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*.

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

European Communists and the Rediscovery of the Third World

Labour, Political and Cultural Networks in the 1960s

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 left[16] – 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 Wroclaw. 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 nations[41] – 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 nexus[46] 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*'s[51] 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. Sorgonà, *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 1957[63] 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 mediterrenée 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 "neoatlantismo" 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 ʿAbd 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*, Brockway[78]), 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 authoritarian[85] 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 Africa[100] 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 stadial 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