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Algeria, Antifascism, and Third Worldism: An Anticolonial Genealogy of the Western European New Left (Algeria, France, Italy, 1957–1975)

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the hypothesis that the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962) occupies a core position in the genealogy of the New Left, having set the political and conceptual framework – namely the ‘global civil war’ – by which the victory of Castro and Guevara or the triumph of the Vietcong would later be understood. The aim is to set out fresh approaches to understanding the emergence of the New Left as a complex process encompassing local, national and transnational dynamics; a process shaped by, but also shaping, decolonisation. The goal is to contribute – at least – to *complicating* the Western narrative of the global 1960s, by shifting the focus from Berkeley and Paris to Algiers. In this sense, it is useful to look at the anticolonial networks in and among Italy, France, and of course Algeria. The periodisation, necessarily loose, takes as *terminus post quem* the ‘Battle of Algiers’ (1957) and as *terminus ad quem* the fall/liberation of Saigon (1975): for the transnational public of the New Left, the first marks a short circuit between the Algerian War and the memory of the Resistance and the Second World War, while the second marks the end of Third Worldism as a political project.



KEYWORDS

New Left; Algerian War of Independence; Third Worldism; decolonisation; anti-colonialism; antifascism; Resistance; memory; global civil war

On 6 January 1962, in a letter to a ‘dear friend’, the Tunisian lawyer Roger Taieb, the former Italian partisan Giovanni Pirelli writes:

The great struggles, the truly revolutionary experiences, are never an experience concluded in themselves. [...] How much the Algerian experience proliferates, through multiple underground ways, almost everywhere, we are only now beginning to understand. And above all, Frantz’s [i.e. Fanon] work and thought comes to take on an enormous weight. You know? Today in Italy Fanon is discussed with the same fervour with which Lenin is discussed.¹

Only three years earlier, in 1959, the Italian band Cantacronache had recorded the *Canzone del popolo algerino* [Song of the Algerian people] which ended with

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these two verses: ‘Who sent you, soldier, | with rifle in hand? | Who sent you, | boy, to die far away? || Go home, tell | everything you see: | offended, invaded, upset, | the land of Algeria remains standing!’² The text was written by Michele Luciano Straniero, while the music was by Fausto Amodei. Roughly the same period also dates *Partigiani fratelli maggiori* [Partisans elder brothers], written by the same two on direct commission from the National Association of Italian Partisans for a tribute ceremony to the partisans who fell in Montoso, in the Pinerolo area.

Michele and I decided to participate together in this commission – recalls Amodei – on a song to be specially composed by the two of us who, by reason of age, had not taken part in the Resistance, to affirm our brotherhood, of “inexperienced younger brothers”, compared to the former partisans.³

Once again, Cantacronache’s choice as to which side to be on, is without hesitation. But above all, it is an explicit and radical break with the spirit of the time. The authoritarian turn of the 1950s’ *centrismo* was certainly not inclined to pay homage to the partisans and in fact the song says: ‘If we look in history books, | if we look in the pompous talk made of air | we can’t find your memory’.⁴ Cantacronache therefore present themselves as the heir and faithful custodians of the memory of the Italian Resistance of which they recognise the legitimate representative to be Ferruccio Parri, one of the most highly respected figures within the Italian Resistance. It is in fact Parri who wrote the cover notes of the vinyl, which ends with an equally explicit *viaticum*: ‘1945, 1948 left a suspended delivery. Blessed are those who collect it. Hope lives in song’.⁵ The concluding verse of *Partigiani fratelli maggiori* seals this ideal passage of witness:

A voice in the hour of the dead | called us to your flags with Italy | to watch the flame over the mountains; | but if one day that hour returns, | for the dead you have left on the mountains, | partisans, call us again!

Recovered in an almost clandestine manner from the margins to which it had been relegated by the dominant political culture, the Resistance is, for these young people in their early twenties, not a past history but rather a precious indication towards the future if not already for the present (‘but if one day that hour returns’).

Towards the end of the 1950s, for Cantacronache there seems to be no doubt that the spirit of the Resistance continues in the struggles of the present, starting with that of the Algerians for their independence. Michele Straniero, again proposing the *Canzone del popolo algerino* twenty years later in a 1979 album, commented:

For my generation, the Algerian war had the value that the Spanish Civil War had for our fathers, and for the younger ones that of Vietnam: it made us discover oppression and torture, gave us the moral certainty and enthusiasm to be on the right side, helped us understand the dynamics of history, was what is said to be an ‘awareness’ that helped us become adults.⁶

In the following pages I propose an outline of an ongoing research project, which is a study of the genealogy of the New Left in Western Europe from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s. Breaking with current interpretations, I contend that we need to reframe the European *political* geography to include the (post)colonial space, and to reassess the historical influence of the Algerian War of Independence – and Third Worldism more generally – in the genealogy of the new political cultures that flourished during the long global 1960s.⁷ The aim is to set out fresh approaches to understanding the emergence of the New Left as a complex process encompassing local, national and transnational dynamics; a process shaped by, but also shaping, decolonisation. The goal is to contribute – at least – to *complicating* the Western narrative of the global 1960s, by shifting the focus from Berkeley and Paris to Algiers.

‘So I Found Myself Back in My Past’

The wider periodisation of the long global 1960s – which in these pages I will abbreviate to ‘global 1960s’ – has produced a significant advance in the understanding of social and political movements in the aftermath of the Second World War.⁸ The various national historiographies have proposed particularly fitting definitions for specific contexts – for instance for Italy ‘*stagione della conflittualità*’ (season of conflict, Vidotto) and ‘*stagione dei movimenti*’ (season of movements, Gallerano), or for France ‘*années 1968*’ (the years 68, Dreyfus-Armand, de Baecque) – but in each case, the element taken as its relevant historiographical characteristic (in these examples conflict, movements, or the year 1968 respectively) is not broad enough to adequately bring together different contexts.⁹ The choice of an English definition, if on the one hand bending to the hegemonic newspeak (in academia and elsewhere), on the other hand responds to the desire to subscribe *d’emblée* to a debate and a historiography not tied to a national case. ‘Global 1960s’ has the advantage of combining a dilated chronological measure with a spatial dimension that without being all-encompassing, does not reduce itself solely to the national frame, but instead tries to visualise the folds and contact points of a complex political geography. In this sense, ‘global 1960s’ aims at going beyond a myopic approach often concerned only with the Parisian May, or – at the best – extending back to the 1964–65 Free Speech Movement at Berkeley. To take up a formula of Charles S. Maier’s: ‘For those who want to study 1968 more deeply, it will be necessary to understand the grip and the ideological hegemony of the fifties. *Sous les pavés, le passé*’.¹⁰

As demonstrated by Christopher Kalter in an innovative study on the French case, the development of the New Left in many Western countries continued from the mid-1950s onwards, contemporaneous with the processes of decolonisation.¹¹ The New Left harshly opposed the ‘Old Left’ – that is the traditional organisations of the workers’ movement and political Catholicism. In this

generative process, radical anti-colonialism was often one of the New Left's defining features.

Indeed, the New Left framed the anticolonial struggle as a new antifascism by comparing the Algerian liberation movement to the Second World War Resistance, and their enemies to the Nazis and the Nazis' fascist allies. The strong engagement of French intellectuals against the practice of torture during the so-called 'battle of Algiers' (1957) transposed the Algerian War into a European ethical divide.¹² In 1982, in a volume that celebrated the friendship between Italy and Algeria, and published for the twentieth anniversary of independence, former Italian partisan Mario Giovana wrote this heartfelt testimony: 'There is no doubt that [...] the "battle of Algiers" marked the climax, the highest and most emblematic moment, of insurgent Algeria's effort towards liberation through the exceptional unity and intensity of the popular movement in the country's capital'.¹³ And went on:

This popular resilience, in the presence of a retaliatory apparatus that evoked, without too many flights of fantasy, lugubrious examples of the grandeur of the Nazi devices and their refined ruthlessness, gave the exceptionally 'visual' measure, quantifiable with immediacy, of the phenomenon of a rebellion that could be temporarily extinguished by means of a bloody repression; but it was more than ever improbable to imagine the rebellion exhausted in its own tragedy. The 'battle of Algiers', in this sense, defined itself as a sort of 'point of no return' for the fate of the conflict. [...]

The reason for this vividness of [my] memories is no mystery: I found myself, twelve years later and a thousand kilometres further on, in a situation of my life that I already knew: I was back once more in the partisan Resistance, the so called 'war of the poor' – as it has been so suitably defined.

This dimension of his existence was, in other words:

[...] the unique awareness of one's individual choice in the name of perhaps meagre but precise intentions: to hunt a foreign enemy, to get to the freedom of your country, to change the society to which you belong so that at least your children, those who will come afterwards, will suffer fewer pains and have a civil dignity with firm foundations.

So I found myself back in my past.¹⁴

The 'battle of Algiers' – perhaps not so much the reality as the movie by the Italian director Gillo Pontecorvo (former partisan and communist) – marked the New Left deeply.¹⁵ A generation of militants re-appropriated the narrative of the Resistance as not merely defensive but proactive, merging the myth of the 'betrayed Resistance' – still to be accomplished because severed from the social revolution – with the image of imperialism as the 'new fascism'.¹⁶

The European civil war, identified by Enzo Traverso as the main feature of the first half of the twentieth century (1914–1945), was hence reconfigured anew worldwide as a 'global civil war', driven by the Algerian War of Independence.¹⁷

For the militants of the global 1960s this re-activation of the antifascist front had both cultural and practical consequences. For many, the Algerian Revolution would be a shifting point in their political education. Echoing *The Damned of the Earth* – from the first line of the French version of *The Internationale*, used by Frantz Fanon as the title of his most famous work (*Les Damnés de la terre/The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961) – these militants would often become ‘the damned’ of the revolution.¹⁸

The replay of the fascism/antifascism divide within a new global civil war would configure an ethical disjuncture out of which emerges the idea of ‘absolute enmity against an absolute enemy’. This concept was proposed by Carl Schmitt in his *Theory of the Partisan*: published in 1963, the book was deeply influenced by the author’s experience during the Second World War and by the guerrilla warfare of the recently ended Algerian War, to which Schmitt often refers (in particular to the trial of the putschist general Raoul Salan).¹⁹ This global civil war framework – in which is reactivated the distinction between friend and enemy purified from the territorial character (‘telluric’, as Schmitt calls it in his taxonomy) – seems to me to be an essential element in being able to correctly focus on the new political cultures that emerged during the global 1960s, triggered by decolonisation and the Cold War.²⁰

In other words, I propose the hypothesis that the Algerian War of Independence – despite having received relatively little attention by most scholars of the long 1960s – occupies a core position in the genealogy of the New Left, having set the political and conceptual framework – namely the global civil war – by which the victory of Castro and Guevara (Cuba, 1959) or the triumph of the Vietcong (Tet Offensive, 1968) would later be understood. Although Cuba and Vietnam certainly became key references in the revolutionary canon, they took place far from Europe. *Exactly because* of this distance, they would progressively supersede Algeria in the New Left radical pantheon, offering a more useful screen for a projective (and exotic) political imagination. Algeria was different: not only because of its position on the southern shore of the Mediterranean basin, but also because of its specific ‘interior exteriority’ for European political geography – did not de Gaulle say: ‘*La Méditerranée traverse la France comme la Seine traverse Paris*’? Thus, we may indeed ask what, after independence, was Europe, and what was not; what was Algeria, and what was not?²¹ The perspective that I propose to adopt thus moves beyond standard histories of political parties or international relations, and turns to the ‘cultural history of politics’, in the meaning given to this concept by the seminal work of French historian Jean-François Sirinelli.²²

In this sense, it is useful to look at the anticolonial networks *in* and *among* Italy, France, and of course Algeria – the ‘Mecca of revolution’, as Cabral called it – seen as a key element of the global 1960s.²³ The periodisation, necessarily loose, takes as *terminus post quem* the ‘battle of Algiers’ (1957) and as *terminus ad quem* the fall/liberation of Saigon (1975): for the transnational public

of the New Left, the first marks the short circuit between the Algerian War and the memory of the Holocaust and the Second World War, while the second marks the end of Third Worldism as a political project.²⁴

From the European Civil War to the Global Civil War

Thus four different recent historiographical debates intersect. I will start with the one concerning the European memories of the Resistance, which accompanied a profound renewal of the field.²⁵

As exemplified also by the verse from Cantacronache's song, quoted previously, memories of the Second World War, and in particular of the antifascist Resistance, are a key feature of the political imagination of the New Left.²⁶ However, despite an impressive list of scholarly investigations pointing to this link, the historiography has not satisfactorily focused on decolonisation, nor in particular the Algerian War, as a catalyst for this resurgence of the past in the present.²⁷ The memory of the antifascist struggle – and of the Nazi occupation – played a central role in the imaginary of these transnational militants' circle, serving for decades as a 'comprehensive perceptive filter.'²⁸ For a generation that assumed itself to be part of a revolutionary history, Jean Paul Sartre's prison visit to the hunger-striking Rote Armee Fraktion founder Andreas Baader, in December 1974, was evidently part of what Walter Benjamin would have called a 'constellation', extending from World War II, through the Algerian War, to the new anti-fascism – reconfigured as a global civil war.²⁹ What travelled from one point to another of this 'invented tradition' were not only powerful images and myths, but also what Charles Tilly has called 'repertoires of collective action'.³⁰

This conceptual tool allows us to address anew the debate on social movements and on political violence.³¹ With a few remarkable exceptions, in fact, the literature has underestimated the influence of the Algerian War, and more generally speaking decolonisation, in the genealogy of the New Left 'repertoires', from the sit-in to the urban guerrilla.³² It thereby fails to explain why and how, towards the end of the global 1960s, a significant faction of these militants would discover – 'like Fanon's Algerian peasants', observed Hannah Arendt – that 'only violence pays'.³³

Another historiographical trend that needs to be woven into this analytical perspective is the one that began to reconsider the 'long 1960s' in a less Euro-Atlantic perspective, focusing on the Global South and its connections with Europe.³⁴ Particularly useful in tackling the challenge of this complex simultaneous spatiality, is the toolbox developed by global history, which does not just study a generic impact of 'Third Worldism' in one or more national cases. So far, many definitions of this approach have been given, often contradictory.³⁵ The most interesting are those interpretations that have not considered global history as a new academic domain but rather as a mental

attitude aimed at highlighting the transformative dimension of translocal encounters (and clashes), as proposed by global microhistory (Trivellato), by connected history (Subrahmanyam) or by micro-spatial history (De Vito).³⁶ In other words, it is an issue of visualising historical processes not only within the framework of the nation-state but also trying to focus on those ‘alternative or complementary spaces within which historical actors formed social relationships and interpreted their world’.³⁷

This sensibility is particularly effective when combined with an oral history methodology, as in a recent pioneering study on Europe’s 1968.³⁸ However, these studies focus mainly on the East–West exchanges and disregard the North–South dimension. Moreover, it is also necessary to encompass a global intellectual history and a bottom-up approach by grounding its focus in cultures and practices of grassroots activists’ networks.

Networks and Vectors of the New Political Cultures

The hypothesis I thus propose is that it was during the Algerian War that radical anticolonialism started to imagine itself as a new antifascism, connecting with a proactive memory of the Resistance. The Algerian War, in fact, was not only the inverted replay of the Second World War (this time with the French in the role of the Nazis), but Algeria was in all respects part of the history of the European antifascist struggle: ‘Algerian’ soldiers had fought for the liberation of Europe in the French army and, while de Gaulle was in London, between 1942 and 1944 Algiers was the capital of ‘*France libre*’ under the command of the Comité français de libération nationale.³⁹ In this perspective, looking at the anticolonial networks in and between Algeria, France, and Italy, and in order to move beyond merely national monographs, it is necessary to focus on the lives, experiences and memories of grassroots militants – women and men – who, in different ways, engaged in these networks. Who were they? Why and how did they get involved? What were their tasks or desires? With which other networks were they in touch? How do they represent their ‘enemy’, and therefore their own selves? And sixty years later, how do they compose and process their memories of this anticolonial militancy? Moreover, to what extent did Algerians, French and Italians share a common ethos, if any? What were the reciprocal influences between the New Left and the Algerian Revolution, before and after independence?

Many women fought in the Algerian War: were these women as influenced by Western models as much as *they* would influence *them* through figures such as Djamila Boupacha, from the Algiers bombing network?⁴⁰ The portrait of Boupacha drawn by Picasso was published on the front page of the review *Les Lettres françaises* in 1962.⁴¹ The same image appeared in the book *Djamila Boupacha* by Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halimi, published by Gallimard and dedicated to this 22-year-old militant of the National Liberation Front who

had been savagely tortured by French *paras*.⁴² Also in 1962, this book was translated into Italian by Editori Riuniti – however now with the title *I carnefici* (*The butchers*). While the aim of the translators sought to draw attention to the scandal of a ‘partisan’ tortured with methods all-too-similar to those of the Nazi-fascists, yet this attention-grabbing title inadvertently ended up overturning the subject of history – from Boupacha to the ‘butchers’, the French parachutists who tortured and raped her.⁴³ Less well known, beyond a small circle of music-lovers and scholars, is that Djamila Boupacha also had one of Luigi Nono’s *Canti di vita e d’amore* dedicated to her in that same year.⁴⁴

Around the end of the 1950s, new communication technologies, unprecedented media markets, and the access to a mobility that would have been unimaginable a few short years before, contributed to radically redesign what corresponded to the word ‘world’.⁴⁵ The texts and the images of Fanon, Guevara, Castro, Lumumba, Ho Chi Minh or Boupacha created a powerful feeling of a shared – although asymmetrical – space, in which the Third World had moved from the periphery to the centre.

At the crossroads of political history and cultural history, the burgeoning field of research on ‘political cultures’ helps us to better understand this ‘new world’ that is starting to take shape. According to Jean-François Sirinelli and Eric Vigne, a political culture consists of ‘a sort of code’ and ‘a series of referents’ that can be ‘formalised within an organisation’ or more broadly spread ‘among a political family or a political tradition’.⁴⁶ This approach is particularly useful, on the one hand in analysing the interaction between the phenomenon of decolonisation and the political cultures traditionally represented by social democracy, communism, and political Catholicism in Western Europe during the Cold War;⁴⁷ and on the other hand in studying the contemporaneous formation of a new, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist ethic, within and beyond the political parties.⁴⁸ The Algerian War of Independence was also a turning point in this respect, revealing divisions and discontent inside traditional Left organisations that appeared to the anti-colonial militants progressively morally delegitimised. Algerian peasants and Cuban guerrilla fighters – rather than the gentrified workers or trade unionists of the First World – became, in the eyes of the emerging transnational New Left, the real actors in the world revolution of which they dreamed.⁴⁹

In this perspective, it’s clear that Third Worldism was a political project more than a geographical space.⁵⁰ It was also an attempt to experiment with *other* political geographies, which cut across the binary Cold War status quo.⁵¹ New Left parties such as the PSU (Parti socialiste unifié) in France, or the PSIUP (Partito socialista italiano di unità proletaria) in Italy were born, blending these shared views with national and local features.⁵²

In a diachronic study of how established organisations of the Left dealt with the issue of decolonisation – and more specifically that of Algeria – the key question to be answered is thus why did the way this was handled become

unsatisfactory for a growing number of militants, giving birth to what would later be called the New Left? And conversely, in which ways – if any – was the ‘horizon of expectation’ of the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN), and later also of the opposition movements (*Imazighen* [Berbers], the FFS, the *Front de forces socialistes* led by Hocine Aït Ahmed, etc.), influenced by the rising New Left (particularly through *coopérants* and *pieds-rouges*)? By means of optics other than those currently available, we should be able to visualise and test the consistency of these new transnational political cultures, sometimes overlapping with but also progressively exceeding the Cold War cultures. It is in this framework that the issue of political violence needs to be reconsidered, aiming to better understand the relation between the global civil war and the radicalisation of the repertoires of collective action.

The importance of an author like Frantz Fanon obviously cannot be underestimated in this perspective. In particular *The Wretched of the Earth* was undoubtedly a bestseller of the global 1960s.⁵³ A long-cherished yet superficial reading of Fanon, hard to dislodge, tends to present him as merely a theorist of violence. However, Fanon’s thinking was not and is not reducible to a superficial reading of the first chapter of *The Wretched*, ‘Concerning Violence’. Fanon was the key figure who made the Algerian War of Independence intelligible for the New Left who conceived of decolonisation also as decolonisation of the mind/self from all the varied panoply of power, in both its material and epistemic dimensions.⁵⁴ In this sense, Fanon’s work – like Marx’s *Manuscripts of 1844* – became an instrument for understanding the alienation of the capitalist condition.

The ‘Damned’ of the Revolution: Three Case Studies

In what follows I will briefly dwell on three examples of what I have called the ‘damned of the revolution’ (echoing Fanon’s *Damnés de la terre*): those militants of the new radical left for whom the Algerian Revolution was a turning point in their biographical-political trajectory.

Without attempting to be exhaustive in mapping the complexity of the new political cultures of the global 1960s, and being aware of local and national specificities, I have chosen three case studies that are, however, exemplary of the general approach that underlies the basic thesis of this article. It is not simply a matter of investigating the anti-colonial genealogy of the European new left, a perspective that in the last twenty years has begun to gain a foothold in the most relevant historiography.⁵⁵ In other words, it is not so much a question of evaluating *once again* the impact on A of B – here the influence on Western culture of something from ‘outside’ – whereby the focus would always remain the West, Europe. Rather, it is a matter of considering these phenomena together, trying to redesign the political geography of Europe to include the postcolonial space. And this perhaps means simply to consider the

long 1960s in a true global perspective: one that is capable of visualising these two 'spaces' together, investigating the 'folds' where two even geographically distant edges meet politically.

Among these New Left militants, an apparently anomalous case study is that of Elaine Mokhtefi. Born Elaine Klein in New York in a modest Jewish milieu, she moved, aged 23, to Paris in 1951, so as to (in her words) 'drink at the fountain of the past'.⁵⁶ At the time, her main historical and political reference was the Second World War. Her passionate memoirs open with a reference to the war and the Nazi occupation of France: Elaine grew up during the war and, on arrival in Paris, that was inevitably still her main reference.

A year later, in 1952, came what she calls retrospectively her 'enlightenment': when she witnessed the brutal police repression of an Algerian rally on 1 May.⁵⁷ Starting from 1950, Algerians based in France decided to join the traditional demonstrations of the workers' movement, on 1 May and 14 July, especially in Paris, where they formed a section framed by their own *service d'ordre* [security staff] at the back of the demonstration, to underline the growing disagreement with the hegemonic Communist Party.⁵⁸ As is increasingly common in the 1950s, the police opened fire, and on 1 May 1952 there were four deaths (in Paris, Le Havre, Montbéliard) in an escalation that characterised the convulsive sequence preceding the insurgency in Algeria and which culminated in six Algerians shot dead at the demonstration on 14 July 1953 in Paris.⁵⁹

Thus Elaine Mokhtefi discovered the 'lie' of the colonial French republic.⁶⁰ Soon afterwards she wrote: 'The Algerian War became the defining issue of the 1950s in Europe. Everyone took side, and wherever I lived – in France, Switzerland and Belgium – I became involved, marching in anti-war demonstrations, introducing resolutions, denouncing torture.'⁶¹ In this sense, although born in America, Elaine Mokhtefi can be considered so much influenced by the French context and by the Algerian War of Independence as to be worthy of being fully included in the ranks of these militants of the nascent New Left.

After having worked for the delegation of the provisional government of the Algerian Republic back in New York, in the summer of 1962 she moved to Algiers. At the time Algiers was becoming 'a hub for liberation and antifascist organisations.' Elaine Mokhtefi goes on:

I came to know exiles from Spain and Portugal, opponents of the military dictators Franco and Salazar, as well as others from Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, and Central America, political opponents as well as representatives of guerrilla movements. Every imaginable liberation organisation had an office in Algiers, from the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (the Vietcong) to the ANC, SWAPO, FRELIMO, the MPLA, student hijackers from Ethiopia, and Palestinian liberation organisations.⁶²

In 1969 she met Eldridge Cleaver, the Black Panther Party's Minister of Information, who landed in Algiers one June night. She soon became the Panther's fixer, interpreter and eventually 'comrade'. As she wrote at the end of her

memoirs: 'My story with Algeria has invaded and occupied my being forever. I was one of the dreamers who came to build a more perfect world.'⁶³

The second case study is of Mokhtar Mokhtefi, Elaine's husband. They met in Algeria during the Revolution. The son of a butcher, Mokhtar Mokhtefi was born in 1935 in Berrouaghia, a town in the present-day *wilaya* of Médéa, some one hundred kilometres south of Algiers. The youngest of six siblings, Mokhtar was the only one to continue his studies beyond the '*certificat d'études primaires*', thanks to the foresight of a teacher who recognised that his abilities were out of the ordinary, and who convinced Mokhtar's (recalcitrant) father of the opportunities that the school could offer to his son. Mokhtar went to high school in Blida, was a '*maître d'internat*' in Constantine, and discovered metropolitan France in a sort of 'journey of formation', maturing political awareness towards militancy in favour of a free, democratic, and independent Algeria, joining in 1957 the Algerian Front of National Liberation. He writes in his memoirs:

In high school I lived with Europeans, I discovered their way of life without however understanding their indifference to everything related to Algerian classmates. They don't want to know us, they are content with the prejudices inculcated by their parents, they don't realise that ignorance of the other generates fear, that this fear is transformed into the arrogance and racism of the winners. But what grieves me most is the ditch that is dug between me and my people. Unwittingly, I mentally feel very far from them.⁶⁴

The biographical path of Mokhtar Mokhtefi is certainly not typical of the whole of Algeria, which at the time of the war of liberation was still a rural country with a largely illiterate population. And yet the story of Mokhtefi is still indicative of a minority that is not negligible, so much so that one could speak of 'exceptional normal', taking up the oxymoron coined by micro-historian Edoardo Grendi.⁶⁵

In his memoirs, Mokhtefi shows the importance of the contribution of Algerian youth associations and of student associations to the struggle for independence (culminating in the strike of 19 May 1956). Regarding the quarterly forum of the Algerian Youth Association for Social Action held in Sidi Ferruch in April 1955, he writes:

In a rural setting, young people from all communities, boys and girls, question each other amicably. They belong to the student or Christian worker youth (JEC and JOC), to the Union of Jewish students and to various Algerian organisations. They discuss the country's problems without fear of facing political issues, of evoking injustice, repression, the absence of freedom.⁶⁶

But above all – and it seems to me perhaps the most innovative aspect – Mokhtar Mokhtefi's story fully reintegrates Algeria and Algerians into the global 1960s. And this not through a diplomatic history or international relations, but from the opposite end of the spectrum, 'from below', with a history of Mokhtar's readings, interests, travels and encounters – such as when, travelling to France,

Mokhtefi and his friend Mohamed find themselves at the La Bocca international campsite near Cannes, in the company of French, Dutch, Yugoslavian youths.⁶⁷

The third, and quite unusual, case is that of Giovanni Pirelli.⁶⁸ The oldest son of the great Italian tyre-maker, Giovanni (b. 1918) participated in the Russian campaign and then in the Resistance, two crucial experiences for the development of his political identity. On 7 May 1946, as his father regained control of the family business from the partisans who had been running it, Giovanni told him of his decision to join the Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity.⁶⁹ One year later, in May 1947, the Antifascist Front split apart.

It was against that backdrop (the authoritarian restoration organised by the Christian Democrat party), that Giovanni Pirelli agreed to collaborate with Piero Malvezzi on the research which led to 'a document and a monument that are priceless' (Goffredo Fofi): their collection of letters written by Italian partisans about to be executed (*Lettere dei condannati a morte della Resistenza italiana*, 1952) and the companion volume of letters from around Europe, *Lettere dei condannati a morte della Resistenza europea* (1954).⁷⁰

The year of that latter publication, 1954, saw the beginning of the War of Algerian Independence, which Pirelli, like most intellectuals and militant former partisans, increasingly identifies as the new front in the struggle against Fascism. In 1961, he writes:

The wave of antifascism raised by the Eichmann trial is useful. Sure, it's also useful. As will the trial of a Massu or a Salan, in a few decades, be useful for the million Algerians who died in a purely Nazi war that is taking place today under our eyes of patented antifascists.⁷¹

In February 1961, Pirelli visited Algerian refugee camps in Tunisia for the first time. There, as with the partisans' letters, he took on the huge task of collecting testimony, 'convinced that the Algerians themselves were the only people qualified to talk about their experience, which was quite distinct from the French opposition to the war, *and should be kept so*'.⁷²

That conviction gave birth to two extraordinary works. With Jacques Charby, Pirelli published a collection of accounts and drawings by Algerian refugee children in Tunisia (published in 1962 simultaneously in Italy by Einaudi and in France by Maspero).⁷³ This is a unique work, perhaps its only peer Yann Le Masson's film *J'ai huit ans* [I am eight years old], shot in those same Tunisian camps and with those same drawings.

The following year, in 1963, a thick volume of more than seven hundred pages was published (again by Einaudi and Maspero). It was edited by Patrick Kessel and Giovanni Pirelli, and in the Italian edition bore the title – printed on a cover with the colours of independent Algeria – *Lettere della rivoluzione algerina*.⁷⁴ The title's echo of the collections of Resistance documents was no marketing ploy: the context may have differed – in that this war was still going on – but the working method was the same. The sense of the work is summed up on

the back cover in a single sentence: ‘This book documents how, through numberless tragedies and *individual* acts of heroism, a people has grasped self-awareness and a nation has been born’. Once again Pirelli focuses attention on the real individuals who make history:

An element common to all these documents – we read in a sober note from the editors – is that they have a personal character. [...] This criterion led to the exclusion of those texts which, although having testimony value, appeared classifiable as journalistic, literary writings or belonging to an area that could be defined as official.⁷⁵

Pirelli’s ‘partisan’ posture is the same as that which led him to undertake the work on the antifascist struggle in the late 1940s. Thus, in 1969, in a new foreword to his *Lettere della Resistenza* conceived for students, he writes:

Never forget that the Resistance did not end with the defeat of Fascism: it continued, and continues to this day against all that survives of that mentality and those methods; against every system which gives a handful of people the power to decide for all. It continues in the struggle for real independence by peoples subject to colonialism or imperialism. Continues in the fight against racism. In short: as long as there are exploiters and exploited, oppressors and oppressed, those who have too much and those who starve, there will always be the need to choose which side to be on.⁷⁶

Epilogue: From One Generation to Another

In this transnational movement of ideas and practices, a key role was played by the networks directly supporting the Algerians’ struggle. Unfortunately, there is still very little scholarship on these informal groups, mostly limited to the main characters of the two best-known French ‘*réseaux*’ (networks): namely the one headed by Sartrean philosopher Francis Jeanson, and the other organised around the Egypt-born communist Henri Curiel.⁷⁷

Beyond these charismatic (Parisian) intellectuals and their immediate circles, we know almost nothing about the militants involved at different levels of the networks: nearly nothing about their relations with the Algerians, and next to nothing about their contacts and links with the other networks active in Belgium, Germany, Italy, Switzerland. We do know, however, that the elders among these anti-colonial militants had often been partisans in the Resistance, as with Francis Jeanson in France or Giovanni Pirelli in Italy.

Speaking at a rally for Vietnam in 1967 in Florence, only two days after the far-right military coup in Greece, Franco Fortini, also a former partisan, said: ‘At the beginning I asked myself what we were talking about: | and I know that we talked about Vietnam to the extent that we talked about us, about the violence we suffer and about the violence we have to exercise’.⁷⁸ In this sense, antifascism was a shared ethos, all the stronger because it was understood not as a historical event that had concluded, but as a ‘suspended delivery’ (Parri) between one generation and another, between former partisans (born around

the 1920s) and ‘inexperienced younger brothers’ (born around the 1940s). The example of the ‘elder partisan brothers’ was there to indicate what to do ‘if one day that hour returned’. Fortini clarifies: ‘war no, guerrilla yes’.⁷⁹

Notes

1. Archivio Privato Giovanni Pirelli, Cartelle di lavoro, 30, Fanon corrispondenza, quoted in Love, “Anti-Fascism, Anticolonialism and Anti-Self,” 353. Unless otherwise indicated translations are mine.
2. *Cantacronache* 4, Italia Canta C 0008, 1959, 45 rpm EP. Cover notes by Maurizio Corgnati. See Ferrari, “Cantacronache 1958–1962.”
3. Amodei, *Nel blu dipinti di rosso*, 21.
4. *Cantacronache* 3, Italia Canta C 0006, 1959, 45 rpm EP. Cover notes by Ferruccio Parri.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Testi delle canzoni con note dell'autore*, in Michele L. Straniero, *La Madonna della Fiat*, Divergo 5335 525 – DVAP 025, 1979, 33 rpm LP.
7. For the use of ‘(post)colonial’ see Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*, ix *passim*.
8. For an overview on the global 1960s: Chen et al., *The Handbook of the Global Sixties*; Chaplin and Pieper Mooney, *The Global 1960s*.
9. Vidotto, *Italiani/e*; Gallerano, “La stagione dei movimenti e le sue periodizzazioni,” 33–41; Dreyfus-Armand and de Baecque, *Les Années* 68.
10. Maier, “Conclusion: 1968—Did it matter?,” 413–34.
11. Kalter, *The Discovery of the Third World*.
12. See Brun and Penot-Lacassagne, *Engagements et déchirements*.
13. Giovana, *La memoria di una lotta*, 271.
14. *Ibid.*, 272, 277–8.
15. See Brazzoduro, “Il nemico interno,” 127–42.
16. For the extreme development of this aspect see Matard-Bonucci, “Des usages de l’antifascisme et de la résistance par les Brigades Rouges,” 16–35.
17. Traverso, *Fire and blood*.
18. See also Ventrone, *I dannati della rivoluzione*.
19. Schmitt, *Theorie des Partisanen*. In the same year the concept was proposed by Arendt, *On Revolution*. See on this Agamben, *Homo sacer II. Stasis*.
20. For this ‘deterritorialised’ reading of Schmitt see also Srivastava, *Italian Colonialism and Resistances to Empire, 1930–1970*.
21. See Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonisation*.
22. Sirinelli, *Histoire des droites en France*, Vol. 2, *Cultures*.
23. On Cabral see Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution*.
24. On the first see Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*; on the second: Kalter, “From Global to Local and Back,” 115–36.
25. For a survey of the most recent works: Istvan Deak, *Europe on Trial*; Wiewiorka, *Une Histoire de la résistance en Europe occidentale*; Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*; Wiewiorka, *La Mémoire désunie*; Focardi and Groppo, *L’Europa e le sue memorie*.
26. See for example Hugo et al., *Rethinking Antifascism*; Hajek, *Negotiating Memories of Protest in Western Europe*; Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance*; Evans, *The Memory of Resistance*.

27. Remarkable exceptions are Gildea and Tompkins, "The Transnational in the Local," 581–605; Evans, *The Memory of Resistance*.
28. Terhoeven, "Hitler's Children?," 129.
29. See Birchall, *Sartre et l'extrême gauche française*; Arthur, *Unfinished Projects*.
30. Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758–1834*.
31. On which see the recent collective volume edited by Martin Alvarez and Rey Tristan. *Revolutionary Violence and the New Left*.
32. See for example Slobodian, *Foreign Front*.
33. Arendt, *On violence*, 14.
34. See for example Kalter, *The Discovery of the Third World*; Blum, Guidi, and Rillon, *étudiants Africains en mouvements*; Tolomelli, *L'Italia dei movimenti*; Slobodian, *Foreign front*.
35. See Brazzoduro, "Oltre la storia nazionale?," 131–48.
36. See Trivellato, "Is there a future for Italian microhistory in the age of global history?"; Subrahmanyam, *Mondi connessi*; De Vito, "History Without Scale," 348–72.
37. Kalter, *The Discovery of the Third World*, 5.
38. See Gildea et al., *Europe's 1968*.
39. Jennings, *La France libre fut africaine*.
40. See Mauss-Copeaux, "La vita vera," 16–43; Vince, *Our Fighting Sisters*.
41. Daix, *Les Lettres françaises*.
42. De Beauvoir and Halimi, *Djamila Boupacha*. On Picasso's lithography see Gervereau, "Des bruits et des silences," 197.
43. De Beauvoir and Halimi, *I carnefici*. See Brazzoduro, "Voir/ne pas voir l'Algérie. La gauche italienne et la lutte des Algériens," 331–8.
44. See Durazzi, "Luigi Nono's *Canti di vita e d'amore*," 451–80.
45. See Jobs, "Youth Movements," 376–404.
46. Sirinelli and Vigne, "Des cultures politiques," III–IV.
47. See Westad, *The Global Cold War*.
48. See Chakrabarty, "The legacies of Bandung," 45–68.
49. For an innovative study on the identification of the French New Left with the proletarian 'homme arabe', see Shepard, *Mâle décolonisation*.
50. Prashad, *The darker nations*.
51. See Slobodian, "Bandung in divided Germany," 644–62.
52. Agosti, *Il partito provvisorio*; Castagnez et al., *Le Parti socialiste unifié*; Gordon, "A 'Mediterranean New Left?'," 309–30.
53. In a boundless bibliography see the recent: Batchelor and Harding, *Translating Frantz Fanon Across Continents and Languages*; Srivastava, "Le Fanon italien," 565–83.
54. See Beneduce and Gibson, *Frantz Fanon, Psychiatry and Politics*.
55. See, at least for France, Bantigny, 1968. *De grands soirs en petits matins*; Zancarini-Fournel, *Les luttes et les rêves. Une histoire populaire de la France*; and Ross, *Mai '68 and its Afterlives*.
56. Mokhtefi, *Algiers, Third World Capital*, ix.
57. *Ibid.*, 6.
58. See Ruscio, *Les communistes et l'Algérie*, 165–71.
59. See Kupferstein, *Les balles du 14 juillet 1953*. See also Blanchard, *Histoire de l'immigration algérienne en France*, 64, and Blanchard, *La police parisienne et les Algériens (1944–1962)*, 117–43.
60. Mokhtefi, *Algiers, Third World Capital*, 6.
61. *Ibid.*, 16–7.
62. *Ibid.*, 69.

63. Ibid., 210.
64. Mokhtefi, *J'étais Français-Musulman*, 128.
65. Grendi, "Micro-analisi e storia sociale," 506–20.
66. Mokhtefi, *J'étais Français-Musulman*, 123.
67. See *ibid.*, 136 sg.
68. See Scotti, *Vita di Giovanni Pirelli*; and, enriched by an anthological choice of textes, Scotti, *Giovanni Pirelli, intellettuale del Novecento*.
69. Tranfaglia, *Vita di Alberto Pirelli*, 320.
70. Fofi, *Prefazione*, 8.
71. Pirelli, *La generazione degli anni difficili*, 201–2.
72. Bermani, *Giovanni Pirelli*, 30 (emphasis mine).
73. See *Racconti di bambini d'Algeria; Les enfants d'Algérie*.
74. See *Le peuple algérien et la guerre*; It. trans. *Lettere della rivoluzione algerina*.
75. *Lettere della rivoluzione algerina*, XXXI.
76. Pirelli, *Lettera a giovani che conosco e ad altri che non conosco*, 8–9.
77. See for example Andersson, *Mémoire éclatée*; Kaminsky, *Adolfo Kaminsky, une vie de faussaire*; Ulloa, *Francis Jeanson*; Charby, *Les porteurs d'espoir*; Hamon and Rotman, *Les porteurs de valises*. Recent historical reasearch on Italy's case: Panvini, "Third Worldism in Italy," 289–308; Ottolini, "Giovanni Pirelli e la guerra d'indipendenza algerina," 85–110; De Giuseppe, "Il 'Terzo Mondo' in Italia," 29–52.
78. Fortini, *Intervento alla manifestazione per la libertà del Vietnam*, 1408. On this episode see Socrate, *Sessantotto*, 37–45.
79. Fortini, *Intervento alla manifestazione per la libertà del Vietnam*, 1405.

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