

The Relationship between the Italian Leftist Parties and the Conflict in the Middle East

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*The Parliamentary Left
and the Israeli – Arab
Palestinian Question*

By

Nicola Seu

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For Eleonora

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INTRODUCTION

1) General Introduction

In the study of the relationship between the Italian left and the Conflict in the Middle East, it is first necessary to clarify those parties involved. The participants in this conflict can be clearly identified as the Israelis and Arabs on one side and the Palestinians on the other.

The conflict, which today has still not come to an end, involves the Jewish community that was to become the core of the Jewish state in 1948, and the Arab populations and countries which have their roots in the presence and growing immigration of early European Jews (also including African and Asian players in a land of different cultural and social structures). Whichever opinion and side is taken regarding the conflict, the struggling entities are clearly identifiable on a racial and/or religious basis.

Some difficulties arose when the identification of leftist political thought in the newborn Italian Republic had to be made. Firstly, it is important to keep in mind the field of study of this book, which does not undertake any investigation outside of the parliament. Due to this, none of the extra-parliamentarian leftist formation, which had a certain influence on Italian public life especially in the sixties and seventies, is taken into consideration, except in relation to the role it played both for and against the leftist parliamentarian factions.

The task is now to define the leftist parties. In this book, the political bodies under investigation are those whose roots can be found in the labour movement, and in the socialist and Marxist traditions. This approach also finds its rational explanation in the socialist basis of the Zionist ideology that inspired the European Jewry during the process of the colonisation of historical Palestine, and eventually in the creation of the State of Israel. The Kibbutzim attempt to break with the bourgeois tradition in order to experiment with a socialist way of life¹ finds no linkage even with the first social-liberal traditions of the Republican Party. For this reason, the P.R.I. is left out of this book, despite their self-proclaimed association with the left. The Republican Party has no Marxist background and no real socialist roots, and instead finds its points of

¹ Brenner, 2003, p. 66.

reference, especially for the international orientation, in Atlanticism, liberal and democratic liberal speculation.² The political bodies referred to in this book are fundamentally two; the P.C.I., and the socialist parties. These socialist parties have a turbulent history of division and reunion that continues even today.

The Communist Party have been the major opposition party throughout the history of the Italian Republic, and played the main role in shaping the political thought for the Italian left. The most valuable characteristic of the P.C.I. is its connotation of being a party of the masses. Being outlawed by the fascist regime, the Communist Party entered into the Italian democratic scenario with a vast popular consensus and with the important task of reshaping its structure from a revolutionary anti-Fascist movement into a political entity able to play within democratic rules and to respond directly to its electorate and party members.³

In contrast to the Communist Party, the main characterising aspect of the history of the Socialist Party regards its fragmentation. Unlike the P.C.I., a Leninist democratic centralist party,⁴ the socialist ground has shown splits and different apolitical guidelines since the end of the post-war democratic era. For the sake of the book it is not necessary to look into the passages of the Socialist Party in detail, what is important to underline is the less dogmatic character of the party, and the opening to different political electorates, in which can also be included non-leftist areas, as Pietro Nenni pointed out at the national congress when speaking about the Catholic electorate.⁵ The relations between the Communist Party and milieu played a central role in the development of the Socialist Party, which moved from being an ally in the first democratic elections in the Italian Republic,⁶ and later distanced itself in pursuit of independent logic and a more active participation in the ruling of the State, eventually culminating in the leading of the government itself. Throughout its entire history, however, the Socialist Party never repudiated its history of anti-Fascism, its leftist basis and its profound link with the working class.

After seeing the composition of the Italian left in the Parliament, a view of the happenings on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea is required. In the Italian colonial empire, two provinces in North Africa, Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, were conquered by the Italian army in the

² http://www.pri.it/new/documenti/statuto_pri.pdf

³ Scoppola, 1991, pp. 114-120.

⁴ Panebianco, 1989, p. 160.

⁵ Scoppola, 1991, p. 323.

⁶ <http://elezionistorico.interno.it/index.php?tpel=C&dtel=18/04/1948&tpa=I&tpe=A&lev0=0&levsut0=0&es0=S&ms=S>

second decade of the 20th century and unified under the name of Libya by the fascist regime in 1934. In the Arab world, the Italian influence did not cross Libyan borders, and the defeat in the Second World War forced Italy to leave the colonies and transform its colonialist political strategies in the Mediterranean into economical and commercial ones.⁷ The great transformation following the end of the Second World War gave rise to, on the one hand, the process of decolonisation, and on the other, the industrialisation and transformation of the Italian society from a rural to a consumer-based society, passing through the tight relations with the Arab lands, both for the necessity of obtaining raw materials, and also as a way out for the growing Italian industry. The majority of the petroleum and gas consumed in Italy came from countries like Libya and Algeria, and this has had an enormous burden on the political choices of the Italian governments throughout the post-war years and during the founding of Israel.⁸ Such a matter was a concern for the ruling classes, and for the party that was in power and was therefore under pressure to make the Italian State work; but to what extent did the energy needs and policies of Italy have an influence on the non-ruling parties? The major opposition party all through the first Italian Republic, the Communist Party, never came to the governmental bureaux of the State, and foreign relations were not an issue concerning the economy of the State or the energy supplies for the country. Which kinds of policy can concern a party reasonably free from direct accountability for the accomplishments or failures of the country's economical development?

In the history of the Jewish and Israeli representation of values after 1948, the ideological elements were increasing, reaching a peak in emotional involvement in the seventies and eighties. What is most spectacular, however, concerns the mutation of Israel's face in the eyes of the leftist parties and wider political thought.

The Italian member of Parliament Fiamma Nirenstein spoke (in her 2007 work) of her vexations about the distant past, with reference to the time when, on the eve of the establishment of Israel, the P.C.I. secretary Palmiro Togliatti stated his party's appreciation of the: "*Great victory of anti-Imperialism.*"⁹ Such a sentence nowadays would be difficult to place in the mouth of any politician, and does not represent any political body or thought in the leftist milieu. However, immediately after Israel's birth the major opposition party worked actively in order to pressurise the Italian government into a recognition of the fledgling state. Communist Party

⁷ Lewis, 2003, p. 185.

⁸ Sachar, 1998, p. 248.

⁹ Nirenstein, 2007, p. 248.

member Terracini's point of order in the parliament, requiring an explanation for the lack of acknowledgement,¹⁰ seemed to be incompatible with the same Communist Party's position of 20 years later.

To compare statements, what Togliatti said in 1948 clashes with what his successor at the helm of the party affirmed about the Arab people fighting against the Israeli expansionist policy.¹¹ To a greater extent, the profound change in the Communist Party is evidenced by the joint communication of the P.C.I. and the socialist Baath Party after a meeting between the two. The Syrian party expressed its gratitude for P.C.I. solidarity in the Arab people's struggle against the aggressive Israeli expansionist policy supported by imperialism and international Zionism.¹²

It was hard to believe, when, during a visit to Israel in the early nineties, the secretary of the former P.C.I. (which shortly before had become known as the P.D.S.) Achille Occhetto, reshaped perceptions of Zionism by contesting that the Italian left was incapable of understanding it. The Jewish national movement then turned towards a freedom led ideology which had its roots in the labour movement as well. The major fault of the Italian left was to have lost the memory of it, to have perceived Zionism as an enemy, a fundamentalist and racist thought, and not as a part of the same socialist origin, a movement for the rights of the Jewish people and for the path of the workers' rights.¹³

Such a drastic and dramatic metamorphosis in the Communist Party is not alone in the leftist Italian milieu. A similar process, despite having less noteworthy language and a different root and motivation, happened in the Socialist Party (or more specifically, *parties*) as previously highlighted.

Gaetano Arfè, chief director of the official press organ of the Socialist Party, gave a good example of the changing progress inside the socialist environment in Italy when he wrote, just after the end of the Six-Day War, a descriptive article praising a Socialist Party which: "*once again moves on a line for the defense of the peace, committed to identifying the real menacing dangers without responding to the logic of the power interests that once again clashes in the Middle East.*"¹⁴ The distance that separates the two major leftist Italian parties seems pretty clear, as does the proclaimed political and ideological independence of the socialist, whereas the communists are engulfed in a bigger and more external logic. However, not much time passed before what could be read within the

¹⁰ Unità 26/5/1948.

¹¹ Unità 13/5/1973.

¹² Unità 12/7/1973.

¹³ Unità 30/4/1991.

¹⁴ Avanti! 18/6/1967.

pages of the same newspaper, from the pen of the very same journalist, was indicative of a quite different approach towards Israel. In December 1973, after a terrorist attack at the airport in Rome, Arfè blamed what he saw as Israeli racist political short-sightedness for preventing the Palestinians from turning their movement into one of real resistance. *“Israel is now arrogant, imperialist and what bonded it to the socialist political thought belongs to the past.”*¹⁵

How is such a sea-change possible? How can such radical positions appear after such a short length of time? Is the change the result of a negligence complex within the Italian left, relating to a perceived excessive friendship towards the Jews and Israel? Has their analytical power by this point grown to the extent that it could have been shedding a light on what was before veiled?¹⁶ It is seriously hard to believe that the colonialist nature of Israel could not be perceived before the outbreak of the Six-Day War, as it was surely not possible to be left in the dark, for it concerned the real nature of Zionism and the situation of the Palestinian victims. Yet in 1938, with the great Arab rebellion, the future Prime Minister of Israel David Ben-Gurion spoke in front of the Mapai (a leftist working class political party) committee thus: *“stating that the Arabs are the aggressors and the Jews those who defend themselves is halfway true. As for safety it is, but this is a political struggle, and politically the Jews are the aggressors, and the Arabs those who defend themselves.”*¹⁷ The connotations of the State of Israel as a fighting, colonialist and aggressive entity could have been perceived by the Italian political parties, and could therefore have formed a part of the debate in the aftermath of the Second World War, but in reality that did not happen.

My intention is to give enough evidence to refute the ideological vision behind the conflict which is currently the most widespread one, and to prove that the historical and military events that happened (and are happening) outside of the Italian borders are the real cornerstone of the Jewish state’s varying degrees of appreciation within the Italian leftist parties during the 50 years under consideration.

In addition to that I intend to demonstrate that the importance of the conflict in the debate and strategies of the parties comes in relation to international factors and to the space the media dedicates to the Middle East. Moreover, the level and profundity of the analyses are deeper and more intense as the events develop outside of national borders, and as other turbulent areas of the world, for instance Eastern Europe or South

¹⁵ Avanti! 19/12/1973.

¹⁶ Caffaz in Cingoli, 1989, pp. 71-77.

¹⁷ Morris, 2001, p. 837.

America, consume their burden of emotionality and thus lose their centrality in the Italian political debate.

2) Methodology

Before giving an outlook on the literature and the primary and secondary sources used in the book, I consider it essential to spend some time addressing the core reasons that motivated me to research this issue. Having spent my entire academic life studying the Middle East, and having spent my bachelor years in a biased environment within the university, I reached a different point of view on the matter after spending some years abroad and living in the region, both in the Jewish State and in various Arab countries. The seed of the investigation begins with my perception of the manipulation of independent variables, that is to say, the interpretation of objective factors to support theories responding to external interests. For instance, the recurring comparison of the Israeli policy towards the Arabs with either the Nazi persecution of the Jews, or the attempt at exterminating the Arab population in Palestine, clashes noticeably with the absence of the growing birth rate and the number of Arab inhabitants both in the territories and within the pre-1967 borders of the Jewish State. A lack of such simple verification raises the question of an independent variable as an independent fact, which could influence the observed variable, and therefore alter perceptions of the aspects of reality which have suffered from being manipulated.

Manipulation in this case must not be interpreted as a conscious modification of data, but rather as a degree of importance assigned to that data, concerning the dominating theories and analysis of the state of things. Just to give an example, numbers of Arab students in Israeli universities, or the infrastructure built in the territories under Israeli occupation are not publicised in order to highlight other data which better suits existing presumptions.

To this end, the qualitative analysis integrates scientific investigation through observation, interviews and introspection. The observational method is, Piaget suggests, among other possibilities, a methodological contribution; although the assimilation of facts by the individuals excludes the existence of pure fact, as the concepts are subjective¹⁸. In my personal case, observation goes alongside personal experiences in both realities, the Middle Eastern one and the Italian one.

¹⁸ Crespi, 2002, p. 116.

Observation is inseparable from the interviews carried out regarding the topic. Even before the decision to undertake this research, my experience led me to close-knit relations with many active players, people of various backgrounds. It is inappropriate to talk about interviews with these subjects only because the initial intention was not to collect data from those conversations to be put into practical use, but this type of informal conversation does not differ much from the actual interviews conducted. My approach with the interviewee has always been, both before and after the decision to write this book, a half structured one, meaning that the first intent is to let the interviewee speak without too much interference by the interviewer. It does not mean that clear and specific questions are not asked, but simply that the free flow of speech is given priority. To give an example, an account of the pre-1967 university feeling about the Jewish cause was given to me by an elderly Israeli doctor who graduated in Italy, and who described with a touch of nostalgia the pro-Israeli environment he experienced during the Six-Day War time. During my time in Italy and the Middle East, the chances for me to have such conversations were numerous, and within the limits of my possibilities, I took advantage of them all. Clearly, such conversations do not constitute scientific literature, but helped me to better understand and depict the emotions and feelings of the changing Italian approach to the Israeli-Palestinian question.

When it was time to conduct interviews with the active participants some difficulties arose, with the primary problem being that of actually reaching the persons of interest. On the Palestinian side, luck did not help me often, as every attempt to contact Palestinian ambassadors or activists was met with silence. My emails and phone calls aimed at starting a dialogue with anyone connected to the Palestinian community in Italy was unsuccessful.

As for the Jewish community, although there were some refusals, the vice-presidents of the Milan and Turin communities were kind enough to dedicate some of their time to me, as well as the president of CIPMO who gave me important information and reference points, especially regarding the last 220 years of history. Finally, a special thanks goes to Emanuele Fiano, the P.D. deputy who outlined clearly how his party approaches the question nowadays in parliament.

Before moving to the written literature, the introspective aspect has to be mentioned, although it is probably the least considered in the draft of the work. As stated previously, the ongoing conflict in the Middle East continues to cause a heavy emotional burden that might taint people's perception of it, and I myself am not entirely exempt from this. The

observational method has also considered the phenomenon of introspection¹⁹ and the personal and emotional participation in the conflict's events and reports. The inner world of the author of this book has been used, amongst many other methodological tools, as a lens for what this conflict could have represented psychologically for the Italian public, a mass of individuals with directly familiar or cultural connections to the Middle Eastern reality.

The above mentioned material cannot be considered as the primary source for the development of the book, despite being important tools for a wider vision and a more complete psychological understanding.

The primary sources for this book are the two main official press organs of the two biggest leftist parties in Italy, *L'Unità* for the P.C.I. and *Avanti!* for the P.S.I. These two daily newspapers do not simply represent the parties' guidelines but were and are sites of actual political debate, where diverse opinions and trends found a space for expression. In addition to the world news reports, the pages of *L'Unità* and *Avanti!* dealt frequently with political analysis, and routinely transcribed the communist and socialist leaders' opinions and political acts. Things changed with the break-up of the Soviet Union and the wider fall of the East-West divide, this being also the time in which the P.C.I. turned into the P.D.S. On the front page of *L'Unità*, the statement of the newspaper's official role disappeared, just as it did in *Avanti!* when the bribe scandal of the early nineties led to the end of the Socialist Party. Foundations, bulletins and documents of the political congresses have proven useful for details of the parties' politics, and thanks as well should go to the Nenni archive (even if it must be said that not much is left outside the official press organs) which carried out very detailed work granting every potential reader the possibility of following proceedings with the highest level of information available to them. In addition to the daily press, other newspapers related to the leftist political thought have been useful for the sake of the book. Magazines such as *Mondo Operaio* and *Critica Sociale* were and are sites of deep political debate and discussion, and have a long and representative history in the Socialist Party; the former being created on Pietro Nenni's initiative and the latter one on Filippo Turati's. Both are still in existence as socialist inspired press organs, though not directly affiliated with a party. A magazine complementary to the daily organ for the communists was *Rinascita*, which, unlike the socialist papers is not issued anymore, as its purpose was to provide an ideological guideline to the communist movement, covering also cultural aspects.

¹⁹ Enciclopedia Rizzoli-Larousse: Introspezione. Milano, Rizzoli editore, 1970.

A wonderful tool that saved me much time on my research, and probably also a visit to the Italian capital city, has been the internet. Not only for the results of the elections, which are now fully accessible on the websites of the Senate and Deputy Chamber, but also for the stenographic relations of all the important sessions of the Italian parliament, which themselves are freely accessible online. The internet has also been vital for the downloading of documents such as U.N. resolutions, European statements, and entire works (or summaries thereof) such as those by Lenin, Marx, or even papers from the new leftist thinkers.

For the historical events taking place in the Middle East, Benny Morris's book "*Righteous Victims*" has been a big help in reconstructing the Israeli side. Xavier Baron's "*Palestinesi, genesi di una Nazione*" has also been a good tool for gaining an insight into the development of the Palestinian movements and the struggle for independence and the homeland.

As for previous works on this subject, some books deserve to be mentioned for various reasons. Antonio Rubbi's work has been enlightening for the reconstruction of the leftist parties' political involvement with the Arab countries and movement, and although it did not cover the Israeli counterpart fully it has helped chronologically. The works of Fabrizio Molinari and Matteo di Figlia provide a remarkably good overview of the Israeli and especially Jewish perspective, as the relation with the leftist parties and thoughts regarding the Jewish Italian components are the real leitmotive of their works.

The works of Italian political analysts such as Panebianco and Scoppola have been of the utmost importance in tracing the nature of the Italian parties and their theoretical backgrounds. In particular, Scoppola's "*La Repubblica dei Partiti*" deepens understanding of the changing process, and helped me to picture which kind of political theories could be applied to the turbulent path of the Italian left. As for the theory, a more detailed outlook of the sources will be given in the next chapter, but the works of Marx regarding the Jewish Question²⁰ are well explained and applied to the Italian society by Cingoli, as is the Marxist theory of Internationalism, both of which are so important for the time-lapse before 1967.

To demonstrate the centrality of the political and military events as key factors in the shaping of the Italian leftist parties approach to the Israeli-Arab-Palestinian question, I decided to proceed by dividing the time lapse into three parts, demarcated by important events joined by the common

²⁰ <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question>

characteristic of not having occurred in Italy. The first period starts with the establishment of the State of Israel and ends with the outbreak of the Six-Day War, and this phase is characterised by a low level of interest from the Italian media and in the general public debate. The second period ends with the fall of the Berlin wall and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, and throughout these years, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict reached its highest level of ideological shove and covers most of the Italian efforts, both to the political and dialectical extent.

Political parties are the real key centres, and play the most relevant roles in shaping the perception of the Middle Eastern scene. The last and therefore latest period begins with the massive bribe scandal, subsequent to the moment of the world's general division into two blocks. Regarding this last feature, a lot of speculation and conjecture is still doing the rounds in Italy, and probably only time will tell what really happened and, above all, why such a massive scandal took place immediately after this ideological separation between the communist and non-communist world. However, the major effect of the scandal has been a radical mutation of the structure of Italian politics, and the deep changing of the roles and perceptions of the parties as a basis for political metabolism and development.

The comparison of the processes and differences between these three time lapses is the basis of my research, and the grounds for my attempt to solve the always problematic issue of relations between the sides of the Italian left, and of course the thorny Middle Eastern question.

3) Theory

The first significant contact between the leftist political philosophy and the topic of this book can be dated back to Karl Marx and his “*On the Jewish Question*” in the latter first of the 19th century. Contesting the theory of his friend Bruno Bauer about the necessity of a secular state in order to put an end to religious struggles, Karl Marx speaks of human emancipation, which is required to emancipate the human beings and not simply the State or the institutions. Historicising of the religious phenomenon builds to an extent where, according to Marx, there are no differences between the different religions, as they all constitute worldly limitedness.²¹ The political emancipation suggested by Bauer entails the separation of a Human Being into a Jew or a Christian, and a citizen,

²¹ Marx, *Sulla questione ebraica*, 1968, p. 163.

something which must be fought and annihilated by the State in such a way as is common for private property.²²

Such a vision of the Jewish question denies the specificity of the Jewish people and their religion, simplifying the diversity of Jewish history and identity as a mere outcome of the bourgeois heritage. Although the Jewish plot to control the world by economic means is totally absent in Marx's analysis, to a modern review the traces of the modern leftist anti-Semitism and refusal to understand the Jewish peculiarities have foundations in an approach to the Jewish question which does not contemplate the needs of the Jewish people to be as such.²³

Marx's interpretation is fundamentally economical. Judaism is perceived as a metaphor of capitalism²⁴, hence it is a legacy of the old world, a product of injustice and, ultimately of the class struggle. The Jews do not constitute an external body to the society. In the most profound illuminist spirit, Marx aligns himself with the French deputy Clemont Tonnerè in 1789, when speaking to the assembly for the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, he states that: "*We refuse everything to the Jews as nation, we grant everything as individuals. They do not constitute a political body, or an order. They are individually citizens.*"²⁵

Such bases merge into Gramsci's internationalism theory, where Judaism and the Jewish question at-large do not disclose any specificity or national claim. A 'nation' in this sense is nothing stable or definitive, but it represents only a moment of economic and political organisation of the people.²⁶ Just like Karl Marx, the young Gramsci approaches the issue in a historical materialist way, perceiving the Jewish question as an economical phenomenon. Gramsci's analysis is naturally not restricted to the Jewish question but encompasses the whole world, including every society outside the western world or culture. The economic and political life of the States is, according to Gramsci, strictly controlled by Anglo-American capitalism, by a sort of monopoly in a regime of private property. The national State is dead, becoming a sphere of influence for foreign forces. The world is unified meaning it is controlled by a hierarchy that controls and disciplines, in an authoritarian way, every relation and movement. The world is in the hands of small group of Anglo-Saxon bankers, industrialists, and owners.²⁷

²² Marx, *Sulla questione ebraica*, 1968, pp. 168-169.

²³ Rubinstein W.D., 1986, p. X.

²⁴ Cingoli, 1989, p. 13.

²⁵ Voghera, p. 113.

²⁶ Gramsci, *Scritti giovanili*, 1975, pp. 200-201.

²⁷ Gramsci, *Ordine Nuovo*, 1954, pp. 227-228.

The most important point in Gramsci's internationalism theory stems from the unification of the world and of economic relations, leaving no room for other, non-materialist, features to play a role in the historical mechanisms. Nationalism, within Zionism, and Jewish national claims are ascribable, as a political and economic doctrine is merely reduced to an encounter and/or clash of interests of the single categories of classes in order to preserve their privileges.²⁸ People and cultures of very different backgrounds and histories see the world through the same lenses and pursue the same goals.

The question of the Palestinians is of course still not present at Gramsci's time, but even if it were no major difference would have been made in his approach. Egyptians, Indians, Chinese or Irish people, each are taken to represent their national complex, and all the people on earth who are working class view the Lenin-Churchill duel as the struggle between the powers that keep them enslaved, and the powers that can lay down the conditions for their autonomy.²⁹ Hence, national states are an institution to dismantle, a trick to turn attention away from the real emancipation. The liberal tradition is against the State, as it is the very idea of Internationalism, whose purposes point at putting an end to the conflict by abolishing private property. In fact, the latter is the cause of the establishment of borders between countries, secessions, wars and of the constant conflicts between States.³⁰ Private property encompasses every peculiarity of the history of humanity, including also the Jewish question.

Communism can and will only be international, in this sense the socialist and proletarian movement is against the state, as it is against the capitalist national states, because it is against the national economies which find their nourishment in the national state. However, although this international communism would destroy the national state, the state as a concrete form of human society would not be abolished. The national socialist state, produced by the organised proletariat, would be set up in order to integrate with the other socialist states to reach the final goals of the International Communist, which would provide for any state, institution or individual with life and freedom fullness.³¹

In such a perception, where the capitalist forces control the life of the countries, Gramsci develops an analysis of Italy and the Italian people, which, in my opinion, paves the way for the interpretation of the situation in Palestine after the Second World War. Italy is a market of colonial

²⁸ Gramsci, *Scritti Giovanili*, 1975, p. 159.

²⁹ Gramsci, *Ordine nuovo*, 1954, p. 264.

³⁰ Gramsci, *Ordine nuovo*, 1954, p. 380.

³¹ Gramsci, *Ordine nuovo*, 1954, pp. 378-379.

exploitation, a sphere of influence, a land of capitulation, a dominion (in the British sense) of a land granted with half determination by the Empire of London. Italy can be everything but an independent and sovereign land. Italy needs a deep sacrifice, as profound as when the ruling class closed out the country, to create once again an historical independent personality.³² The Italian situation described by Gramsci has no major differences from the Italian leftist thought analysis of Palestine under the British mandate; Italy can be seen as a metaphor of what the Middle East suffered under the British occupation.

The acknowledgment of the national aspirations of people living on the mandatory Palestine misleads us from a real comprehension of the situation and of the cosmopolitan mission of the populations worldwide. In the latter purpose, cosmopolitanism, or a modern form thereof, is something in which the Italian people, the working class, are the most nationally interested. Collaboration to reconstruct the world economically is in the tradition of the Italian history, not to dominate it but to exist and develop as the Italian people.

Italian people's missions consist of restoring the Roman and medieval era styles of cosmopolitanism with the most modern and advanced methods.³³ Even to a very peculiar extent, while taking into consideration the roots and the aspirations of a delimited people, namely the Italians, the leftist internationalist thought makes no distinctions and refuses to see the national and proletarian ambitions outside of a worldly communitarian sense. The Italian modern cosmopolitanism does not represent only the traditional working person, but should become a modern cosmopolitanism granting the best working conditions for the Italian workers, in any place of the earth they might live.³⁴

The inability to recognise any national aspiration as legitimate, and the levelling of the diverse cultures and populations of the Middle East to a common cosmopolitanism aimed at enfranchising the working people from organised capitalism remained a cornerstone for the Italian leftist Internationalist outlook up until the conclusion of the Second World War, when some significant changes occurred. Historical tragic facts like the Holocaust, the common enemy and the struggle against the persecutors of the Jews (who were persecuted for the mere fact of being Jews on Italian soil) pushed the Italian left to a reshaping of Gramsci's theories. Internationalism was not in question, the supreme goal of the revolution and of the union of the world's populations continued, but previous

³² Gramsci, *Ordine Nuovo*, 1954, pp. 262-263.

³³ Gramsci, *quaderni dal carcere*, 1996, p. 1989.

³⁴ Gramsci, *quaderni dal carcere*, 1996, p. 1988.

debates on the non-recognisable nature of the Jewish people ceased to be carried out.³⁵ Internationalism now represented a chance for the land of Palestine (not to be confused with the present meaning of it; so to say a national State for the Arab Palestinian people) to break the chain of economic and cultural slavery brought on by British colonisation, and the agent capable of making this change was the Zionist movement, of socialist intents.

The evident contradiction that saw the national Zionist movement as a tool for the liberation of another people, did not create too much of a problem for leftist thinkers. The strategies of a socialist, or even communist revolution could be carried out by a population, the Jewish one, well aware of the enemy, both capitalist and Nazi, and conscious of their own history and suffering. Palestinians, who, by the end of the Second World War, were not regarded as such, were supposed to benefit also from the Zionist purposes, as the common goal of the populations would lead to the enfranchisement from colonialist and imperialist forces.

Such political theory found its limits and deficiencies immediately after the establishment of the State of Israel, but time was needed for the Italian left to realise it, and to shift to a different political approach. Political events and stances, like soviet anti-Semitism, or the common anti-fascist legacy, played a major role in the developing of an alternative theory in the Italian left, and when new forms of leftist approaches beyond Internationalism appeared outside of the Italian borders, the leftist debate was late to adopt them. When conflicts broke out between great powers and small, underdeveloped populations, the new leftist thinkers accepted the inadequacies of Gramsci's Internationalism, despite never doing so openly, to be able to redesign the real essence of the revolutionary forces, and to turn upside down the nature of the Middle Eastern players.

The passage from an Internationalist theory to Third-Worldism came after the Six-Day War, but its existence dates back to the early sixties with the birth of the new left. The basis of such new theories can be found in Herbert Marcuse's analysis of the democratic non-freedom and the concept of marginality.

The advanced technological society, according to Marcuse, is subdued to the capitalistic power, and one of its main themes is consumption. It is conquered by a "democratic" domination of the industrial civilisation. Technology has within itself the nature of a dominating ideology which permeates everything, even the social classes and layers that historically have been fighting against it. Such democratic non-freedom is fully

³⁵ Cingoli, 1989, p. 13.

integrated and has absorbed also the revolutionary bodies, namely the working class. With the absorption of the working class into the system, it is unrealistic to believe that the revolution to overthrow the capitalist powers can come from them.

So, who are the real players that can carry out a revolution? To fight the universal takeover of the industrial society, the research must lead towards the emarginated fringes of the societies, to everyone who has been not phagocytised by society. Persecuted, unemployed, rejected people are the real hope, as they have been living on the margins of society and have not been swallowed into it.³⁶ The Jewish workers, the kibbutzim movement and all those socialist immigrants from Europe were suddenly polluted and incapable of fighting for the good cause. Their mission failed because of the mere fact that they became a part of the system, even if they believed that they were struggling to change it. To a wider extent, Israel itself holds a different role. Israel becomes a totalising entity, both culturally and politically a monolith embodying the Western Capitalist and Imperialist World, causing the rejection of the leftist thought worldwide,³⁷ not just in Italy.

On the other hand, such a new perception suits perfectly the Palestinians, who really are the emarginated ones, on the unrelated fringes of the world, reliant on, and moreover taken into consideration as, being an autonomous political actor. Already in 1960 the American sociologist Charles Mills realised the need to reshape the Marxist approach to the realities of the third world and to approach them differently, as he wrote to the journal *New Leftist Review*: *"To be "Left" means to connect up cultural with political criticism, and both with demands and programmes. And it means all this inside every country of the world."*³⁸ The nationalist aspect of the third world countries and their political and ideological development is no longer ignored, and although it does not consist necessarily of the basis of the leftist political ideology, it was viewed and taken into serious consideration.

The most significant example is the Syrian political thinker Michele Aflaq and his founding ideology of the Baath party. Labelling himself as an Arab Socialist, Aflaq does not conceive socialism as it is conceived in western political thought, and instead formulated an Arab version of it. The core problems of the left in the west, such as the role of the state or economic equality, are of no greater importance for Aflaq, who stresses on

³⁶ Crespi, 2002, pp. 148-150.

³⁷ Rubinstein W.D., 1986, p XII.

³⁸ <http://www.marxists.org/subject/humanism/mills-c-wright/letter-new-left.htm>

the contrary the need for the creation of Arab individuals freed from enslavement and domination.³⁹

Despite criticising some aspects of Marxism, the Baath ideology strongly supports revolution as the only means by which to achieve the renaissance of the Arab nations, which are otherwise doomed to oblivion.⁴⁰ The political thought of Michele Aflaq is indeed wider than this and has many aspects of open contrast with Marxism and more generally, with the leftist and New Leftist mainstream ideologies in Italy and in the west, however the acknowledgment of an independent political and ideological movement alongside the military one is undisputable. The Arab Socialist Union develops a well-structured political thought not necessarily in accordance with the leftist thought, but which indeed could make leftists reconsider their Internationalist positions.

As pointed out quite clearly by Noam Chomsky in the seventies, concepts like the end of racism, the full equality of people in front of the law, the struggle against capitalist, imperialist movements (including Zionism) and the active role of the Palestinian population in reaching such goals is something which the Arab people are sufficient to provide themselves.⁴¹ It is finally clear by now that even a winning, successful proletariat cannot impose happiness upon any foreign people unless it brings to an end its own victory. In other words, all peoples must find their own way to revolution, and must find their own happiness. Revolutionary struggles cannot be exported, but must arise on the spot.⁴²

This change was indeed of utmost significance for the Italian leftist thought. The western socialist push unveiled its inadequacy for any region that refuses it, and claims what in Internationalist ideology represents a deception of the right purposes, and on the other hand a population with no experience of class struggle and no Marxist background has its own ways and its own forces to revolt properly without western socialist guidance. All the hints for the collapse of the leftist ideology are already visible by this point in history, but still throughout the seventies ideology still plays a central role, and the political and ideological thought remained strong and deeply rooted in the Italian political debate and the approach to the Middle Eastern issue.

What brought a radical change in the ideology of the leftist Italian milieu, and of the whole world, was the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet Union, as Fukuyama points out in his work at the beginning

³⁹ Salem, 1994, pp. 69-70.

⁴⁰ Salem, 1994, p. 62.

⁴¹ Chomsky, 1976, p. 73.

⁴² Chomsky, 1976, p. 93.

of the nineties. The traumatic events of the twentieth century formed the backdrop to a profound intellectual crisis as well,⁴³ which had a slowly growing impact on the socialist countries worldwide from the beginning of the eighties onwards. From the first Chinese measures regarding the free growing and selling of their own food in 1980 to the failed *coup d'état* in Russia in August 1991, the communist ideology collapsed under its incompatibility with history.⁴⁴ Fukuyama argues about the universal aspiration of democracy belonging to the entire world's people. The most advanced form of democracy respects the essential individual social ambitions of every single person, letting him/her proceed on the basis of his/her capabilities and possibilities.

With the end of the communist (Eastern) bloc, the tendency became global, aimed at conforming every other political system to the principles of liberal democracy. This trend is perceived as the ultimate goal of every people, because it arrives after the complete failure of political experiments such as monocracy, oligarchy or totalitarianism, which turned into liberalism, affirming their defeat.⁴⁵ Summed up in a sentence, Fukuyama asserts that: *"What is emerging victorious, in other words, is not so much liberal practice, as the liberal idea. That is to say, for a very large part of the world, there is now no ideology with pretensions to universality that is in a position to challenge liberal democracy, and no universal principle of legitimacy other than the sovereignty of the people."*⁴⁶

Around ten years before Fukuyama's essay, Italian thinkers like Gianni Vattimo on his work, *"Il Pensiero Debole"*,⁴⁷ Norberto Bobbio or Dario Antiseri, discuss the admission of the end of strong political thought. The most pertinent aspect of weak thought concerns the crisis of the truth, meaning the lack of certainty about the opinions and ideologies that characterised the debate and development in the Italian political scene. Reasons for such phenomena are to be found in the increasing complexity of world knowledge, which makes more and more implausible the existence of a unique truth able to support the multiplicities. In addition to the diversification of the knowledge, a diversification of the spheres of existence occurs. Each specific region or life sector has its own system of truth and specific logic.⁴⁸ The natural development of diversification leads

⁴³ Fukuyama, 1992, p. 7.

⁴⁴ Fukuyama, 1992, p. 26-28.

⁴⁵ Fukuyama, 1992, p. 39-55.

⁴⁶ Fukuyama, 1992, p. 45.

⁴⁷ Italian for "The Weak Thought".

⁴⁸ Vattimo in Antiseri, 1993, p. 26.

to relativism and relativist theories where reasoning has no certainty and anyone is entitled to think and believe anything among the various cultural universes.⁴⁹

What seems today to be the only point of convergence in the philosophical debate is the lack of unique, ultimate and normative foundations, the crisis of the grounds is now within the very concept of truth.⁵⁰ The real problem of the truth in weak thought concerns the impossibility to discern between a good truth and a bad truth; as such, distinction is simply no longer a subject of philosophical speculation. Such awareness is the major conviction of weak thought, and such awareness puts an end to the old concept and perceptions of ideologies.⁵¹

To equal conclusions comes the Italian philosopher of law Norberto Bobbio, who argues that the time of great philosophy has come to an end. The precise meaning of the end of political thought concerns the lack of the presumption to possess the entire knowledge. In this moment, no philosophical recapture can answer the core question of the unique truth, of a sole code of knowledge guiding political thinking.⁵² The disappearance of philosophy has, according to Bobbio, a religious connotation that has brought about the death of the unquestionable God. At the present time, we live in a transitional moment waiting for the coming of new faiths and new gods, as the previous ones are now seen as fake ones, divinities responsible for the abuse of reasoning and of its bloody consequences.⁵³ Briefly, political theories are of no use for the Italian society, which seeks with other tools, mostly personal methods and interpretations, the answers to the great political questions.

The eighties appear to be marked by a heavy downfall of ideological motivation, by a still living interest in politics but not necessarily bonded to the party system logic.⁵⁴ The political parties, and in this all of them, not only the leftist ones, were of service for the ideologies as containers, whose role was to gather people around ideas. The incapability to reinterpret themselves with something different, something not related to the ideological debate puts an end to them. With the lack of contents, the political parties can no longer be useful as containers and their life as workshops of political theories becomes progressively more ineffectual.

⁴⁹ Vattimo in Antiseri, 1993, p. 28.

⁵⁰ Vattimo, 1983, pp. 7-8.

⁵¹ Vattimo, 1983, p. 9.

⁵² Bobbio, 1982, pp.164-175.

⁵³ Antiseri, 1993, p. 85.

⁵⁴ Scoppola, 1991, p. 395.

From my personal point of view, the changes and mutation of the leftist political and philosophical thoughts about the Middle Eastern issue do have a utilitarian development for the Italian leftist parties. Despite the structural differences and diverse purposes of the communists and the socialists, the use of the Palestinian – Israeli conflict is at the service of the political contingencies of the political bodies. Throughout the course of history, especially regarding the second half of the 20th century, the focus of the international happenings has led the development of the guidelines of the parties. In other words, the parties have material needs that depend on the requests and susceptibilities of their electorate. In order to give a satisfying answer to a complex bulk of shifting perceptions in a changing international scenario, the political bodies shift their attentions to different realities, depending on public opinion and current moods. To a wider extent, it is correct to assume that the inactivity of the Italian parties in creating a politically independent theory shows a lack of motivation and the inability to lead opinion and give exhaustive responses. The action remains limited to a wise and rational observation of the flow of events and international consideration of the facts, and consequently to an adjustment of the parties' positions according to their interests.

