the Italian New Radical Left

But only Revolution saves the Past

Pier Paolo Pasolini¹

From the early 1950s through the 1960s, decolonization struggles and the end of colonial empires put Asia and Africa at the heart of the world political agenda. In a historical and geopolitical context determined by the Cold War, the decolonizing countries became the privileged battleground between the two blocs, but at the same time progressively jammed the bipolar mechanism. Indeed, the so-called “third world” – to employ the expression coined by Alfred Sauvy in 1952 – imposes itself not only as a geographical and economic category but also as an alternative political project. This was African socialism’s big moment, which ended up destabilizing – at least in part – that “peaceful coexistence” on which were based both the Cold War partitioning of the world and the future. Not only because African socialism represented a third political pole between the US and the USSR, but also because it introduced a political horizon that was still in the making and not directly traceable to the Soviet Union. To quote the concluding lines of Sauvy’s famous article, «this Third World ignored, exploited, despised as the Third State, wants, too, to be something».² It was in this context that in the summer of 1961, responding to a reader of the communist magazine *Vie Nuove*, Pier Paolo Pasolini wrote: «Bandung is the capital of three-quarters of the world: it is also the capital of half of Italy», in reference to the Indonesian city where 29 Afro-Asian countries had gathered in 1955, laying the foundations of the Non-Aligned Movement.³ Ernesto De Martino, who had in 1962 reviewed for *Paese Sera* Fanon’s *The Damned of the Earth* with a short paper with an unequivocal title (*The Awakening of the Third World*) and who in those years was engaged in the great

¹ «Ma solo la Rivoluzione salva il Passato»: Pier Paolo Pasolini, *La rabbia*, in *Per il cinema*, ed. by W. Siti-F. Zabagli, t. 1, Milano: Mondadori, 2001, p. 384. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

² A. Sauvy, *Trois Mondes, une planète*, «L’Observateur», 14 August 1952.

³ P.P. Pasolini, *Bandung capitale di mezza Italia*, «Vie Nuove», 29 July 1961.

research workshop on cultural apocalypses (with a planned chapter on “apocalypse and decolonization”), writes:

the ‘little brothers’ are emancipating themselves, and in the course of the process of emancipation they have grafted into the traditional themes in their cultural life a discourse that has for its subject precisely the ‘limits’ of the ‘big brothers’ and their culture. Thus has arisen for Western man a possibility of reflecting himself in an entirely obsolete self-image, and returning to himself by paths not yet travelled by his consciousness.⁴

Long neglected by a deeply Eurocentric historiography, the historical relevance of Africa and “third-worldism” has only begun to find adequate consideration in recent years. With the new millennium, a season of scholarship has blossomed that has embraced the need to «provincialize Europe», to borrow the particularly apt title of Indian historian Dipesh Chakrabarty’s book, first published precisely in 2000.⁵ In academic *newspeak*, this shift in perspective increasingly goes under the category of “global history”.⁶ Beyond fashion, the Global 1960s lens is an approach that can be useful especially insofar as it helps us visualize history differently by placing other *spatialities* and points of contact and confrontation alongside more usual categories and dimensions, such as those of area studies or national histories. Indeed, a comprehensive perspective on the Long Global 1960s does not aim at an all-encompassing narrative (of the “world history” genre), but rather aims to read together key events that are normally studied (and taught) separately, such as decolonization on the one hand and the “1968 years” on the other. If we assume such a perspective, it becomes possible to view these two episodes as parts of the same «cycle», in the sense Braudel ascribed to it, namely a decisive historical sequence located at an intermediate level, where the «foam» of events finds a point of contact with the profound mutations of «structures».⁷

⁴ E. De Martino, *Promesse e minacce dell’etnologia*, in *Furore simbolo valore*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2002 [1962], p. 108; for the review of Fanon’s work see *Il risveglio del terzo mondo*, «Paese Sera», 10 July 1962.

⁵ D. Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe. Postcolonial thought and historical difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

⁶ For a critical overview see A. Brazzoduro, *Oltre la storia nazionale? Tre risposte alle sfide della global history*, «Passato e Presente», 37/108, 2019, pp. 131-148.

⁷ F. Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II*,

Although Braudel (mistakenly) overlooked the events, 1960 can be taken as a strongly characterizing moment for this conjuncture.⁸ In April, at the conclusion of the *Frammento alla morte* [*Fragment to the death*] dedicated to the poet Franco Fortini, Pasolini wrote: «ah, the desert deafened | by the wind, the stupendous and unclean | sun of Africa that illuminates the world. || Africa! My only | alternative».⁹

«Without Africa, there will be no history of France»

In fact, 1960 is the “year of Africa”, with the independence of as many as 17 nations – Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, Somalia, Tchad, and Togo. They had all but three belonged to the French empire, the exceptions being Congo, which was a Belgian colony, and Nigeria and Somalia which had been under British rule.

Following the half-coup of May 1958, General de Gaulle is recalled to power in France.¹⁰ Increasingly bogged down in the Algerian War, where the bulk of its forces are concentrated, France endows itself with a new Constitution (imposed by the General) that realistically aims to peacefully “manage” African demands through the expedient of the French Community to replace the French Union, created by the Fourth Republic in 1946. But the *imbroglio* soon becomes apparent and in 1960, one after another, the countries choose independence and thus put an end to a “Community” that while in theory affirms the desire to establish an equal relationship, in reality instead keeps all strategic

Paris : A. Colin, 1966; on which see for instance I. Wallerstein, *Braudel, le «Annales» e la storiografia contemporanea*, «Studi storici», 21/1, 1980, pp. 5-17.

⁸ On the “return of the event” see F. Dosse, *Renaissance de l'événement. Un défi pour l'historien: entre sphinx et phénix*, Paris: Puf, 2010.

⁹ «ah, il deserto assordato | dal vento, lo stupendo e immondo | sole dell'Africa che illumina il mondo. || Africa! Unica mia | alternativa»: P.P. Pasolini, *Frammento alla morte*, in *La religione del mio tempo* (1961), now in *Tutte le poesie*, ed. by W. Siti, Milano: Mondadori, 2003, p. 1050; on which see G. Trento, *Pasolini e l'Africa. L'Africa di Pasolini. Panmeridionalismo e rappresentazioni dell'Africa postcoloniale*, Sesto San Giovanni (MI): Mimesis, 2010.

¹⁰ For a detailed account see Georgette Elgey, *Histoire de la IV République*, vol. 3, *La Fin. La République des Tourments (1954-1959)*, Paris: Fayard, 2008, pp. 708 ff.

sectors (foreign policy, defence, economy and management of raw materials) firmly in the hands of the French.

The sinking of the dream of “*la plus grande France*” represents for the ruling classes and to some extent also for large sectors of French society a traumatic event and therefore largely immediately foreclosed. In 1957, future President of the Republic François Mitterrand – then Minister of Justice – does not mince words: «Without Africa, there will be no history of France in the 21st century». ¹¹ And the more the empire sinks, the more the war instead escalates to preserve Algeria, «the jewel of the empire»: in France, in fact, 1960 is the «year of the manifestos». ¹² As many as eighteen petitions concerning Algeria were published in *Le Monde* in 1960 (out of sixty-two published between the advent of the Fifth Republic in 1958 and the end of the war in 1962). Of all of them it is surely the so-called *Manifesto of 121* that marks a discontinuity, later becoming one of the most striking examples of *engagement* of intellectuals after World War II. ¹³

On 6 September 1960, a news article in *Le Monde* on the back page reports that «121 writers, academics and artists have signed a petition on the right to disobedience in the Algerian war». The newspaper also reports the three programmatic points with which the manifesto closes: firstly «We respect and consider justified the refusal to take up arms against the Algerian people». Secondly, «We respect and consider justified the behaviour of the French who think it their duty to offer aid and protection to the oppressed Algerians in the name of the French people». And third, «The cause of the Algerian people, which contributes decisively to the destruction of the colonial system, is the cause of all free men». ¹⁴

Among the 121 first signatories – others would be added in the following months – we find many leading figures in the intellectual life

¹¹ Quoted in Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993, p. 178.

¹² Catherine Brun and Olivier Penot-Lacassagne, *Engagements et déchirements. Les intellectuels et la guerre d'Algérie*, Saint-Germain-la-Blanche-Herbe – Paris, Imec-Gallimard, 2012, p. 153.

¹³ See, in Italian, N. Pianciola, *La guerra d'Algeria e il «manifesto dei 121»*, Roma: Edizioni dell'Asino, 2016. In French the chap. *L'intouchable* in Annie Cohen-Solal, *Sartre. 1905-1980*, Paris: Gallimard, 2019 (new edition), pp. 694-752.

¹⁴ This short piece (only seven lines) is in the article *Le procès des membres du «réseau Jeanson» est appelé devant le tribunal militaire*, «Le Monde», 6 Septembre 1960.

of the twentieth century: writers (Marguerite Duras, Robbe-Grillet), poets (André Breton), partisans (Vercors), academics (Pontalis, Vidal-Naquet), publishers (François Maspéro, Jérôme Lindon), militants (Anne and Daniel Guérin), filmmakers (many *nouvelle vague*, but not Godard), *Les Temps modernes* (Sartre, Lanzmann), and then, *en vrac*, Michel Leiris, Edouard Glissant, Pierre Boulez... In France, however, the full text of the manifesto (written by Maurice Blanchot) has a clandestine circulation (it will be published instead abroad: in Belgium, in the United States, and in Italy by *Tempo presente*, Chiaromonte and Silone's magazine): *Vérité-Liberté*, which publishes it in the September-October 1960 issue, is immediately seized by the censor, and the editor in charge denounced for incitement to desertion; *Les Temps modernes* of 14 October comes out with two blank pages because at the last moment the printer refuses to print the manifesto that was to appear in it. Censorship will be followed by particularly severe repressive measures, with the denunciation of twenty-nine signatories and the imprisonment of one, journalist Robert Barrat. Instead, everyone is barred from public radio and television, while officials are suspended (this is the case with Vidal-Naquet) or even fired (like Laurent Schwartz, a professor at the Polytechnic). So if it seems that de Gaulle, referring to Sartre, tells his interior minister «you don't put Voltaire in prison», for many of the signatories the price to pay is nonetheless high: the loss of their jobs and the impossibility of finding another one, at least in the public sector. This material aspect is generally overlooked in this affair, which is read as a purely idealistic tussle, but will instead contribute powerfully to amplifying the international reception of the “manifesto”.

Quite different is the reception given to the *manifesto of the French intellectuals*, which responds to that of “the 121”, accusing them of being «professors of treason» and «apologists for desertion». Indeed, on 7 October 1960, the new manifesto is published in full by both *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* with all 185 names of the signatories, and partially by *Combat* and *Paris-Presse l'Intransigeant*. These “French intellectuals” railed against the «scandalous statements» of the previous month, which «constitute the logical consequence of a series of actions carefully prepared and orchestrated for years against our country, against the values it represents – and against the West. These are the work of a “fifth column” that takes inspiration from foreign propaganda when not from international watchwords brutally dictated and slavishly applied. Such conduct did not begin with the war in Algeria. It is clear that the Algerian war represents but one episode; there were others yesterday; there will be more tomorrow». The Algerian War is «but one episode» of a

much larger conflict. Should the message and the terrain of confrontation not be clear, the *manifesto of the French intellectuals* closes with this explicit call to arms: «It is still not too late. But it is urgent for the country and the public authorities to open their eyes to the form of war being waged against us: a subversive war, waged, armed and financed by the foreigner on our territory, and aimed at the moral and social disintegration of the nation». The theme of civil war is omnipresent even though the phrase is never uttered.

Who are the 185 first signatories of this second manifesto? They are basically right-wingers, almost all academics but also writers and lawyers, most of them with solid careers behind them (Sorbonne, Institut, Académie française...: they all declare their titles, unlike the “121” who signed only with their names). If the “121” are destined to become famous *maîtres à penser*, in 1960 it is clear that the signatories of the *manifesto of French intellectuals* represent the opposite: the intellectual group which is not only a numerical majority, but above all the one that firmly holds the cultural institutions in its hands and against which the heirs to “121”, i.e., the generation of 1968, will soon be unleashed. The battle for or against “French Algeria” represents in some respects a dress rehearsal for May.

In an issue of *Combat* devoted to the “121” *affaire* (6 October 1960), Roland Mousnier, historian and among the future signatories of the *manifesto of French intellectuals*, writes:

France is at war. Some French departments, those that make up Algeria, are being attacked by factionalists, instruments of the foreigner, especially Marxist-Leninists, who practice all the methods of subversive warfare: slander, denigration, demoralization, massacre, torture, terror. The duty of every Frenchman is to fight on all fronts, for the freedom of France and the integrity of its territory. The call to insubordination and desertion is an act of treason that must be punished as such. Long live French Algeria!¹⁵

Indeed, it should not be forgotten that the context in which these two manifestos intervene, in the fall of 1960, is strongly determined by the trial of the so-called “réseau Jeanson”, namely the illegal network

¹⁵ Quoted in J.-F. Sirinelli, *Guerre d'Algérie, guerre des pétitions?*, in Id.-J.-P. Rioux (eds.), *La guerre d'Algérie et les intellectuels français*, Bruxelles : Complexe, 1991, pp. 292-293. See also A.-M. Duranton-Crabol, *Combat et la guerre d'Algérie*, «Vingtième Siècle», 1993, n. 40, pp. 86-96.

supporting the struggle of Algerians organized in France around the figure of the Sartrian philosopher Francis Jeanson. On 3 October 1960, fourteen young militants of the “reseau” were thus sentenced to «148 years and 8 months in prison in 125 minutes», as *l'Humanité* headlined.

The Algerian War, “one episode” of the global civil war

In the global framework of decolonization struggles, the Algerian war is a crucial junction also because in France – but not only in France – it contributes to reactivating the memory of the «European civil war» (Traverso) in a proactive and not merely commemorative tone. This perspective quickly enters into controversy with the traditional parties of the “old” left who stand as patent guardians of that memory, while they wage a war without quarter in Algeria.¹⁶ The “new” left is also born out of this turn of events which have their roots in decolonization and which, against the preservation of the status quo that legitimizes the Cold War, see the figure of the partisan re-actualized by the fighters of anticolonial liberation struggles: “Jeune Résistance” was the name of the first opposition group active in France against the war.¹⁷

While it remains difficult to assess the real impact of the “battle of the manifestos” in the autumn of 1960, it is clear that the Algerian uprising brought France to the brink of civil war.¹⁸ The ground of the conflict was in fact not only ethical-political, and shortly thereafter the heinous OAS attacks would demonstrate it unequivocally: among the many attacks on publishing houses and leftist intellectuals, the plastic bomb of 7 February 1962, which was supposed to hit André Malraux and instead scarred forever four-and-a-half-year-old Delphine Renard, would re-

¹⁶ See E. Traverso, *A ferro e fuoco. La guerra civile europea, 1914-1945*, Bologna: il Mulino, 2007.

¹⁷ See A. Brazzoduro, “Se un giorno tornasse quell’ora”. *La nuova sinistra tra eredità antifascista e terzomondismo*, «Italia contemporanea», 2021, n. 296, pp. 255-275; N. Lamri, *Antifascisti e antifasciste italiane di fronte alla guerra di decolonizzazione algerina*, in *Antifasciste e antifascisti: storie, culture politiche e memorie dal fascismo alla Repubblica*, ed. by G. Fulveti-A. Ventura, Roma: Viella, 2024, pp. 345-360.

¹⁸ See G. Anderson, *La guerre civile en France, 1958-1962. Du coup d’état gaulliste à la fin de l’OAS*, Paris : La fabrique, 2018. J. Jackson also uses the expression “civil war”: *A certain Idea of France. The Life of Charles de Gaulle*, London : Allen Lane, 2018, pp. 536 ff.

main in the memory. But it was especially in Algeria that the balance of the war was dramatic, and quickly became itself a terrain of conflict. The only casualties on which there are reliable figures are French military personnel. There were 2.5 million soldiers who left for Algeria; of these, 1.2 million were conscripts. 30,000 died: a considerable figure even when compared with the American war in Vietnam (which lasted the same number of years and claimed 58,000 lives, but out of a population of 216 million Americans, while there were 44 million Frenchmen at the time). The dead *pieds-noirs*, on the other hand, are still the subject of contention concerning both their number and those responsible. Especially in the last phase of the war, with the tragic chaos of the evacuation of the French army, and then with the equally chaotic showdown that characterized some areas of Algeria after independence, it is sometimes difficult to attribute these deaths accurately either to Algerian independence fighters, or to the indiscriminate terrorism of the OAS that wanted to make Algeria “scorched earth”, or to the French armed forces. Among the *pieds-noirs*, the dead were probably between 4-4,500. Appropriately fueled by the entrepreneurs of memory, the battle of the numbers is central to the rhetorical device of those – such as, to be precise, some associations of *pieds-noirs* – who have made accusations France’s abandonment of them into an element of their very identity.

Even less consensus exists about the *harkis*, the Algerians who fought alongside the French army: according to some of the organizations representing them their dead number 150,000, while historical research speaks more realistically of a figure as low as between 5-6,000 or as high as 60-75,000, numbers in any case far from negligible.¹⁹ In Algeria the count is even more uncertain. The official version of the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) claims 1.5 million «martyrs», while more serious historiography puts the figure at 250-500,000 Algerian dead.²⁰ That we should stick to a hypothetical accounting speaks volumes about the structural violence that characterized “French Algeria”: the life of a “Muslim” had to be worth infinitely less than that of a “European” if it could be so easily lost without a trace.

¹⁹ Cfr. F.-X. Hautreux, *La guerre d’Algérie des harkis 1954-1962*, Paris : Perrin, 2013.

²⁰ See also J. McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 232-233.

The Italian “translation” of the Algerian War of Independence

In Italian public opinion, an echo of the war had arrived at least as early as 1956, with the translation of Colette and Francis Jeanson’s investigation-denunciation, *L’Algeria fuorilegge*, published by Feltrinelli (with a splendid cover designed by Albe Steiner), and then even more explosively in 1958 with the terrible testimony that Henri Alleg, a survivor of torture by paratroopers, had smuggled out of prison through his lawyer and which Einaudi promptly had translated (by historian Paolo Spriano) and published in the “white books” series directed by Raniero Panzieri, politician, Marxist theoretician and founder of *operaismo*.²¹ Then in October 1960, it was *Tempo Presente*, the magazine founded by activists and writers Nicola Chiaromonte and Ignazio Silone, that translated the 121 *Manifesto* and disseminated it, presenting it to readers as «a document of great importance».²² But *Tempo Presente* did not merely revive the appeal of the 121. In the next issue of the magazine (November 1960), a «Declaration of Solidarity with French Intellectuals» appeared, drafted by Nicola Chiaromonte and Elio Vittorini – another key writer and editor of those years –, and signalled by a conspicuous call-out on the front page, setting the tone of the initiative: «Right to Resistance».²³ In a brief editorial introduction, the journal clarified how they had «felt that the 121 Manifesto demanded that intellectuals in other countries take a stand on the very principle it proclaims and because of which its signatories were indicted: the right to disobedience».²⁴ In record time Chiaromonte and Vittorini managed to collect the signatures of over a hundred intellectuals. The Italians (it is impossible to list

²¹ C. et F. Jeanson, *L’Algeria fuorilegge*, it. tr. A. dell’Orto, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1956 (original French edition *L’Algérie hors la loi*, Paris: Seuil, 1955); H. Alleg, *La tortura. Con uno scritto di Jean-Paul Sartre*, it. tr. P. Spriano, Torino: Einaudi, 1958 (original French edition *La Question*, Paris: Minuit, 1958). See A. Brazzoduro, *La gauche italiana e la guerre d’indépendance algérienne. Voir/ne pas voir la guerre*, in *La guerre d’Algérie revisitée. Nouvelles générations, nouveaux regards*, ed. by A. Kadri et al., Paris: Karthala, 2015, pp. 331-338.

²² *Dichiarazione sul diritto all’insubordinazione nella guerra d’Algeria*, «Tempo Presente», 5 (September-October 1960), nn. 9-10, pp. 707-709: 707.

²³ On which see C. Panizza, *Nicola Chiaromonte. Una biografia*, Roma: Donzelli, 2017, pp. 276 ff.

²⁴ *Diritto alla resistenza. Dichiarazione di solidarietà con gli intellettuali francesi*, «Tempo Presente», 5 (November 1960), n. 11, p. 785.

them all here; the signatories comprise mainly very prominent figures: art historian Giulio Carlo Argan, composer Luigi Dallapiccola but then also composer Luciano Berio, writer Italo Calvino, poet Giuseppe Ungaretti...) were joined by the British (Isaiah Berlin, Bertrand Russell...) and Americans (Hannah Arendt and her friend Mary McCarthy, but also Harold Rosenberg and Mark Rothko...).

At the heart of the Declaration lay the explicit reference to fascisms and World War II, re-proposed as a warning in a framework of antifascism re-actualized by the Algerian War:

When we see intellectuals persecuted for proclaiming the right of the good citizen to refuse obedience to unjust commands, we cannot fail to remember that fascism, Nazism, the last war, the post-war period in many countries both here and beyond the so-called Iron Curtain and, by contrast, the Nuremberg judgment, have abundantly demonstrated how blind execution of orders, prone obedience, conforming to authority just because it is so can be criminal, while refusal of obedience can become not only a right but a first duty. The barbaric norm that recommended serving the country whether right or wrong should have been buried in the death camps along with the victims of those who could not choose between obedience in folly and disobedience in reason.²⁵

The anti-fascist reference also appeared in the title of a large collective work exhibited in Milan six months later, on 5 June 1961. At the Brera Gallery there had been the vernissage of the third exhibition of the "Anti-procès" group, whose manifesto was illustrated by the Large Collective Antifascist Painting by six artists: Enrico Baj, Roberto Crippa, Gianni Dova, Errò, Jean-Jacques Lebel and Antonio Recalcati.²⁶ In a 2001 article, Baj recalls that the painting «was produced by a spontaneous creativity and convergence germinated by a sincere spirit of adherence to the civic commitment of the "121". The work, which measures five by four meters, was painted on the spot in 1961, before the opening of the exhibition».²⁷ Referring in particular to the figure of Breton («a champion of anti-fascism and anti-totalitarianism»), Baj emphasizes how «the Manifesto of 121 immediately transcended the Algerian mo-

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 786.

²⁶ See R. Fleck-A. Gouedard, *Tableau d'Histoire ou histoire d'un tableau?*, in E. Baj et al., *Grand tableau antifasciste collectif*, ed. by L. Chollet, Paris : Dagorno, 2000, pp. 65-130.

²⁷ E. Baj, *Un quadro e il suo sequestro*, «MicroMega», 16/1, 2001, p. 79.

tivations from which it originated to situate itself in the general thought and struggle against fascism, by fascism meaning the spirit of death, war, aggression, violent totalitarian oppression, practiced through the systematic use of torture, police brutality and terrorism».²⁸

Indeed, on this large canvas with expressionist features, one could clearly read, in the lower right-hand corner, «Manifesto of the 121» and, separated by a swastika, the names of the cities of «Sétif» and «Constantine» (symbols of the fierce French repression that, in these Algerian localities in 1945 and then 1955, had left thousands dead).²⁹ On the pretext that religious symbols figured in it (the Madonna and Child in the mouth of a general, and Pope John XXIII and Cardinal Ottaviani stood out in particular), the police seized the work for ... «public vilification of the state religion» (and «preserved» it – «brutally crumpled», Baj laments – in the basement of Milan police station until 1987).³⁰

Pier Paolo Pasolini, who also does not appear among the signatories of the Declaration promoted by *Tempo Presente*, writes in *Contemporaneo* (October-November 1960) a Testimony for the 121 in support of the call of French intellectuals to sabotage the war against the Algerians. In this short text the poet clearly takes sides, though without neglecting the complexity of the situation: «I am wholeheartedly for the Algerians», he writes, «I would be ready to take any responsibility, on their behalf. But even here the problem is not simple, if, as is well known, there are one million French people in Algeria». Then he praises the courage of the French intellectuals' gesture, «the result of a difficult choice, in which even so, doubts cannot but remain. And for this all the more admirable». Finally, Pasolini closes with a «bitter consideration» that is a summons to Italian intellectuals: «Would 121 intellectuals capable of such an act of courage be available in Italy – not literary, for there is far too much literary courage! – but political and civil? No: I say they would not be found: perhaps not even a third».³¹

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

²⁹ See J.-L. Planche, *Sétif 1945: histoire d'un massacre annoncé*, Paris: Perrin, 2006; C. Mauss-Copeaux, *Algérie, 20 août 1955: insurrection, répression, massacres*, Paris: Payot, 2010.

³⁰ E. Baj, *Un quadro e il suo sequestro*, p. 80.

³¹ *Testimonianza per i 121*, «Il Contemporaneo», 3 (October-November 1960), nn. 30-31, now in P.P. Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica e la società*, ed. by W. Siti-S. De Laude, Milano: Mondadori, 1999, pp. 738-739.

Pasolini's La rabbia: memories of the future

Algeria will be given an exceptional place – for space and intensity – in the poetic video essay Pasolini works on in 1962-1963: *La rabbia* [*Anger*]. A document of great relevance also and particularly if considered from the perspective of a social and cultural history of politics. Indeed, cinema was one of the key cultural infrastructures of the Long Global Sixties.³² And – as historian Benjamin Stora pointed out – the Algerian Revolution was the first modern war to also be a *war of images*.³³ The Global Sixties were indeed a revolutionary turning point for cinematic language as well. In the laboratory of the film *La rabbia*, Pasolini experimented for the first time with a form that was different from both the traditional cinematic narration and the conventions of documentary films. He sought to create, in his own words, «a new cinematic genre. To make an ideological and poetic essay with new sequences».³⁴

La rabbia is, in fact, a found footage film: a film purely composed of archival footage related to international events from the past decade, from 1945 to 1962, the year of the Algerian independence. The technique used is quite similar to that which Guy Debord – the «*soi disant cinéaste*» – was employing during the same years.³⁵ Perhaps not coincidentally, *La rabbia*, according to Pasolini, was meant to be «An act of indignation against the unreality of the bourgeois world and its consequent historical irresponsibility. To document the presence of a world which, unlike the bourgeois world, deeply possesses reality. Real-

³² See M. Salazkina, *World Socialist Cinema. Alliances, Affinities, and Solidarities in the Global Cold War*, Oakland: California University Press, 2023. For a social history of cinema and audiences, see A. Gelardi-L. Peretti, *Di film festival e terzomondismo*, in 'Nostra patria è il mondo intero'. *Per una storia sociale dell'antimperialismo in Italia*, ed. by S. Bacchini-A. Brazzoduro-G. Fugazzotto, «Zapruder», n. 66, 2025, pp. 168-179. The special issue as a whole proposes a social history, "from below", of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism in the Long Sixties, taking Italy as a case study.

³³ B. Stora, *Imaginaires de guerre. Les images dans les guerres d'Algérie et du Viêt-nam*, Paris: La Découverte, 1997. See also A. Bedjaoui, *Cinema and the Algerian War of Independence. Culture, Politics, and Society*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2020.

³⁴ P.P. Pasolini, intervista con M. Liverani, «Paese Sera», 14 April 1963, now in P.P. Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, cit., p. 3067.

³⁵ See *Guy Debord (contro) il cinema*, ed. by E. Ghezzi-R. Turigliatto, Milano-Venezia: Il castoro/Biennale di Venezia, 2001.

ity, that is, a true love for tradition, which only revolution can give».³⁶ In other words, it is a critique of the unreality of the *society of the spectacle*, where the arrival of television in homes marks a turning point in the colonisation of consciousness – a key scene in both *La rabbia* and Chris Marker's *Le fond de l'air est rouge* (1977).

In this sense, Pasolini constructs his video essay – this «new cinematic genre» – as a vector for a new kind of political imagination, namely *memories of the future*. A task that Chris Marker and Jean-Luc Godard would also attempt to take on in those works where they too will attempt to empty cinema as a specific device of memory – capable of revealing the complex and ever-changing tension field that binds past, present, and future.³⁷ Hence, while on the screen we see the images of the coronation of the masters of the earth (Elizabeth II in London and Eisenhower in Chicago, at a Republican convention), the “voice in poetry” reads: «We find ourselves at the start of what will probably be the ugliest epoch in the history of man: the epoch of industrial alienation. When the classical world is exhausted, when all the peasants and all the craftsmen have died, when the industry has made the cycle of production unstoppable, then will our history be over».

Born in Bologna in 1922 and murdered in Rome in 1975, Pasolini was a writer, poet, and director: undoubtedly one of the most influential Italian intellectuals of the second half of the 20th century. Having moved to Rome in 1950, he began an intense cinematic career, first as a screenwriter and then as a director, creating films such as *Accattone* (1961), *La Ricotta* (1963), *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964), *The Hawks and the Sparrows* (1966), *Oedipus Rex* (1967), *Medea* (1969), *Salò* (1975)...³⁸

La rabbia, released on April 1963, consists of two parts: the first directed by Pasolini and the second by Giovannino Guareschi. Both parts are roughly fifty minutes long. However, this two-part structure was created in a surreptitious manner. The fact is anecdotal only if it does not reveal a characteristic feature of a world riven by irreconcilable oppositions. Originally, Gastone Ferranti, the obscure producer of

³⁶ P.P. Pasolini, intervista con M. Liverani.

³⁷ On Marker see G. Fofi, *Prefazione*, in C. Marker, *Scene della terza guerra mondiale 1967-1977*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1980; on Godard see A. de Baecque, *L'histoire-caméra*, Paris: Gallimard, 2008.

³⁸ On Pasolini see B.D. Schwartz, *Pasolini Requiem: Second Edition*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017.

the newsreel *Mondo Libero*, had decided to use his newsreel archives, asking only Pasolini – who was already a well-known writer but still a debuting filmmaker, having made at the time only *Accattone* (1961) and a short episode for the collective Ro.Go.Pa.G., *La ricotta* (1963) – to create a documentary film using the footage.³⁹

When the film Pasolini had made was deemed too left-wing by the producer, production was halted. Ferranti insisted on cutting the film in half and asked the writer-director Giovannino Guareschi (the popular author of the novel *Don Camillo*), a humorist very much aligned with the far-right, to create a second part to “balance” Pasolini’s work with that of an author with opposing views. Pasolini, who had initially accepted the premise, upon seeing Guareschi’s film, realized he had fallen into an ambush and refused to let his film be presented in this way.

The polemic between the two escalated to virulent proportions, with Pasolini stating on 13 April 1963 after the first public screening of the movie: «If Eichmann could rise from the grave and make a film, he would make a film like this. Through a proxy, Eichmann made this film».⁴⁰ It is perhaps worth remembering that Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi logistics specialist responsible for planning the extermination of European Jews, had been tried and hanged on the 1 June 1962.⁴¹

Film critics, for obvious reasons, have always focused solely on Pasolini’s part. However, while from a cinephilic perspective it is right to want to restore the original version edited by Pasolini (as Bertolucci did in 2007 for the Cineteca di Bologna, Laboratorio L’Immagine Ritrovata), from a less authorial but more social-historical perspective, it should not be forgotten that the film was conceived by the producer as a two-part project, a «cinematic duel» (Tatti Sanguineti).⁴² Two parts opposed to each other. They express, in their own way, the fault lines that ran

³⁹ On the history of the film and its genesis see R. Chiesi, *Il “corpo” tormentato de La rabbia. La genesi del progetto, la “normalizzazione” del 1963, l’ipotesi di ricostruzione del 2008*, «Studi pasoliniani», 1/3, 2009, pp. 13-26.

⁴⁰ P.P. Pasolini, *La rabbia (1962-1963)*, in Id., *Per il cinema*, p. 3068.

⁴¹ On the trial, see H. Rousso, *Judging the Past: The Eichmann Trial*, in *The Trial That Never Ends. Hannah Arendt’s Eichmann in Jerusalem in Retrospect*, ed. by R.J. Golsan-S.M. Misemer, Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2017, pp. 22-42.

⁴² T. Sanguineti, booklet, in P.P. Pasolini-G. Guareschi, *La rabbia. Versione completamente restaurata da negativo originale dalla Cineteca di Bologna, con le sequenze inedite a colori dei dipinti di Renato Guttuso*, ed. by T. Sanguineti, Roma: Rarovideo, 2016, no pagination.

through Italy and the world during this pivotal moment of the Sixties. Expressing an *ethical divide* that is both the fracture and the fabric of the Global Sixties.⁴³

The duel in which Guareschi (from the right) and Pasolini (from the left) participated has little to do with the noisy, fruitless televised brawls to which we are accustomed today. The duel fought by Guareschi and Pasolini is instead one in which positions are still firmly taken. One where people take sides. For or against the struggles for decolonization. For or against the struggles of the oppressed and the exploited. Let us not forget that Guareschi – and the entire old, petit-bourgeois Europe along with him – openly despised “blacks”. As Pasolini himself, trying to withdraw his part, denounced:

It is not just a qualunquist, or conservative, or reactionary film. It is worse. There is hatred against Americans and the Nuremberg trial is called a revenge. There is talk of John Kennedy only showing his wife as if he did not exist. There is hatred against the blacks, and the only thing is missing is that they must all be put up against the wall. There is a white girl who gives a flower to a negro, and immediately afterwards the speaker covers her with insults for this. It is said that because the Italians were forced to leave the colonies, the balance in Africa is broken. There is a hymn to the ‘paras’ extolled as magnificent troops. There is an anti-communism that is not even *Missino* [of the neofascist party Movimento sociale italiano], it’s from the Thirties. There’s everything: racism, the yellow peril, and the typical procedure of fascist orators, the accumulation of indemonstrable facts.⁴⁴

Indeed, in Pasolini’s film, the struggles for decolonisation – Cuba, Vietnam, Congo, and especially Algeria – play a central role, shaping the political agenda of the present.⁴⁵ And these struggles, which decisively characterize the urgencies that Pasolini seeks to address, are interpreted

⁴³ See A. Brazzoduro, *Algeria, Antifascism, and Third Worldism: An Anticolonial Genealogy of the Western European New Left (Algeria, France, Italy, 1957-1975)*, «The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History», 48/5, 2020, pp. 958-978.

⁴⁴ Quoted in A. Barbato, *Pasolini non vuole firmare* La rabbia, «Il Giorno», 13 April 1963.

⁴⁵ On this interpretation see N. Perugini-F. Zucconi, *La rabbia: Pasolini’s Color Ecstasy*, in *Pier Paolo Pasolini. Framed and Unframed. A Thinker for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by L. Peretti-K.T. Raizen, London: Bloomsbury, 2019, pp. 99-110.

through the «comprehensive perceptive filter» of the mortal combat between fascism and anti-fascism.⁴⁶

This is an aspect that, in my view, has not been sufficiently emphasised: *La rabbia* is undoubtedly many things, but it is also, in effect, an anti-colonial film, in the sense that Pasolini recognises the crucial historical significance of the decolonisation struggles and accordingly devotes substantial space to them. With the specific aim, on the one hand, of documenting them, and on the other, of supporting them. Indeed, *La rabbia* is also one of the first film to explicitly – rather than implicitly – evoke the Algerian War for Independence.⁴⁷

Yet it is precisely in its anti-colonial stance that *La rabbia* also emerges as an eminently anti-fascist film, in the sense that it deliberately invokes that memory. For Pasolini – and for an entire generation of left-wing militants alongside him – anti-fascism is not a memory consigned to the past, but a living possibility, still to be pursued.⁴⁸

In the film, the struggles for decolonisation are, in this sense, *memories of the future*: a prefiguration of the world to come. A historical imagination.

But they also represent a reactivation and fulfillment of the anti-fascism of the 1930s and, above all, the 1940s. Of the *spirit* of the anti-fascist Resistance.

From this perspective, at the heart of Pasolini's intellectual operation, some have plausibly identified a strong influence of, or at least a proximity to Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Concept of History*.⁴⁹ This proximity is not without

⁴⁶ For the expression “perceptive filter” see P. Terhoeven, *Hitler's Children? German Terrorism as Part of the Transnational 'New Left Wave'*, in *Revolutionary Violence and the New Left. Transnational Perspectives*, ed. by A. Martin Alvarez-E. Rey Tristan, London: Routledge, 2017, p. 129.

⁴⁷ See A. Brazzoduro, *Il nemico interno. La guerra d'Algeria nel cinema francese*, «Passato e Presente», 27/76, 2009, pp. 127-142.

⁴⁸ On this see also A. Rapini, *L'antifascismo. Una tradizione generativa (1945-2025)*, Roma: Donzelli, 2025.

⁴⁹ See S. Monti, *La rabbia (1963): il film-saggio e la funzione-Benjamin nel cinema di Pasolini*, «The Italianist», 41/2, 2021, pp. 308-322. Monti identifies as the earliest studies on the relationship between Pasolini and Benjamin those by R.S.C. Gordon, *Pasolini: Forms of Subjectivity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, and F. Trentin, “Organizing Pessimism”: *Enigmatic Correlations between Walter Benjamin and Pier Paolo Pasolini*, «Modern Language Review», 108, 2013, pp. 1029-1035.

textual evidence, considering that the first Italian edition of the *Theses* was published precisely in 1962 by Einaudi, edited and translated by Renato Solmi.⁵⁰ Which means exactly when Pasolini was working on the creation of *La rabbia*.

For Benjamin, in fact, the historical materialist must be capable to «blast open the continuum of history» (*Thesis XVI*), that is, breaking the sequence of chronological and linear time – past, present, future – in order to grasp, in the moment of the now (*Jetztzeit*), that specific «constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one» (*Thesis XVIII*). In this sense, for Benjamin – as also for Pasolini in *La rabbia* – the past is not a fixed datum, once and for all, but a «spark of hope» (*Thesis VI*) that is ignited when a moment of the present is brought into proximity with a moment of what-has-been, in a constellation saturated with tensions.

In *La rabbia*, Pasolini directly engages with both the technique of montage and Benjamin's theory of history, likely finding in them a possible path toward a non-dogmatic Marxism. In this sense, Pasolini juxtaposes – or rather, *cites* – moments from the past within the present, in order to create new layers of meaning. As in the sequence on the Hungarian refugees, where he says:

These snows, are they from last year
or from before a thousand years, before every hope.

[...]

These are our mothers, our children and grandchildren,
our old relatives, these figures of semblance,
survivors of the days of tears – who cry.
Forty-three, forty-four,
years of the same whiteness,
of this emigration! They had not passed,
they were here, with their ineffaceable snow,
with their hereditary tears.⁵¹

⁵⁰ W. Benjamin, *Tesi di filosofia della storia*, in *Angelus Novus. Saggi e frammenti*, Torino: Einaudi, 1962.

⁵¹ «Queste nevi erano dell'altr'anno, | o di mille anni fa, prima di ogni speranza. | Dove le abbiamo conosciute, queste nevi, | queste nevi che incorniciano giorni di pianto? | [...] Sono madri nostre, figli, nipoti, | vecchi parenti nostri, queste figure identiche, | sopravvissute dai giorni del pianto – che piangono. | Il quarantatré, il quarantaquattro, essi | sono gli anni di questo biancore, | di questa emigrazione! Non

To weld two temporally distinct and distant events into a single constellation – thus rendering them present by revealing their secret yet unequivocal connection – is the operation Pasolini proposes to carry out with history. Convinced, as he says while images of the Soviet ballerina Ulanova appear on screen, that «only Revolution saves the Past». It is not difficult to recognise in this expression the influence of Benjamin's political messianism, for whom, if «nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history», «only a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments» (*Thesis III*). That is, not only the past of victors, but also that of generations of the exploited and the defeated.

«*The days ... in which the Resistance plants roots and founds the future!*»

La rabbia is an anomalous filmic object in Pasolini's œuvre, a 'singular creation' constructed with a skilful editing of only archival materials into which is interwoven the 'voice in poetry' (*voce in poesia*) of the novelist Giorgio Bassani (who dubbed Orson Welles in *La ricotta*) and the prose commentary (*voce in prosa*) of the painter Renato Guttuso who read Pasolini's text.⁵² The poet is "disgruntled" and speaks his anger in the face of post-war problems. Prominent among these is colonialism, «anachronistic violence of one nation on another, with its trail of martyrs and deaths».⁵³ In two of several sequences devoted to Algeria (LII and LIV), Pasolini traces Paul Éluard's celebrated poem *Liberté*, published clandestinely during the Nazi occupation of Paris (1942). So as a «series of photographs of tortured and tortured» Algerians scrolls across the screen, the "voice in poetry" reads:

erano trascorsi, | erano qui, con le loro indelebili nevi, | con le loro ereditarie lacrime»: P.P. Pasolini, *La rabbia*, p. 370.

⁵² Z. Baross speaks of «singular creation» in *In Praise of (La) Rabbia*, «La Rivista», 2015, n. 4, p. 90. On the differences between the «magnifique et douce» *voce in poesia* and *voce in prosa*, see G. Didi-Huberman, *Rabbia poetica. Note sur Pier Paolo Pasolini*, «Poésie», 37/143, 2013, pp. 114-124.

⁵³ *Appendice a La rabbia*, in P.P. Pasolini, *Per il cinema*, p. 408. See also P.P. Pasolini, *La rabbia*, ed. by R. Chiesi, Bologna: Cineteca di Bologna, 2009.

On my dirty rags
 on my skeletal nakedness
 on my gypsy mother
 on my sheepish father
 I write your name.

On my first marauder brother
 on my second slovenly brother
 on my third shoeshine brother
 on my fourth beggar brother
 I write your name.

On my underworld comrades
 on my kept comrades
 on my unemployed comrades
 on my fellow laborers

I write your name

freedom!⁵⁴

This is followed by a contrasting sequence of images devoted to the pro-Algeria French putsch (13 May 1958) led by Massu, the butcher of the so-called “Battle of Algiers” (“black rally”, *comizio nero*, says a subtitle), and de Gaulle’s subsequent return to power (with the sibylline «I got you», *je vous ai compris*, 4 June 1958). Then, again we see an unbearable sequence of Algerian men and women raped, tortured. Pasolini-Bassani continues:

On the nomads of the desert
 on the laborers of Medina
 on the wage earners of Oran
 on the little clerks of Algiers

⁵⁴ «Sui miei stracci sporchi | sulla mia nudità scheletrica | su mia madre zingara | su mio padre pecoraio | scrivo il tuo nome. || Sul mio primo fratello predone | sul mio secondo fratello sciancato | sul mio terzo fratello lustrascarpe | sul mio quarto fratello mendicante | scrivo il tuo nome. || Sui miei compagni della malavita | sui miei compagni mantenuti | sui miei compagni disoccupati | sui miei compagni manovali || scrivo il tuo nome || libertà!»: P.P. Pasolini, *La rabbia*, p. 394.

I write your name.

On the miserable people of Algeria

on the illiterate peoples of Arabia

on the poor classes of Africa

on the enslaved peoples of the under-proletarian world

I write your name

freedom!⁵⁵

It is not of interest here to discuss Pasolini's possible "heretical" or "corsair" Orientalism, although this does not fail to question our gaze today.⁵⁶ It is perhaps of greater interest to emphasize, through Pasolini's work, the centrality of decolonization, and of Africa and Algeria in particular, for the new political cultures that emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This is an inescapable centrality for those who want to grasp the discontinuity expressed by those political and cultural ferments, with respect to which the discovery of "Colour", a "new extension of the world", marks a point of no return, even in the rereading of revolutionary classics, Marxism *in primis*.⁵⁷ As the terrible images of Patrice Lumumba, the first prime minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo, tied up like an animal, shortly before being murdered, scroll across the screen, the "voice in poetry" declaims: «A new problem is born in the world: it is called colour».

Indeed, Pasolini, and with him the generation of the New Radical

⁵⁵ «Sui nomadi del deserto | sui braccianti di Medina | sui salariati di Orano | sui piccoli impiegati di Algeri | scrivo il tuo nome. || Sulle misere genti di Algeria || sulle popolazioni analfabete dell'Arabia | sulle classi povere dell'Africa | sui popoli schiavi del mondo sottoproletario | scrivo il tuo nome || libertà!»: P.P. Pasolini, *La rabbia*, p. 395.

⁵⁶ On which see L. Caminati, *Orientalismo eretico. Pier Paolo Pasolini e il cinema del Terzo Mondo*, Milano: Mondadori, 2007. For a harsh "postcolonial critique": G. Giuliani, *Pier Paolo Pasolini and the Decolonizing/Postcolonial Subaltern: for a Post-colonial Critique*, in *Cinema italiano postcoloniale*, ed. by L. Caminati-V. Deplano-D. Garofalo-L. Peretti, «Cinema e Storia», 13/1, 2024, pp. 173-204.

⁵⁷ P.P. Pasolini, *La rabbia*, cit., p. 371. See also M. Mellino-A. Ruben Pomella (eds.), *Marx nei margini. Dal marxismo nero al femminismo postcoloniale*, Roma: Alegre, 2020.

Left, connects in an ideal constellation the partisans of the European Resistance to Nazi-Fascism, the struggles of decolonization, and the subalterns of an «Africa» that «begins on the outskirts of Rome, includes our Meridione, part of Spain, Greece, the Mediterranean states, and the Middle East».⁵⁸

As says Pasolini-Bassani commenting in *La Rabbia* on images of Algerians celebrating the liberation of their country:

Coloured people, it is the days of victory
of all the partisans of the world!

People of colour, these are the days of victory
in which the Resistance plants roots and founds the future!⁵⁹

ANDREA BRAZZODURO

⁵⁸ P.P. Pasolini, *La resistenza negra*, in *Letterature negra*, ed. by M. De Andrade, Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1961, p. xxiii.

⁵⁹ «Gente di colore, sono i giorni della vittoria | di tutti i partigiani del mondo! || Gente di colore, sono i giorni della vittoria | che la Resistenza pianta le radici e fonda il futuro!»: P.P. Pasolini, *La rabbia*, p. 396. On the “moment 1962” see M. Rahal, *Algérie 1962. Une histoire populaire*, Paris : La Découverte, 2022.



THE GLOBAL
SIXTY-EIGHT AND
ITS AFTERMATH

Cold War in Africa, Détente in Europe, and the Antinomies of Revolutionary Internationalism in the Aftermath of 1968

Historians mostly look at the late “global 1960s” as introducing to the end of the postwar world order, the gradual implosion of the bipolar system, and the definitive emergence of the post-colonial universe. Global perspectives help to provide the sense of a deep transformation announcing the making of our times – because of the intersection of new impulses to integration and fracture, the interaction of long-term processes with a multiplicity of actors, cultures and languages, the shifting role of nation states as unprecedented transnational dynamics surfaced, the shaping of a new economic world order. In that context, our understanding of the international dimension has shown an increasing complexity while also maintaining a crucial intellectual significance. However, the tendency to represent such complexity in terms of the birth of a “global community” – based on networks emancipated from the existence itself of nation states – seems quite one-sided and disputable as a way to analyze contradictory and differing historical phenomena. In particular, we should see the encounter between communism and decolonization in the light of political global projects leading to divergences and conflicts. The establishment of relations between the Second and the Third World resulted more in divisions within the “Socialist camp” than in the expected advances of Soviet-type socialism, while Third Worldism mainly offered ideas and visions competing with international communism.¹ The conjuncture of the “global 1968” further added to those scenarios by making irreconcilable the fractures inherited from the previous decade. It exposed the crisis of communist internationalism, both as a consequence of the Sino-soviet split and as an epiphany of profound social and genera-

¹ S. Pons, *The Global Revolution. A History of International Communism*, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. On the development of internationalism and the roots of a “global community” see A. Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

tional changes, disconnected from the old ethos of sacrifice and rejecting the binary thinking of the Cold War. The tension between Cold War-minded approaches and post-colonial actors was unresolved – and in the communist world tension remained between the mantra of “peaceful coexistence” and anti-imperialist militant traditions.

However, the crisis of communist internationalism probably represented the most visible factor of a predicament of all major internationalist political visions. The era of the opposition between Wilson and Lenin, as symbolic figures of alternative projects of world order, was at its twilight. Henry Kissinger and Leonid Brezhnev respectively symbolized a crisis of the Wilsonian legacy and the sclerosis of Leninist principles.² The binary logic of East-West antagonism appeared obsolete to many people globally, and less meaningful than the imperatives of peace and Third World development. The Vietnam war catalysed a widespread criticism of the United States while it was not enough to maintain the unity of the communist movement. The Prague Spring and its repression implied instead all-round criticism of any imperial dominance and Cold War discipline. Young people were protagonists of a rupture by subverting hierarchies of sense, even if their accomplishments would not correspond to their dreams. They influenced the *esprit du temps* by shaping new ways to imagine a post-Cold War world and delegitimized either communist or liberal projects, by radically criticizing established traditions. However, the movements of the “global 1968” also exploded in a fragmented multitude of transnational networks.³

Post-colonial nationalism rather forged the main mobilizing ideas of a new world order – even if the revolutionary wave of decolonization was decreasing in the second half of the decade.⁴ The growth in representation of post-colonial countries at the United Nations con-

² F. Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century: US Foreign Policy since 1900*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001, p. 235; O.A. Westad, *The Cold War. A World History*, London: Allen Lane, 2017, pp. 365 ff.

³ M. Bracke-J. Mark, *Between Decolonization and the Cold War: Transnational Activism and its Limits in Europe, 1950s-1990s*, «Journal of Contemporary History», 50/3, 2015, pp. 403-417.

⁴ A. Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: the Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019; M. Thomas, *The End of Empires and a World Remade. A Global History of Decolonization*, Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2024.

tributed to weaken the credibility of old internationalist traditions and emphasize new languages from the Global South.⁵ The reinvention of internationalism passed through multiple combinations of post-colonial sovereignties, resistance against Superpower influence, agendas of development, non-Soviet socialist visions. A plurality of actors mostly counterposed the problems of the post-colonial world to the Cold War itself – something they shared with the movements of 1968 – and also took distances from the Eurocentric visions of secular revolutionary traditions – thus menacing a subversion of established identities and practices. But they also had to come to terms both with their own diversity in national characters and with internationalist legacies in the world system – which opened the way to diverging visions. The mythology of the Third World as a political project declined since alternative visions of the Global South were competing with each other. The fragmented landscape of the Third World needed to be seriously reconsidered as decolonization had not produced the emancipatory impact expected by many. As Jeffrey Byrne remarks, two different fractures overlapped: the split between Moscow and Beijing and their competition for international influence, along the North–South divide, on one side; the growing opposition between the exclusive Afro-Asian paradigm, mainly put forward by Maoism, and the inclusive strategy of the Non-aligned movement (NAM), along the South-South line, on the other side.⁶ Thus, diverging visions of the global role of socialism intersected competing interpretations of the Third World by the end of the 1960s.

In my chapter, I will focus on the efforts to relaunch NAM and on the crisis of international communism, in the context of the global Cold War and of détente in Europe. These two movements – composed of both state and non-state subjects – were by far the most important in the universe of secular revolutionary anti-imperialism. A substantial fracture between the two movements, previously emerged in the decade, deepened in the aftermath of 1968. At the same time, they also showed transversal divisions and antinomies that were

⁵ M. Mazower, *Governing the World. The History of an Idea*, New York: Penguin, 2012, pp. 269 ff.

⁶ J.J. Byrne, *Beyond Continents, Colours, and the Cold War: Yugoslavia, Algeria, and the Struggle for Non-Alignment*, «The International History Review», 37/5, 2015, pp. 912-932. See also Id., *The Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, p. 282.

never reconciled. Africa was in many respects the major theatre for competing actors and visions of the meanings and perspectives of revolutionary internationalism – no less important than events in Asia that mainly attracted the imaginary of young generations and public opinion in the West.

The global repercussions of the invasion of Czechoslovakia

The European aftermath of the Prague Spring is well known. The military intervention of the Warsaw Pact in August 1968 and the repression of reform-minded communists was soon followed by détente in the bipolar order. The invasion of Czechoslovakia could even be seen as a decisive passage for the negotiations which would lead to the Helsinki Final Act seven years later. Historians have often described détente as a common design of the two superpowers, aimed at containing the forces of change from below. Petra Goedde, for instance, maintains that the great powers adopted the “politics of peace” earlier put forward by the oppositionists of the Cold War, with the goal of coopting them into their system – though eventually transnational networks would undermine the Cold War system.⁷ However, different actors had diverging ideas of what détente should bring about. The conservative project apparently shared by Washington and Moscow was hardly consistent in itself – while unintended consequences emerged very early even in the European context as strategies of regulation and control from above revealed their limits. Within such framework, the active role of European actors achieved a new dimension and influence, particularly because of the launching of Ostpolitik by the social-democratic government formed in West Germany by the end of 1969. However, the main point is that the order of détente was limited to Europe. European stability implied global instability. In such respect, the conservative response of the great powers to the “global 68” fueled a series of fractures, created by imperial rivalries but also by autonomous actors. The predicament, reinvention, and fragmentation of internationalist political cultures represented a fundamental component of such a landscape.

The repression of the Prague Spring created a sense of frustration

⁷ P. Goedde, *The Politics of Peace. A Global Cold War History*, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

and disenchantment for intellectuals as well as reformers in the communist establishments. Nevertheless, Prague represented a nexus between democratization and Europeanization which was not exclusively related to the Soviet sphere of influence. Humanistic socialism became in Europe an alternative project to Maoism and militant anti-imperialism, putting in question the legitimacy of the party-State as a model for global state-building - even though its legacy was limited to Europe and the Soviet Union.⁸ However, while historians have started to analyze the world diffusion of Maoism, they have probably underestimated the global repercussions of the repression of the Prague Spring. Outside Europe, the rise and fall of humanistic socialism had no authentic relevance, even less among the national elites leaning on the Soviet side. But the invasion of Czechoslovakia had its own impact as several actors rejected the Soviet violation of state sovereignty and saw the “Brezhnev doctrine” as just a pretext for great power intrusion. The authority of the Soviet Union as an internationalist subject was undermined both in Europe and in the Third World. In such respect, Prague disclosed a significant ambivalence that has not been fully appreciated yet. The message of humanistic socialism implied a renovate focus on Europe as an undivided political space, while the outcome of its suppression played out rather in favor of the discourses and practices of Non-alignment in the Third World.

The role of Yugoslavia was central as a mouthpiece. Belgrade feared the specter of a Soviet invasion, but did not approach the question exclusively in terms of national security. Tito enhanced the issue of sovereignty, which was crucial to Non-alignment and maintained a crucial importance in the post-colonial world, even in the aftermath of independence. His criticism against the Warsaw Pact intervention was no tougher than others - particularly criticism by the Chinese or the Italian communists - but its potential influence was even wider because of the networks created by the Yugoslavs in the past decade. Two months after the invasion, Moscow revealed serious concern for Belgrade’s activism in Asia and Africa. The Soviets believed that the Yugoslav proposal to convene a new conference of Non-aligned countries had the objective to condemn the theory and practice of “limited sovereignty”. A CPSU directive instructed Soviet ambassa-

⁸ S. Pons-M. Di Donato, *Reform Communism*, in *The Cambridge History of Communism*, III, *Endgames? Late Communism in Global Perspective, 1968 to the Present*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 178-202.

dors to counter Yugoslav influence – even though remarking that countries as India, Nigeria, and the Arab United Republic had coldly reacted to such proposal.⁹ Tito's idea received no unanimous support indeed. Nasser preferred to avoid damaging relations with Moscow in the aftermath of the Six Day War. Indira Ghandi chose a prudent conduct as tensions between India and China suggested preserving good relations with the Soviet Union.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the invasion of Czechoslovakia produced significant reactions. Soon after the invasion, the Algerian leaders confidentially expressed to a representative of the Italian Communist Party, Romano Ledda, their critical evaluation as they saw the “logic of blocs” suppressing “national ways”. They maintained that there was hardly sense for anyone in the Third World to fully accept the Soviet reason of state – though they also did not want to compromise their economic relations with the Soviet Union. The charismatic leader of Guinea Bissau, Amilcar Cabral, a crucial personality in the liberation movements against Portuguese colonialism, also was extremely critical and assumed that Moscow was unprepared to understand the diversities of revolutionary realities in the world. At the same time, he thought that a “referendum” on Czechoslovakia would greatly damage the anti-imperialist front. In fact, significant differences had already emerged between those African leaders who approved the Soviet intervention – such as Sekou Tourè in Guinea – and those who publicly condemned it – such as Julius Nyerere in Tanzania. Even the leaders of liberation movements in Southern Africa were divided as Marcelino Dos Santos of Mozambique shared Cabral's views while Agostino Neto of Angola supported the intervention.¹¹

Belgrade was well aware of the limits to open criticism towards Moscow in the Arab countries and in Africa. Still, their goal was not public stance of the Non-aligned countries on Czechoslovakia. Their strategy was enough flexible to admit that «the issue of Czechoslovakia would not be discussed» openly, in order to involve the Arab countries. They rather aimed to «intensify the collaboration and joint activities» between key countries, based on the principle that «the world must not

⁹ *Prager Frühling. Das Internationale Krisenjahr 1968, Dokumente*, doc. 171, Köln-Weimar-Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2008, pp. 1284-1289.

¹⁰ J. Čavoški, *Non-Aligned Movement Summits. A History*, London-New York: Bloomsbury, 2022, p. 109.

¹¹ Fondazione Gramsci, Archivio del Partito Comunista Italiano (APC), Estero, Information by R. Ledda, mf 552, 20-23, 26 September 1968.

be left to the mercy of big and strong countries, and that small countries can be powerful only if they are united».¹² Between the end of 1968 and early 1969, diplomatic consultations particularly to India, Indonesia, Ethiopia and Egypt led the Yugoslavs to believe that contacts were developing «after the initial period of hesitation and confusion caused by the intervention in Czechoslovakia». They knew that Moscow accused them of using instrumentally Non-alignment to enhance their anti-Soviet stance on the issue of Czechoslovakia. Consequently, Tito reassured his interlocutors that such an issue would not appear on any official agenda.¹³ He still assumed, however, that various Third World actors could hardly see any longer their proximity with the “Socialist camp” as a condition for sovereign independence. Such an idea was quite influential, even if not openly argued in official gatherings. One year later, in a conversation with Tito, Zambia’s president Kenneth Kaunda quite significantly affirmed that «the intervention in Czechoslovakia has damaged the USSR irreparably. Moscow has been compromised in the eyes of African and other countries. I personally have lost any confidence in the USSR, although I’ve chosen socialism (...). But the socialism we aspire to is significantly different from the one practiced and imposed on other countries by the Soviet Union».¹⁴

Belgrade was successful in organizing a consultative meeting, in spite of reluctance by many actors. The Algerians, in particular, disliked an inclusive approach and preferred to restrain alliances to “progressive” regimes such as Syria, Iraq, Guinea, Congo Brazzaville. They opposed the perspective itself of a new conference of Non-alignment. The Yugoslavs knew that they feared to displease the Soviet Union, though their stance on Czechoslovakia remained ambivalent.¹⁵ In fact, an Algerian delegation had visited Moscow in March 1969 to reaffirm the relationship between the two countries and ask support for the Palestinian cause – but avoided taking a definite position both on China and Czechoslovakia.¹⁶ Despite all problems, the meeting took place in Belgrade in July 1969 with more than fifty countries taking part. Previous divisions were not overcome – particularly between Yugoslavia and Al-

¹² Kabinet Predsednika Republike (KPR), Belgrade, State Secretariat for Foreign Affairs, I-4-a/7, 16 December 1968.

¹³ KPR, I-4-a/7, 24 February 1969.

¹⁴ KPR, I-2/44-2, 7 February 1970.

¹⁵ KPR, I-4-a/7, 10 June 1969.

¹⁶ APC, Estero, 1969, mf 0308, note by D. Forti, 2 april 1969.

geria and their respective allies. The Algerians maintained their vision of an alliance exclusively limited to radical anti-imperialist actors. But Tito reached his objective of relaunching the global role of NAM five years after its second conference. A third conference was planned to be held the following year.¹⁷ Neither Tito nor other leaders made mention of Czechoslovakia – but the discourse against great power interference was eloquent enough. We can establish, therefore, a momentous connection between the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the relaunching of NAM at the end of the decade. Both Kissinger and Brezhnev failed to see such a connection and maintained that NAM would hardly become a significant international factor.¹⁸ Historians also have sometimes neglected Tito’s strategy to exploit the rejection of Soviet “limited sovereignty” doctrine for reshaping the project of NAM.¹⁹

Communist internationalism in crisis

A few weeks before the Belgrade meeting, on 5-17 June 1969, a conference of world communism was convened in Moscow. The Soviet leaders originally planned the conference to condemn the Chinese heresy, but it obviously also became the occasion for an approval of the “normalization” of Czechoslovakia by communist parties. On both counts, Moscow celebrated its authority and control over the communist movement, having defeated the Chinese challenge and suppressed the reform attempt of the “Prague Spring”. Seventy communist parties excommunicated Maoism, though the conference exhibited a fragile and deceptive unity. The most important Asian parties did not participate, as well as the Yugoslavs. The Italian communists sent a delegation only to confirm their disagreement on the invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Romanians reaffirmed their autonomy within the Warsaw Pact. Brezhnev and his leading group, however, believed to credibly relaunch communist internationalism by combining «peaceful coexistence» with anti-imperialism – in other words, the defense of Soviet state interest and support for liberation

¹⁷ J. Čavoški, *Non-Aligned Movement Summits*, p. 113.

¹⁸ J. Dinkel, *The Non Aligned Movement: Genesis, Organization and Politics (1927-1992)*, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2019, pp. 121-122.

¹⁹ R. Niebuhr, *The Search for a Cold War Legitimacy. Foreign Policy and Tito’s Yugoslavia*, Boston: Brill, 2018, pp. 115 ff.

struggles from Vietnam to Palestine. Brezhnev acknowledged the difficulties created by the «new front» of neo-colonialism to «non-capitalist development» in the global South, but had no solutions to offer besides unconditional confidence in the Soviet Union. His vision was centered on the «relations of strength» with the capitalist world and the need to respond to the «militarization» fueled by the West on a global scale.²⁰ Speaking after the conclusion of the world conference to the Central Committee of the CPSU, the Soviet leader felt satisfied with the condemnation of the Chinese by the majority of world communism and with the containment of dissent in Western Europe – as the French communists withdrew their earlier reproach, leaving the Italians alone. He proudly denied that talking of a «crisis of international communism» made any sense.²¹

However, the liturgy of the conference could not hide flaws and contradictions. The Italian communists kept alive criticism in Europe – by denouncing a «crisis of internationalism» because of the split with China and the Warsaw Pact intervention to suppress the “Prague Spring”. Arab and African communists let surface another kind of divergence in spite of their loyalty to Moscow. They were not interested in European reform-minded communists and even saw them as masked social democrats compromising the unity of the movement. The head of the delegation of the Algerian “party of socialist avantgarde”, L. Bouhali, sided with the Soviet Union up to the point to blame their own government for missing to recognize East Germany, thus undermining «European security», which implicitly meant support to the invasion of Czechoslovakia. However, they considered the final document weak on the issue of supporting anti-imperialist liberation movements, even if they accepted it. They criticized their own government for limiting progressive policies closer to Soviet-type socialism – even though acknowledging its commitment to the anti-imperialist cause. In practice, they approved the Algerian government’s basic positions about Palestine and Southern Africa, but also feared the influence of conservative components on foreign policy.²² In this way, they in fact asked for further commitment of Moscow to the Arab cause against Israel and the United States. Although the

²⁰ Rossiiskiy Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii (RGANI), Moscow, f. 10, op. 1, d. 309.

²¹ RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 159.

²² RGANI, f. 10, op. 1, d. 351.

Soviet Union had already intensified its alliances with radical regimes and movements in the Arab world, that was not enough.²³

The Algerian communists thus represented a voice in favor of radicalization in the Third World, while totally accepting Soviet strategy in Europe. The same can be said of other delegations from Africa. They saw recent military subversion of Socialist regimes in Congo Brazzaville and Mali as a demonstration of increasing imperialist aggression – which also was a shared evaluation with the European communists.²⁴ The South African communists complained that too much attention had been devoted to Europe. They raised the question of Czechoslovakia only to remark how critical positions had «no support at all in our movement» – a message addressed to the Italian communists. They accepted the final document as well, but disagreed with any formulation opened to collaboration with other forces outside the movement, particularly European social democracy. «We have fresh memories», said the head of the delegation, J. Marks, «of the betrayal of the French socialist party over Algeria». He even declared that social democracy played a role in West Germany's «alliance with fascist South Africa». Their basic argument was that a war of liberation had already begun in the entire region of Southern Africa, and this would inevitably produce a wider international impact.²⁵ Such an argument was extremely serious and implied greater involvement by the Soviet Union. Small and marginal as they were, communists in Africa still represented a significant agency. They voiced visions that were shared by various subjects and could influence the Soviet conduct. The sense of commitment to Southern Africa's affairs in the CPSU International Department should be understood also as a consequence of pressure from local communists.²⁶ But the thrust towards a new wave of radicalization had a global dimension exceeding the boundaries of the communist movement and its schism. In such light, the intervention of Cuba's observer, Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, was quite relevant, as his country was also a member of NAM.

²³ V. Zubok, *Failed Empire. The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2009, p. 199.

²⁴ G. Siracusano, *Pronto per la rivoluzione! I comunisti italiani e francesi e la decolonizzazione in Africa centro-occidentale (1958-1968)*, Roma: Carocci, 2022.

²⁵ RGANI, f. 10, op. 1, d. 363.

²⁶ O.A. Westad, *The Global Cold War. Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 205, 218.

Cuba had pursued its own internationalist strategy by gathering the Tricontinental conference in Havana in 1966 – a project intended to break with the Bandung tradition of neutralism and relaunch a revolutionary connection between socialism and Third Worldism.²⁷ In the aftermath of the conference, relations with the Soviet Union had reached their lowest level from the time of the missile crisis. The efforts of Havana to fuel armed struggle in Latin America disappointed Moscow, as they jeopardized bipolar détente. Even after the death of Che Guevara, Fidel Castro maintained his standing as a foe of détente and a champion of militant anti-imperialism.²⁸ However, the strategy launched by the Tricontinental had made no significant progress by 1968. Cuba represented the hub of radical Third Worldism, but revolutionary actions in Latin America and in Africa were in a stalemate, even if the African scenario promised to be much more dynamic. Castro took the chance of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia to mitigate tensions. Though acknowledging that the Warsaw Pact had violated Czechoslovakia's sovereignty, he proclaimed his approval of the use of force against the Prague Spring as a necessary defense of the «Socialist camp».²⁹ Thus, he chose the priority of loyalty to the «socialist community» – that in his view was menaced by Dubček – over the defense of national sovereignty – that had been so relevant to the Cuban revolution. The election of Richard Nixon as president of the United States and the final rupture between Moscow and Beijing combined to confirm that choice. Most importantly, Castro's support to the Soviet military intervention had consequences in the divisions of the Third World, no less than within the communist movement.

In this light, the decision to send an observer of Havana to the world conference in Moscow was a demonstration of proximity more than a sign of divergence. The Cuban representative took the chance to formulate a strategy still inspired by militant anti-imperialism though in terms of re-alignment to the Soviet Union. On one side, he

²⁷ *The Tricontinental Revolution. Third World Radicalism and the Cold War*, edited by R.J. Parrott-M.A. Lawrence, Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

²⁸ P. Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions. Havana, Washington, and Africa 1959-1976*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002, pp. 217 ff.

²⁹ P. Gleijeses, *The Cuban Revolution: the First Decade*, in *The Cambridge History of Communism.*, II, *The Socialist Camp and World Power, 1945-1960s*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 364-387.

supported the invasion of Czechoslovakia and hinted to Western attempts to destabilize the Soviet bloc. On the other side, he rescued an opposition dating back to previous years, and proclaimed the priority of anti-imperialist struggles over «peaceful coexistence». The death of Che Guevara, he promised, did not mark the end but the start of a new revolutionary phase in Latin America and elsewhere.³⁰ Several participants saw Cuba as a very influent actor and a model to follow. This was, for instance, the vision of Nigerian communists as they reported on the civil war in their own country and the secession of Biafra.³¹ In other words, communists from the Global South provided unconditional support for the Soviet theory and practice of “limited sovereignty” in Eastern Europe. However, their alignment also implied pressure for increased Soviet action outside Europe under the sign of anti-imperialism – something that should better exploit the predicament of the United States in Vietnam. Cuba clearly was assuming the role of a hub in such context – both by promising to fuel militant internationalism and contain the moderating influence of Yugoslavia.

As the two conferences of world communism and of Non-aligned countries convened, in June-July 1969, the connection between the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the start of détente between the great powers was becoming evident. The launching of the “Brezhnev doctrine” in November 1968 had soon assumed the character of a vision of stability proposed to the West – one that in Soviet intentions would lead to complete the Yalta agreements and allow Moscow to turn fully into a global player. Scholars have mainly underlined the short-sightedness of the “Brezhnev doctrine” – which was indeed an improvised discourse aimed at providing ideological legitimacy for the military intervention – as its inefficacy was later demonstrated by persistent in-subordination in the Soviet sphere of influence.³² But contemporaries had no such retrospective understanding while that vision of stability made sense to the Western decision-makers.

As Mario Del Pero has observed, what changed in 1968-1969 was not the practice of détente but its conceptualization. The main points of such change were the awareness of the limits of American power, the priority of security over universal principles, the existence of recip-

³⁰ RGANI, f. 10, op. 1, d. 353.

³¹ RGANI, f. 10, op. 1, d. 359.

³² M.J. Ouimet, *The Rise and Fall of the Brezhnev Doctrine in Soviet Foreign Policy*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

rocal interests between the two powers – particularly, containment of centrifugal pressures in both the European spheres.³³ The “Brezhnev doctrine” was a primary component of a turn towards consensual bipolarism. At the start of 1969, the newly elected American president and former Cold Warrior, Richard Nixon, launched what he called «the era of negotiation». If the nightmare of Vietnam represented the basic impulse for the American political turn, the authoritarian “normalization” in Prague, implemented without any authentic Western objection, showed the content of the deal. Kissinger’s geopolitical paradigm emerged in this European context. The escalation of the conflict between the Soviet Union and China, in March 1969, contributed not only to the excommunication of Maoism, but also to Moscow’s further search for stability in the European “socialist camp”. Then Western Europe also emerged as an actor, as German social democracy won the elections and Willy Brandt could launch his Ostpolitik in October 1969. In a meeting of the Warsaw Pact held in December 1969, Brezhnev obtained approval of dialogue with the Federal Republic of Germany in spite of East Germany’s reluctance. Retrospectively, a few years later, the Soviet leader maintained that «without Czechoslovakia there wouldn’t have been Brandt in Germany, Nixon to Moscow and not even détente»³⁴.

Non-aligned internationalism

As détente developed in Europe, Tito carried on his effort to defend and relaunch a role for Non-alignment. His principal interlocutor was the president of Tanzania Nyerere – one of the most convinced advocates of pan-africanism and socialism, who was also becoming a crucial supporter of Non-alignment.³⁵ Nyerere met Tito in Belgrade on 15-16 October 1969, after visiting Moscow. The understanding between the two leaders went much further than general discourses shared with the

³³ M. Del Pero, *Henry Kissinger e l’ascesa dei neoconservatori. Alle origini della politica estera americana*, Bari-Roma: Laterza, 2006.

³⁴ A. Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod. Dnevnik dvukh epokh 1972-1991*, Moskva: Rosspen, 2008.

³⁵ S. Onslow, *Tanzania, the Non-Aligned movement and Non-Alignment*, in *The 60th Anniversary of the Non-Aligned Movement*, edited by D. Dimitrijević-J. Čavoški, Belgrade: IIPE, 2021.

Soviets about support to liberation movements in Africa. Czechoslovakia still was an issue. Tito remarked he had disagreed with Brezhnev about the menace of «counter-revolution» in Prague, either domestically or inspired by West Germany, and also had warned in vain how the invasion would damage «the global socialist cause». He also made clear to perceive no authentic threat from Moscow – answering to Nyerere’s question – but maintained that the invasion had jeopardized for some time Europe’s perspectives of stabilization. Both agreed, anyway, on the importance of détente in Europe for world affairs. Nyerere’s view of Africa was a contrasting one between instability and potentialities. He regretted Nkrumah’s fall, but also spoke of himself as the gradualist alternative to Ghana former president’s impatience. He saw the decolonization of Southern Africa as decisive for the fate of the entire continent but also maintained that the influence of all great powers should be limited as far as possible. He believed that Tanzania, Zambia and «other friendly countries» had sufficient resources to support guerrilla warfare and help the liberation of Portuguese Africa. Elsewhere in the continent, he argued, though several coups d’état in recent years had weakened «progressive forces», for instance in Mali, a process of «consolidation» was possible and required renewed attention to the problem of development. In his vision of Africa’s future, the decisive point still was to get rid of great powers’ influence. He mentioned Nigeria as the obvious case, to reject the usual idea that tribalism had been the crucial factor for the outbreak of violence. British interests in Biafra had rather fueled a war, while peaceful separation could have been accomplished between different peoples that only colonial rule had assembled. «The war in Nigeria», he said, was «not the consequence of tribal or religious conflicts but of external influence». The two leaders basically shared very similar views of world affairs. In particular, they agreed on the recognition of Israel even after the Six Day War and the recovery of relations with China after the Cultural Revolution. They established to gather a meeting in Dar es Salaam to prepare a new conference of NAM.³⁶

Having established an alliance with Nyerere, Tito turned out to set up a rapprochement with Algeria in his visit of 5-9 November 1969. The Algerian foreign ministry, Bouteflika, spoke now a language quite close to Belgrade’s views. He stated in fact that though «the Great pow-

³⁶ KPR, I-3-a/115-4, 15-16 October 1969. For a Soviet record of Nyerere’s meetings with the Soviet leaders, see *SSSR i strany Afriki*, Moscow: Politizdat, 1982, pp. 184-188.

ers have asserted themselves as the guarantees of order and of their concepts of peace» and were «evading a direct atomic conflict between themselves» they engaged «in series of contained wars in various parts of the Third World». Consequently, he said, «the nations who suffer the most from use of force must be among the “main architects of peace”». The Yugoslav report noticed how Algerian intransigence had been partly mitigated – and even their approval of the Soviet military presence in the Mediterranean was subject to reservations. In their conversations, Tito and Houari Boumedienne established an essential convergence – though with some significantly differing nuances. Both leaders agreed that peaceful coexistence should not represent a framework allowing the intervention of great powers, as was the case in the Arab-Israeli conflict. In this light, they confirmed reciprocal commitment to overcome different views of Non-alignment. Their exchange on the Soviet Union, however, showed some significant discrepancy. Boumedienne defined Algeria’s relations with the Soviet Union as «friendly» but also expressed disappointment «with the fact that they love to, in one way or another, interfere in internal affairs of other states». Tito’s opinion was much harsher as he declared that «they have shown no understanding for the importance of progressive and liberation movements in the global struggle for socialism». Boumedienne noticed that something had changed, as Moscow eventually accepted such movements «as allies in the struggle against imperialism». But the Yugoslav leader disagreed: «Tito responded that what Boumedienne noted is only partially true. The Russians see such movements as the “reserve”, as second-rate partners – while the communist are first rate partners, in spite of their limited real political power».³⁷

The exchange between Tito and Boumedienne was quite meaningful. Moscow played in fact a double role as a self-declared pillar of anti-imperialist struggles and as a protagonist of the globalizing Cold War. As bipolar détente was being established in Europe, it was unclear if and how the Soviets rather adopted a paradigm of confrontation in the Third World. At the same time, their approach to Non-alignment remained divisive, and even more so in the aftermath of the invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Soviet Union continued asserting itself as the key partner of liberation movements and post-colonial progressive regimes – providing aid and military assistance – and tried to impose the priorities of its own Cold War outlook. Communist internationalism,

³⁷ KPR, I-2/43, 8 November 1969.

however, represented a divided and fragmented subject in Europe, Asia, and Africa, while being increasingly subordinate to Soviet power interest. As the conversation between Tito and Boumediene shows, the leading actors of Non-alignment had to deal with the ambiguities of such scenarios. Reflections in Africa were extremely serious. For instance, as Algeria applied to liberation movements its approach to privilege relations with politically close actors, a conflict emerged with Tanzania, particularly as it supported Biafra's secession struggle.³⁸

Tito continued to explore all chances to relaunch NAM that surfaced in the aftermath of 1968. In January 1970 he traveled to Tanzania to meet Nyerere again and plan the consultative meeting to be held in two months in Dar es Salaam. In his conversation of 27 January with the African leader, Tito remarked how the scenario of the great powers increasingly «conducting their conflicts on African soil» required an adequate response that could not any longer be limited to small countries creating their protective networks. Non-aligned countries should make an effort to «participate in resolving problems that affect them» and also «global issues» as they were not «a prerogative of great powers». The two leaders acknowledged that dialogue between the superpowers was a positive development and looked with interest at the idea of a conference on cooperation and security in Europe. They even maintained that European peace was in the interest of all countries and appreciated the policy of the Brandt's government. In other terms, where Brezhnev established separated scenarios they saw interdependences – a category that Tito had already employed at the second conference of Non-alignment held in Cairo in 1964. At the same time, both leaders thought that a new activism of Non-aligned countries was indispensable, focusing on vital economic issues as the only way to ensure authentic independence. The main arena remained the UN Assembly. In Tito's words, besides resolving the question of China's inclusion in the UN, support or opposition to the «codification» of peaceful coexistence and to «definitive decolonization» was what made the difference – as «the moral factor» still was important in world affairs.³⁹ Quite clearly, Tito and Nyerere were not shifting from a political discourse to an economic one, as historians have sometimes interpreted the turn of 1970.⁴⁰ The idea of «definitive decolonization»

³⁸ KPR, I-2/43, Report on Algeria, November 1969.

³⁹ KPR, I-2/44-1, 27 January 1970.

⁴⁰ J. Čavoški, *Non-Aligned Movement Summits*, p. 116.

rather implied a new political reading of economic issues to relaunch Non-alignment, besides continuing support to national liberation movements.

Tito confirmed the priority of «full decolonization» as he met representatives of the liberation movements in Portuguese Africa and South Africa, based in Tanzania and Zambia – Agostinho Neto of MPLA (Angola), Samora Machel of FRELIMO (Mozambique), Alfred Nzo of the African National Congress of South Africa, and the leaders of SWAPO (Namibia), ZAPU (Zimbabwe), and MNLC (Comore Islands). All of them recognized the crucial role of Yugoslavia in providing aid and assistance. Tito insisted asking what were the margins of legal action for each movement, though receiving negative responses.⁴¹ Thus, Yugoslavia confirmed its unique standing, as it maintained relations with different actors of the global South, from post-colonial states to liberation movements in arms, while challenging the Cold War system. That was a crucial role and a strategic goal as well, since radical pressures from anti-imperialist movements could diverge from Non-alignment or limit its project. The conversation made no mention of recent tensions between president Nyerere and the ANC, though it had obviously serious implications for the latter's armed struggle. In fact, South African communists had to move their bases away from Tanzania in late 1969, as their connections with the Soviet Union created fierce strain after the government's decision to break relations with “normalized” Czechoslovakia. Even among cadres of the ANC, divisions surfaced on how to deal with Nyerere's firm stance against the invasion of Czechoslovakia.⁴²

After Tanzania, Tito made a second important stop to Zambia, where he met another key ally as Kaunda on 3 February. Like Nyerere, the president of Zambia shared Belgrade's positive attitude towards a European conference on security and cooperation and insisted on the need to engage South Africa in the UN by using political and diplomatic means. Kaunda also stressed how Zambia had condemned the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia «with the same vigor as it criticized US policy in Vietnam», thus rejecting «the theory of limited sovereignty». This meant that inclusiveness in the movement could not refer to «aligned» countries. Such views, however, were hardly

⁴¹ KPR, I-2/44-1, 1 February 1970.

⁴² T. Lodge, *Red Road to Freedom. History of the South African Communist Party 1921-2021*, Oxford: James Currey, 2021, pp. 376-379.

common to other subjects. The two leaders agreed on circumscribing a unified agenda for Non-alignment – opposition against the «politics of force» and «limited sovereignty» to open the way for aid to development and «definitive decolonization».⁴³ Thus the agenda of the third meeting of NAM, to be held in Lusaka, was established. In the Yugoslav vision of Non-alignment, Africa occupied now the central place. The construction of Africa as a “Non-aligned continent” was amplified internationally by Belgrade.⁴⁴ This was not just imagination. A new generation of anticolonial leaders, primarily represented by Nyerere, emerged to play a crucial role.⁴⁵

In his speech to the preparatory meeting in Dar es Salaam, on 13 April 1970, Nyerere underlined the importance of relaunching the movement along the lines agreed with Tito. Since the Conference held in Cairo in 1964, he stated, the Cold War had become «less simple», the Iron Curtain «less solid» – even if the great powers had responded by using force – and the «power game» was three-sided as Non-alignment had become «a policy of involvement in world affairs». The Tanzanian leader remarked the continuity of the original inspiration («by Non alignment we are saying to the Big Powers that we also belong to this planet») but also maintained that the next conference should lead to a progress of the movement, while avoiding to form any kind of «bloc». The point was that independence was menaced by «the economic power of the big states» no less than by military supremacy. Economic cooperation between decolonized countries should thus become a strategic goal to negotiate just relations with the wealthy world.⁴⁶ The idea to privilege collective action instead of bilateral approaches with the West was followed by all participants, overcoming the reluctance of a key member like India.⁴⁷ The road was open for the third Non-aligned conference of September 1970 in Lusaka.

In his opening address of 8 September, the president of Zambia

⁴³ KPR, I-2/44-2, 3 February 1970.

⁴⁴ N. Radonjić, *Africa in the Global Imaginary of Socialist Yugoslavia*, in P. Stubbs (ed.), *Socialist Yugoslavia and the Non-aligned Movement. Social, Cultural, Political, and Economic Imaginaries*, Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2023, pp. 313-314.

⁴⁵ A. Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*, p. 151.

⁴⁶ J.K. Nyerere, *Non-alignment in the 1970s*, Tanzania: The United Republic of Tanzania, 1970.

⁴⁷ J. Čavoški, *Non-Aligned Movement Summits*, p. 116.

Kaunda, while presenting «common action» for cooperation to reduce dependence as a decisive step for the development of the Third World, provided quite a tense picture of international relations. He did not forget to remark how «the hydra of military invasion of one country by another, which characterized international relations before the Second World War, still rears his head in the second half of this century». Such words hinted to Indochina as well as to Czechoslovakia – an event which had made equidistance from the Superpowers much more easily defensible than in the past. Kaunda went on mentioning the racist regimes of South Africa and Rhodesia and the Portuguese colonies supported by the West. His argument was that making Third World countries «less vulnerable to outside pressures» was a vital goal, if a difficult one to achieve, in a world still subject to violence and imperial dominance. The proposal on economic cooperation had to be understood in this light.⁴⁸ Tito gave priority to Southern Africa, the Middle East, and Cambodia as sources of international trouble, while presenting détente in Europe as a positive factor which could help resolving conflicts elsewhere in the world. His key argument was that Non-aligned countries as an «active factor» internationally should focus on «problems of development in the broadest sense of the term» much more than in the past. Tito did not use the term of “internationalism” for obvious reasons, but he employed the formula of «universal progress» and peace as the ultimate sense of a «new type of international relations» destined to herald the disappearance of existing blocs.⁴⁹

The agenda proposed by Kaunda and Tito found a wide resonance in the meeting – though the latter’s appreciation of European détente passed under silence. However, basic divergences emerged as the Cuban delegation, headed by the foreign minister Raul Roa Garcia, made clear that «Cuba has not come to the Conference to speak in vain nor to compromise with imperialism» and declared that «we cannot omit» or «isolate» the Socialist countries as they represented «the most powerful force» in anti-imperialist struggles. In particular, he expressed «lack of faith» in the United Nations and asked for «effective assistance», not only political and moral solidarity, to the liberation movements of Southern Africa.⁵⁰ In fact, these words reflected more

⁴⁸ *Third Non-Aligned Nations Summit Conference*, Lusaka, Zambia, 8-10 September 1970, p. 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-32

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 200-202

ambitions than reality if related to Cuban capacities in Africa. Cuba had intense relations in military training for liberation movements, but its effective presence was limited to Guinea-Bissau, while the Chinese played a major role in Tanzania.⁵¹

However, Cuba would expand its presence in the following years. Historians have analyzed its increasing influence in Africa and its contribution to prepare the fall of the Portuguese empire. Nevertheless, they have probably failed to see how such role also represented one crucial factor in the universe of revolutionary internationalism – though less apparent than China. In fact, as Maoist internationalism imploded in the Cultural Revolution, the Cubans were probably the principal advocates of militant anti-imperialism. Their attempt to play a global vanguard function by gathering forces in the Tricontinental perspective had stalled. But the Soviet excommunication of China provided them the chance of taking over the radical spirit within the movement. They rejected the Maoist North-South divide without accepting a stabilizing vision of East-West bipolarism. In the aftermath of 1968, they mitigated their previously uncompromising rejection of “peaceful coexistence” by embracing the perspective to separate the European scene from the rest of the world. In this way, they also were an active subject of the Cold War – a troublesome ally for Moscow but still an aligned dynamic actor. At the same time, the Cubans clearly proposed themselves as an alternative to moderate leaderships of NAM and made no attempt to hide such an ambition. Some delegations in Lusaka followed their same inspiration. The representative of Guinea even asked for «rethinking the concept of Non-alignment» as they were not «neutral» between the blocs.⁵²

However, the third conference of Non-aligned countries was an obvious success for its main inspirators and organizers – Tito, Nyerere and Kaunda. Tito and Nyerere expressed each other a very positive assessment during the proceedings.⁵³ Their inclusive approach had prevailed – five years after the failure to convene a “second Bandung conference” in Algiers. The Algerians had come closer to their positions. The Indian and Indonesian delegations basically supported them. The absence of Nasser weakened the position of subjects leaning on the Soviet side. The agenda of the movement had been renovated

⁵¹ P. Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 227.

⁵² *Third Non-Aligned Nations Summit Conference*.

⁵³ KPR, I-4-a/9, 8 September 1970.

by finding a common ground on the issue of development. The perspective of “full decolonization” was connected to the ambition to modify economic relations of strength on a global scale. Not least, the topic of sovereignty was now mainly formulated in terms of equidistance from the Superpowers, more credibly than ever before. NAM represented a globalized subject, more representative than regional and continental organizations – the only such subject emerged from the past dream of the Third World as a political project.

Belgrade’s evaluation was even more positive as the final documents of the Lusaka conference were adopted by the General Assembly of the UN and «non-aligned policy has identified itself with a progressive orientation more firmly than earlier». They understood the agenda of development as «crucial for democratizing international relations». ⁵⁴ Belgrade also granted a significant connection with European politics – a role that several actors in Africa and elsewhere recognized as crucial. For instance, in his meeting with the delegations of liberation movements held during the conference in Lusaka, he informed them that German social democrats had promised their government would stop previous economic connections with racist regimes in Southern Africa and provide more aid for anti-imperialist struggles. ⁵⁵ At the same time, the Yugoslavs were aware of divisions within NAM, for instance on the idea to formally institutionalize a permanent body, rejected by India. Tito himself was not entirely satisfied, as his design to shape a universal mission for Non-alignment still had to be accepted by many actors. ⁵⁶ However, divisions were even more significant, as ideas of “reforming” the world order were either rejected or ignored by a strong minority of actors exclusively inspired by anti-imperialist militancy and closer to the Soviet Union.

More diversity than unity

In the following years, the divisions and fractures of revolutionary internationalism either emerged or strengthened in 1968 became deeper and deeper – while the scenarios of détente in Europe and of the global Cold War exhibited ever-increasing disjunctions. Major

⁵⁴ KPR, I-2/47, February 1971.

⁵⁵ KPR, I-4-a/9, 11 September 1970.

⁵⁶ J. Čavoški, *Non-Aligned Movement Summits*, p. 121.

international factors – such as Western economic instability after the end of the Bretton Woods system and rapprochement between China and the United States – only added to those trends. The Soviets and the Cubans intensified their interventions in Southern Africa, where a crucial front definitely opened both for anti-imperialist struggles and for the Cold War. The Yugoslavs further developed their own activism for Non-aligned protagonism, based on equidistance from the great powers. At the same time, Tito supported détente in his meetings with Brezhnev and Nixon. Other state actors in the Third World oscillated between bloc and non-bloc policies, which implied transversal differing visions of anti-imperialist action – particularly Algeria but also socialist governments in black Africa such as Guinea, Tanzania and Zambia. The communist movement revealed fragmentation well beyond the opposition between Moscow and Beijing – particularly since Western parties started imagining an alliance in the framework of European integration, while communists in the Global South mostly continued looking at “peaceful coexistence” as their *bête noire*.

The Soviets expanded military assistance to African liberation movements in the early 1970s. They reacted to pressure from local actors, but were also obsessed by the Chinese renewed presence after the Cultural Revolution. As Nixon announced his intention to visit Beijing after Kissinger’s secret mission, in July 1971, the Algerians remarked how such move would reinforce Chinese positions in Africa.⁵⁷ The problem of Maoism was also linked to Non-alignment, as rejection of bloc policies represented a shared view for many actors even if Beijing did not take part in the movement. Containment of NAM and criticism of any posture of “neutrality” remained a serious motivation for Moscow, even though resuming dialogue with Belgrade. As Brezhnev met Tito in September 1971, he declared Moscow’s understanding of Belgrade’s foreign policy but also mentioned the centrality of the «class principle» in international policy.⁵⁸ The Soviets believed that intensifying their activity in Africa would reinforce their credibility as a socialist power and have no effect on détente, since the Nixon Administration maintained its appeasement towards racist white regimes.⁵⁹ Then Africa became a crucial theatre of the Soviet strategy in

⁵⁷ APC, Estero, 1971, mf 162, Report on a trip to Algeria of comrade Renzo Rosso, 11 October 1971.

⁵⁸ KPR, I-3-a/101-131, September 1971.

⁵⁹ N. Telepneva, *Cold War Liberation. The Soviet Union and the Collapse of the Por-*

the Third World. Moscow even planned to convene a fourth conference of world communism to consolidate ideological legitimacy both for the policy of détente in Europe and its anti-imperialist standing outside Europe.⁶⁰ However, a prominent official of the CPSU International Department such as Anatoly Chernyaev wrote in his diary that even if the Soviet Union remained an «ideological power», in spite of official rhetorics about world communism no one knew «what to do with the movement» as its very existence was in question.⁶¹

The principal actor to make pressure on Moscow and other European socialist states for action in Africa were the Cubans. In July 1972 Fidel Castro traveled to Guinea and Algeria before visiting the European socialist countries and the Soviet Union, in a decisive move to build up Cuban internationalist engagement. Castro went to Moscow for the first time after eight years, but his road map exhibited several symbolic meanings, by connecting Latin America, Africa and the communist world. In Conakry and Algiers, the Cuban leader relaunched a global anti-imperialist mission and put emphasis on the role of «progressive countries». In his subsequent meetings with the socialist leaders such political drive was no less important than the task to integrate Cuba's economy in the Comecon. Castro publicly approved the Soviet positions on Europe, including the proposal of a conference on security and cooperation, and reaffirmed his endorsement to the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Economic dependence and acceptance of “peaceful coexistence” were considered by many observers as signs of weakness, but Cuba's anti-imperialist role was no pure rhetorics and exercised its own influence.⁶²

Castro did not extend his trip to Yugoslavia. Relations between the two countries were entirely frozen, as Castro himself was reported to have said by the Cuban ambassador to Belgrade.⁶³ Reciprocal declarations of good will led to nothing. In fact, the Cubans and the Yugoslavs represented opposed concepts of internationalism, even if converging on the objective to support liberation movements in Africa. Tito con-

tuguese Empire in Africa 1961-1975, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022, pp. 140-144.

⁶⁰ APC, Estero, 1973, mf 048, 621-29.

⁶¹ A. Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, p. 19.

⁶² APC, Estero, 1972, mf 053, Notes on Fidel Castro's trip to Africa and in the Socialist countries, July 1972.

⁶³ KPR, I-5-b/61-3, 23 May 1972.

tinued his effort to strengthen NAM as a subject struggling against the Cold War system and as a project for peaceful change of the world order. His concrete goal was to further develop the agenda of Lusaka and convene a fourth conference of NAM. However, the universe of Non-alignment required a constant effort to unity. A meeting in Georgetown, Guyana, held in August 1972 approved a very general declaration in favor of détente and economic cooperation, but broad agreements concealed divisions, once again about inclusiveness and bloc policies.⁶⁴ In early 1973, the Yugoslavs commented on a preparatory meeting to be held in Algiers by remarking how the main advancement lay in the lessening of «radicalism» in tones and arguments. The document probably hinted at Algeria but also at Cuba. In fact, the Cubans started playing an active role in the movement – much more than they had ever done earlier – especially by developing relations with Algeria. According to an information of the PCI, Castro even planned to assume the leadership of Latin American countries at the next NAM conference.⁶⁵ Such change led to a limited diplomatic rapprochement with Yugoslavia, but it also meant increasing competition between differing ideas of Non-alignment. The establishment of a credible equidistance from both blocs would in fact result seriously weakened. In that respect, the Cubans and other progressive actors, particularly in the Arab world, contributed to the unchanging vision from Moscow of Non-alignment as a minor and contingent factor in the framework of the structural alliance between the “Socialist camp”, the communist movement and Third World radical forces.⁶⁶

The conference of Non-alignment held in Algiers in September 1973 is often seen as the culmination of the movement. Inclusiveness had prevailed on exclusive views of membership. The centrality of Africa was definitively established, as African countries achieved the majority, sharing the goal of full decolonization and the problem of “neo-colonialism”. The approval of a defined platform on development and unequal economic relations was the prologue to the launching of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) at the UN, as a project aimed at a global redistribution of wealth.⁶⁷ Nevertheless,

⁶⁴ J. Čavoški, *Non-Aligned Movement Summits*, p. 139.

⁶⁵ APC, Estero, 1973, mf 046, 16 June 1973.

⁶⁶ KPR, I-4-a/15, Yugoslav embassy in Moscow, 25 July 1973.

⁶⁷ S. Lorenzini, *Global Development. A Cold War History*, Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, pp. 120-121.

the conference also represented a compromise leaving intact basic divergences and differing languages. This time the Yugoslavs failed to create a strong connection between the agenda of development and “peaceful coexistence”.⁶⁸ Competing visions of the relationship between Europe and the Global South clearly surfaced. Boumedienne provided basically shared arguments as he declared that decisions in world affairs should not be taken without the Third World – stigmatizing recent events such as the Helsinki conference in Europe and the rapprochement between Beijing and Washington – and that economic independence was the common goal. He had been quite a consistent advocate of such arguments in the preparation of the conference.⁶⁹ However, Algerian visions of a multipolar world still fluctuated between conflictual intransigence and attitude to negotiation. Algiers represented a bridge between Arab radicalism, African-Cuban anti-imperialism, relations with the “Socialist camp”, and anti-Cold War callings. But the effort to gather divergent actors and visions had obvious limitations. Indira Ghandi invoked «a new era of polycentrism and détente» and preferred to call for «responsibility» rather than «rebellion» for remaking the world order. Tito also insisted on the «moral and political responsibility» of NAM as the only existing agency of universal principles. But he emphasized how important was change in Europe in an interdependent world, as the old continent was «no longer a focus of immediate war danger» while the «policy of force» still dominated in other parts of the planet. Fidel Castro rather voiced the persistent inclinations to look at NAM as a vehicle of Third Worldism. He repeated Cuba’s opposition to establish an equivalence of the two blocs – a stance stronger in the Algiers conference than had been in Lusaka three years before.⁷⁰ Each of those readings would lead to diverging strategic perspectives, in spite of apparent unity.

⁶⁸ J. Čavoški, *Non-Aligned Movement Summits*, pp. 146, 150-151.

⁶⁹ M.L. Ghetta, *Algeria and the Cold War. International Relations and the Struggle for Autonomy*, London-New York: I. B. Tauris, 2018, pp. 101-102, 108.

⁷⁰ KPR, I-4-a/15, Conference Bulletin, September 1973. *Tito and Non-Alignment. President Tito’s Addresses at Conferences of Non-Aligned Countries*, Socialist Thought and Practice, Beograd 1979, pp. 77-92. *Algiers Conference of Non-Aligned Countries*, Government of India, 6 September 1973. See also J. Dinkel, *The Non-Aligned Movement*, p. 140.

Conclusions

In my chapter I have explored the visions and trajectories of the main actors that assumed revolutionary internationalism as a perspective of political change in the conjuncture of the late 1960s-early 1970s. I have focused on overlaps and divergences between the communist movement and the emergence of visions that changed hierarchies of sense internationally, related to the Third World. The major events of 1968 – the uprising of new radical movements and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia – imposed in different ways revisions to the notion itself of revolutionary or progressive internationalism. The anti-imperialist universe catalyzed by the Vietnam war and by various mythologies of Third Worldism had definitely its impact on the delegitimation of the structures of dominance inherited from colonialism. However, even if internationalist projects were politically alive only in the context of decolonization, they exhibited increasing divisions and fractures – particularly as radical anticolonial globalism regrouped around Cuba in the aftermath of the Tricontinental conference.⁷¹

Historians usually agree that in the aftermath of 1968 and up to mid-1970s, NAM reached the highest influence of its history and competed with Afro-Asianism and Tricontinentalism as diverging projects from the Third World. The heroic years of such personalities as Nehru, Sukarno, Nkrumah, Ben Bella and Nasser had gone into the past. Old and new protagonists (Tito, Nyerere, Boumediene) worked out for a new start. Their agenda of development, with all its general rhetorics, allowed NAM to increase its numbers, speak with a considerable consistency, and prepare the ground for the launching of the NIEO. In itself, this was a serious challenge to the West and also, in many ways, to the Socialist bloc. However, the accepted idea that the enlarged NAM based its influence exclusively upon an economic focus should be reconsidered. As I have argued, the new protagonists of NAM pursued a political project with universalist intents, though it was significantly detached from radical Third Worldism.

What were the main lines and the limits of such a project in the aftermath of 1968? According to Byrne, the principal feature should be seen in an «anti-systemic rebellion against détente», including its economic East-West dimension.⁷² However, as we have seen, some of

⁷¹ M. Thomas, *The End of Empires and a World Remade*, pp. 300-305.

⁷² J.J. Byrne, *Beyond Continents, Colours, and the Cold War*.

the key promoters of NAM in the early 1970s did not oppose détente as such, even though they clearly saw the dangers of an entente between the Superpowers. Tito, in particular, reacted against bipolar governance but also maintained his idea that a connection between European détente and the activism of Non-aligned countries would enlarge spaces of influence and interaction for minor actors globally. African leaders such as Nyerere and Kauna shared his view of the link between Europe and the Global South as a way to avoid the dominance of the Cold War system. The notion of détente was obviously subject to ambiguities. Various Third World actors hardly saw any benefit from a bipolar stabilized agreement between the great powers. Proximity to the Soviet Union meant formal acceptance of “peaceful coexistence” but also led to a divorcing of the Global South from the European scene. In other words, détente was a disputed notion and revealed deeper fractures.

Some other actors, both in the communist movement and in NAM, aimed at using the Cold War for purposes of anti-imperialist struggle and national interest as well. Fidel Castro was the key personality in such respect, while Africa and the Middle East represented the crucial scenarios. The Tricontinental had substantially failed as a revolutionary project, but its legacy still inspired radical anti-imperialist forces and visions.⁷³ Instead of rejecting bipolar antagonism as the principal source of injustice and of failures in post-colonial ambitions, however, they bet on the Soviet Union as the legitimate pillar of anti-imperialism. They exercised successful pressure on the Soviet Union as it was worried by China and Yugoslavia for different reasons. In particular, they saw Southern Africa as the theatre offering an invaluable global opportunity because of the combination between armed liberation struggles, pro-Western racist regimes, and the collapsing Portuguese empire. Intensification of the Cold War, and not its ending, was the basic objective of radical anti-imperialist forces. For this reason, they were poorly interested in NIEO as a proposal to reform the world order.

The fracture of anti-imperialism between the Cold War-inspired vision and the inclusive vision leading to NIEO was a decisive factor. However, there were also apparent limitations and contradictions to both visions. Fidel Castro saw the chance to relaunch a role of internationalist avantgarde for Havana, since support for liberation move-

⁷³ *The Tricontinental Revolution.*

ments in Southern Africa was mounting internationally, well beyond the boundaries of the communist movement. By the mid-1970s, the context of liberation from racism and colonialism in Southern Africa showed how communists and Marxist-Leninist subjects still provided a prominent contribution – in continuity with their own tradition dating back to the inter-war era. The alliance established between Moscow and Cuba created an axis of containment against moderate positions within NAM and interacted with radical “progressive” actors. However, the identification of the communists with the emerging imperial face of the Soviet Union represented a serious source of discredit. Furthermore, they did not understand that liberation struggles against the Portuguese Empire represented a conclusive chapter of anti-colonial history and not the opening of a new season for world revolution. The consequences of armed struggle in Southern Africa and the influence of the Soviet Union actually led to a strengthening of Cold War power politics and failed in their declared purpose to shape global radical changes.

At the same time, internationalism based on the defense of national sovereignty was in many ways inconsistent as a subject in the Global South. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia incited reactions against any kind of “limited sovereignty” and, therefore, fueled anti-Cold War visions. This was a crucial passage for promoting a new agenda of development, which consolidated consensus among various anticolonial actors. But attempts to claim universalist and moral visions for NAM had obvious limitations. For instance, Sadat’s Egypt and Ghandi’s India constantly followed their own nationalist priorities and used NAM to that purpose.⁷⁴ Even the most active members showed disunion, though the imagination of an egalitarian global economy shaped a serious challenge as such.⁷⁵ The goal itself of a “democratization of international relations” was ambiguous and contradictory as it meant participation of sovereign states in world affairs, and not democratic change inside the new nation-states. Under such respect, the influence exercised by NAM in the conjuncture of the early 1970s left a long-term legacy in the Global South, that was focused less on the construction of alternative globalizations than on national sovereignty founded

⁷⁴ L. Lüthi, *Non-Alignment, 1961-1974*, in *Neutrality and Neutralism in the Global Cold War. Between of Within the Blocs?*, edited by S. Bott-J. Hanhimäki-J. Schaufelbuehl-M. Wyss, London-New York: Routledge, 2016, pp. 99-100.

⁷⁵ A. Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*, p. 144.

on one-party regimes. Even before the oil shock and its divisive impact, the antinomies of revolutionary internationalism prevented the creation of a shared vision to reform the world order by negotiating structural economic changes with the West. The fundamental evolutionary implications of the project of remaking the world order conveyed under the label of NIEO were not really acknowledged – as they represented a potential break with the revolutionary traditions of anti-imperialism. In such light, the project of NIEO as the apex of post-colonial internationalism showed quite weak foundations to oppose the global “passive revolution” undertaken by Western political and economic actors by the mid-1970s.

SILVIO PONS

Anti-Imperialism, the New Left and 1968

Introduction

In the aftermath of WWII, independence claims and decolonization conflicts were not a novelty by any means. What was new, however, was the chain of interconnected events that gave rise to an unstoppable “process of decolonization”.¹ There is no doubt that decolonization pressures – as expressed at the Bandung Conference (1955) – and restraints stemming from the political frame of the Cold War – as emerged with the Suez crisis (1956) – were dismantling the former centre of the imperial world order. As a result, Europe shrunk and split along the ideological divide of the *iron curtain*.²

In light of this process leading to the demise of European empires, it might be surprising to note the revival of a public debate on imperialism and anti-imperialism in the western world in that same period. Both terms were revisited and, in some respects, updated so as to be used in relation to the post-war context. In their status as “nomadic concepts”,³ imperialism and anti-imperialism were loaded with new meaning in the second half of the 20th century according to the several transformations decolonization was bringing about.⁴

The main drives to re-formulate these terms came from the transnational New Left: a network of intellectual groups, circles, and activists

¹ J. Jansen-J. Osterhammel, *Decolonization: A short History*, Princeton 2017.

² O.A. Westad, *The Cold War. A World History*, New York 2017; T. Judt, *Postwar. A history of Europe since 1945*, London 2005; E. Buettner, *Europe after Empire. Decolonization, society, and culture*, Cambridge 2016.

³ O. Christin (sous dir. de), *Dictionnaire des concepts nomades en sciences humaines*, Paris 2010.

⁴ In the British academic field, a telling example of this can be seen in the seminar held at Oxford University in 1969-1970, the proceedings of which were then published by R. Owen-B. Sutcliffe (eds.), *Studies in the theory of imperialism*, London 1972.

that from the end of the 1950s – the events of 1956 marked the *terminus a quo* – embarked on a lively, unorthodox debate on Marxism and Marxist theory as well as a critical analysis of the post-war order. Later, i.e. at the end of the 1960s, theoretical debates on old and new forms of imperialism were appropriated by new collective actors, such as the student movements culminating in the protests of 1968,⁵ who sought to connect their critique of the western world to the struggles taking place in what came to be named the “third world”. The Vietnam war then accelerated the formulation of an anti-imperialist strategy meant to facilitate the building of a united anti-imperialistic front along a south-north line of interaction.

My *research hypothesis* reads as follows: While in the late 19th century and even more so in the early 20th century, anti-imperialism was a key concept of an international revolutionary strategy led mainly by communist political parties, in the second half of the 20th century it became an apt label for creating unity among a plurality of forces pursuing a variety of goals in diverse areas of the world. In this context, anti-imperialism rather than communist internationalism was the driving idea behind a process of mobilization enacted far beyond the territories and peoples directly subjected to imperial dominance. Of course, the overthrow of capitalism – still conceived as the premise of modern imperialism⁶ – was still a goal, but anti-imperialism also served to create a common ground upon which to foster a new network of solidarity-based relations between revolutionary forces in both the “first world” and emerging “third world”. While supporting the anti-colonial struggles carried out directly by colonized populations, anti-imperialist agency focused increasingly on issues of national self-determination and devoted much less attention to the workings of class structures in the new, emerging independent states. The more disappointing post-colonial examples became due to the difficulties they had to face, the more the idea of imperialism as the major enemy waned and lost its capacity to forge unity among heterogenous forces. Moreover, in light of both the increasing critique of the Soviet model

⁵ G. Dreyfus-Armand, R. Frank, M.-F. Lévy, M. Zancarini-Fournel, *Les années 68. Le temps de la contestation*, Brussels 2008; I. Gilcher-Holtey, *1968 - vom Ereignis zum Gegenstand der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Frankfurt am Main 2008.

⁶ T. Kemp, *Theories of Imperialism*, London 1967. A brief anticipation of Tom Kemp's understanding of imperialism also circulated in France: T. Kemp, *Qu'est-ce que l'impérialisme?*, «Partisans», 13, 1963-64, pp. 49-66.

of state socialism and the post-Maoist Chinese turn toward a market economy, the notion of imperialism as inherent to free-trade capitalism was also challenged.

The New Left and theories of imperialism

The very history of the New Left as a new, self-aware transnational political orientation begins with reactions to the critical events occurring in 1956.⁷ These developments brought to light the reality of the Cold War, the supremacy of the US over European powers and, on the other side of the iron curtain, the need to undertake a reformation process (de-Stalinization) while reassessing Soviet supremacy over the member states of the Warsaw Pact. At the same time, in the South of the World, new emerging forces were asserting their own positions on the international scene (Bandung 1955) – most of them refusing to align with a new system of power relations (Belgrade 1961). This was the context in which, in the second half of the 1950s, a wave of internal criticism began to grow louder and louder inside western communist and socialist parties. In many cases, this dissent led to political splits or simply drove party members to leave in search of other, more open spaces of debate. The need to express critical thought without abandoning Marxist tenets, to exchange and debate such thought, was the key factor behind the establishment of several journals that served as the privileged channel of communication and exchange forging the transnational New Left. The most influential of them included *New Reasoner* and *New Left Review* in the United Kingdom, *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, *Partisans*, *Arguments*, *Tribune Socialiste* a.o. in France, *Ragionamenti*, *Problemi del Socialismo*, *Quaderni Piacentini* in Italy; *Neue Kritik*, *Das Argument*, *Merkur* in Germany; *Studies on the Left*, and *Monthly Review* a.o. in the United States.⁸ The wide thematic scope of these journals demonstrates just how necessary it was in that period to overcome the doctrinairism of the established Left so as to regenerate Marxism into the dynamic theoretical approach it originally provided.

⁷ In chronological order: the 20th congress of the Soviet Communist Party, the Suez crisis, the harsh Soviet repression of uprisings in Poland and even more so in Hungary. On the watershed marked by these events see J. Eley, *Forging democracy. The history of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000*, Oxford 2002, p. 335.

⁸ T. Renaud, *New Lefts. The Making of a Radical Tradition*, Princeton 2021.

Of course, this was not a matter of returning Marxist theory to its pristine origins but, on the contrary, developing it further and verifying its usefulness for critically analysing capitalism in the post-war era. In addition, the formation of the New Left depended on a second important factor: disappointment with the ambivalent position western socialist and communist parties – particularly French and British ones – took in relation to the critical issues decolonization was raising, including its impact on the extant power of European countries.

By addressing this range of questions, the New Left also engaged in a debate about imperialism and anti-imperialism. Decolonization and the rise of the “third world” seemed to be the pebble triggering the landslide, thus extending to involve a great number of many connected questions. What role to ascribe to the new emerging forces in the revolutionary perspective? What was the relationship between the “third world” and the key historical forces represented by the European workers movements, as well as the new revolutionary nation-states such as the Popular Republic of China or Cuba, in addition to the Soviet power? How was capitalism reorganizing following the dissolution of the former imperial order? These and many other questions were at the core of the debate the New Left carried out from its formation onwards.⁹

Unsurprisingly, the debate initially developed in the countries directly affected by the dismantlement of their imperial domination. In Britain, a public discussion followed the publication of a book by John Strachey, *The end of empire* (1959), which pointed to the peculiar transition Britain was undergoing in the 1950s. Strachey was a member of the Labour party and held social-democratic views. His book raised many questions and provoked lively reactions, many of them expressed and further debated on the pages of the *New Left Review*. It was Michael Barratt Brown who, in one of the first issues of the journal, referred to Strachey’s main arguments to emphasize some points of divergence and better illustrate his own view.¹⁰ No – argued Barrat Brown, in contrast to Strachey – imperialism had not disappeared with the end of colonial empires. Just like capitalism in the post-war years had to face the challenges posed by both the rise of a communist

⁹ P. Worsley, *Revolution of the Third World*, «New Left Review», 12, 1961, pp. 18-25.

¹⁰ M. Barratt Brown, *Imperialism yesterday and today*, «New Left Review», 5, 1960, pp. 42-49.

superpower and the increasing loss of direct rule over the colonies, imperialism – understood as a means of class domination – modified the mechanics through which to ensure its own survival and exert power over the «new emerging forces».¹¹ In his analysis of the changed mechanisms of imperialism, Barratt Brown dialogued with theories circulating in the anglophone Atlantic area, in which scholars such as Paul Baran, André Gunder Frank and Gunnar Myrdal were conducting studies on the global development of post-war capitalism.¹² Moreover, building on Lenin's view of imperialism as related to a particular stage of capitalist development, Barratt Brown acknowledged a close relationship between imperialism and the specific needs of capitalism during a certain phase. In the Cold War frame, he argued, decolonization caused the disaggregation of former imperial structures but did not prevent capitalism from resorting to other means. The defence of capitalism on the global scale prevailed over the interests of individual political entities. Consequently, the levers of imperial rule had shifted from the governments of former imperial states directly to the heads of “imperial companies” acting on the global scale. For instance, the kind of power exerted by the big oil companies that intervened heavily in political manoeuvres in the immediate post-war decade to assure the loyalty of former colonial countries' governments was called “Off-shore imperialism”. The conviction that neither western nor non-western working classes could benefit from the imperialist policies of the new imperialist economy led Barratt Brown to call for the building of «a new co-operative commonwealth out of the old corrupt and unjust empire of capitalism and its feudal and comprador allies».¹³ Yet, how to attain such a «co-operative commonwealth» remained an open question. From a different angle, social scientist Perry Anderson focused on Portuguese «ultra-colonialism» as a case study allowing for the assessment of the «history and structure [...] of this empire,

¹¹ The label «new emerging forces» or *nefos* was coined at the Bandung Conference 1955 to indicate all countries and societies achieving independence from colonial rule. See the Conference opening speech delivered by President Sukarno in K. Ampiah, *The political and moral imperatives of the Bandung Conference of 1955: the reactions of the US, UK and Japan*, Folkestone 2007.

¹² P. Baran, *Political Economy of Growth*, New York 1957; G. Myrdal, *Economic Theory and Underdeveloped Regions*, London 1957; H. Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism. The economics of US Foreign Policy*, New York 1966.

¹³ M. Barratt Brown, *Imperialism*, p. 49.

both for their own interest and for the importance they have for any general account of imperialism». In other words, Anderson's goal was to «suggest a theoretical model [of imperialism, MT] which can integrate the available material into a coherent and significant whole».¹⁴ Deeming the Portuguese the oldest and most primitive remnant of the imperial order,¹⁵ Anderson seemed to agree that the world was entering a post-imperial era. Nevertheless, the author implicitly evoked an idea of continuity, at least in terms of functional equivalence, between the «chartered companies» of the late 19th century in Africa and what Barratt Brown had called the «imperial» or «offshore companies» of post-war imperialism.

Past and present forms of imperialism were also investigated by the US New Left with a particular interest in economic and foreign policy issues involving the western superpower.¹⁶ A lively debate was carried out through journals such as *Studies on the Left*¹⁷ and the historical *Monthly Review*,¹⁸ the latter of which dialogued closely with the European New Left, particularly in Italy – where an Italian edition of the *Monthly Review* was inaugurated in 1968¹⁹ – and France.²⁰ What

¹⁴ P. Anderson, *Portugal and the End of Ultra-Colonialism*, «New Left Review», 15, 1962, pp. 83-102; Part II, 16, 1962, pp. 88-123; Part. III, 17, 1962, pp. 85-114.

¹⁵ Basing upon a definitory distinction between precapitalist and capitalist imperialism – what he called respectively *exchange* (based on extraction of raw materials) and *transformative imperialism* (based on extraction and commodification of goods) – Anderson deemed the Portuguese transition into capitalist imperialism as failed. Regardless of the validity of his view, the author insisted on the economic/capitalistic matrix of imperialism, in the past as in his present time.

¹⁶ J. Rolling, *The anti-imperialists and the 20th century America Foreign Policy*, with a comment by H. Baron and Th. McCormick, «Studies on the Left», 3, 1962, pp. 9-33.

¹⁷ C. O'Brien, *Contemporary Forms of Imperialism*, «Studies on the Left», 3, 1965, with a comment by T. Harding, pp. 13-40; R. Wolfe, *American Imperialism and the Peace Movement*, «Studies on the Left», 6, 1966, pp. 28-43.

¹⁸ L. Huberman-P. Sweezy, *The Theory of U.S. Foreign Policy*, «Monthly Review», 12, 1960, particularly issues 5, 6, and 7.

¹⁹ Great interest in the American New Left featured also in the Italian journal «Quaderni Piacentini», which devoted several articles to movements and debates developing in the US.

²⁰ French *nouvelle gauche* journals gave regularly account of debates unfolding within the American New Left. See for example M. Munk, *La Nouvelle Gauche améri-*

emerged was an analytical frame focusing on the major role played by US economic and political forces, both in replacing the former European world hegemony and in containing communism in the newly independent countries by “promoting” the adoption of free-trade capitalism. This reading of post-war power relations was further corroborated by in-depth studies that enjoyed great international resonance.²¹

A different view on imperialism developed in France, where the topic was addressed more from an ethical than a theoretical-economic perspective. Already in the last years of WWII, i.e. before the formation of the *nouvelle gauche*, philosopher Simone Weil had sharply critiqued French colonialism based on a comparison between the oppression the French experienced under Nazi-occupation and the oppression the French state acted out in its colonies.²² This comparative reasoning was later enriched with new arguments developed by a small but influential circle of intellectuals, such as Aimé Césaire²³ and Frantz Fanon,²⁴ and unorthodox Marxists gathered around journals such as *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and *Les Temps modernes*. Though their views diverged in part, they all stressed the unacceptable contradiction between praising republican (western) values even while systematically violating these same values in the colonies. Critiques had already surfaced following the violent repression of uprisings in North Africa and Madagascar in the late 1940s and during the Indochina war, but they gained significant momentum with the Algerian war, when accusations against both the legitimacy and military management of the war entered the public sphere, leading to extremely heated debates. Since the late 1950s a public campaign for Algeria’s independence carried out by intellectuals, lawyers, students, editors and journals had contributed to the moral delegitimization of the French colonial order, albeit in its diluted form of the French Union.²⁵ This kind of

caine, «Partisans», 23, 1965, pp. 60-63. This is also noticed by Ch. Kalter, *The Discovery of the Third World. Decolonization and the Rise of the New Left in France, c. 1950-1976*, Cambridge 2016, p. 211.

²¹ Among them P. Baran-P. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital. An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order*, New York 1966.

²² S. Weil, *On Colonialism. An ethic of the other*, Lanham 2003.

²³ A. Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme*, Paris 1950.

²⁴ F. Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Paris 1952; Id., *L’an V de la Révolution algérienne*, Paris 1959; Id., *Les damnés de la terre*, Paris 1964.

²⁵ For a concise assessment see Buettner, *Europe after Empire*, pp. 107-162.

criticism sharpened lines of conflict with the established Left as well as multiplying the voices of a self-aware *nouvelle gauche* around new organizations (the PSU and its organ *Tribune socialiste*, both founded in 1960)²⁶ and journals such as *Partisans*.²⁷

Free to express their views regardless of ideological loyalty, *nouvelle gauche* representatives extended their critique of imperial dominance so far as to include the Soviet Union, deemed perhaps the main example of a lack of principled coherence. The communist state was accused of playing a twofold game under the vestige of a great anti-imperialist advocate. On one hand it bestowed official support to countries struggling for independence from western imperialism; on the other, it avoided any direct confrontation with its main opponent, the US, so as to maintain a condition of peaceful coexistence necessary to guarantee its hegemony in the socialist bloc.²⁸ For both superpowers, peaceful coexistence represented a win-win condition that warranted the pursuit of their respective interests to the detriment of weaker countries. The critique went even further, arguing that there was a relationship of functional equivalence between Soviet anti-imperialism

²⁶ I. Gilcher-Holtey, „Die Phantasie an die Macht“. *Mai 68 in Frankreich*, Frankfurt a.M. 1995, pp. 96-104.

²⁷ The role of «Partisans» for the French New Left is emphasized by Ch. Kalter, *The Discovery*, pp. 207-214.

²⁸ «Khrouchtchev a toujours présenté son ‘aide’ au mouvement de libération nationale et à la lutte anti-impérialiste comme une aide unilatérale, un sacrifice librement consenti par l’Union Soviétique et l’amenant, sans contrepartie aucune, à assumer de graves risques. En fait, il se révèle que l’URSS [...] n’a pris des actions dans le mouvement anti-impérialiste et en particulier à Cuba que pour s’assurer une monnaie d’échange qui lui permette éventuellement d’acheter ‘sa paix’. [...] En offrant son appui à Cuba et à la lutte anti-impérialiste, Khrouchtchev soutenait l’ennemi de son ennemi... provisoire [*Italics*, MT]. Mais ce à quoi il aspirait, c’était à se décharger sur cet allié également provisoire du fardeau de la guerre froide et de la pression impérialiste. L’aubaine qui s’offrit à lui fut celle d’un second front ouvert contre l’impérialisme. Il comprit que l’impérialisme n’accepterait pas longtemps de mener une guerre sur deux fronts et qu’il préférerait conclure sur son front à lui, celui de la guerre froide, une manière de paix séparée. En dernière analyse, il ne s’agissait pas pour Khrouchtchev que d’aider les révolutionnaires à mieux tirer les marrons du feu pour son compte» (L.X., *A quoi sert la révolution anti-impérialiste?*, «Partisans», 18, 1964-65, pp. 69-71, here pp. 70-71).

and US imperialism that had to be contested.²⁹ Breaking this balance between the two superpowers was deemed necessary to challenge the strengthening of imperialism in the post-imperial era. The driving force was evidently the “Colonial Revolution” occurring in the South of the world, although the revolutionary forces of the developed countries were expected to make a key contribution.³⁰

The issue of creating grounds for solidarity among the revolutionary forces in both the western and decolonizing world was also deemed critical among thinkers who can be considered the Italian representatives of the New Left³¹ – a small but significant nucleus established since the end of the 1950s, gathered around journals such as *Problemi del Socialismo* (since 1958) and *Quaderni Piacentini* (since 1962)³². A long article authored by Lelio Basso – founder of *Problemi del Socialismo* – pointed to the «stronger, modern imperialism» arising in the post-war order: a system of rule the US had already tested out in Latin America and was poised to extend more widely following the dissolution of the European empires. In Basso’s view, it was clear that the leading – albeit not only – force of this «modern imperialisms» was the US.³³ Particularly in Africa – a decolonization context to which

²⁹ A. Heurteaux, *Les bases économique de l’impérialisme*, «Partisans», 23, 1965, pp. 6-17.

³⁰ In this regard the author referred to but disagreed with Barrat Brown’s reformist position as outlined in the «NLR». In opposition to the latter, Heurteaux argued that it was unrealistic to imagine a «reasonable capitalism» in a regime of peaceful coexistence. As a solution, he urged for decolonizing peoples to be involved, although asserting the leading role of western forces: «les marxistes révolutionnaire doivent travailler à développer et organiser le mouvement révolutionnaire dans les pays capitalistes avancés, *clé de la révolution mondiale*, en liaison étroite et constante avec les révolutionnaires de pays coloniaux et semi-coloniaux, avec les révolutionnaires qui existent ou existeront dans tous les pays socialistes». *Ibid.*, p. 17, italics M.T.

³¹ Regarding the specificities of the Italian New Left with regard to the political weight of the PCI see M. Tolomelli, *Il Sessantotto. Una breve storia*, Roma 2008, pp. 37-41.

³² P. Spazzali Forti, *Temi per una elaborazione teorica del colonialismo e della decolonizzazione*, «Quaderni Piacentini», 17-18, 1964, pp. 54-56.

³³ «[...] l’esempio di paesi come il Vietnam meridionale e il Congo ex-belga, passati dopo l’indipendenza, nella sfera di influenza politica ed economica nordamericana, provano che la conquista dell’indipendenza non è per se stessa una lotta anti-imperialistica ma può anzi rappresentare il passaggio ad una fase più moderna, e più difficile

the journal dedicated several articles³⁴ – international capitalism was strengthening its grip through a strategy of allying with select, adequately supported new ruling elites. The post-colonial workings of international/US-led capitalism was the new, great challenge facing every anti-imperialist strategy seeking to overcome imperialism on a global scale. To acknowledge “modern imperialism” as the common enemy was therefore the premise needed to fuel a common struggle for achieving socialism – but not Soviet state socialism! – on global scale. And yet, argued Basso, many difficulties stood in the way. First, the great heterogeneity of the forces and interests involved and, second, growing tensions within the socialist camp (especially the Sino-Soviet conflict). Aware of the complexity of Cold War relations, Basso called for a strategy based on the principle of political autonomy for each individual political force or movement involved in an anticolonial or anti-imperialist struggle. This meant that both the contending socialist states – USSR and China – had to renounce their ambition to play a leading role unilaterally. According to Basso, the only way to build a shared strategy suited to defeat the main common enemy of socialism, i.e. imperialism, was to recognize the need to unite the front beyond existing divergences.³⁵

This view of imperialism as the main enemy impeding the pursuit of socialism was also echoed by the West-German *Neue Linke* – the political, intellectual milieu that, since the late 1950s, solidified around journals such as *Das Argument*, the short-lived but impacting *Anschlag*, the literary informed *Merkur*, and, last but not least, the students’ journal *Neue Kritik*.³⁶ In the early 1960s, the topic of imperialism was tackled only indirectly; the German government in particular

a rompere, di soggezione coloniale. Si è visto infatti in questi anni come sia stato più facile [...] far cadere il vecchio colonialismo in Asia e in Africa che non il colonialismo di tipo moderno impiantato dagli USA nell’America Latina» (L. Basso, *Problemi del movimento comunista mondiale*, «Problemi del socialismo», 7-8, 1963, pp. 793-836, here p. 826).

³⁴ Several of which were authored by Africa expert Chiara Robertazzi.

³⁵ Basso, *Problemi del movimento comunista*, p. 836.

³⁶ The journal of the young socialist German intelligentsia revolving around the German Socialist Students’ League (SDS) after the split from their former supporter, the social-democratic party SPD (1961). M. Tolomelli, „Repressiv getrennt“ oder „organisch verbündet“. *Studenten und Arbeiter 1968 in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und in Italien*, Opladen 2001, pp. 119-122.

was criticised for supporting colonialist/imperialist countries such as France and Portugal in their respective wars against anticolonial liberation movements. Furthermore, the German government was also accused of pursuing so-called developmentalist policies in “under-developed” countries, especially Africa, that would ultimately exacerbate rather than overcome their economic dependence.³⁷ In the mid-1960s, the more the German New Left was integrated into the transnational debates,³⁸ the more the issue of imperialism gained relevance. In 1964 the first issue of *Anschlag* opened with an article by the young sociology student Rudi Dutschke – not yet the leading figure of the West-German 1968 movement – denouncing all forms of imperialism: the *Sozialimperialismus* of the Soviet Union³⁹ – which in his eyes had already lost any credibility as a model of socialism – and the capitalist imperialism of the western countries led by the American superpower. Similarly to the critique expressed by the *nouvelle gauche*, the German New Left also dismissed the principle of peaceful coexistence. Arguing that imperialism inherently entails the risk of world war and that socialism and imperialism are irreconcilable, Dutschke claimed that imperialism must be combated with all available means.⁴⁰ Such reasoning inevitably would gain more traction following the outbreak of the Vietnam war some months later.⁴¹

³⁷ I dealt with this theme in the article M. Tolomelli, *Al di qua e al di là del Muro: l’Africa tra politiche di sviluppo e solidarietà internazionale nelle due Germanie (1958-1975)*, «Storia e problemi contemporanei», 2, 2021, pp. 59-79.

³⁸ B. Davis, *A whole world opening up: transcultural contact, difference, and the politicization of New Left activists*, in *Changing the world, changing oneself. Political protest and collective identities in West Germany and the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s*, ed. by Ead. et al., New York 2010, pp. 255-273.

³⁹ The first issue of «Anschlag» (August 1964) entailed an article assessing *Die Rolle der antikapitalistischen, wenn auch nicht sozialistischen Sowjetunion für die marxistischen Sozialisten in der Welt*, a telling title about the view of the German New Left on the Soviet Union. Bold M.T.

⁴⁰ «Es gilt also nicht, mit dem Imperialismus zu koexistieren, sondern ihn mit in unserer Epoche zur Verfügung stehenden Mitteln an seinen schwächsten Stellen zu bekämpfen, um dem Ziel, einer Welt ohne Hunger und Krieg näher zu kommen». R. Dutschke, *Sozialimperialismus und Sozialdemokratie*, «Anschlag» 1, 1964, quoted by B. Rabehl, *Der SDS und die Strategie der direkten Aktion in Westeuropa*, «Neue Kritik», 50, 1968, pp. 26-53, here p. 39.

⁴¹ G. Anders, *Der amerikanische Krieg in Vietnam oder Philosophisches Wörterbuch*

The theories on imperialism and the criticism developed by the transnational New Left enjoyed a political reach extending far beyond the network of connections the movement itself fostered.⁴² This current of thought also affected apparently isolated countries such as Switzerland which, in line with the New Left critique of imperialism, also fell under sharp criticism.⁴³ It was especially thanks to scholars/activists such as Jean Ziegler – a sociologist who viewed the social sciences as a form of political engagement for addressing issues of global justice – that the role of Swiss corporations in the global network of “imperialist companies” became an issue in the late 1960s. Studies on Swiss companies’ big business – what Ziegler defined a «secondary imperialism» closely tied to the «primary» one led by the US – added a further facet to understandings of the global workings of imperialism.⁴⁴ Moreover, Ziegler contributed to spreading the debate on imperialism to the European academic world, as happened through the world congress on the sociology of imperialism held in Bulgaria in 1970.⁴⁵ Together with like-minded scholars and activists, he contributed substantially to the assessment of the complexity of

heute, «Das Argument», 45, 1967, pp. 349-397; Id., *Imperialismus und der Kampf dagegen oder Philosophisches Wörterbuch heute (II)*, «Das Argument», 51, 1969, pp. 1-31; P. Strotmann, *Der Zusammenbruch des kapitalistischen Entwicklungsmodells in der Dritten Welt*, «Das Argument», 51, 1969, pp. 32-49.

⁴² Worth mentioning are the summer meetings at Korčula (Croatia) in the early 1960s, true international happenings of unorthodox Marxists organized by the Yugoslav journal and group «Praxis». B. Kanzleiter, *Yugoslavia, Marxist Humanism, Praxis Group, and Korčula Summer School, 1964-1974*, Wiley Online Library, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405198073.wbierp1630>.

⁴³ O. Pavillon, *La nouvelle gauche en Suisse romande des années 60 au milieu des années 80. Un essai de mise en perspective*, «Cahiers d'histoire du mouvement ouvrier», 21, 2005, <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-520231>; M. Kalt, *Tiersmondismus in der Schweiz der 1960er und 1970er Jahre. Von der Barmherzigkeit zur Solidarität*, Bern 2010.

⁴⁴ J. Ziegler, *Sociologie de la nouvelle Afrique*, Paris 1964; Id., *Main basse sur l'Afrique. La recolonisation*, Paris 1978; Id., *Une Suisse au-dessus de tout soupçon*, Paris 1976; F. Höpflinger, *L'empire Suisse*, with a preface by J. Ziegler, Geneva 1978.

⁴⁵ The Congress was held in Bulgaria (Varna) in September 1970 under the title *Contemporary and Future Societies: Prediction and social planning*. Part of the proceedings was published by the Egyptian sociologist A. Abdel-Malek (sous la dir. de), *Sociologie de l'impérialisme*, Paris 1971.

entanglements underpinning international capitalism – or «modern imperialism», as Lelio Basso called it – and to the understanding of the breadth of these entanglements, far beyond the geometries traced by former and new imperialist chains.

Anti-imperialist agency

The idea of close connections among all anti-imperialist forces acting in diverse contexts, as evoked by many voices of the New Left, profoundly inspired the political action of social movements; this was particularly true in the second half of the 1960s, when the international scene was preoccupied with the US military intervention in Vietnam. War-news broadcasted by the media (especially TV) was quickly connected to circulating discourses on new forms of imperialism. This created an atmosphere of urgency and feeling that action was needed. Not only US foreign policy was blamed: in European countries, disappointment grew also with the ambivalence of the established Left. As witnessed by former activist Laurent Schwartz, a French mathematician, the disapproval expressed by most left-wing parties sounded more like a generic moral condemnation than a clear-cut political stance. To the protestors, it was not merely a matter of invoking peace – which was the position they accused the established Left of taking – but of standing up for *Vietnam's victory*.⁴⁶ This meant – as voices of the US New Left also urged – engaging in a conflict to challenge the whole design of US imperialism.⁴⁷

The Vietnam war quickly took on a paradigmatic meaning among New Leftists. Amid them Herbert Marcuse, a key figure of intellectual junction between the US and European (German) currents of the New Left, contributed substantially to this framing. Invited to a students' conference on Vietnam held in Frankfurt in 1966, Marcuse explained the Vietnam war as a manifestation of murderous violence inherent to the global expansion of post-war «imperial capitalism». The conflict

⁴⁶ L. Schwartz, *Un mathématicien aux prises avec le siècle*, Paris 1997, pp. 434-435; N. Pas, «Six Heures pour le Vietnam». *Histoire des Comités Vietnam français 1965-1968*, «Revue Historique», 1, 2000, pp. 157-185. A testimony of the organizing of anti-war campaigns in Britain is T. Ali, *Street fighting years. An autobiography of the 1960s*, London 2005.

⁴⁷ R. Wolfe, *American imperialism and the peace movement*, pp. 8-9.

was part of a system of violent domination whose «aggressive forces» operated in the peripheries, he argued, as well as in the centre of imperial capitalism.⁴⁸ Epitomizing all facets of imperialism, this war – which some also saw as having a mythological dimension⁴⁹ – was not just *an* example but rather *the* example of capitalist imperialism in the post-imperial era, in which the USA had taken the lead. For these same reasons, the mobilization against this conflict assumed a sort of universal character, playing out an “ultimate struggle” against imperialism. In the words of former activist Tariq Ali, it was «a war of West against East, North against South and, above all, imperialism against revolution».⁵⁰ It thus became imperative to take action.

The history of the international protests against the Vietnam war is too well known to be addressed in detail here.⁵¹ However, what remains relevant for the focus of this chapter is the effect of anti-war mobilization on both the understanding of imperialism and the revolutionary imagery and role new and old left-wing forces should play. My thesis is that the Vietnam war, together with several other anti-colonial conflicts of that time, produced two main outcomes. The first involved a shift in goals and roles in that, in this specific historical context, anti-imperialism definitively replaced communism in the pursuit of a global revolutionary strategy. While in the early 20th century anti-imperialism was conceived as a means of pursuing communism, in the 1960s and 1970s overcoming imperialism became a goal *per se*. Consequently, a variety of heterogenous forces – from the National liberation fronts of Algeria and Vietnam to African anti-colonial parties, Latin American anti-imperialist movements and some progressive western collective actors – took over the role international communism had played at the time of the III. International. Instead

⁴⁸ H. Marcuse, *Vietnam – Analyse eines Exempels*, «Neue Kritik», 36-37, 1966, pp. 30-40 [Engl. partial translation by A. Brown in <https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/Chapter6Doc3Intro.pdf> last retrieved 25.08.2023].

⁴⁹ R. Wolfe, *American imperialism*.

⁵⁰ Retrospective statement by former New Left activist T. Ali, *Street fighting years*, p. 110.

⁵¹ It is nevertheless worth mentioning the initiative of the Russell Tribunal for its wide impact on delegitimizing ethically the US intervention. See J.-P. Sartre, *Imperial Morality*, «New Left Review», 41, 1967, pp. 3-10; J. Duffett (ed.), *Against the crime of silence: Proceedings of the Russell International War Crimes Tribunal*. Stockholm, Copenhagen, New York 1968.

of a coordinated and strictly organized strategy led by a centre, the New Left-informed anti-imperialist revolutionary strategy emerging in the 1960s relied on more heterogeneous subjects and more fluid geographies of power. These changes also contributed to deepening the political divide between the established and extra-parliamentarian Left. The western communist parties thus increasingly lost their appeal among revolutionary-minded forces. A second main effect was the simplification of imperialism theories, in that imperialism came to be almost exclusively synonymous with US-American capitalism and foreign policy. This understanding circulated widely within the western New Left⁵² and acquired a much higher emphasis in the global South following the Vietnam war. A crucial event in driving this shift was the Tricontinental Conference held in Havana in January 1966, during which *yankee imperialism* was depicted as the absolute evil: the common enemy against which to organize and carry out a global struggle.⁵³ This vision – emphatically expressed by Che Guevara’s call for creating «many Vietnams»⁵⁴ – gained great traction among the student movements of 1968. It informed a broad theoretical framework on which students relied to think of themselves as part of a broader movement. How to act more efficiently in this common struggle was the subject of lively discussion at the international *Vietnam Conference* held in West-Berlin in February 1968 under the leadership of the German Socialist Students’ League (SDS).

Unexpectedly, along with the galvanizing events of 1968 that nourished this feeling of being on the verge of “making history”, the 1968 movements tended to leave behind the many nuances of thought developed by the intellectual New Left. Anti-imperialism became the common cause forging the vision of a united global front while disregarding the complexity, internal conflicts and contradictions plaguing the alleged anti-imperialist forces themselves.⁵⁵ Moreover, it also in-

⁵² Ph. Gassert, *Antiimperialismus und Antiamerikanismus um 1968. Proteste gegen die US-Außenpolitik*, in), *1968 und die 68er. Ereignisse, Wirkungen und Kontroversen in der Bundesrepublik*, hrsg. G. Dworok, Ch. Weißmann, Wien 2013, pp. 153-170.

⁵³ M. Tolomelli, *Dal terzomondismo all’antimperialismo yankee nei movimenti terzomondisti di fine anni Sessanta*, «Storicamente», 12, 2016, DOI: 10.12977/stor643.

⁵⁴ E. Che Guevara, *Message to the Tricontinental*, April 1967. An English version of the text can be accessed at Che Guevara Internet Archive: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1967/04/16.htm>.

⁵⁵ This tendency to neglect internal contradictions in alleged anti-imperialist coun-

spired a strategy of armed struggle that some envisioned as a transcontinental web of guerrilla nodes based in all continents, western democracies included. In line with this reasoning, some found it legitimate to take actions intended to «bring the [Vietnam] war home»⁵⁶ or even organize armed struggles within the imperialist core – as happened with the *Weathermen* in the US and RAF in West Germany.⁵⁷ These latter cases of anti-imperialist praxis testify to the increasing political distance between these new actors and the debate on imperialism and anti-imperialism held by the New Left in the early 1960s.

Alongside the unfolding of an anti-imperialist front of struggle, in the 1970s a certain disillusionment surfaced about the effectiveness of this strategy. There were diverse reasons for this scepticism: first, the turn to armed struggle became an option for some but also caused disapproval, splits, and disassociations. In western countries, the majority rejected resorting to the use of arms in favour of new kinds of engagement, such as in the field of human rights.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the events of 1968 in eastern Europe – especially the Soviet military repression in Prague/Czechoslovakia – provided new arguments for an open critique of the Soviet foreign policy in terms of “social-imperialism”. Moreover, the Soviet state’s scarce support for a Vietnamese victory – seen as a factor that could sharpen tensions with China – also kindled disappointment with the USSR.⁵⁹ As a consequence, the

tries was already evident in some comments on events of the time. See for example the introduction to some documents of the Tricontental conference, translated and published in Italy soon after. A.L., *Introduzione*, in «Problemi del Socialismo», 17, 1967, pp. 495-496.

⁵⁶ In May 1967, a fire was set in a department store in Brussels by a small group of people inspired by the Situationist International (SI) to bring the feeling of war to the indifferent consumers of the western world. See M.P. Davies, ‘Burn, Baby! Burn!': *Paris, Watts, Brussels, Berlin and Vietnam in the Work of Kommune I, 1967*, «Forum for Modern Language Studies», 2, 2018, pp. 136-156.

⁵⁷ J. Varon, *Bringing the war home: the Weather underground, the Red Army Faction and revolutionary violence in the Sixties and Seventies*, Berkeley 2004.

⁵⁸ The turn to humanitarian engagement is well emphasized by S. Mohandesi, *Red Internationalism: Anti-Imperialism and Human Rights in the Global Sixties and Seventies*, Cambridge 2023.

⁵⁹ T. Ali, *Street fighting years*, pp. 179-180, describes his surprise when during a conversation in Hanoi with Vietnamese representatives he heard that the USSR were providing more military hardware to India and Egypt than Vietnam.

notion of social-imperialism reemerged and added a new nuance to the view on imperialism, slightly weakening the focus on American domination. For those most disillusioned with the Soviet power, such as many so-called K-groups in West-Germany in the early 1970s,⁶⁰ the Soviet Union became a second target of anti-imperialist criticism that culminated at the end of the decade with the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.⁶¹ A third questionable element seen as undermining the feasibility of a united anti-imperialist strategy was the political fragility of alleged anti-imperialist states when dealing with their own national interests. This aspect was discussed widely in the early 1970s with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The 1970 events in Jordan referred to as “black September” made evident that ideologically closed neighbour states such as Egypt, Jordan and Iraq did not support the Palestinian cause, and this realisation seriously challenged advocates of a united front. In fact, it was hard not to notice not only a certain degree of convergence of interests among imperialist and social-imperialist powers, but also that forces presumed to be pursuing common goals had abandoned their anti-imperialist commitment. Enormous disillusionment was expressed regarding state leaders, such as Gamal A. Nasser in particular, accused of prioritizing national interests to the detriment of a shared supranational cause.⁶²

In the years to come, additional developments would challenge the advocates of a united anti-imperialist front even further. These included the loss of international influence by the non-aligned countries: after making some international achievements from the middle of the 1960s (pressing for the establishment of the UNCTAD⁶³) until

⁶⁰ A. Stengel, *Zur Geschichte der K-Gruppen. Marxisten-Leninisten in der BRD der siebziger Jahre*, Frankfurt am Mein 2011.

⁶¹ The event provided for a new wave of critique in France also. To this regard commented the French mathematician and activist Laurent Schwartz after years of engagement in campaigns against the Vietnam war: «Si l'URSS essaie d'avoir un engagement moins massif, la barbarie vis-à-vis du peuple afghan est d'un ordre de grandeur bien comparable à celle qui a caractérisé les précédentes guerres impérialistes» (L. Schwartz, *Préface*, in A. de Bures-J.M. Chaligny, *Le Défi Afghan. L'Urss en échec*, Paris 1986, p. 7).

⁶² A. Desalvo-F. Stame, *Medio Oriente: imperialismo e socialimperialismo al lavoro*, «Quaderni Piacentini» 42, 1970, pp. 2-9.

⁶³ B. Gosovic, *UNCTAD: Conflict among compromise. The Third World's quest for an equitable world economic order through the United Nations*, Leiden 1972.

1973 (Algerian conference of non-aligned countries, impact on OPEC policies), these actors seemed to lose their ability to actively intervene on a global scale against the Cold War system of power relations. In the 1970s, formerly revolutionary, anti-imperialist countries' turn towards violent regimes – Indonesia, Algeria, Ethiopia a.o. – heavily diminished the role of the 'third world' as a guide to political action in a global strategy.⁶⁴ Last but not least, the economic course-change of post-Maoist China at the end of the 1970s also played a role. This last factor, namely the Chinese venture into an unprecedented experiment of state communism combined with state capitalism, did not immediately have an impact on anti-imperialist discourses and strategies. Nevertheless, in retrospect this can be considered a highly important factor for explaining the state of disarray affecting the "new", as well as the "ancient", left-wing from the 1980s onwards. In light of these developments, it can be argued that divergent interests and complex entanglements at the end of the 1970s made it almost impossible not only to assert a united strategy against imperialism, but also to imagine it. In other words, both the theoretical framework that had been elaborated by the New Left during the decolonization process and the anti-imperialist strategy envisioned by the 1968 movements were contradicted or invalidated by the complex building of a post-colonial set of economic and political relations.

Conclusion

As asserted in a recent book by Thomas Piketty, to understand the persistence of massive social inequality in the present we must recognize the weight of inequality structures inherited from the colonial past.⁶⁵ In a certain way, the revival of imperialism theories and anti-imperialist agency from the 1960s to the 1970s contributed to creating this kind of awareness. Anti-imperialist critique as formulated by the New Left and appropriated by the 1968 social movements was based on acknowledging the mechanisms through which old means of dominance were replaced by new ones (post-imperial imperialism).

⁶⁴ R. Gildea-J. Mark-N. Pas, *European Radicals and the Third World. Imagined Solidarities and Radical Networks, 1958-1973*, «Cultural and Social history», 4, 2011, pp. 449-471.

⁶⁵ Th. Piketty, *Une brève histoire de l'égalité*, Paris 2022.

The result was a search for a new strategy of struggle that called for building a united front among highly heterogeneous forces. On the forefront were the decolonizing peoples of the “third world”, the new emerging forces of the *colonial revolution* whose respective national liberation fronts unintentionally took over the role formerly played by the working classes. In fact, since the Algerian war, organisations struggling for *national* liberation causes – Algerian and Vietnamese NLFs, Mozambican FRELIMO, Guinean PAIGC, South African ANC a.o. – became the leading forces of revolutionary movements, an aspect which *de facto* tended to subsume the dimension of class emancipation to issues of national self-determination. In the contingency of the decolonization process, such emphasis on the national dimension seemed both obvious as unavoidable. In retrospect, however, it can be seen as having indirectly contributed to the weakening of the class paradigm within the Left – be it old or new. Furthermore, the focus on anti-imperialist agency and attempt to build a united, global anti-imperialist front was not accompanied by equally intense interest in the complexity of post-colonialism and understanding of how long it takes many countries to transit from a colonial to a post-colonial order. It was the post-colonial critique surfacing in the 1980s that began shedding light on the deepest legacies of colonial mentalities and structures in the post-colonial world. The economic and political features of post-imperial imperialism were integrated into a theoretical frame that later evolved in at least two main directions: claims for human rights and peoples’ rights regardless of the ideological restrictions imposed by the Cold War,⁶⁶ and a critique of neo-liberalism and globalization in the aftermath of the Cold War.⁶⁷ Questions of social injustice and power relations were to resurface vehemently at the end of the 20th century, when it seemed that a second wave of globalization was reaching its peak. Globalization was the new key concept testifying to an unprecedented level of capitalist development, while the terms *empire* and *imperialism* were once again repropounded in efforts to capture the profundity of the changes taking place.⁶⁸ This resurfacing

⁶⁶ S. Mohandesi, *Red Internationalism*; E. Davey, *Idealism beyond Borders: the French Revolutionary Left and the Rise of Humanitarianism, 1954-1988*, Cambridge 2015; F. Rigaux, *I diritti dei popoli e la Carta di Algeri*, Torino 2012.

⁶⁷ D. Harvey, *A brief history of Neoliberalism*, Oxford 2005; Q. Slobodian, *Globalists. The end of empire and the birth of neoliberalism*, Cambridge (Mass.) 2018.

⁶⁸ M. Hardt-A. Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge (Mass.) 2000; D. Harvey, *New Imperial-*

is proof of how extremely *nomadic* these concepts prove through time and space and what high expectations have been put on them in the desire to grasp the making and unmaking of dominance and social injustice in the world.

MARICA TOLOMELLI

ism, Oxford 2003. For this latter publication Harvey reports having been inspired by a year-long seminar on the topic of “Imperialism” organized by Neil Smith and Omar Dahbour at the City University of New York in 2003 (p. viii). The remark reminded me immediately to the seminar on theories of imperialism held at Oxford University in 1969-1970 that I mentioned in fn. 4, thus evoking the rise of a new phase in the long-term history of the critique of imperialism.

Le mouvement populaire de libération de l'Angola (MPLA) et les partis communistes occidentaux pendant la lutte armée anticoloniale (1960-1977)

L'étude des relations entre les anciens mouvements de libération africains, et les partis communistes occidentaux implique, d'une part une évaluation du mouvement communiste international post WW II, et son impact sur les dynamiques internes des mouvements de libération anticoloniaux et anti-néocoloniaux de cette époque, et, d'autre part, l'effet combiné des luttes idéologiques entre les deux blocks de la Guerre froide et de la querelle sino-soviétique sur ces luttes libération dans l'ensemble de l'espace anciennement dit du Tiers-monde. Mon analyse va toutefois se focaliser ici plus particulièrement sur les relations entre le MPLA et les principaux Partis communistes d'URSS et de Chine, du fait des effets structurants que les relations entre ces deux PC eurent sur la vie interne et disputes idéologiques au sein de cet ancien mouvement de libération dès le début de la lutte armée anticoloniale.

Les premiers communistes angolais : des débuts clandestins structurants

La première relation plus ou moins structurante tissée par ce que la colonie d'Angola comptait comme communistes ou s'assurant comme tels issus de la société colonisée fut non pas un parti communiste européen – et moins encore asiatique – fut le Parti communiste du Brésil. Et l'une des particularités à cette époque est que, comme son homologue portugais, cette structure politique sud-américaine vivait dans des conditions de clandestinité, sous les dictatures successives. Ces contacts se firent à travers tout un réseau de mariniers et travailleurs maritimes, qui serviront de courriers et de véritables colporteurs, pour ainsi dire, tant des nouvelles venues des deux côtés de l'Atlantique (Brésil – Angola), comme et surtout d'une littérature clandestine produite ou acquise par le PCB, et envoyés à leurs camarades angolais lors encore sous occupation colonial portugaise. De la sorte, ou pourrait dire que le PCB aura servi de premier parrain non-portugais des projets de création de l'éphémère Parti communiste angolais (PCA).

La précision géopolitique est ici de taille : quoique clandestin en métropole, le Parti communiste portugais avait bien des tentacules structurelles en Angola, à travers ou sous le couvrir de citoyens portugais souvent bon teint (de familles coloniales « nobles »), mais qui avaient à charge de noyauter toutes velléités nationalistes radicales, afin de les inclure dans la « lutte antifasciste » sous l'exclusive direction du PCP. Les raisons de ce noyautage correspondaient à la vision de lutte monolithique centralisée autour d'un seul appareil « antifasciste », certes, mais répondait sur la longue portée au vieux dictat du Komintern d'une lutte anti-impérialiste sous le chapeutage du PCUS. Un système pyramidale donc au sein du mouvement communiste international qui avait atteint son apogée sous Staline comme on le sait. De la sorte, la décision de la petite poignée de communistes angolais dirigés par Viriato Clemente da Cruz, le futur concepteur et fondateur du MPLA, entrera dans la catégorie des brebis galeuses lorsqu'ils décideront de créer, en 1955, le Parti communiste angolais, sans s'en référer ni demander parrainage à l'appareil clandestin du PCP dans la colonie. En décidant de créer un parti communiste africain et indépendant de ce système de contrôle, Viriato da Cruz créait une espèce de chiisme titiste et s'aliénera pour de bon le PCP.

Arrivé à Lisbonne par voie maritime en septembre 1957, Viriato da Cruz sera logé chez Amilcar Cabral, déjà agronome de son état. Il semblerait qu'il ne se soit pas montré pressé de rencontrer le groupe angolais autour de Mário de Andrade, ni même qu'il reçût une quelconque aide de la machine clandestine du PCP ou associations affiliées durant son bref séjour clandestin au Portugal. Il reprochait aux étudiants angolais au Portugal une espèce de dilettantisme de gauche, pas plus, alors que lui, Viriato, avait passé le clair de ses dernières années en Angola à mettre sur pied des organisations nationalistes clandestines dignes de ce nom, pendant que ses compatriotes étudiant au Portugal semblait jouer à un militantisme peu conséquent. Ce reproche est clairement exprimé dans sa dense correspondance avec Lúcio Lara, lui aussi étudiant au Portugal en ce début des années 1950.¹

On aurait pourtant attendu du PCP une solidarité immédiate avec ce communiste pur et dur qu'était Viriato de Cruz : il n'en fut rien, et ce

¹ Cf. sa lettre à Lara, dans laquelle il exprime les immenses difficultés pécuniaires dans lesquelles il vivait en Belgique, en 1959, in Associação Tchiweka de Documentação, *Um amplo movimento Itinerário do MPLA através de documentos e anotações de Lúcio Lara*, Luanda (1st ed Lara), 1997, p. 72.

pour des raisons qui tiennent à la fois à la complexité relationnelle entre lui et le PCP d'une part, et, d'autre part, entre ce parti et le nationalisme angolais progressiste en général. Dans le cas de Viriato, celui-ci semblait d'ores et déjà une espèce d'électron libre vis-à-vis du système obstructif et de contrôle du PCP sur la dynamique nationalitaire dans l'empire colonial lusitanien (à l'instar de son congénère français – le PCF – à la même époque) : il avait créé le PCA sans demander ni l'aval, ni même la bénédiction, après coup, du «grand-frère» métropolitain. La création du PCA apparaissait en effet comme un défi à ce parrainage sourcilieux quasi obligé, et semble justifier cette sorte d'ostracisations dont fut victime Viriato da Cruz dès le départ, de la part du PCP – dont il ne recherchera du reste pas la protection dans sa situation de clandestin récemment débarqué d'Angola. Sur le long terme, on pouvait comprendre que son «maoïsme» lui eût valu l'opprobre de l'appareil du PCP, pro-soviétique et systématiquement aligné sur Moscou pendant longtemps, surtout à cette époque. Mais en 1955-1957, Viriato n'est pas encore un marxiste de tendance maoïste affirmé et connu comme tel. Ce sera une rupture sans recul, et cela justifiera sans doute que cet intellectuel angolais et marxiste convaincu se soit tourné vers le Parti communiste de Chine, dont il subira les courroux plus tard, une fois qu'il osera critiquer, alors qu'il était en exil dans ce pays, les visions, à son avis irréalistes, des dirigeants communistes chinois sur les processus révolutionnaires dans le «Tiers-monde» dans les années 1960-1970, dans une certaine mesure victime indubitable de la querelle sino-soviétique qui faisait alors rage en ce milieu des années 1960, et avait pour ainsi dire élu domicile y compris dans ce même Tiers-monde où se déroulait l'essentiel des luttes anticoloniales et anti-impérialistes. De la sorte, il serait épistémologiquement impossible, voire inadéquat du point de vue méthodologique, de parler des relations entre le MPLA mouvement de libération anticolonial et les partis communistes occidentaux sans y mettre les effets de la querelle sino-soviétique, et donc la dialectique relationnelle impulsée par cette querelle au sein du mouvement communiste international, et les effets que cela eut sur les mouvement de libération anticoloniaux. Dans l'histoire du MPLA, cette dynamique relationnelle sino-soviétique pesa d'un poids structurant qui faillit y compris mener à la disparition de cet ancien mouvement en pleine lutte anticoloniale. Autrement dit, dans le présent texte, cette question reviendra constamment en guise d'éclairage.

Mais il n'y pas de doute que c'est avec le Parti Communiste Portugais que le MPLA initiera ses rapports avec le monde communiste occidental. Un rapport qui aura des hauts et des bas, y compris après l'accès du MPLA au pouvoir, en 1975.

Un bref rappel historique des rapports entre le MPLA et le Parti communiste portugais

Il importe en effet de rappeler,² la plupart des futurs membres fondateurs et dirigeants du MPLA avaient tissé du temps de leurs études universitaires en métropole dans les années post-II Guerre mondiale. Le puissant appareil clandestin du PCP servira d'école de luttes clandestines autant que d'éducation marxiste pour certains d'entre eux. Agostinho Neto, alors étudiant en médecine à la fin des années 1948 (Coimbra puis Lisbonne), symbolisera cet activisme en payant de sa liberté. Plusieurs fois arrêté puis emprisonné pour cet activisme militant au sein de structures liées au PCP quoique souvent sous couverture légale (la branche juvénile du MUD (Movimento Democrático Unido – MUD-Juvenile). C'est ce même appareil clandestin du PCP qui organisera son évasion du Portugal en 1962, par voie maritime, dans une odyssée qui le mènera au Maroc, puis à Léopoldville (Kinshasa), où il assumera la direction du MPLA, jusque-là dirigé par Mário Pinto de Andrade. Lucio Lara, plus tard co-fondateur du MPLA, sera l'autre figure historique dont le rapport avec le PCP sera structurant. C'est la figure angolaise qui obtiendra, en tant que délégué au V Congrès du PCP tenu en 1957, qu'il obtiendra l'abandon par les communistes portugais du lien que eux faisaient entre la chute du régime portugais de l'Estado Novo, et l'émergence de mouvements nationalistes africains, à l'instar du Parti Communiste Français pour les colonies françaises. Cette évolution des positions du PCP ouvrira donc grandes les portes pour une action autonome des nationalistes africains. Le MPLA naît dans cette dynamique et recevra des communistes portugais un indiscutable appui sur plusieurs front et malgré sa condition de clandestinité, qui ne se terminera qu'avec le coup d'État du 25 avril 1974. Et il est un fait connu que c'est Álvaro Cunhal, le légendaire dirigeant communiste portugais, en exil en URSS, qui ouvrira les portes de Moscou au MPLA, comme on le verra plus loin, et donc de toutes les gauches communistes et progressistes européennes. Les relations entre le MPLA et le Parti communiste d'Union soviétique seront cependant frappées de chronique incertitude, sinon défiance. Et l'on ne

² Voir J.-M. Mabeko-Tali, *Rêves fragmentés: la Gauche Marxiste portugaise et le Nationalisme radical angolais en 1950-1977*, in F. Blum-M. Di Maggio-G. Siracusa-no-S. Wolikov (sous la dir. de), *Les partis communistes occidentaux et l'Afrique*, Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose Nouvelle Édition-Hémisphères Éditions, 2021, pp. 261-271.

saurait saisir les raisons profondes de cette défiance si l'on ne fait pas entrer dans la discussion ici ou ailleurs, de la dynamique interne au mouvement communiste international. Précisément, les dissensions internes à ce mouvement, depuis l'opposition Staline-Tito (autrement dit le PCUS sous Staline *versus* le Parti socialiste de Yougoslavie sous Tito), jusqu'à la querelle sino-soviétique, ont eu un effet structurant qui aura largement conditionné le rapport que le MPLA mouvement de libération aura avec les gauches communistes européennes autant qu'asiatiques (Parti communiste de Chine notamment). Raisons pour laquelle, et du point de vue tant méthodologique qu'épistémologique, l'on ne saurait saisir toute la trame de ces rapports si l'on ignore le poids de la querelle sino-soviétique sur le mouvement communiste internationale et, partant. Sur toutes les luttes de libérations ou anti-impérialistes et anti-néocoloniales ont pâti, d'une manière ou d'une autre, directement ou indirectement de cette confrontation idéologique entre les deux puissances communistes de l'époque. Pour le MPLA, ce fut une époque de grandes incertitudes en tous points de vue (militaire, diplomatique, matérielles et politico-militaire).

Le MPLA et le mouvement communiste international : les aléas d'une relation en dents de scie

Il importe également de rappeler que les luttes de libération nationale menées en Angola et dans d'autres colonies se sont entièrement déroulées dans un cadre international marqué par la Guerre Froide. C'est une donnée essentielle pour la compréhension globale et plus approfondie des caractéristiques complexes qu'elles assumèrent. Car, même en admettant, comme le font certains auteurs, que l'Angola n'était pas, avant le 25 Avril 1974 tout au moins, une priorité stratégique tant pour l'une comme pour l'autre des deux superpuissances à l'époque, il reste que la division du nationalisme angolais, avec sa cohorte d'accusations et contre-accusations idéologiques de part et d'autre, a particulièrement été propice aux étiquetages idéologiques.

Le fait est que la bipolarisation mondiale ne laissait pas aux mouvements de libération une grande marge de manœuvre et de choix, dès lors qu'ils se trouvaient véritablement engagés dans une lutte armée anticolonialiste. Et aucune lutte armée anticoloniale radicale n'avait de chance d'aboutir sans les soutiens extérieurs essentiels que sont l'appoint en armements, et le concours politico-diplomatique et financiers des pays tiers, notamment des plus puissants, dans l'accès aux

tribunes et aides internationales et humanitaires. En l'espèce, le bloc socialiste de l'époque, dans son ensemble, et dans les contradictions internes qui le traversaient, aura été l'unique pourvoyeur en armes des mouvements de libération du «Tiers Monde» au lendemain de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale. Si ce seul fait avait suffi à conférer une étiquette communiste aux bénéficiaires, dans le cas angolais, le MPLA n'en aurait certainement pas été le seul dans la mesure où le FNLA a bel et bien bénéficié de l'aide de la Chine Populaire, mais aussi – dans une moindre mesure – roumaine. Ce qu'il y a eu, c'est bien la relation que le MPLA entretenait avec l'URSS et les principaux pays du bloc communiste, mais aussi avec bon nombre des mouvements ouvriers radicaux et Partis communistes du monde entier. Une relation complexe cependant – point linéaire, et qui fut soumise à de constantes renégociations, et aux aléas, intérêts et souvent au pragmatisme de la politique extérieure de ces alliés communistes. Dans le cas soviétique en l'occurrence, cette complexité commence dès 1963, date de la reconnaissance du MPLA par l'URSS. Une reconnaissance arrachée in extremis grâce au concours décisif d'Alvaro Cunhal, le secrétaire général du Parti communiste portugais, alors en exil en URSS.³ Du reste, cette reconnaissance et les rapports subséquents entre le MPLA et le pouvoir soviétique ne se feront pas sur une base idéologique pour ce qui concernait ce dernier. Karen Brutentz, ancien vice-président de la section des affaires internationales du Comité central du PCUS résume ainsi dans ses mémoires, les bases réelles de ce rapport entre les soviétiques et le MPLA:

Notre soutien au MPLA était dicté non pas tant, comme on le pense souvent pour des considérations idéologiques, que pour des raisons pragmatiques : (le MPLA) s'est avéré être le seul mouvement nationaliste (dans le contexte angolais) qui menait une lutte réelle contre les colonisateurs. La preuve du rôle relatif de la référence idéologique est le fait que, à un moment donné, le Bureau Politique du CC du PCUS avait même décidé de reconnaître le concurrent du MPLA, le Front National de Libération de l'Angola (FNLA) dirigé par Holden Roberto, accusé plus tard d'entretenir des liens avec la CIA. Et seuls les retards bureaucratiques, et tout particulièrement les protestations

³ Cf. J. Milhazes, *Angola – O princípio do fim da União Soviética*, Prefácio de Carlos Pacheco, Lisboa: Vega, 2009, pp. 33-34.

de certains dirigeants africains et de la gauche portugaise empêchèrent cette reconnaissance du FNLA.⁴

En tout état de cause, cette reconnaissance fut capitale, qui permit au MPLA de pouvoir compter avec l'appui d'une superpuissance de ce monde polarisé de la Guerre Froide. Bon an mal an, et en fonction des hauts et des bas relatifs au conditionnement posé à tous les mouvements anticoloniaux et anti-impérialistes par la querelle sino-soviétique, ce mouvement de libération pouvait recevoir une aide multiple, surtout en armements, envoyer se former des jeunes dans divers domaines, et surtout, tant que faire se pouvait, une «protection» diplomatique, l'accès à des tribunes internationales qui lui permettaient de faire entendre sa voix.

Comme les autres mouvements de libération alliés issus des autres colonies portugaises (FRELIMO, pour le Mozambique, PAIGC pour la Guinée Bissau et Cap-Vert, MLSTP pour les îles de São Tomé e Príncipe), le MPLA était en effet présent à tous les forums internationaux plus ou moins inspirés par Moscou. Tels les différents festivals de la jeunesse qui se tenaient périodiquement dans différentes capitales des pays socialistes. Il était présent à l'Union Internationale des Étudiants – UIE – et entretenait des relations privilégiées avec le Conseil Mondial de la Paix, la Confédération Syndical Mondiale, etc., tous deux liés à l'URSS. Il n'y a pas de doute que cette participation à des institutions ou forums liés de près ou de loin au mouvement communiste international, mais également la formation de cadres politico-militaires ou civils dans les pays socialistes ou «progressistes», n'ont pas peu contribué à consolider des idées de gauche dans le MPLA. Mais l'absence de toute hégémonie de l'idéologie marxiste en son sein démontre, pour le moins, que cette influence n'aura été que superficielle. Mieux: la méfiance manifestée à l'égard de toute rhétorique marxiste – relevée par les cadres de la guérilla qui s'assumaient comme marxistes, mais aussi par les jeunes venus des centres urbains – remettait déjà à elle seule en cause l'étiquette «communiste» accolée au MPLA comme un ensemble, à cette époque. Pour paraphraser Lénine – pour qui il n'y a pas de révolution sans révolutionnaires –, on ne conçoit pas un mouvement communiste sans une direction communiste, et une idéologie marxiste, quelle qu'en soit la variante, sinon déclarée, du moins assumée et pratiquée. Rien de tel ne s'est passé au sein du MPLA. Si

⁴ V. Shubin, *The 'Hot Cold War'. The USSR in The Southern Africa*, Scottsville (South Africa): Pluto Press & The University of Kwazulu Natal Press, 2008, p. 17.

le discours analytique de ses plus hauts dirigeants était effectivement influencé par la philosophie marxiste-léniniste ou maoïste, il reste cependant que l'idéologie marxiste n'y a été assumée que de manière souterraine – voire presque honteuse – par une petite minorité d'intellectuels, sans aucun poids du point de vue du capital symbolique aux yeux de la majorité des militants. En contrepartie, c'est bien une idéologie nationaliste, volontariste, progressiste, et véritablement radicale, qui caractérisa la pratique des dirigeants du mouvement. En fait, les relations du MPLA avec le bloc socialiste et le mouvement communiste international en général ne suffisent pas à le caractériser comme un mouvement communiste. Ces relations étaient bien le fruit de la conjoncture mondiale, et de la nécessité pour tout mouvement de libération de s'allier avec ceux qui soutenaient moralement et matériellement sa revendication fondamentalement nationaliste (l'indépendance de l'Angola), et surtout qui appuyaient la forme armée de contestation anticolonialiste.

Le MPLA s'est assumé très tôt comme internationaliste, et solidaire de toutes les luttes des opprimés du monde entier. Dans un discours prononcé à Radio Tanzanie, le 6 Juin 1968, Agostinho Neto soulignait ce fait en déclarant:

Notre lutte n'est pas une lutte isolée dans le monde. Elle fait partie de la lutte globale de l'Humanité pour anéantir l'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme, et c'est dans ce contexte que nous devons perspectiver la lutte – hors des limites étroites des préjugés raciaux.⁵

C'est un thème qui reviendra comme un *leitmotiv* dans ses discours.⁶ Or, dans le contexte mondial d'alors, il n'y avait pas meilleure tribune pour exprimer cette solidarité que les conférences, festivals et autres forums promus par les organisations liées d'une manière ou d'une autre au mouvement communiste international. C'est grâce à ces tribunes que les luttes des peuples colonisés sont popularisées et échappent au carcan de silence de la presse occidentale en général. Mais en même temps, le MPLA voulait maintenir son indépendance vis-à-vis de ses alliés. Il prônait de ce fait un neutralisme absolu dans les querelles alors en cours au sein du mouvement communiste in-

⁵ Cf. A. Neto, *Textos políticos escolhidos*, Luanda: DIP, 1987, pp. 30-49.

⁶ Voir par exemple son discours intitulé *XVI aniversário do início da luta armada*, in A. Neto, *Textos políticos escolhidos*.

ternational. On ne soulignera d'ailleurs jamais assez ce fait, au vu des conséquences qui en résultèrent. Selon ce que nous en dit Oleg Njestkin, l'ancien agent du KGB déjà cité ci-dessus, malgré l'appui apporté au MPLA, les relations entre Agostinho Neto et les dirigeants du PCUS « n'étaient pas simples », et la raison d'une telle complexité provenait du fait que

[Neto] n'était pas une figure obéissante aux mains de nos apparatchiks du parti. Il avait toujours sa propre opinion, ses idées sur comment agir, comment conduire la lutte, sur ce qu'il fallait faire dans telle ou telle situation. Ses opinions étaient loin de coïncider avec les nôtres, et il savait défendre ses positions. Par exemple, il ne comprenait pas pourquoi il était nécessaire de tenir un discours anti-impérialiste vaseux, faire des déclarations de soutien à la politique extérieure soviétique [...] avec laquelle il n'était pas toujours d'accord ; signer constamment différents appels, manifestes, dont la plupart étaient dénués de tout sens concret et réel, et n'étaient en réalité que des 'initiatives de pression', « de soutien, etc. [...] Neto avait complètement gâché ses relations avec certains fonctionnaires responsables de la Section Internationale du CC (Comité Central du PCUS). D'où les intrigues [ourdiées] dans son dos, et le désir de ces apparatchiks de soutenir toute autre figure plus commode qui se manifestât contre Neto.⁷

Une opinion identique quant au difficile rapport que Neto entretenait avec les Soviétiques m'avait été également exprimée par de hauts dirigeants du MPLA à la fin des années 1980 pour expliquer les raisons de la différence d'appréciation et la distinction qu'ils faisaient entre le soutien soviétique et celui de Cuba par exemple, et pourquoi la notion d'«internationalisme révolutionnaire», appliquée au soutien soviétique, leur semblait très problématique, au contraire de leurs rapports avec les organisations révolutionnaires et pays du «Tiers-monde».

Neto était en fait regardé au Kremlin comme une espèce de brebis galeuse dans la sphère d'influence soviétique ; un insoumis sur l'échiquier de la Guerre Froide ; un allié incommode et incontrôlable mais utile, dont la puissance alliée avait encore besoin, nous dit Mitrokhin, cet autre ancien officier du KGB passé ensuite à l'Ouest :

Beaucoup à Moscou, cependant, le regardaient encore comme un maverick . Le vice-ministre soviétique des Affaires Etrangères, Vassili Kuznetsov dira en

⁷ C. Andrew-V. Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World*, New York: Basic Books, 2005, p. 451.

privé, en 1975, « Nous avons besoin de lui juste pour un temps. Nous le savons malade... Et psychologiquement on ne peut lui faire confiance ».⁸

Il faut cependant élargir ce tableau relationnel si tout d'abord à titre comparatif, et si l'on veut avoir une vue plus consistante de la complexité des rapports que le mouvement de libération angolais avait tissé avec le monde dit progressiste, lui-même sujet aux rapports de force qui se jouaient tant entre les deux blocs de la Guerre froide, qu'au sein du mouvement communiste international, surtout au moment de la vague de décolonisation des années 1960. Années marquées également par la querelle sino-soviétique à son niveau le plus dramatique.

Les relations du MPLA avec les organisations nationalistes radicales d'Afrique, d'Asie et d'Amérique latine furent sans aucun doute une école d'internationalisme révolutionnaire pour ses dirigeants. Concernant l'Afrique en particulier, en dehors de l'«exemple» que constitua le FLN algérien pour les nationalistes angolais, tant du MPLA que du FNLA, le contact – tardif en ce qui concerne le premier – avec les mouvements nationalistes radicaux comme l'Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC⁹), et les leaders comme Sékou Touré et Kwame Nkrumah; la participation à certains forums africains ou panafricains et pan-nègres comme le Congrès des écrivains panafricains et Nègres de Rome (1955), et aux Conférences panafricaines d'Accra (1958) et de Tunis (1960), etc., furent, de l'aveu de certains pères-fondateurs du MPLA, absolument bénéfiques. Ces contacts leur permirent de sortir de l'enfermement politique et théorique dans lequel avaient vécu les élites africaines à l'intérieur du système colonial portugais. L'Union des Populations du Cameroun en particulier, aura joué un important rôle dans l'acquisition d'une plus grande vision des problèmes africains du moment par les nationalistes issus de ces élites et qui venaient de fuir l'enfermement de l'empire portugais, et se retrouvaient en exil à Rabat, Accra, Conakry et Brazzaville,¹⁰ en compagnie des nationa-

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 451.

⁹ Pour une étude approfondie de la genèse et de la nature idéologique de l'UPC, on renvoie à R. Joseph, *Le mouvement nationaliste au Cameroun - Les origines sociales de l'UPC*, Préface de J.-F. Bayart, Paris: Karthala, 1986.

¹⁰ On rapporte que c'est l'UPC qui offrit à la délégation angolaise les billets d'avion pour se rendre à la conférence panafricaine de Tunis, en 1961. (Je tiens cette précision de mes entretiens avec Lucio Lara, Luanda, 1989. Voir également la discussion sur les rapports entre l'UPC et le MPLA dans J.-M. Mabeko-Tali, *Guerrilhas*

listes camerounais.¹¹ C'est dire si le radicalisme ambiant au sein des élites politiques africaines opposées à des solutions néocoloniales, dont l'UPC fut sans conteste le prototype le plus achevé,¹² apporta un «plus» idéologique au MPLA, et contribua à renforcer son radicalisme nationaliste.

Les racines de ce radicalisme se trouvaient cependant avant tout dans la trajectoire individuelle des élites angolaises. C'était un radicalisme surdéterminé avant tout par un système colonial – le portugais – particulièrement rétrograde. Un système qui réprimait systématiquement toute velléité d'indépendance, sans même laisser la moindre possibilité d'organisation et de formation d'un nationalisme plus modéré, ni aucune forme de syndicalisme africain qui pût servir d'exutoire et de médiateur aux revendications sociales des colonisés ; une répression sans concession d'aucune sorte, sauf la reddition absolue à l'ordre colonial, et qui finira par pousser les élites africaines au raidissement et à des formes violentes de contestation de l'ordre colonial. Il en résultera également un discours radical pan-nègre, dont le FNLA se fit le principal porte-drapeau, conséquence, entre autres, de toutes les spoliations de terres, en particulier dans la seconde moitié du XX^e siècle, dans le Nord angolais, autant que d'un irrédentisme identitaire séculaire kongo. Le discours volontariste et universaliste d'Agostinho Neto essaya constamment d'enrayer cette dérive pan-nègre au sein du MPLA, avec un succès plutôt limité : ce discours universaliste sera toujours remis en cause, ou tout au moins précairement accepté au sein du mouvement de libération, suivant en cela la conjoncture interne du moment, comme on l'a montré précédemment. En tout cas il ne fera jamais qu'une unanimité de façade au sein du mouvement de libération, voire du MPLA parti-État.

Mais l'alliance du MPLA avec les couches urbaines angolaises de

e Lutas Sociais – O MPLA perante si Próprio, 1970-1977 – Ensaio História Política, Lisbonne: Mercado de Letras, 2019 (2018), p. 521.

¹¹ Entretiens avec Lucio Lara, Luanda, 1989-1990. Au cours de ces entretiens, Lucio Lara a insisté particulièrement sur l'importance qu'eut pour eux la rencontre avec Félix Moumié et toute la pléiade d'intellectuels exilés que comptait l'UPC à Conakry, puis à Brazzaville. Selon sa propre expression, ceux-ci furent véritablement leurs instructeurs politiques sur les questions africaines, pour lesquelles ils n'avaient pas toujours des idées précises au moment de fuir le Portugal.

¹² Cf. B. Davidson, *L'Afrique au XX^e Siècle - L'éveil et les combats du nationalisme africain*, Paris: Editions Jeune Afrique, 1980, p. 226.

l'extrême-gauche, en 1974-1975, allait d'une part refléter le positionnement de ce mouvement dans le cadre du mouvement communiste international, tout comme elle allait s'avérer un défi majeur tant dans son discours politique et idéologique, que dans sa vision idéologique du processus révolutionnaire post-25 Avril 1974, en l'occurrence dans les choix politiques majeurs qu'il se devait de faire. Or ces choix ramenaient dans le balance, pour ainsi dire, tout le passé relationnel entre l'ancien mouvement de libération et le monde communiste en général, et tout particulièrement les partis communistes au pouvoir tant en Eurasie, que dans l'hémisphère occidentale, dont Cuba et en Europe de l'Est. De la même manière, les rapports avec le Parti Communiste portugais allaient connaître un tournant plutôt conflictuel, notamment à l'occasion de la crise interne, dite «nitiste», invoquée plus haut. Cette crise allait d'une certaine d'une certaine manière servir de vecteur de refondation, dans le sens d'un refroidissement, des rapports entre le MPLA et la gauche communiste portugaise. Cela ravivera les anciens ressentiments nés du refus pendant longtemps, par le PCP, d'accepter une voie africaine vers l'indépendance.¹³ D'où l'intérêt épistémologique de faire un bref examen de cette relation problématique et illustrative des querelles au sein du mouvement communiste international lui-même. Surtout parce que cette extrême-gauche angolaise allait jouer un rôle important dans des débats idéologiques qui répondaient comme écho des luttes factionnelles dont la querelle sino-soviétique n'était du reste que la partie la plus visible, et historiquement la plus récente dans l'histoire du mouvement communiste international.

L'alliance problématique du MPLA avec l'Extrême gauche angolaise en 1974-1975 : l'ombre du PCP ?

La naissance de groupes d'extrême-gauche dans les centres urbains angolais en 1974-1975 est inséparable de la dynamique de gauche au Portugal. La raison est que la plupart de fondateurs de ces groupes étaient soit des citoyens portugais présents en Angola, ou des étudiants angolais rentrés au pays natal au lendemain de la «révolution des œillets» du 25 Avril 1974. Ces jeunes avaient soit milité dans l'appareil clandestin du Parti communiste portugais, notamment de l'Union des Étudiants Communistes, branche juvénile du PCP, soit ils avaient fait

¹³ Cf. J.-M. Mabeko-Tali, *Guerrilhas e Lutas sociais, passim*.

partie des groupes marxistes ou maoïstes dissidents ou qui s'étaient créés à la gauche du PCP. De ce point de vue, et dans la première catégorie (anciens des jeunesses communistes du PCP), la figure la plus emblématique fut indubitablement Sita Maria Valles, ancienne étudiante en médecine. De parents originaires de Goa, ancien territoire colonial en territoire indien, jusqu'à sa reprise par l'Inde en 1961, Sita Valles sera le symbole d'une relation heurtée entre la direction du MPLA et les militants issue de cette trajectoire communiste métropolitaine.¹⁴ Elle fera partie d'une tendance prosoviétique au sein du désormais parti-État MPLA, qui accusera la vieille garde du parti de « déviationnisme » idéologique « maoïstes » voire « social-démocrate ».¹⁵ Le MPLA entrera alors dans une longue et nouvelle crise de 1976 jusqu'au dénouement tragique de cette querelle idéologique. Cette dissidence se terminera tragiquement, avec ses compagnons, dans une dissidence et une insurrection mal préparée sinon improvisée, le 27 mai 1977, soupçonnée par le MPLA d'avoir été « orchestrée » par la direction soviétique, et par le Parti communiste portugais – ce que le PCP niera toujours. Cet épisode sanglant embrunira, pour ainsi dire les relations entre le PCP et le PCUS. Les Soviétiques resteront muets sur cet épisode, et le PCP continuera de nier avoir envoyé Sita Valles comme un « agent », comme l'en accusaient les dirigeants du MPLA.¹⁶ Les vieilles méfiances entre le PCP et les nationalistes du MPLA du temps de leur militantisme (du temps où les communistes portugais faisaient dépendre au triomphe de la révolution prolétarienne au Portugal le choix d'une voie africaine autonome vers l'indépendance)

¹⁴ Cf. L. Figueiredo, *Sita Valles: Revolucionária, Comunista até à morte (1951-1977)*, Lisbonne: Aletheia Editora, 2010.

¹⁵ Lire son texte historique majeur (en fait la plaidoirie qu'il espérait présenter au plenum du Comité central du MPLA, suite aux accusations de "fractionnisme" dont lui et certains de ses compagnons, dont Sita Valles et son époux José Van Dunem faisaient l'objet), intitulé *Treze Tese em minha Defesa*. Le a été publié par des survivants de l'insurrection ratée du "27 de Maio 1977", in Associação 27 de Maio, *Nito Alves MPLA – A Revolução Traída – 13 Teses em Minha Defesa*, Préface de J. Reis, Postface de M. Santos Torres, Luanda: ELIVULU, 2021. Pour une exégèse de ce document en tout état de cause historique, Cf. J.-M. Mabeko-Tali, *Rótulos Atribuídos, Rótulos Assumidos – Memórias e Identidades Políticas em Angola, da Luta Armada ao 27 de Maio de 1977 (1960-1977)*, Lisboa: Guerra e Paz Editora, 2023, pp. 121-292.

¹⁶ C. Andrew-V. Mitrokhin, *The World was going our Way. The KGB and the Battle for the Third World*, New York: Basic Books, 2005, p. 444.

refirent alors surface. Cette double accusation faite au PCP et au PCUS installera au sein du MPLA une méfiance systémique vis-à-vis de tout discours prosoviétique et mettra à mal la situation de ceux des cadres de souche portugaise mais nés en Angola et qui avaient rejoint les rangs du MPLA en 1974. Tel fut le cas emblématique de Sita Valles. Le PCP continue de rejeter l'accusation, jamais vraiment étayée du reste, selon laquelle Sita était une « agente du PCP » au sein du MPLA. Certains de ces militants déçus et déchus de leur appartenance aux structures du MPLA reprendront le chemin de Lisbonne, ou les cachots du nouvel état « révolutionnaire »; et d'autres, comme Sita Valles succomberont sous la torture, dans une tragédie qui pèse encore de tout son poids sur le champ politique postcolonial angolais.

Mais dans la foulée du coup d'état de 1974 au Portugal, ces jeunes activistes marxisants seront un atout extraordinaire pour la reconstitution d'un MPLA qui était sorti du maquis dans un état organisationnel pratiquement éclaté, résulta d'une longue série de dissidences entre 1969 et 1974. La dynamique sociale urbaine, dominée par ces groupuscules d'extrême-gauche qui naquirent dans les villes angolaises, notamment à Luanda, au lendemain de la chute du régime de l'Estado Novo au Portugal, le 25 avril 1974, fut à la fois vitale et problématique pour le MPLA. D'une part elle lui apporta une masse militante jeune et largement anti-impérialiste ; d'autre part, toutefois, cette alliance montrera bien vite ses limites face aux défis idéologiques posés par ces groupes, qui estiment que la direction du MPLA n'est pas assez révolutionnaire, voire est un ramassis de « petit-bourgeois ». En effet, si l'identification du MPLA aux groupes d'extrême gauche était conjoncturellement justifiée, les profondes divergences idéologiques clairement affichées entre les divers courants marxistes ou marxisants d'une part, et d'autre part la direction du mouvement de libération, montre *a priori* à quel point cette identification était très relative, voire apparente. Les dénégations de l'étiquette « communiste » par les hauts dirigeants du MPLA face aux accusations des médias occidentaux ou venues du FNLA et de l'UNITA, conduit ces jeunes à la conclusion définitive qu'ils ne pouvaient pas compter sur ce MPLA-là pour faire une « révolution prolétarienne » en Angola. Cette conclusion, renforcée au fil des mois pendant la période de transition pos-25 Avril 1974 au sein des plus radicaux des « Comités », conduira ceux-ci à des actions de plus en plus marginales, jusqu'à la rupture avec leur allié issu du maquis, et à la répression que mènera celui-ci contre les Comités réfractaires à son hégémonie politique.

En tout état de cause, cette dénégation, pour plus tactique qu'elle pût

paraître, reflétait en réalité le peu de prise de l'idéologie communiste au sein de la direction de ce mouvement de libération. La suite le montrera du reste : la création du MPLA-Parti du Travail «marxiste-léniniste» au congrès constitutif de 1977 ressemblera plus à un acte volontariste qu'à la traduction d'une quelconque assise de l'idéologie et de la théorie marxiste au sein d'un corps politique dont l'écrasante majorité ignorait même ce que marxisme signifiait, comme je le montre dans mon ouvrage consacré à ce mouvement de libération puis ses premiers pas comme parti-État angolais.¹⁷ Cela soulève donc la question du peu d'influence que les relations tissées avec les partis communistes occidentaux et euro-asiatiques, au pouvoir ou non, avait pu avoir sur le MPLA. Si l'appui multiple de ces partis et du mouvement communiste international dans sa large majorité avait aidé sans doute aucun la cause nationaliste angolaise pendant les longues années de lutte armée anticoloniale, tout au plus peut-on dire que cette aide internationaliste n'avait pas nécessairement, loin s'en est fallu, à faire du MPLA un nouveau parti communiste comme on l'a si souvent et très «paresseusement» étiqueté dans nombres d'écrits en Occident. Tout au plus, cette dynamique solidaire a renforcé la nature radicale et clairement de gauche qui aura caractérisé nationalisme du MPLA.

Le nationalisme radical du MPLA, une idéologie de gauche ?

Pour résumer les faits, le nationalisme radical du MPLA, que d'aucuns ont trop rapidement assimilé à une idéologie communiste, a bu à trois sources principales. En premier lieu, un système colonial incapable de produire autre chose qu'une élite africaine profondément frustrée, sans la moindre ouverture politique ni même syndicale au sein de la société coloniale, ou des institutions métropolitaines, comme d'autres systèmes coloniaux en avaient malgré tout pu produire. C'est ce sentiment de frustration qu'exprime l'analyse faite par Viriato da Cruz en 1956, dans le document appelé plus tard *Manifeste du MPLA*, dans les circonstances que l'on a analysées plus haut. Même prise dans ses deux versions (l'originelle, et celle, remaniée et adaptée à la fin des années 1950), cette analyse exprimait en tout état de cause cette profonde frustration de l'élite urbaine colonisée, laquelle en était arrivée à la conclusion que le colonialisme portugais ne tomberait pas sans une

¹⁷ J.-M. Mabeko-Tali, *Guerillas e Lutas sociais*.

action radicale, armée, et violente du nationalisme africain. En second lieu, il y a la formation marxiste ou marxisante de certains pères-fondateurs du MPLA, et leurs expériences, communes ou individuelles, de lutte clandestine, tant en Angola qu'en métropole, dans des groupes de gauche d'obédience communiste. La troisième source d'influence est constituée par les liens et échanges que le MPLA entretint pendant les années de lutte armée avec les organisations et les mouvements radicaux liés au mouvement communiste international. Mais il y a une quatrième source, qui avait permis de décanter et de consolider les autres acquis cités ci-dessus: la longue lutte armée anticoloniale, et les rejets systématiques, par la puissance colonisatrice, de toute idée de négociation d'une quelconque solution politique aux guerres coloniales. Ce n'est pas un hasard si la métropole elle-même finit par pâtir de ce radicalisme colonial, miné de l'intérieur qu'il avait fini par être après avoir mené simultanément, et sur trois larges et distants fronts (Angola, Mozambique et Guinée-Bissau) de longues et coûteuses guerres coloniales, en plus des luttes sur le front interne, métropolitain, contre les diverses oppositions anti salazaristes, y compris, et de plus en plus, au sein de l'appareil militaire.

C'est donc dans ces indéfinitions politico-idéologiques internes que le MPLA allait devoir procéder à des choix capitaux quant au modèle politique qu'il entendait instaurer dans ce pays qu'il avait, dores et déjà, décidé de gouverner seul. La question de la part des anciens alliés des pays et partis au sein du mouvement communiste international, en l'occurrence le PCUS, mais aussi le Parti Socialiste Ouvrier de l'ancienne République Allemande (RDA, dont des cadres furent envoyés comme instructeurs à l'École nationale du Parti, créée au lendemain de la formation du MPLA-Parti du Travail, marxiste-léniniste au congrès de décembre 1977).

L'impact de la querelle sino-soviétique sur la lutte armée du MPLA

Deux vérités péremptoires méritent d'abord d'être rappelées ici. D'une part, il ne serait pas possible de saisir tout le processus des luttes de libérations anticoloniales qui eurent lieu dans l'ancien espace géopolitique dit du Tiers-monde (Sud global selon le concept actuel) si l'on ne met pas dans la balance d'une part l'impact diplomatique structurant que joua la Guerre froide dans les relations internationales, et, d'autre part, le caractère tout aussi structurant de la querelle sino-soviétique. Chacune de ces deux composantes de la géopolitique

mondiale de l'époque (Guerre froide, querelle sino-soviétique) avait mis le mouvement de libération tant en Afrique qu'en Asie et en Amérique latine dans une situation permanente d'avoir à choisir leur camp.

Si aucune lutte armée anticoloniale et anti-néocoloniale pouvait espérer une quelconque aide du bloc occidental en ce qui concernait tant l'armement que l'appui logistique nécessaire à l'action armée proprement dite sur la base du principe de l'internationalisme anti-impérialiste, par contre tous les mouvements de libération ont obtenu des pays socialistes de l'époque, *mutatis mutandis*, les appuis vitaux qui ont permis de mener à bon port leur cause. Ces aides variaient cependant tant en volume qu'en qualité, et pouvaient tout aussi cesser, en fonction des hauts et des bas tant des dynamiques relationnelles au sein du bloc socialiste, que des conflits internes au sein des mouvements de libérations eux-mêmes. Le MPLA connut tous ces chapitres, au point où son existence-même fut sur le point de tomber dans le néant politique et militaire. En cela, la querelle sino-soviétique eut un rôle structurant plus qu'avéré et les dissidences internes tantôt facteur catalyseur, tantôt reflet de la querelle sino-soviétique. D'où la difficulté, voire l'impossibilité d'invoquer chacun de ces facteurs sans s'en référer à l'autre. Le mode communiste aura en fait permis aux mouvements de libération, dont le MPLA, de disposer de ce qui constituait une aide vitale, à laquelle il faut ajouter les canaux diplomatiques qui lui permettront de pouvoir avoir accès à de nombreuses tribunes internationales, même si sur cette forme d'aide, nombre d'organisations et associations de solidarité occidentales jouèrent un rôle non négligeable.

Certes des exemples d'aides de puissance impérialiste à une lutte nationale anticoloniale radicale et même d'obédience clairement communiste ont existé, à l'instar de l'assistance dont les États-Unis eurent à gratifier tant l'Armée Populaire de Libération de Mao, que le Front National de Libération du Vietnam contre le Japon, leur ennemis commun durant le II Guerre mondiale.¹⁸ Mais ces aides bien conjoncturelles et géostratégiques furent vite stoppées une fois la guerre terminée. La suite on la connaît : la Chine communiste et les États-Unis s'opposeront durant des décennies, nonobstant leur alliance de fait contre l'URSS entre 1970 jusqu'à la fin de cette dernière. Pour leur part,

¹⁸ Cf. S. Karnow, *Vietnam. A History*, New York: Penguin Books, 1997. Voir également : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5-wTRK861c> (consulté le 21-8-2019); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVwtRR0S4fY> (consulté le 13-8-2019); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWY9KbIXpdI> (consulté le 13-8-2019).

une fois gagnée leur guerre anticoloniale contre l'armée française, les Vietnamiens du FLN vont victorieusement affronter et de 1962 à 1975.

En tout état de cause, l'immédiat post-II Guerre mondiale donnera à l'URSS, jusque-là l'unique pays socialiste, un rôle prépondérant qui en fera l'inévitable recours en termes d'aide aux mouvements de libération nationale tant en Asie qu'en Afrique. La proclamation de la République Populaire de Chine constituera certes une autre source de solidarité internationaliste avec les mouvements de libération, dont bénéficieront indubitablement les combattants de mouvements issus des divers empires coloniaux, et dans le Tiers-monde émergent. Mais l'évolution complexe des rapports entre le Parti communiste chinois et le PCUS tendra à produire des effets quasiment contradictoires pour nombre de ces mouvements anticoloniaux, armés ou non-armés. L'éclatement au grand jour, puis l'accentuation du conflit sino-soviétique deviendra un problème, voir un facteur de déstabilisation politico-diplomatique dont le MPLA allait faire de dramatiques frais.

Autant la rationalité manichéiste qui avait caractérisé les relations internationales pendant la Guerre froide avait constitué un terrible obstacle pour les jeunes États-nations sortant de la colonisation, autant la querelle sino-soviétique va constituer un authentique dilemme pour ces mêmes jeunes États-nations, et à plus forte raison un cauchemar pour ceux des colonisés qui luttent encore armes à la main ou non, pour leur indépendance, et avaient grand besoin d'un monde socialiste uni et pouvant leur garantir les aides dont ils avaient besoin sans devoir passer sous les fourches caudines d'un chantage à l'aide. Tel fut le cas du MPLA. Sommé de soutenir l'une ou l'autre des deux géants communistes et des anathèmes idéologiques et accusations géopolitiques qu'ils se renvoyaient mutuellement, la direction du MPLA avait choisi la voie de la neutralité. Cela ne plus ni aux Chinois ni aux Soviétiques. Le prix à payer fut lourd. Le MPLA fut littéralement abandonné, et pratiquement affamé par les deux puissances communistes. Loin d'être un euphémisme, ce terme traduit la situation réelle du mouvement de libération angolais au début des années 1970 : pas d'aide du tout de la part des Chinois, et encore quelques bourses, mais plus d'armement ni d'appui en matériel logistiques de la part des Soviétiques.

Sur le plan diplomatique, le MPLA pouvait certes compter sur le régime du maréchal Tito pour quelques armements et dans les corridors diplomatiques des pays non-alignés, mais le poids de la Yougoslavie n'égalait pas celui de l'URSS de Brejnev sur les tentacules organisationnelles dominées par le PCUS et le Komsomol, qui allaient de l'Union Internationale des Étudiants, basée en Tchécoslovaquie, à la Fédération

mondiale de la Jeunesse Démocratique (FMJD), basée en Allemagne de l'Est d'alors, sans compter la puissance de la diplomatie soviétique...

En fait, la querelle sino-soviétique eut des effets allant au-delà des deux puissances communistes opposées, car elle affecta la dynamique interne du mouvement communiste international, y compris en Occident.

Lorsque tombe à Lisbonne la dictature de l'Estado Novo, le 25 Avril 1974, le MPLA est éclaté en trois tendances, et littéralement sur le bord de la disparition. Le coup d'État au Portugal lui servira de nouveau souffle, mais pour deux factors : d'une part, des groupuscules d'extrême-gauche, très actifs, vont s'allier au MPLA contre les deux autres mouvements armés, le FNLA et l'Unita, vus comme des « mouvement fantoches et pro-impérialistes ». L'autre factor décisif sera l'aide apportée en tous points de vue y compris en armement, par les officiers de gauche du Mouvement des Forces Armées au pouvoir à Lisbonne et qui nommera un nouveau gouverneur portugais, l'Amiral Rosa Coutinho, clairement proche du PCP, et surnommé « l'Amiral Rouge », chargé de gérer la transition. Ce haut officier de la marine portugaise sauvera le MPLA sur le plan militaire, et permettre au leadership contesté d'Agostinho Neto de reconstituer militairement le MPLA et de proclamer unilatéralement l'indépendance de l'Angola. La gauche communiste portugaise payait ainsi un dernier tribut de solidarité internationaliste envers un mouvement de libération dont nombre de leaders avaient des accointances personnelles et anciennes avec certaines des hautes figures du nouveau régime portugais. Les Soviétiques avaient pour leur compris le vent tourner, et se précipiteront dès la fin de 1974 pour apporter au MPLA un appui militaire et logistique qu'ils lui avaient refusé depuis le début des années 1970. Mais face aux atermoiement de grande puissance des Soviétiques dans le cadre de la politique dite de la coexistence pacifique, c'est Cuba qui accomplira la geste militaire, grâce à la quelle la jeune République Populaire d'Angola survivra de la grande invasion sud-africaine de 1975-1976.

De la sorte, l'étude des relations entre le MPLA et les partis communistes occidentaux passe inévitablement par tous les méandres et aléas qui ont marqué le mouvement communiste international dans son ensemble, et ne saurait donc se limiter à la seule aire géographique occidentale.

JEAN-MICHEL MABEKO-TALI

This volume is the outcome of a PRIN 2017 research project devoted to reconstructing the political, ideological, cultural, and socio-economic networks through which the international communist movement engaged with anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements in Africa from the 1920s to the early 1970s. Bringing together national case studies and transnational perspectives, the essays examine encounters and strategies, contradictions and failures that shaped the project of an 'alternative globalization' embodied by communism across a historical period marked by the world wars, the Cold War, and decolonization.