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ITALIAN COLONIALISM AND RESISTANCES TO EMPIRE, 1930–1970

NEELAM SRIVASTAVA



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To my family: Giulia, Yogi and Amrit

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A NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

All translations from Italian-language material are my own, unless otherwise specified. I have endeavoured to use published English translations of Italian texts where available.

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Introduction

This book presents a cultural history of Italian colonialism and anti-colonialism. Its aim is to show that Italy's imperial ambitions played a fundamental, though overlooked, role in the development of an oppositional discourse to Western imperialism more broadly. I examine this claim in relation to a significant moment in the history of empire and resistance: the interwar period, which witnessed the consolidation of anti-colonial ideas that prefigure the work of postwar postcolonial theory.

The Italian case presents some unique and distinct characteristics compared to the far more established liberal empires of Britain and France, which were based on a stronger and older sense of national unity. Italy, as a rather belated newcomer on the imperialist stage, only founded its first colony, Eritrea, in 1890, barely 30 years after unification in 1861. The colony of Somalia soon followed, and then Libya was invaded in 1911, forming the “fourth shore” of Italy's national territory. Italian colonialism influenced the articulation of anti-colonial discourse precisely because it was so belated; the fascist regime's illegal invasion of Ethiopia occurred in 1935, when anti-imperialist movements and alliances were flourishing across the globe, and Western public opinion was beginning to seriously question the values underpinning the imperial project. Empire, in other words, was in crisis. Italy's actions in Ethiopia received widespread international condemnation and therefore provided a golden opportunity for anti-colonial activists, especially Pan-Africanists, to highlight the cruelty

and barbarism of imperialism to an increasingly sympathetic global audience.

Furthermore, the coexistence of Italy's colonial aspirations with massive emigration altered the standard structure of the colonial relationship as it was conceived within British and French imperialism, and sowed the seeds of Italian internationalist and Third-World solidarity. Early Italian colonial theories, by championing what Mark I. Choate calls "emigrant colonialism", emphasized the ways in which Italy could become an internationally significant power in the world through the exportation of its labour and the dissemination of typically "Italian" cultural and social traits abroad; it could also boost its economy thanks to the remittances that emigrants sent back home.¹ The word *colonia* held two meanings in this early period: it meant both Italian emigrant communities abroad (for example, in North and South America) and Italian colonial territories in East Africa. It made complete economic and political sense for Italy to pursue a policy that promoted emigration and overseas territories at the same time, because, unlike France and Britain, Italy lacked capital to invest in establishing colonies abroad. Such an approach to colonialism shakes up conventional understandings of hegemonic versus subaltern relationships in postcolonial studies, as it does not distinguish neatly between colonization and diaspora. By contrast, in British and French colonial theories, it was through territorial conquest that the colonizer's cultural and political hegemony could be established over colonized populations.²

At the same time, emigration was symptomatic of Italy's "internal colonialism", the systematic exploitation of the Italian working classes on the part of the elites, and of the wealthy North extracting maximum economic advantage out of the impoverished South. As Antonio Gramsci acutely observed in the early 1930s, "the poverty of a country is relative [...] emigration is a consequence of the inability of the ruling class to put the population to work and not of national poverty."³

Gramsci's radical critique of colonialism responded directly to Mussolini's brand of social imperialism that was presented to Italians as their right to a "place in the sun". But colonialism, in Gramsci's reading, simply cannot be justified by the need for *Lebensraum*; it instead stems from internal hegemonies, which subject subaltern classes *within* the nation to economic and political exploitation. Francesco Crispi, a liberal Prime Minister who strongly supported Italian colonial expansion in the Horn of Africa, presented the "mirage" of African colonies to the Southern Italian peasant as a diversionary tactic to avoid effecting a more equitable

redistribution of land in Italy itself, and to consolidate the hegemony of the political ruling class over the rural masses of the South.⁴

In response to Mussolini's imperialism, in the 1930s the Italian Communist Party (PCI), steered by Gramsci's internationalist vision and by the Comintern's supportive stance towards anti-imperialist movements, outlined a specifically Italian anti-colonialism, which looked outwardly towards global solidarity with the oppressed, and with migrant labor worldwide, because Italians had experienced first-hand discrimination and oppression both as emigrants and within their own country. The PCI promoted a radical anti-colonial campaign against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, also hoping that this costly war would prove so unpopular with the working classes that it could serve as a form of leverage to topple the fascist regime. On the contrary, Mussolini's aggressive vision of an Italy finally obtaining a position of international prestige alongside the other great European powers prevailed so strongly that the establishment of the "Italian empire" after the invasion proved to be the highest point of Mussolini's popularity.

But the seeds of Italian anti-colonial internationalism had been sown, also thanks to the strenuous propaganda efforts of the exiled PCI in the interwar years and to the anti-fascist resistance during the Second World War. The Italian *Resistenza* was later recast as a war of liberation against fascism, and the postwar period saw an attempt to reconstruct an idea of the nation that distanced itself from its fascist past. This experience profoundly marked a generation of ex-partisans and left intellectuals, who saw decolonization movements of the 1960s and 1970s as an ideal continuation, in the postwar period, of anti-fascist struggle. Giovanni Pirelli, an active supporter of the Algerian *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) and a close friend of Frantz Fanon, wrote in 1969 that

the Resistance did not at all end with the defeat of fascism. It continued and continues against everything that survives of that mentality, of those methods, against any system that gives to the few the power to decide for many. It continues in the struggle of peoples subject to colonialism and imperialism, for their real independence. It continues in the struggle against racism.⁵

Here we can see that Pirelli's understanding of the meaning of the Italian Resistance was shaped by his subsequent involvement with the Algerian cause. Later chapters of this book explore the extraordinary influence

Third-World revolution had on Italian radical culture of the postwar period, tracing its effects in the “resistance aesthetics” of films such as Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) and Valentino Orsini’s forgotten Third-Worldist classic, *I dannati della terra* (1969), named after Fanon’s last work, *Les damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*). It is important to remember, however, that the relationship the postwar Italian left had with anti-colonialism was contradictory and ambivalent, to say the least: on the one hand, there was great support for anti-imperialist struggles such as those in Algeria and Vietnam, and, on the other, a puzzling amnesia in relationship to Italy’s own colonial past.

Italian anti-colonialism is part of the wider narrative about metropolitan anti-colonialism that I trace in this book, namely a global politics of resistance that developed between 1930 and 1970, which would crystallize into cross-reciprocal solidarities between anti-fascists and anti-colonialists in the lead-up to the Second World War. Indeed, anti-colonialism and anti-fascism are part and parcel of the same ideal: a will to transform the nation from within, a new conception of “nation” that rejects imperialism and fascism in the same breath. The history of metropolitan anti-colonialism has not received the full scholarly attention it deserves, partly due to the prevailing tendency to produce a narrative of postcolonial thought as a stark struggle between undifferentiated “colonizers” and undifferentiated “colonized”, though, of course, it must be acknowledged that the establishment of this dichotomy had a specific political intent and thus retains a strategic validity.⁶ A historicist approach to postcolonial thought can serve to identify the interwar and immediate postwar periods as crucial milestones in the history of anti-colonial activism, but also encourages us to reevaluate historical figures who prepared the intellectual groundwork of postcolonial studies before it became known as such. Such figures have been left out of established narratives of the field because their political commitment to the anti-colonial cause sits uneasily with their metropolitan location or with their mistrust of the emancipatory promises held out to colonized peoples by European communism. While adopting a historicist approach, my book gives a greater attention to aesthetics, novels, films and other modes of cultural and narrative representation than might be found in more straightforwardly historiographical approaches. This allows me to identify sites of struggle for agency that are at times overlooked in historical writing, which can tend to favour structural accounts over a focus on individual agency. In the book, there is a focus on questions of genre and a careful consideration of the specific form in which

anti-colonial ideas are conveyed in relationship to the text's intended audience and to its political effects. The novel, the newspaper and the film, among other genres, are here considered together in order to offer a comparative account of anti-colonial subjectivities.

My case studies in this book are centred on avowedly partisan figures who championed an anti-colonial and anti-fascist politics. These include the Pan-Africanist thinker George Padmore; the great protagonist of the Harlem Renaissance Claude McKay; the feminist, socialist and anti-colonial campaigner Sylvia Pankhurst; the film-maker Gillo Pontecorvo (director of *The Battle of Algiers*); and the extraordinary writer, partisan and anti-colonial activist Giovanni Pirelli. Partisans are characterized by their taking of sides, a commitment to a political cause that does not come from a filial relationship to their culture or nation but from an affiliative one, a chosen allegiance, as it were. By reversing the negative connotations of Italian "*partigianeria*", or partisanship, I mean to assert the values of a political affiliation that "sidesteps assimilability within the major forms of the political".⁷ When Italian anti-fascists produced cultural texts that sought to link anti-imperialist struggle with their experience of fighting against the Germans and Mussolini in 1943, they were enacting a form of affiliation, of voluntary empathy, a rejection of "the idiom of their own colonizing culture".⁸ European empires, like fascism, were not monolithic discursive formations, and they did not command the unqualified support of all their citizens.

As Leela Gandhi has emphasized in her groundbreaking study of the politics of friendship in fin-de-siècle radical circles in London, the importance of metropolitan anti-colonialism lies in its oppositionality that transcends race, class or nation and unites diverse groups beyond all expectation. By pointing to the "failure of imperial binarism", Gandhi urges us to undo Manicheistic approaches to the study of resistance.⁹ In the spirit of Gandhi's approach, this book posits resistance as a transnational concept and as a partisan concept, while remaining mindful of the very diverse investments of Pan-Africanists and British anti-colonial activists in denouncing the atrocities of Italian imperialism in Africa.

The partisan has been defined by Carl Schmitt as an irregular combatant, who has an essentially defensive and "tellurian" character, as he protects his territory, his homeland.¹⁰ This book offers an internationalist, rather than nationalist, understanding of partisanship, seeking to highlight the connections between anti-colonial and anti-fascist commitment in specific moments of a transnational history of empire. Such a position does

not come naturally, as Schmitt seems to suggest with regard to his territorial understanding of partisanship; on the contrary, internationalism is not an instinctive defense, but a deliberate stance, an unconventional action and, above all, an individual choice. For progressive thinkers in postwar Italy, the Italian Resistance came to represent a more complex and less territorial idea of the *patria* (homeland) than one based on mere commonality of origin. It was rather a partisan patriotism that aimed to replace one type of society with another, as the *Resistenza* was not merely a war of liberation from a supposed invader but a civil war between Italians, fascists against anti-fascists, and there were no facile ethnic or national distinctions that could signal the difference between friend and enemy.¹¹

If to be a partisan, according to Schmitt, “is precisely to avoid carrying weapons openly, the partisan being one who fights from ambushes, who wears the enemy uniform and whatever insignia serves his turn, as well as civilian clothing”,¹² then the metropolitan anti-colonial partisans I discuss here to some extent were *in camouflage* because they were of European origin and were thus hidden from view in retrospective narratives of anti-colonialism, which assumes its opponents to “belong to the other side”. And yet these radical partisans—George Steer, Sylvia Pankhurst, Giovanni Pirelli—who appear in this book alongside their Pan-Africanist comrades-in-arms—George Padmore, Claude McKay and C.L.R. James—did much to publicize and disseminate the ideas that helped to critique imperialism among European audiences. Gandhi’s idea of “self-othering” is a hermeneutically illuminating term to describe such activists, who were born within the imperial culture but displayed a radical commitment to the colonized and were influenced and inspired by their struggles. Supporters of anti-colonialism in the metropole were influenced by anti-colonial activists both in and outside Europe.

The protagonists of the anti-colonial politics described in this book are not smoothly assimilable within the narrative of communist anti-imperialism. Timothy Brennan argues that the interwar moment was a time when “European consciousness of the colonies changed sharply.”¹³ By focusing the scholarly gaze onto Europe rather than the colonies, it becomes possible to understand the effects of anti-colonialism on Europe’s own political and discursive formations instead of following the more well-trodden path of studying European influences on emerging polities in the colonial world.¹⁴

While fully agreeing with Brennan on the importance of the interwar period’s alliances and networks in the development of twentieth-century

decolonization movements, I nonetheless wish to complicate the narrative of origins whereby the “rightful” place of anti-colonial and postcolonial thinking belongs exclusively to the history of international Marxism. Marxism provided a crucial intellectual matrix and institutional support within which anti-colonial politics developed in the 1930s (with some obvious exceptions, such as M.K. Gandhi’s programme for Indian nationalism). The interwar period also witnessed the development of a Pan-Africanist thought that was to gain even more intellectual heft and autonomy in its *distancing* from orthodox Marxism and Eurocommunism, producing powerful critiques of it. James, Padmore and McKay were deeply critical of the Communist International in their writings of the 1930s and 1940s. McKay’s recently discovered novel *Amiable with Big Teeth: A Novel of the Love Affair Between the Communists and the Poor Black Sheep of Harlem*, written in 1941 but only published in 2017, narrativizes black Harlem’s conflict with the Communist International’s attempt to instrumentalize their opposition to the Ethiopian war of 1935 and to coopt their struggle. Critical positions that emphasize the flexibility of what would later come to be called “tricontinental Marxism” appear more convincing than those which position Marxism as postcolonial theory’s only valid intellectual and historical basis.¹⁵ Padmore, McKay and James, three major twentieth-century black thinkers who formed their political identity within Marxism, subsequently sharply criticized the Comintern’s ambivalent stance towards Ethiopia and thus began to develop the theoretical foundations of Pan-Africanism (Padmore entitled one of his books *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*, presenting this as an “either-or” choice).¹⁶

My examination of PCI records, the writings of Pan-Africanists and the print activism of Sylvia Pankhurst, who was one of the founders of the British Communist Party but who later concentrated her energies on supporting Ethiopia against a fascist invader, all demonstrate that the emergence of socialism and communism as revolutionary and anti-fascist movements is inextricable from their concomitant development of an anti-colonial politics. Pankhurst’s, Padmore’s, McKay’s, Pirelli’s and Pontecorvo’s connections to communism in the context of the anti-fascist struggle often led them to question the former and develop the latter in the direction of an anti-colonial political and cultural expression. With the advent of World War II and decolonization, many of the more innovative developments in Marxist politics shift to the so-called Third World. Challenging the oft-repeated claim that Marxism and the history of capital

provide the ultimate explanatory framework for all postcolonial political and ideological processes, the chapters that follow trace the ways in which anti-colonialism profoundly shaped Marxism itself as a revolutionary and emancipatory ideology in the twentieth century.¹⁷

This work shows how anti-colonialism in the metropole is the function of a progressive nationalism, present in European left engagement with the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in the 1930s and with Third-Worldism in the 1960s. It is a nationalism that rejects imperialism and supports internationalist solidarities. What emerges is the picture of a Europe in which decolonization is still an ongoing process, where the conflict within left discourse between anti-colonialism and an investment in overseas territories generates fascinating and under-studied tensions.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Chapter 2 examines the anti-colonial discourse that developed within the PCI in opposition to Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. By way of context, the chapter firstly explores how the war was seen at the time as an event that represented the ideal realization of Mussolini's dictatorship. By examining Italian literary writings and propaganda around the war, it gauges the novel impact of fascist colonialism and argues that it developed its own specific form of colonial discourse, distinct from that of more established European empires. The chapter then moves on to focus on little-known archival documents of the PCI, in order to delineate how the recently formed PCI had been developing its own anti-colonial discourses and strategies alongside its opposition to fascism. The PCI seized on the Ethiopian war as a way to try to mobilize popular opposition to Mussolini's regime, and to this effect it did quite a bit of propaganda both within and outside Italy, including sending a mission to Ethiopia itself. The intense activity that the PCI put in motion against this war testifies to the fact that its anti-colonialism developed in conjunction with its anti-fascism. The internationalism of the PCI in those years led to its almost inevitable opening to cosmopolitan, transnational connections with other anti-fascist groups and anti-colonial movements. The PCI documents I examine in this chapter show a clear consciousness that the alliance between the Western proletariat and anti-colonial movements would be essential for the communist revolution to succeed. My conclusion is that the development of communism is inextricable from the anti-colonial internationalism that marked the 1930s.

The third and fourth chapters analyze the Ethiopian war as a critical event in the history of Pan-Africanism; examining the global black diaspora's reactions to this event allows us to piece together part of the fragmented narrative of black internationalism. Chapter 3 offers a broad picture of the historical impact of the war on the African diaspora, and then homes in on the writing of Padmore, one of the founders of the Pan-African Association. Padmore expressed his disillusionment with the Communist International's alleged support for anti-colonial movements over its behavior in the Ethiopian case.¹⁸ I examine Padmore's political writings in relationship to the war to show that his denunciation of Italian imperialism in Africa stood as a proxy for his opposition to imperialism *per se*. In my reading of his and C.L.R. James's work, Ethiopia thus represents the convergence of the transnational articulation of anti-colonial resistance, and Italian colonialism becomes symbolic of European fascism more widely.

The fourth chapter discusses the emergence of literary Pan-Africanism in relationship to the Ethiopian war. It looks at the ways in which Harlem and Ethiopia represent two transnational "homes" for blacks in the African American imagination. I show that the Ethiopian war prompted a rethinking of race in debates in the African American press. The intellectual and literary flourishing of Pan-Africanism as a consciously autonomous formation is exemplified through my reading of McKay's 1941 novel *Amiable with Big Teeth*, where I offer one of the first analyses of this recently discovered text, and George Schuyler's *Ethiopian Stories*, Afrocentric literary narratives that present the Ethiopian war as their main theme.

Chapter 5 maps out the complex panorama of responses in Britain to the Ethiopian war. I am interested in the ways in which these reactions were specifically shaped by the characteristics of Italian fascist colonialism, and how different groups and constituencies with contrasting ideological and political agendas immediately grasped the nexus between fascism and colonialism as linked ideological processes. My central focus in this chapter is the work and writing of the British feminist and socialist Sylvia Pankhurst, who campaigned tirelessly in favour of Ethiopia against the fascist invasion of 1935. She produced a broadsheet, *New Times and Ethiopia News* (NTEN), which supported a free Ethiopia and aimed to keep Britain informed of the atrocities being committed by the Italians. It also had widespread circulation in the British colonies, fostering solidarity with Ethiopia and reinforcing Pan-Africanist sentiments. I analyze the newspaper as a forgotten but crucial document of anti-fascist and

anti-colonial internationalism in the 1930s, articulating many of the insights about colonial relationships that would shape postcolonial discourse in the postwar period. I look at how *N TEN* gradually evolved into a mouthpiece for the voicing of political opinions by prominent anti-colonial nationalists across the colonized world (especially from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean). I also discuss the writing of the journalist George Steer, the *Times* correspondent who wrote a highly sympathetic account of the war from the Ethiopian side, *Caesar in Abyssinia* (1936), in direct contrast to Evelyn Waugh's pro-Italian version of events in *Waugh in Abyssinia* (1936).

Chapters 6 and 7 examine how postwar Italian cinema and writing engaged with Third-Worldist thought, especially that of Frantz Fanon, and how these cultural texts, in turn, created influential representations of anti-colonial struggle for global audiences.¹⁹ I argue that Third-Worldism allowed Italian intellectuals in the postwar period to find novel applications and adaptations for the concept of anti-fascist resistance. They embraced the Algerian independence struggle in this internationalist spirit, demonstrating a solidarity unmatched by France, the erstwhile colonial power. This chapter traces an idea of "resistance aesthetics" in the work of Italians who had come from the experience of the *Resistenza* and who redeployed their memories of anti-fascist struggles in their artistic and political commitment to Third-Worldist forms of struggle. The texts I examine in these two chapters include the books of testimonies about the Algerian war of independence collected by Giovanni Pirelli; the renowned anti-colonial film *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) by Gillo Pontecorvo; and *The Wretched of the Earth* (*I dannati della terra*) (1969) by Valentino Orsini, a forgotten cinematic masterpiece about African decolonization. My examination of these texts establishes new ways of appreciating the legacy of Third-Worldism in the renewal of European art and political thought after World War II. Testimony, documentary realism and montage are highlighted here as key aspects of Pontecorvo's, Pirelli's and Orsini's "resistance aesthetics".

NOTES

1. Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 14.
2. My study builds on pioneering accounts in the field of Italian postcolonial studies. These have tended to focus on historical, visual and material

- aspects of Italian colonial cultures, such as Ruth Ben-Ghiat's *Italian Fascism's Empire Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), David Forgacs's analysis of colonial photographs from Italy's colonies in East Africa in *Italy's Margins: Social Exclusion and Nation Formation Since 1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) and Mia Fuller's *Moderns Abroad: Architecture, Cities, and Italian Imperialism* (London: Routledge, 2007). Valeria Deplano's historical monograph *L'Africa in casa. Politica e cultura coloniale dell'Italia fascista* (2015) and her most recent *La madrepatria è una terra straniera. Libici, eritrei e somali nell'Italia del dopoguerra (1945–1960)* (2017) stand out for their argument that Italian national identity was profoundly shaped by colonialist and racist discourses relating to the imperial project. Several edited collections address a range of cultural artefacts, including literature, most recently Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo's *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), and Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes's *Quel che resta dell'impero. La cultura coloniale degli italiani* (2014).
3. Antonio Gramsci, Notebook 2, §51, *The Prison Notebooks*, translated by Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 296.
 4. Antonio Gramsci, Q19, §24, *Quaderni del carcere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), 2018.
 5. Giovanni Pirelli, Preface, *Lettere di condannati a morte della Resistenza europea*, ed. Piero Malvezzi and Giovanni Pirelli, second edition (Turin: Einaudi, 1969), 8.
 6. There are few studies that deal with metropolitan anti-colonialism; three important texts deal with the British context. These are: Leela Gandhi's *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-siècle Radicalism, and The Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Priyamvada Gopal's *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonialism and the Making of British Dissent* (Verso, forthcoming), not yet out at the time of publication; and an earlier study, Stephen Howe's *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). Romain Rainero's *L'anticolonialismo italiano da Assab ad Adua 1869–1896* (Milano: Edizioni di Comunità, 1971) offers a historically circumscribed account of the Italian context.
 7. Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-siècle Radicalism, and The Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 13.
 8. Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 7.
 9. Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 3.
 10. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan: A Commentary/Remark on the Concept of the Political*, translated by A.C. Goodson (1963; English translation, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004), 13.

11. This is the main issue that troubles Schmitt in his theory of the partisan: that this figure undoes the traditional distinctions between friend and enemy in warfare (Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan*, 2).
12. Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, 26.
13. Timothy Brennan, *Borrowed Light: Vico, Hegel and the Colonies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 2.
14. Brennan has affirmed that the 1930s should be seen as the pre-history of postcolonialism, drawing attention to the field's Marxist lineage: "... it was primarily the outrages in Abyssinia (Ethiopia), Morocco and Algeria that electrified opinion between the Wars, although the structure of resistance was far greater and more articulate because of the Russian Revolution, whose networks of terms and meanings allowed disparate outbreaks to acquire coherence. As a political unconscious, the view to the colonies had been inspired by the revolution's expanding influences" (Brennan 2002, 197).
15. See Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), for a discussion of tricontinentalism in relationship to postcolonial theory.
16. Christian Høgsbjerg has analysed in great detail James's political activity in Britain in the interwar period, with especial attention to the development of his Trotskyite stance in relationship to anti-imperialism, Pan-Africanism and the Comintern. See Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).
17. As Robert Young has argued, "postcolonial theory remains Marxist in orientation but at the same time has always defined itself through its deviation from orthodoxy, disorienting Marxism in its Stalinist, or subsequent Communist Party versions" (Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, 167).
18. Though Padmore has been relatively overlooked as a postcolonial intellectual, recent scholarship has refocused attention on his figure, most notably Leslie James's outstanding biography, *George Padmore and Decolonization from Below: Pan-Africanism, The Cold War, and the End of Empire* (2015).
19. *The Battle of Algiers* was seen as so provocative that it was banned in France for several years after its release. Most famously, it was shown in the Pentagon on the eve of the US invasion of Iraq.

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Italian Anti-colonialism and the Ethiopian War

INTRODUCTION

In 1935, fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia, an independent sovereign state governed by the emperor Haile Selassie and recognized by the League of Nations: it was one of the last colonial wars of conquest ever fought in the world. Some activists, like Sylvia Pankhurst, saw Ethiopia as the first victim of fascist aggression after Italy.¹ Mussolini was attempting to build up Italian colonial possessions at a time in which colonialism was beginning its decline and anti-imperialist movements were developing in various parts of the European empires. The Italo-Ethiopian war acted as a catalyst for anti-fascist and anti-colonial resistance movements on the eve of World War II, and, most notably, provoked a wave of reactions across the world. The Ethiopian war can be defined as a “critical event”—an event that institutes “a new modality of historical action that was not inscribed in the inventory of that situation”.² In the lead-up to the invasion and afterwards, new modes of action came into being that redefined and focalized race consciousness for African Americans and other members of the black diaspora, in terms of a transnational sense of affiliation with an imaginary black homeland, Ethiopia.

As I argue in this chapter, examining holistically what the Ethiopian war of 1935 meant to different anti-colonial and anti-fascist groups allows us to view the development of anti-colonial nationalisms as located within a profoundly internationalist dimension. The emergence of a widespread

and transnational opposition to the war challenged narratives about the event constructed by fascist and colonialist discourse, hegemonic in Europe at the time. As François Furet says of the French Revolution, “the revolutionary event, *from the very outset*, totally transformed the existing situation and created a new mode of historical action that was not intrinsically a part of that situation.”³

Responses, and indeed resistances, to Italian colonialism in the course of the twentieth century had a profoundly internationalist and transnational dimension. The 1930s are a particularly interesting period in which to trace the trajectories of transnational anti-colonial resistance because of communism’s strongly internationalist emphasis, and because the struggle against fascism had a transnational character, as is exemplified by the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War. Similarly, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia provoked unprecedented waves of support in black communities on both sides of the Atlantic—from Harlem and Chicago’s South Side, to the Caribbean plantations in British Guiana, to Paris and London. But the Ethiopian war also sparked solidarity among citizens of imperial nations such as Great Britain; the sympathy for this “victim country” cut across racial, class and colonizer/colonized divides.⁴

It was a critical event, I argue, also for other groups that campaigned against the invasion. For the PCI and, more generally, for Italian anti-fascist groups both at home and abroad, the Ethiopian war came to be seen as a way to mobilize Italian public opinion against the fascist regime and a golden opportunity to topple Mussolini. The PCI developed quite an elaborate strategy on several fronts to try to exploit and manipulate popular sentiment against the war; but it also formed part of an anti-colonial strategy that had marked its political objectives nearly since its inception as a party. The war is a turning-point for the Italian left’s attitudes towards imperialism—partly fueled by Lenin’s influential anti-imperialist stance on the Comintern but also emerging out of an enduring anti-colonialism that dated back to Italy’s liberal empire.⁵ Documents of the time from the PCI archives held in the Istituto Gramsci of Rome reveal how the party had developed a specific strategy aimed at fostering anti-imperialist sentiment in the Italian colonies or, at the very least, one designed for Italian communist groups to work with the anti-colonial nationalist groups there. The Italian left displayed some perplexing colonialist tendencies after the war, when the United Nations was attempting to decide about the trusteeship of the erstwhile Italian colonies. But in the 1930s, PCI anti-fascism coincided very productively with anti-imperialism

and with the aims of anti-colonial groups such as the Ethiopian resistance and Pan-Africanists.

Finally, the Ethiopian war represented a critical event in the deepening sense of crisis that surrounded European understandings of empire and of the “civilizing mission”. Arguably, it was also a “critical event” for fascism, in the sense that it established new forms of colonial policy and transformed Mussolini into an emperor. It was also the event that preceded the establishment of the racial laws in 1938. Ethiopia was the only colony constituted *after* the advent of fascism; the other pre-fascist colonies, namely Somalia, Eritrea and Libya, experienced Mussolini’s dictatorship as a repressive intensification of an existing colonial rule. International reactions to the war were an expression of ambivalence towards concepts such as “civilization” and “barbarity”. The obscure but strong link between fascism and colonialism—colonialism as a historical *precursor* of fascism, its necessary precondition—emerges most saliently with the propaganda and mobilization around the Ethiopian war and becomes apparent to public opinion. The 1935 Peace Ballot, for example, demonstrated the great support for Ethiopia among the British population.⁶ In Chap. 5, I examine specifically the writings of the feminist socialist activist Sylvia Pankhurst and her broadsheet *NTEN*, which steadfastly worked to keep the Ethiopian cause at the forefront of British and international public opinion. A unique publication, Pankhurst’s broadsheet was motivated by a more general anti-fascist sentiment but always maintained a focus on Ethiopia.

By bringing together a tripartite archive of this kind—Italian left reactions, Pan-African reactions to the war and the debate around it within the European public sphere—the first four chapters of my book seek to give a central importance to the Ethiopian war in rethinking the ways in which colonial and anti-colonial discourses developed in the course of the twentieth century. As we shall see, the impact of fascist colonialism—what Evelyn Waugh defined as a “new type of colonization”—shaped the specific modalities of anti-imperial resistance both in Europe and across the colonial world in the 1930s and beyond. In the activities of George Padmore’s International African Service Bureau (IASB), the PCI’s opposition to Mussolini’s invasion and Pankhurst’s campaigning in favour of Ethiopia, anti-colonialism emerged as a practice of resistance that was translated into different idioms of struggle and protest.

The account I present in these four chapters is a sort of cultural history of the war that takes a more holistic view of it than existing accounts. It seeks to supplement historical narratives, which have been mainly from the

perspective either of black history and Pan-Africanism or from within Italian historical studies. Within Italy itself, the story of its colonies has been largely neglected and, as many recent critics have argued convincingly, repressed within public memory.⁷ Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller in their introduction to their edited volume *Italian Colonialism* make a case for opening up the study of Italian colonialism to wider comparative histories of empire, and indeed argue for the importance of making a focus on Italy's empire an integral part of these histories.⁸ The structuring of my analysis of these transnational reactions into four distinct chapters, each focusing on a different group, might at first be seen to reproduce historiographical divisions between "mainstream" and anti-colonial histories. But the work I aim to do here is to highlight an inherent similarity in the interpretations these groups had about the war, in terms of their analysis of the links between anti-fascism and anti-colonialism. The Ethiopian war allows us to rethink and reconceptualize anti-fascism as integrally connected to an anti-colonial project, even within Europe itself.

In the present chapter, I firstly seek to frame Italian left reactions in 1935–1936 within a broader understanding of Italian responses to the war. But this story is, in its turn, intimately linked to the ways in which Italian historiography has dealt with the event. What emerges from the documents I analyze is that, though fascism effectively suppressed any public opposition to the war, the exiled PCI developed a very acute and indeed prescient analysis of what this war meant for Italian fascism's present and future foreign policy, in some ways predicting the advent of the Second World War. Thus their understanding of the war anticipated the later findings of the pioneering Italian historians who first tackled the study of Italian colonialism. To date, no one has looked at these documents contained in the archives of the PCI in terms of their significance for the development of left politics in the 1920s and 1930s and for the elaboration of anti-fascism.

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE ETHIOPIAN WAR

As with Anglophone and Francophone accounts of imperial history, the historiography surrounding the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935 is in itself a fertile ground for postcolonial enquiry. Up until quite recently, studies of Italian colonialism didn't form part of mainstream Italian historiography, and indeed access to the state archives relating to Italy's colonies was highly restricted until the 1960s and 1970s. It was the groundbreaking

work of the historian Angelo Del Boca, an *ex-partigiano* (resistance fighter) and a fantastic writer with a great attention to personal testimonies about the colonial period, that produced the definitive scholarship on the historical documentation of Italy's empire. He also played a major role in decolonizing the Italian archive relating to its colonial past by writing a number of books that circulated widely in the public sphere. It is well known that he was never awarded a university chair and that he faced significant political opposition, perhaps because he had exposed uncomfortable truths about Italy's brutal actions in North and East Africa, dispelling the myth of Italians as "*brava gente*", as a good, well-meaning people who were cheerfully devoid of the ruthless militarism of Northern European colonial powers. Most notably, he denounced Italy's use of poison gas against the Ethiopian population during the 1935–1936 war—a well-established fact, globally known to public opinion at the time of the war, but for a long time persistently denied by respected Italian public figures, such as the journalist Indro Montanelli.⁹

It has only been in the past ten years or so that Italian historiography has begun to consider Italian colonialism, including the Ethiopian war, as an integral part of national history. Previously, the tendency had been to relegate it to the aberrations of the fascist period, when in fact the first Italian colony was established in 1890 in Eritrea. The preoccupation of Italian statesmen with colonial expansion dated since the 1880s (see Del Boca); aspirations to empire were seen as fundamental to Italy's sense of itself as an international player and as a European power, a unified nation finally able to shake off its fragmented, semi-colonized past.

Nicola Labanca, another pioneering Italian historian of colonialism, and Del Boca have both drawn attention to the need for a critical approach to the study of the Italian empire and its legacies. Indro Montanelli's attitude towards this past is representative of that of many Italian intellectuals; in his debate with Del Boca about the veracity of Italy's use of poison gas, he made the point that Africans had benefited, rather than suffered, from having the "Europeans in their homeland".¹⁰ Del Boca has commented that critical studies of empire by Italian historians are pitifully behind compared to colonial studies in other ex-colonial countries, such as France and Belgium.¹¹ Moreover, studies of Italian colonialism, especially more recent work examining its cultural and literary impact, have tended to flourish among international scholars outside of Italy, as testified by the work of Mia Fuller, Patrizia Palumbo, Ruth Ben-Ghiat, Derek Duncan and Cristina Romeo, among many others.¹²

The Ethiopian war was the only “new” colonial conquest (albeit short-lived) under Mussolini; all of Italy’s other colonies—namely Libya, Eritrea and Somalia—had been established before his rise to power. Critics and historians agree that fascist colonialism shows some strong continuities with Italy’s “liberal empire”, but that, in its ideological orientation and most notably in its propaganda, it represented a departure from previous Italian colonial policy—it saw itself as radical, forward-looking, utopian and militaristic, as reflected in the architecture of Asmara, Eritrea’s colonial capital, the focus of major renovation and construction in the lead-up to the Ethiopian war.¹³ In my account of the conflict and its historical significance, I follow the line of interpretation established by Del Boca and Labanca, who see this war as crucial to the chain of events that precipitated the Second World War. The PCI documents about the Ethiopian war analyzed further on in this chapter establish that this interpretation is in line with many critical understandings of the event among left activists of the period.

On the whole, even major historians of fascism, such as Renzo De Felice, have failed to examine the centrality of colonial policy under Mussolini as an integral part of this period of fascist ideology.¹⁴ Giorgio Rochat is a major exponent of a new trend among Italian historians who contextualize the Ethiopian war as the first of a series of fascist aggressions against sovereign states between 1935 and 1941. He argues that these wars have been largely (and conveniently) forgotten, as the Second World War and the shift to Italy as a theatre of war overshadowed them. The defeat of the fascist regime meant that the wars waged in its name were largely erased from postwar Italian memory, despite the fact that “Mussolini’s wars were fought and paid for by all Italians.”¹⁵ By contrast, attention to the international dimensions of the war—which Labanca invites us to think of as a “global event”—has marked Italian historical scholarship since the 1970s.¹⁶

Since the era of the conflict, Anglophone scholars and activists have extensively documented the scope and importance of the international repercussions of the war, and many studies exist on the massive mobilization of colonized and non-European peoples against this war. Specifically, accounts of Pan-Africanism and of anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles in the African diaspora gave a central role to the impact of this war on the black colonized consciousness.¹⁷ For example, Fikru Negash Gebrekidan has a chapter on the long-term racial ramifications of the Italo-Ethiopian war in his history of Ethiopian and New World black relations between

1896 and 1991. The war thus plays a prominent role in the conceptualization of his study, which is included within “the overall theoretical framework of Afrocentrism or Africa-centered narrative”.¹⁸ As I will explore in Chap. 3, some fascinating studies exist on the reactions of black diasporic communities to the Ethiopian war, among whom it inspired a deep, perhaps unforeseen, transnational(ist) feeling, what George Padmore termed “African nationalism”, *per se* a loose but powerful sense of identity that moved easily between nationalism and transnationalism. These are the beginnings, he argues in his study of the war, of Pan-Africanism.¹⁹

The following section offers the reader an overview of the preparation for the war in Italy itself, and the cultural and social responses to it, which were primarily influenced by the massive propaganda machine set in motion by the fascist regime to enlist mass support for the conflict. I offer this particular overview of fascist colonialism in order to contrast it to the “counter-discourse” of the Italian left, which I develop and examine in later sections.

PREPARING FOR WAR

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 had been long in the making and was intimately connected to Italy’s imperial ventures in East Africa at the end of the nineteenth century. Barely twenty years after unification in 1861, Italy had already begun to put in place an expansionist policy in East Africa—partly supported by Britain, which felt it needed a junior partner in extending its sphere of influence on this part of Africa.²⁰ These “African wars” sat uneasily with the fresh memory of the Risorgimento and with the values of national self-determination associated with this central event of Italian history.²¹ Italy’s first colony was founded in 1890 and was named *Eritrea*, after the Greek name for the Red Sea, which it bordered. Soon afterwards, the Italian government began outlining grandiose plans to conquer, or at least subdue, the Ethiopian empire, the only state in Africa that had not been taken over by a European power in the 1885 scramble for Africa. Francesco Crispi was Prime Minister of Italy at this point, and, despite being a liberal, he has gone down in history as the most “imperialist” statesman in the early period after unification.²² Crispi and the imperialist lobby in the Italian parliament vastly underestimated the military strength of emperor Menelik II, ruler of late nineteenth-century Ethiopia. The Italians considered Ethiopians to be “African savages” and thus not worth bringing out extra troops for—they had no doubts at all

about the outcome of such a war.²³ Consequently they decided to confront the Ethiopian army in open battle. On March 1, 1896, the Italian army suffered a major and humiliating defeat at the hands of the Ethiopians. Italian soldiers spoke of a real “butchery” on the battlefield, and about 5000 Italian soldiers died. The defeat of Adwa forced Crispi to resign, and it also signalled the end of Italy’s participation in the scramble for Africa.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the debate about the morality of empire revolved around the issue of civilization, a sticking point that would also emerge at another crucial moment of imperial crisis, the 1930s. Critics of colonialism from right and left argued that Italy was in dire need of a “civilizing mission” itself: with 60% illiteracy, a widespread lack of hygiene and a corrupt political class, the nation was hardly in a position to act as a guiding light for colonized subjects.²⁴ Thus the debate around Italy’s level of civilization, or lack thereof, as well as its uncertain standing among other European nations, was at the heart of the opposition between colonialists and anti-colonialists, and one that did not map onto left-right divisions. Added to this was almost complete ignorance of the East African regions and their political organization on the part of politicians, the general population and the military, which led to the various military defeats at Dogali and then Adwa in 1896.²⁵ Adwa was the first time a European army lost a military battle against an African nation; subsequently, popular opposition to empire became widespread within Italy and was a prime cause for the halt on imperial expansion until the conquest of Libya in 1911.

Adwa became symbolic of a much greater defeat; Italy, in losing to an African opponent, had failed to prove to the rest of the world that it was an international state actor that could pursue a colonial policy of prestige and that it could compete with other European nations in spreading the “civilizing mission” to Africa. It was to haunt the Italian ruling class for many decades afterward.²⁶ The battle of Adwa later became an important pretext in fascist propaganda for the invasion of Ethiopia, since it was viewed as a “stain” on the honour of the nation, which needed to be avenged.

Let us now turn to 1934–1935, when Mussolini was planning his invasion of the sovereign state of Ethiopia. Prior to this time, Italy had continued its colonialist expansion with the invasion of Libya in 1911. Italian colonialism, between 1911 and 1932, caused 100,000 deaths of civilians, guerrilla fighters and soldiers in Libya alone. Between 1887 and 1941, during the various colonial wars against Abyssinia (Ethiopia), the dead

amounted to about 400,000.²⁷ This is a strikingly huge number of casualties for such a short-lived empire. Soon after coming to power in 1922, Mussolini made Italy's "imperialist" identity a cornerstone of his policy, through a massive use of propaganda, a feature that distinguished fascist colonial policy from that of the liberal era, according to Labanca. In 1926, Mussolini made a well-publicized speech in Tripoli, in which he said that Italy needed to expand in the Mediterranean and in the East.²⁸ In the years that followed, Italy's Ministry for the Colony actively multiplied its propagandist efforts in favour of colonialism by instituting a series of exhibitions, demonstrations and cultural events focusing on Africa. Rather belatedly, Italy was catching up with the diffuse "culture of imperialism" that had proved so effective in promoting support and knowledge of the colonies, and specifically of Africa, within the liberal empires of Britain and France.²⁹ Fascist imperialism, especially in Ethiopia, was supported by the Italian masses—though Labanca also points out that the consensus lasted even less time than the actual empire (another distinguishing factor from French and British colonialism, where consensus was much more entrenched among the population). But the consensus was also sustained by a massive use of propaganda by the regime, which infiltrated nearly every major newspaper, periodical, magazine and children's publication in Italy.³⁰ The Ministry of Press and Propaganda was consolidated in the year of the invasion of Ethiopia and centralized the entire political culture of the country: from books to information, from tourism to show business.³¹ Historians agree that the period of the invasion coincided with the highest support Mussolini ever enjoyed.

In the lead-up to the invasion, Mussolini had transformed the colonial capital of Asmara into a general headquarters. Troops, munitions, provisions and other material necessary for the war had flooded this small city, which also underwent an architectural revolution in the latter half of the 1920s and early 1930s, becoming a sort of test case for Italian modernist architecture informed by fascist ideals.³² Italians in East Africa used Modernism and Rationalism as architectural languages that established the supremacy of the Italian colonizer in terms of the built environment; and the segregation of urban space between Italians and "natives" aimed to shore up the "racial prestige" of the former, who could not be seen consorting or mingling with those they ruled over.³³ In the words of Michela Wrong, "Fascism's architects designed petrol stations that looked like aircraft in mid-flight and office blocks that resembled space rockets surging into orbit."³⁴

Asmara's transformation into a modernist fantasy seemed to signal that there was something singular and different in the way fascist colonialism conceived of itself vis-à-vis liberal colonialism before 1922. Central to this difference was the fact that Mussolini wanted this war at all costs, and indeed he was the main driving force behind it. War was at the basis of fascist ideology and, specifically, of Mussolini's Empire, and he had planned the Ethiopian war for a very long time.³⁵

Since 1932, Mussolini had asked Minister of the Colonies Emilio De Bono to prepare a plan for a war of aggression against Ethiopia, though Del Boca shows how the statesman had had this war in mind for the previous ten years.³⁶ Rochat draws attention to the top-secret Memorandum that Mussolini drew up on December 30, 1934 (after the Ual-Ual incident), in which he decided the direction the war would take, making full use of his authority as dictator. Rochat quotes directly from Mussolini's Memo: "The problem of Italo-Abyssinian relations [...] has become a *problem about force*, a *historical* problem that must be resolved by the only means through which such problems have always been resolved: the use of arms'.³⁷ In this document, Mussolini made clear he aimed at the "total conquest of Ethiopia". This Memorandum was issued after the incident of Ual-Ual.

On December 5, 1934, the Italian garrison of Ual-Ual on the border between Ethiopia and Somalia (which was Italian territory at the time) rejected an advance of Abyssinian troops trying to reconquer territory that the Italians had occupied in previous years. Mussolini used this trivial incident as a major pretext to spark his war of aggression against Ethiopia.³⁸ Ual-Ual was a small fortification, but it also held the most important source of water in the entire region of the Ogaden (for this reason it had always been hotly contested among the tribes there). Ual-Ual was certainly not the most serious border incident that had occurred between 1923 and 1935, but Mussolini used this minor provocation as a justification for his war of aggression against a sovereign state.³⁹

The top-secret Memorandum "contains all the aspects of [Mussolini's] late imperialist reasoning".⁴⁰ In this document, Mussolini explicitly links the war of aggression to Adwa, a stain on the honour of the nation that needed to be avenged. Both Del Boca and Rochat concur that Mussolini did not wage this war for social, economic or demographic reasons, as was later argued; he saw it as a war of prestige for Italy, a purely imperialist venture which would strengthen the regime on the international level. He made a calculated gamble that neither France and England (the two

countries with the most interests in East Africa) nor the League of Nations would oppose the invasion in any significant way. The document also demonstrates that Mussolini wanted to make this into a “great” colonial war, so as to involve the entire nation in the conflict and present it as a mechanized war, a showpiece for fascist Italy as a modern, efficient, undefeatable regime.⁴¹ As the Futurist and fascist poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti said in a sort of love poem to the Ethiopian war, “The war has a beauty of its own because it serves the power of great fascist Italy.”⁴²

Rochat convincingly argues that the involvement of hundreds of thousands of troops, and the massive propaganda unleashed in support of the invasion, made this colonial war into a *national* war.⁴³ The Italian writer Carlo Levi, in his classic, searing autobiographical text *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (1945), set in 1935–1936, comments ironically on the ways in which the authorities attempted to “sell” the war to Italian peasants and middle classes as a “war of the people”, a war that would gain land and riches. But the Southern *contadini* were hardly fooled.⁴⁴

More than anything, Mussolini needed a quick war, a *Blitzkrieg*, to establish Italy’s prestige at a time in which Hitler’s Germany was beginning to flex its considerable muscles on the international scene. And indeed it was conducted very fast; in the space of very few months the Italian army took over most of the major Ethiopian cities, including Adua, Axum and, in May 1936, the capital city of Addis Ababa (though the actual hold over Ethiopian territory was extremely tenuous).

Part of the reason for Italy’s lightning victory was that the Ethiopian army, quite simply, did not possess the technological advancement and the immense reserves of men and matériel that the Italians had. Against Italy’s modern army, the emperor Haile Selassie only had 250,000 men and very little in the way of modern equipment, tanks or airplanes. The army fought with great valour on the battlefield—and indeed, given Ethiopia’s warrior tradition, this couldn’t have been otherwise—but there was simply no contest. Mussolini’s illegal and unprovoked war quickly brought Ethiopia under Italian rule, though many regions remained unvanquished and the guerrilla warfare against the Italians continued for years until Ethiopia eventually fell to the British in the course of the Second World War (1941).

Moreover, the Italians used poison gas in their air attacks against the Ethiopians, and historians such as Rochat and Del Boca argue that this considerably enhanced Italian chances of victory. As Del Boca argues, Mussolini’s secret Memorandum of December 30, 1934, mentioned above, makes it clear that the full political responsibility for the war was

Mussolini's, and hence also the use against the Ethiopian army and civilians of poison gas, which had been outlawed in 1925 in an accord that Italy had signed.⁴⁵

There has been much historical research done recently on the enormous propaganda organized by the regime around the war.⁴⁶ The regime presented the war as an occasion for providing Italy with a "place in the sun": more land in which to settle its rapidly growing population, so that it could finally have that *Lebensraum* which it deserved and which would serve as a substitute for the need for emigration to America (which the regime had recently put to an end). Official propaganda, through photographs and articles, reinforced Italy's role in "civilizing" the barbarian empire of Abyssinia where slavery was still practiced—though this idea never really convinced many people.⁴⁷

SOME LITERARY RESPONSES TO THE WAR

Italian writers of the time responded in very different ways to the invasion. Charles Burdett, in his excellent analysis of Italian travel and journalistic writing around the Ethiopian invasion and conquest, argues that "such writings did not merely reflect the changing realities of the time, they formulated and disseminated ideas about the country and its population, they commented on and helped to further the imperial policies of the regime."⁴⁸

A theme that emerges out of their writings, though, develops a point that would be picked up later by British pro-Italian sympathizers, most notably Evelyn Waugh and Muriel Currey, who travelled to Ethiopia during the war as journalists and observers. Strong support for the war can be found in the writing of Elio Vittorini, a major Italian writer who had fascist sympathies but then later turned *partigiano* during the Second World War, fighting against the fascists. However, in 1935 he was very much in favour of the invasion. He saw it as an "experiment" for the fascist proletariat, for collectivization, "uncontaminated by the methods of capitalist and predatory colonialism".⁴⁹

It's worth examining in detail the response of major Italian writers of the time to the Ethiopian war. The Italian literary critic Alberto Asor Rosa noted how there was a vein of "socialist/left-wing" fascism among younger writers such as Elio Vittorini, Vasco Pratolini, Romano Bilenchi and others. This left-wing fascism eschewed bourgeois culture and embraced fascist ideology because it seemed to offer a national-socialist alternative to

the iniquities and conservatism of the liberal period. It offered a chance for socially committed young writers to do political activity with mass dimensions.⁵⁰ Asor Rosa locates the origins of neorealism within this left-wing fascism.⁵¹ Many of these writers and intellectuals would then turn against fascism after the Civil War in Spain and, in the case of Vittorini, become committed anti-fascists and *partigiani*. But at the time of the Ethiopian war, they still held a firm belief in fascist ideology and the benefits this war would bring to the masses of Italy, perhaps fulfilling the promises to the Italian people that seemed to have been reneged upon in the latter period of the regime. The fascist literary periodical *Il Bargello*, which published the writings of these young intellectuals, squarely identified the Ethiopian war as the “re-opening” of the fascist revolution and, at the same time, as its fulfilment (*compimento*). The writer Vasco Pratolini defined the war thus: “For a fascist, the war is not materialism, it is the reason for a social reevaluation of the proletarian Nation. It is a war of the people, not of words but of actions, because the people do not know diplomacy.”⁵² Vittorini, for his part, fused his left-wing, socialist sympathies with a valorization of the newly acquired African colony as a space where Italy could operate its civilizing mission and where collectivist, anti-capitalist ideals could be implemented, theorizing a sort of “socialist colonialism”:

Such is the essence of capitalism: INDIVIDUAL SALVATION, each one creating his own banner of personal safety. Whereas the corporate ideal can only envisage collective SALVATION. It is for this, the idea of collective salvation, of security for the entire people, that the economic potential of Ethiopia must be reserved.⁵³

This position is echoed by Evelyn Waugh, for whom Italian colonization marked a “new type of conquest”, distinct from the merely commercial foundations of liberal empires such as Britain and France, because in East Africa he saw “white men hard at work on simple manual labour”.⁵⁴ And whereas he felt that “English colonization has always been the expansion of the ruling class [...] the Italian occupation of Ethiopia is the expansion of a race” (166). It’s worth quoting this passage in full:

It is something new in Africa: something, indeed, that has not been seen anywhere outside the United States of America for two hundred years. English colonization has always been the expansion of the ruling class. At the worst it had been the achievement of rich men trying to get richer; at the

best it has been the English upper classes practising among the simpler communities of the world the virtues of justice and forbearance and sympathy which they have inherited and for which their own busier civilization gives less scope. It has always been an aristocratic movement and the emigrant of humble origin in his own home finds himself a man of position in the colonies, with dignity and responsibilities, a host of servants, the opportunities for expensive sport, and the obligation of a strict rule of conduct, simply by reason of his being an Englishman in an English colony. The 'poor white' is a thing to be abhorred, to be pushed out of sight; white men are only permitted to be underdogs in their own countries. But the Italian occupation of Ethiopia is the expansion of a race. It began with fighting, but it is not a military movement, like the French occupation of Morocco. It began with the annexation of potential sources of wealth, but it is not a capitalistic movement like the British occupation of the South African goldfields. It is being attended by the spread of order and decency, education and medicine, in a disgraceful place, but it is not primarily a humane movement, like the British occupation of Uganda. It can be compared best in recent history to the great western drive of the American peoples, the dispossession of the Indian tribes and the establishment in a barren land of new pastures and cities.⁵⁵

Waugh here connects the newness of Italian fascist, recently unified identity with the newness of their colonial discourse and methods, founded on *manual labour*. Waugh seems to refer to the ways in which the national socialist foundations of Italian fascism were leading to a new form of colonization in which the abolition of class and class egalitarianism in the metropole rested on the bedrock of racial supremacy in the colony. Waugh's comparison between British and Italian colonization yields the insight that whereas, in the Italian colonies, it was the Italians themselves who undertook the hard manual labour, the British colonies tended to rely either on native labour or imported labour from other colonies such as India, as, for example, in the practice of indentured labour in the Caribbean and East Africa, which dated since the nineteenth century. Thus the division of labour in many British colonies in Africa followed the racial divide; it was injurious to white prestige if whites were to be seen as part of the working classes in the colony. This was very different in the case of Italian colonies; Italians came over as labourers, drivers, farmers, mechanics and so on. This was really a "*colonia di popolamento*": a settlement colony, not an exploitation colony.⁵⁶ The strict reinforcement of racial segregation in Italian East Africa, which was enacted under Mussolini,

may have been due to this need to shore up white prestige in a situation where whites were performing “humble” jobs, such as road-building, farming and so on. Nicola Labanca notes that 50% of Italians living in the colonies were manual workers.⁵⁷

The fascist propaganda of the time certainly reinforced the idea that Italy’s empire was a form of “proletarian colonialism”, or an *impero del lavoro* (an empire founded on labour), East Africa being the (new) ideal destination for all those poor Italians who had been prevented from emigrating to America due to Mussolini’s campaign against emigration from 1926 onwards.⁵⁸

For Italian fascists, it was important to see themselves as *civilizers*, as this notion fed into a more properly “European” idea of Italy, doing away with its persistent image of a nation of immigrants. Arguably, it is with colonial fascism that the Italian term “*colonia*” moves from an undifferentiated definition of all Italian settlements abroad (including the Italian diaspora in the Americas and elsewhere) to a more specific concept of colonial *hegemony*.⁵⁹ Fascist colonialism develops the discourse of colonial hegemony in a novel way, not only by discouraging Italian emigration to other countries but also by promoting ideas of Italian colonization as regarding both immigration *and* colonialism proper. Fascism, by bolstering the idea of hyper-nationalism, concomitantly transforms Italian colonial discourse into a more specific one about colonial hegemony, the importation of Italian ideology and culture abroad. An example of this fusion between a more “subaltern” notion of Italian diaspora and a more “hegemonic” one of Italian colonial discourse can be found in fascist territorial claims regarding the French colony of Tunisia, where the majority of the foreign population was Italian.⁶⁰ On May 5, 1936, shortly after Italian troops entered the capital of Addis Ababa, Mussolini pronounced that the war was over and that the Empire had once again appeared on the “fatal hills of Rome”. The gigantic crowds that accompanied this declaration in Piazza Venezia testified to the significant popularity of this war, though Paul Corner argues that there were simple economic reasons for this, including the imagined opportunities of land and wealth offered by this new colony.⁶¹ There was, moreover, the question of international prestige in the eyes of the world. As Del Boca remarks, “Italians were very satisfied with themselves”, because it had been a long time since they had won a war so quickly and so completely.⁶² Unfortunately, however, this was merely a mirage. Economic opportunities for migrants did not materialize; and, all in all, the Italian state lost much more than it invested in

the colonies. Del Boca and Rochat note the astronomical cost of the Ethiopian war, an expenditure that could only have taken place under a fascist government without democratic checks and balances. Del Boca places the number of casualties on the Italian side (including the *ascari*) at 8850, and the cost of the war around 24 billion lire.⁶³

What is perhaps the most grievous legacy of the Italian occupation of Ethiopia was its utter brutality towards the population. Rodolfo Graziani, who became vice-roy of the colony, has gone down in history as one of the most ruthless colonial officials. He personally ordered the massacre of thousands of Ethiopians in the capital of Addis Ababa as a consequence of an attempt on his life by a young Eritrean patriot in 1937.⁶⁴ Waugh, on his part, was completely charmed by the man, in his brief audience with him while he was a war correspondent there: “He asked about the book I was going to write; said he was sure he would not have time to read it, and dismissed me. I left with the impression of one of the most amiable and sensible men I had met in a long time.”⁶⁵ In Chap. 5, I will discuss further Waugh’s intense sympathy for Italian fascism and, specifically, for its colonizing efforts in East Africa.

The undersecretary for the Italian colonies, Lessona, in his memoirs, noted bitterly that Mussolini had actually very little interest in Ethiopia’s value for the Italian people; and as Del Boca comments, Ethiopia was merely the first in a series of wars the Duce entered rather lightly, such as the Spanish Civil War and, of course, the Second World War.⁶⁶

Though the League of Nations officially passed sanctions against Italy for its invasion of Ethiopia, a sovereign state and a member of the League, these were not enforced by any of the member states. Their only effect was to prevent Ethiopia from gathering the necessary arms to fight against its unlawful invader. At an international level, it was widely felt among colonized subjects, and among many of their European sympathizers, that the League of Nations had betrayed Ethiopia, because it had not upheld the sanctions against Italy. This betrayal can be read via the politics of appeasement towards Mussolini and the racist attitude towards Ethiopia, not really considered a sovereign state because it was African. In his account of how the war had been a major trigger for the birth of Pan-Africanism, Padmore expressed considerable bitterness towards European politicians in general and the Soviet Union in particular, the latter of which had betrayed the Ethiopian cause despite its being a communist state and thus ostensibly committed to anti-imperialist struggle.⁶⁷

On June 30, 1936, the erstwhile emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, pronounced a memorable and prophetic speech in front of the League of Nations in relationship to Mussolini's now concluded act of aggression. Before he could even open his mouth, he was badly heckled by the audience, especially by a group of Italian journalists sent by Mussolini and by the Romanian delegate Titulescu, who asked the President of the League of Nations, Von Zeeland: "*Au nom de la justice, faites taire les sauvages!*" ("In the name of justice, tell the savages to shut their mouths!")⁶⁸ Haile Selassie pronounced the action of the Italians "barbaric" and said that this act would threaten the collective security of the world and the very existence of the League of Nations. "In other words", he said, "it's international morality that is at stake."⁶⁹ The Emperor made a last desperate appeal to the League of Nations to help Ethiopia against the Italian occupation of their country, asking for a loan of ten million pounds and the reprisal of the sanctions against Italy. The League of Nations denied both requests.

The ruthlessness of the Italian fascist command in Ethiopia and Mussolini's policy of complete, direct domination without any colonized intermediaries led to sustained revolt and the lack of a willingness to compromise with the Italian invader on the part of the Ethiopians.⁷⁰ At the level of propaganda, the justification for direct domination was premised on the representation of Ethiopians as barbaric and uncivilized. Barbara Sòrgoni argues that Italian anthropological theory needed to construct a "we" for a young Italian nation, which was still in the process of defining its identity.⁷¹ Most importantly for the argument in this chapter, this "we" of the Italian colonizer, set against the "them" of Ethiopians, Eritreans and Somalis, had to be premised on a concept of the "modern" European. This claim to modernity, as we shall see, would be subsequently deployed to great effect by Haile Selassie and his supporters *against* the Italian invaders, arguing that it was Ethiopia that was the modern, civilized nation, whose sovereign rights as a member of the League of Nations had been trampled upon by the barbarous troops of Mussolini and his infamous Blackshirts. In the subsequent section, I will examine the response of Italian communists to the invasion, in order to begin to chart the complex nexus of 1930s internationalism, communist anti-fascism and diasporic/non-diasporic anti-colonial movements that converged in a common stance against the colonization of Ethiopia on the part of Mussolini's regime.

THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY AND THE ETHIOPIAN WAR: AN OPPORTUNITY TO TOPPLE THE REGIME?

In this section I examine documents and published material by Italian communists in order to map out the response of the PCI to the Ethiopian war. The archives documenting the activities of the PCI between 1926 and 1938 allow us to reconstruct an oppositional narrative to colonialism that developed among the Italian left in the fascist years.⁷² Broadly speaking, what emerges is that the PCI worked hard to transform this conflict into an opportunity to try to topple Mussolini's regime because they knew from their internal sources that many Italians were highly disillusioned with this venture into which Mussolini had dragged the nation.⁷³ To this effect, the PCI did quite a bit of propaganda in the Italian colonies against the regime, attempting to influence Italian migrant communities in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Somalia. This propaganda culminated with the Barontini mission in 1938, which I will discuss below, in which a group of PCI members travelled to Ethiopia to fight alongside the resistance movement against the Italian occupiers. The larger issue that the PCI's activism around the Ethiopian war raises is two-fold: firstly, the central connection between Italian anti-fascism and anti-colonialism, which we see developed and amplified in the intellectual/artistic work of Gillo Pontecorvo and Giovanni Pirelli in the postwar period, who enter into a close dialogue with Third-Worldism. The *Resistenza*, a central experience for the development of the Italian left, was both preceded and followed by intense anti-colonial activism. Thus it can be said that the first testing-ground for the Resistance was effectively *outside* Italy, in its colonies. Secondly, the intense activity that the PCI put in motion against this war testifies to the fact that its anti-colonialism arguably *predates* its anti-fascism or, at the very least, develops alongside it. In other words, the PCI had always been marked by a long-standing anti-colonial stance that would have significant repercussions at the time of the Algerian war, especially between 1958 and 1961. As I will discuss further below, the PCI had developed a colonial policy as early as 1926, at the time of its *Theses of Lyons* (*Tesi di Lione*), a historic and foundational text for the future ideological orientation of the party, profoundly influenced, and indeed mostly written, by Gramsci. I will examine in detail a lesser-known section of these seminal Theses, namely the "*Tesi Nazionali e Coloniali*" ("National and Colonial Theses"). These were related to Lenin's formulation of the National and Colonial Question at the time of the Third International (1920), and yet they were

also subtly different in that they focused squarely on Italy's relationship with its *own* colonies, i.e., Libya and Italian East Africa, and also, in more complex ways, with the Slavic world, with which it shared a border and towards which at times it assumed the traits of a colonizer.⁷⁴

At an ideological level, communist and socialist opposition to the war stemmed from a sense that fascism had radically distorted the values of the Risorgimento. Or rather, the emancipatory and progressive wing of Italian nationalism during the Risorgimento had been suppressed and betrayed by the politically conservative faction during Italy's various wars of independence, led by the Savoy dynasty in Piedmont. This caused many left commentators to define the Risorgimento as a "royal conquest" (*conquista regia*), as Gramsci observes in *The Prison Notebooks*.⁷⁵ This conservative faction exercised its hegemony over Italian governments from unification (in 1861) onwards, and then even more brutally with the advent of fascism in 1922.

If, as the Italian socialist Andrea Marabini said in his 1939 book about the fascist invasion of Ethiopia, Italy was supposed to bring "civilization" to the African country, then surely the question of what "civilization" actually meant needed an answer.⁷⁶ Marabini explicitly links fascism's inability to bring civilization to the colonies with its barbarity at home, pitting these failures against the values of the Risorgimento:

How could, and how can Italian fascism bring a moral, intellectual and material improvement to the people of its colonies, if with its most brutal and barbarous methods it has destroyed the few moral, material and cultural conquests that the Italian people had made over 50 years of civil wars?⁷⁷

The left critique of the justifiability of the invasion here centres around who has the right to be the bearer of the civilizing mission, and, for the socialist Marabini, it was certainly not the Italians. Marabini here redeploys the discourse of the Risorgimento in order to construct the Italians as a people who have fought for freedom against external occupiers and who cannot therefore impose a form of colonialism of their own. Italian anti-fascist discourse involved, in other words, a reimagining of *Italy*, wresting it from fascist hegemonic conceptions.

It also implied an alignment of Italian Risorgimento values with anti-colonial values: the right to self-determination, a strong sense of nationhood, the valorization of national culture. A reading of the Risorgimento in terms of decolonization circulated among major anti-colonial

movements, for example in India. It is well known that Giuseppe Mazzini's writings exerted a great influence on Indian nationalists, especially Gandhi, and his organization Young India was partly inspired by Mazzini's *Giovine Italia*.⁷⁸

A discussion of the relationship between the values of the Risorgimento and the development of the PCI would need much more space than this chapter allows. However, Gramsci's analysis of the Risorgimento as a passive revolution remains one of the most influential Italian historiographical theories concerning the movement.⁷⁹ It may be partly for this reason—the clear analogies between decolonization movements and Italy's struggle for national unification—that Gramsci's reflections gained so much currency among postcolonial theorists later on.

On a different, though related, note, the PCI had developed a colonial policy by 1926 and possibly earlier. I wish to analyze here a number of documents relating to the PCI's analysis of Italian foreign policy and expansionism under fascism. The party's intense interest towards this aspect of Mussolini's regime lies in the clear realization that anti-colonial revolt and struggle, and an alliance with colonized peoples fighting against a colonial oppressor, could be essential to the victory of the communist revolution and the end of bourgeois imperialist states. This may have been in part a strategic alliance, one that the PCI had realized since 1926, inspired by Lenin's *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* and his "Theses on the National and Colonial Question", presented at the Baku Congress of 1920.⁸⁰ Analyzing such documents in relationship to colonialism has not been done before and is central to my project, in that they serve to illuminate the interconnectedness of Italian communism, anti-fascism and anti-colonialism. They support my central point that anti-colonial liberation movements taking place across the world profoundly influenced the evolution of left politics in Europe in the 1930s (and afterwards).

THE "NATIONAL AND COLONIAL THESES" OF THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY (1926)

The Third Congress of the PCI took place in exile, in Lyons in 1926. This is the site of the historic *Theses of Lyons* (*Tesi di Lione*), which were mainly formulated by Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti and which represented the most articulate and developed exposition of the founding ideas of the

Italian Communist Party.⁸¹ The *Theses of Lyons* was part of a broader series of Theses representing the position of the PCI at that time. These other Theses included the Agrarian Theses, with a specific discussion of the rural South and its strategic role in the “Italian proletarian revolution”.⁸² The huge importance of the *Theses of Lyons* for the future development of the PCI is undeniable and has been amply discussed by historians such as Paolo Spriano. What has been less remarked upon is the presence of a colonial policy in this document, a sign of the future attention of the PCI towards the colonial question, which would endure throughout and beyond the fascist period.

The General Principles of the “National and Colonial Theses” established, first of all, the necessity for the proletariat to find allies for its struggle against the bourgeoisie. Central to a search for such an alliance is the thesis that “the production of historical forces is not conceivable outside of class conflict [*contrasti di classi*].”⁸³ Thus anti-colonial struggle is equated with anti-capitalist struggle right at the beginning of the Theses; and this has a strategic importance for the work of communist parties everywhere. Firstly, it means, as the Theses elaborate, that a central analogy is set up between, on the one hand, the alliance of the peasantry and the working class against the great landowning and banking capitalists, and, on the other, the alliance of colonized peoples with the revolutionary proletariat, under whose direction alone they will be able to effectively achieve equality with other nationalities and political independence, as well as liberation from capitalist exploitation.⁸⁴ Secondly, anti-colonial movements are recognized as central to anti-capitalist struggle. Ruggero Grieco, a Communist Party member who would be a key promoter of the colonial policy of the PCI in future years, offered the following helpful commentary to the “National and Colonial Theses” when they were presented at the Third Congress of the PCI in 1926:

Operating in the colonies is becoming more and more important for the revolutionary working class. Our generation is witnessing the independence movements in the colonies. What should be the communists’ position towards these events? We must see the colonial problem in the context of the struggle that the proletarian class wages against the capitalist regime. The colonial peoples, like the peasantry, represent a powerful ally for the proletariat. Leninism teaches us how to connect the struggle of the proletariat against capitalism to the struggle that the people of the colonies wage against capitalism.⁸⁵

Obviously we must not overestimate the importance of these Theses within the PCI's more general anti-fascist and revolutionary strategy in those years. However, in 1926 it was undoubtedly already abundantly clear to Communist Party cadres that a focus on anti-imperialism was a major political objective, as well as a potentially winning strategy against both bourgeois and fascist regimes. Also in 1926, Gramsci wrote *The Southern Question*; and Gramsci's analysis of the Southern question bears an obvious relationship to Grieco's commentary and to the "National and Colonial Theses" themselves, which were most likely conceived by Gramsci and Togliatti together. Gramsci recognized that the proletarian revolution in Italy could only be realized through an alliance between the Southern peasantry and the Northern industrial working class. He extends this insight to the situation of the colonies: the colonized people can act as a "powerful ally" for the victory of the proletarian revolution worldwide, just as the rural Southern populations could support the Northern proletariat. Therefore anti-colonial nationalisms are supported *in the context of*, and for the sake of, the wider triumph of international communism. However, later on in the document, when the Theses tackle the national question in Italy, they also discuss the fraught issue of the contested border territories between Italy and Yugoslavia, and they strongly endorse an alliance between Italian and Yugoslavian communists. In this section of the Theses, the authors insist firmly that this issue of borders and demarcations of national territory cannot become a point of conflict between the two parties; rather, "The national question can only be considered in the context of the worldwide proletarian revolution."⁸⁶ So yes to nationalisms if they can serve to support and sustain the revolution; but, in order to avoid jingoism and the triumph of national-bourgeois hegemony at the expense of the proletariat, they must be framed within the emancipatory horizons of an international struggle.

The last section of the Theses regards the Italian colonial empire, namely Eritrea, Somalia, Jubaland and Libya. In addition to important statistical data about the population and the extension of these territories, the Theses offer precious clues as to the Italian communists' interpretation of how Italian imperialism first developed shortly after the unification of the country. It is worth quoting the document in full here, namely point 25 of the "National and Colonial Theses":

The first steps towards Italy's colonial expansion originate from the political need to seek out all the elements that could help to create a *consciousness of*

the unified state within the metropolis and to strengthen the young bourgeois regime through its intervention in the policy of colonial expansion of the European states. Moreover, Italian industry, which began developing around 1880, pushed the State to seek natural resources and new markets for its products.⁸⁷

The reasons behind Italy's colonial expansion are analyzed on two levels here: the ideological and the economic. The authors of the "National and Colonial Theses" acutely see that colonialism can serve to strengthen a sense of unified national identity, as well as a sense of a unified *state* identity. Thus foreign policy enables Italy to become an equal player with European states and to present itself as a distinct actor in the international arena. They also suggest here that colonialism helps give the nascent Italian state a stronger sense of its own unity: a crucial factor at a time in which Italy was attempting to combat banditry (*brigantaggio*) in the South and was finding it difficult to bring together such a fragmented country (especially given the divide between North and South).

The authors of the Theses make two other significant points in relationship to Italian colonialism. Firstly, Italy was a latecomer compared to already-established colonial empires such as the British and the French, and hence had to settle for the "poorer regions of central Africa".⁸⁸ Secondly, they make the crucial point that, since its very inception, Italian colonization had always had an exclusively political value and resulted in an economic loss for the metropole. This thesis would be maintained and developed both by Grieco, in his illuminating 1928 report on the PCI's colonial policy, and by Gramsci, in his well-known analysis of Italian colonialism in the *Prison Notebooks*.⁸⁹

The historical accuracy of this analysis is even more remarkable given the lack of easy access to real data regarding the Italian colonial presence in North and East Africa. As discussed previously, the fascist state had put together an impressive propaganda machine to gather support for its renewed imperialist efforts in these regions. The official message was that there would be freely available land (*oltremare*) for impoverished Italians, who were encouraged to emigrate to Africa rather than to America. The real figures and the actual economic and human costs of fascist colonization would only be known publicly at a much later period, thanks to the pioneering work of Del Boca.⁹⁰

In the "National and Colonial Theses", there is also a clear consciousness of the increasingly important role that the "movement of Negro

emancipation” was playing in the fight against imperialism. The authors identified the increasingly important role of Ethiopia in developing black nationalism, which they felt would spread to the Italian colonies: “and we must not only study its progress but also support it and ensure its success.”⁹¹ The rest of this section, dedicated to the Italian colonies, analyzed the situation in Libya and how the PCI could best support emerging nationalist movements there. The colony of Tunisia was also considered an important area of intervention because of the substantial Italian population living there. In the Theses, the authors claimed that Italian and French workers should unite with Tunisian nationalists in opposition to Italian and French imperialists (149). Moreover, “The Italian Communist Party must contact the Italian communists in Tunisia, and the Italian working class in Tunisia, in order to fight the imperialist propaganda being conducted by the Italian fascists” (149; at the time, the fascist regime claimed sovereignty over Tunisia).

The authors conclude this section on the Italian colonies with one observation and one injunction. They reiterate the need to view the “indigenous insurrectional movement” in North Africa as part of the worldwide movement of resistance of the colonies against capitalism and not as an isolated, sporadic fact. It must be “explained through the fight that the revolutionary proletariat conducts against capitalism, supported by the colonial peoples and by the poor peasant classes” (149). The authors thus contextualize anti-colonial struggle holistically within global class conflict. They finish with an injunction to the Italian working class: they *must* support the colonial peoples’ struggle for their own liberation, and this alliance needs to happen with the Communist Party as its guiding element.

One last remark to be made about the “National and Colonial Theses” concerns the importance given to active sites of conflict in the world in the late 1920s. The Theses see anti-colonial movements as forms of *war* against capitalism. They explicitly mention Morocco, China, the Balkans and “the colonies”:

We must pay the utmost attention to what is happening in North Africa, the Balkans, Syria and China. In these countries, Italian imperialism meets and contrasts with other imperialisms. *The next conflict, into which Italy will inevitably enter, will emerge from these sites of conflict.*⁹²

The PCI at this point in time, and later on as well (as is evident from Grieco’s 1928 document), was absolutely certain that the war against capitalism would emerge from anti-colonial struggle. This is why they

were able to predict with so much accuracy that the Ethiopian war would be the harbinger of a future world conflict; and, at the time, they saw in it a perfect opportunity to gather together the oppositional forces that were against the Italian occupation, with the aim of toppling the fascist regime.

It is obvious that Grieco's subsequent 1928 report on the PCI's colonial policy developed organically out of the "National and Colonial Theses", though Grieco presented a much more detailed and concrete plan of action for the work the party needed to do in the colonies, as well as much more information about the actual anti-colonial forces present on the ground.⁹³ This document represents a precious source of information for the PCI's analysis of the colonial situation and is as startling for its prescience with regards to the crucial role Ethiopia was to play in triggering a future world conflict as for the types of alliances the PCI was hoping to set up with anti-colonial groups and with the French Communist Party (which had a strong presence in North Africa) in order to initiate a world revolution against capitalism. I would argue that the deep involvement of the PCI with the colonial question has been completely overlooked by Italian historiography of the PCI, especially in its close connections to the PCI's future role in the *Resistenza*.⁹⁴ A closer look at this document in conjunction with the "National and Colonial Theses" and other texts about the colonies highlights the ingrained streak of anti-colonialism that had characterized the work of the PCI nearly since its inception. It also outlines very clearly the way in which the lead-up to the Ethiopian war, and more generally Italy's colonial policy, constituted a "critical event" for Italian left understandings of anti-fascism and for their will to redefine the Italian nation as anti-imperialist and proletarian.

RUGGERO GRIECO'S REPORT ON THE COLONIAL POLICY OF THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY (1928)

Grieco begins his report with a straightforward admission of negligence on the part of the PCI towards the colonial issue and thus frames the document as a will to rectify this situation by proposing a concrete plan of action that had been lacking previously:

Comrades, I must say immediately and clearly that the C.I [*sic*] has not been able to accomplish any work in the Italian colonies of North and East Africa. The Theses on the colonial question, approved by our Party at the Third Congress, were never put into action and have never been applied in any way. (11)

Grieco dedicates quite a bit of space to the situation in Libya and the ferocious repression and reconquest on the part of the Italian occupying powers there, and the possible action of the PCI. The verdict on the Italian imperial venture as merely a source of economic loss for an already poor country, previously articulated in the Theses, is reiterated here as “the paradox of an artificial empire, of an empire that does not give to the metropole but is sustained by the metropole, a metropole of starving and miserable people” (13).

He then provides a startling and suggestive analysis for Italy’s interest in Ethiopia. Let us remember that this was 1928, quite a few years before the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935. But Grieco already understood that by taking over Ethiopia, Italy would be able to connect its North African and East African colonies in such a way as to create “a single African colonial system”. He thus outlines the future colonial policy of the PCI, which will need to focus on the question of Ethiopia, a country that is already being eyed by several colonial powers in Africa and which has a crucial strategic importance for Italy:

Therefore, together we must find the knot to untie, the weak spot that can destroy the imperialist setup in North-East Africa. We think we have found this knot in Ethiopia, a formally independent, Catholic-Christian state, which hosts ministers of the great powers and ambassadors and missions of the Pope and of the Vatican. [...] We must gather all possible information in order to study this aspect of the anti-imperialist problem of Central-East Africa, because it is likely that this can be the point of departure for the movement that aims to weaken the colonial system of imperialism in this part of the world’s colonial territories. (14)

Grieco clearly identified in Ethiopia a desirable target for colonialist aspirations on the part of several different imperial powers. For this same reason, he argued that Ethiopia could become a centre for anti-colonial resistance for the entire colonial region of East and Central Africa. This may have been due to Ethiopia’s importance for nascent Pan-Africanism and for “Negro emancipation”, as the “National and Colonial Theses” outlined in 1927 (see discussion above). Thus the PCI had already reflected seriously on the issue of black emancipation in the 1920s and 1930s (proof of this is also Gramsci’s extended discussion in *The Prison Notebooks* of the role of black intellectuals in leading the struggle for African liberation).⁹⁵

It is hard to overestimate the importance of Grieco's document. It provides a precise and concrete plan of action for making contact with the various liberation movements in the Italian colonies—especially Libya, the soon-to-be-invaded Ethiopia and Tunisia, a French colony with a large Italian population. It is also remarkably prescient for its intuition that Ethiopia would very soon cease to be an independent state, while at the same time becoming the centre for anti-colonial resistance to Italian occupation in the region. It also predicted with remarkable accuracy the fact that these events might set the stage for World War II, as they indeed did.⁹⁶ This document can also be said to be the prehistory of the PCI's subsequent intense involvement in the Ethiopian campaign.

The Ethiopian war, in many ways, represented an important change in the direction of anti-fascist opposition. It engendered a debate among the various left movements that perhaps, for the first time, proposed "tactics, alliances, programmes and principles that would reemerge during the Resistance, eight years later".⁹⁷ The oppositional narrative to the propaganda surrounding the invasion, which I trace here, consists of a variety of elements: attempts to gauge public opinion towards the regime through intelligence-gathering, organizing agitation propaganda against the war and, more concretely, sending operatives to Abyssinia and Egypt to stir up "anti-Italian" feeling among the populations. Around the time of the invasion of Ethiopia, the PCI tried to get a sense of the consensus towards the war among the population, and registered dissent as well. In 1935, the PCI documented an "interesting protest" in the *Sera* newspaper against vaudeville shows about the Abyssinian war. This newspaper, after a long introduction on the moralization that fascism had brought to the arts, protested against a show in which a comedian with pomade in his hair "mocked the anxiety of our people". Apparently the comedian had sung a song which described how the Abyssinians had cruelly deprived a war veteran of his manhood and how the veteran was embarrassed at not being able to perform sexually on his return to his conjugal bed after a victorious war campaign. The newspaper ended the story by asking that such unseemly satires be banned from the stages.⁹⁸

The Ethiopian war, for the PCI, promised to offer a real opportunity for toppling the regime, if public opinion could be swayed against the war. To this end, the PCI attempted to multiply negative propaganda among Italians by publishing a number of flyers and manifestoes condemning fascist aggression against Ethiopia and asking Italians to rise up against the regime. The flyers often emphasized that the brunt of the war's costs

would lie on the workers' shoulders, based on the conviction that opposition to the war was mainly economic. There was also a "Manifesto of the world women's movement against war and fascism": "Italian women! In the deserts of Eastern Africa, Italian youth is suffering and dying. They did not want this war: fascism did!"⁹⁹ Many of these leaflets were printed and distributed in Marseilles, where the PCI was particularly active. In 1935, the PCI and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) decided to hold a congress for Italians abroad with the aim of bringing together all the organizations opposed to the war. But the various factions failed to come to an immediate agreement, though the congress was eventually held in Brussels with the participation of numerous anti-fascist groups, including the two Communist Internationals and about 100,000 Italian workers living abroad.¹⁰⁰

Anti-fascists were hoping to see fascism collapse through the Ethiopian war because this act had isolated Mussolini internationally, with the imposition of sanctions on Italy on the part of the League of Nations. The leftists were banking on the hope that Italy was woefully underprepared to sustain a military attack on such a vast empire. At the first signs of defeat, their reasoning went, the Italian people would rebel and get rid of the dictatorship imposing this unwanted war on them. What actually happened was that the conquest of Ethiopia was quite rapid, almost a *Blitzkrieg*, without excessive losses on the Italian side. In early summer of 1936, from his balcony overlooking Piazza Venezia in Rome, Mussolini proclaimed to a crowd of more than 200,000 people that, after fifteen centuries, the empire had reappeared "on the fatal hills of Rome".¹⁰¹ Thus the rapid takeover of Ethiopia had coincided with a mass resurgence of the nationalist spirit and an unprecedented support for the regime, never equalled before or after. The colonial war that the anti-fascists had thought would signal the beginning of the end had actually consolidated consensus for fascism among the masses. The real problem, as Carlo Rosselli, president of the leftist organization *Giustizia e Libertà*, put it in a 1935 letter to the cadres of the PCI and PSI, was that a mass opposition to the Ethiopian war could not be stirred up by conferences and flyers. One had to close the gap in communication that existed between Italian society under the regime and anti-fascist movements abroad:

Propaganda against the war must not be based on a lofty theoretical harmony among the opposition that would fail to echo the country's present mood. Slogans like 'Hands off Abyssinia! Down with imperialism!' [...] are

rather pointless and show the inability to understand the psychology of those living in Italy.¹⁰²

The anti-fascist organization *Giustizia e Libertà* believed in operating on the ground: the only way to proceed was to create the spiritual and material basis among the Italian population that would transform the imperialist and fascist war into civil war.¹⁰³ Angelo Tasca, writing in the theoretical journal of the PCI, *Stato Operaio*, printed in Paris, was also doubtful that the mere act of invading Ethiopia was going to topple the regime: "We do not believe in a tranquil 'decline' of fascism and thus we can consider, with firmness, all possible scenarios. But we do not intend to entrust to the war the solution of our conflict with the regime."¹⁰⁴ But the PCI, on the whole, did tend to pin quite strong hopes on the undermining effect the war would have on the Italian proletariat. They lay great store in international action, focusing on the League of Nations and anti-fascist propaganda abroad. At the end of 1935, Carlo Rosselli proposed the creation of a revolutionary Italian alliance that would bring together all anti-fascist formations. But the PCI refused to countenance it. The PCI, given its ideological dogmatism, was highly suspicious of *Giustizia e Libertà*'s proposal for a "socialist republic founded on the forces and free institutions expressed by the people in the course of their struggle". Such vague and all-embracing slogans did not appeal to the deeply autonomistic character of the PCI cadres.

In the aftermath of events, the PCI acknowledged that they had made an error of judgement; in fact, the war had served to deviate attention *away* from dissatisfaction with the regime and had provoked "*dans le pays une nouvelle vague chauviniste*" ("a new chauvinistic wave in the country").¹⁰⁵ *Stato Operaio*, the journal of the PCI, also acknowledged that fascism had managed to "fanaticize" a significant part of proletarian youth. It was now useless and counterproductive to insist on the idea of a class-based anti-fascism that relied on the anti-national spirit of the proletariat in denouncing the warmongering of fascists and nationalists. After almost fifteen years of fascism, patriotic ideals had begun to take root among the masses. Thus anti-fascist propaganda had to play the economic card in order to unify people through their shared misery and deprivation, including their "brothers in Black Shirts", i.e., the eponymous fascist organization.¹⁰⁶ The PCI was now very careful not to offend the widespread nationalist sentiment reinvigorated by the war. In May 1936, around the time of Mussolini's proclamation that the Roman Empire had been

reborn, *Stato Operaio* published an editorial in which it clearly revealed its wish to coopt the soldiers and Blackshirts who had served in the war. These youths had fought with courage and made huge sacrifices, which showed the “great capacity for abnegation and resistance of our magnificent people”. But the cause they had fought for was unjust, and they had been tricked by fascism into fighting for it. These youths, said the article, had for the most part ignored the fact that a people does not rise by annexing other populations through violence, violating the territorial integrity and national independence of other peoples: “Now these fighters [...] want a job for themselves and their family members in the fatherland [*patria*] [...] They have the right to it. The capitalists should pay for the costs of war [...] those who have profited greatly from the sacrifices and the blood of the Italian people.”¹⁰⁷ As this passage demonstrates, the PCI pragmatically targeted fascist youth, and for this purpose it was adopting the very same rhetoric of fascist social propaganda.

THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY IN ACTION IN COLONIAL AFRICA: EGYPT AND ETHIOPIA

In the years immediately preceding and following the Ethiopian war, the PCI swung into action in the colonial territories as well as in Europe. The party sent its representatives in Egypt and in Ethiopia itself to stir up anti-Italian feeling. It is important to note that two of Mussolini's most important international actions before his entry into World War II, namely the sending of troops to sustain the Franchists in the Spanish Civil War and his war against Ethiopia, were, conversely, also fundamental training grounds for shaping the future protagonists of the Italian anti-fascist Resistance. Ilio Barontini, the emissary of the PCI who helped organize Ethiopian resistance against the Italian colonial army, had previously fought in Spain with the Republicans, and subsequently became a *partigiano* (resistance fighter) in the Italian Resistance. At the end of the war General Alexander, the commander of the Allied troops in Italy, decorated him for his merits in combating Nazi-fascism.¹⁰⁸ The Italian communists' participation in the Spanish Civil War had led them to take into consideration wider forms of struggle against fascism, such as the Ethiopian mission, headed by Barontini and organized by the PCI between 1938 and 1940. Indeed, though it was a little known and isolated event, the Barontini mission constituted a link between the volunteers fighting for the Republican cause in Spain and the development of a war of resistance organized in

small groups, which would be perfected by the *partigiani* during the Second World War. Add to this the surprising fact, reported by Bruno Anatra, that among the anti-fascist volunteers who went to Spain there were some Ethiopians.¹⁰⁹

Fascist propaganda had recently infiltrated Egypt in order to agitate against the British colonial occupation and gain allies among Egyptian nationalists.¹¹⁰ The fascist regime had intensified the propaganda among Muslims, and had even participated in a world pan-Islamic congress held in Geneva in September 1935. The fascist deputy Bernardo Barbiellini, who was a delegate at the congress, had actually converted to Islam. This news was reported to the PCI in a letter dated December 3, 1935.¹¹¹ Given Italy's anti-colonial (i.e., anti-British) agitation in Egypt, the PCI, in a countermove, established a connection with an anti-Italian, anti-fascist Egyptian Jew by the name of Marcel Messiqua (what follows is excerpted from another letter to the Secretariat of the PCI by an emissary in Egypt, PCI archives). Messiqua was one of the leaders of the *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme* and the *Ligue contre l'antisemitisme* based in Alexandria. Messiqua, while registering the success of fascist propaganda against the British, also told the PCI emissary that Egyptians would definitely take a pro-Abyssinian side in case war broke out. Through Messiqua, the PCI hoped to make a connection with anti-Italian forces in Libya, which was occupied by Italy. Moreover, a second PCI emissary, "Sergio", mentioned in the letter, had just become foreign correspondent for the London-based *Daily Express*, a pro-Ethiopian paper. The *Daily Express*, according to the letter, had agreed to pay Sergio for the most important news about Italian fascist intrigues in Egypt. Sergio had offered to stay at least two months in Egypt, with the possible aim of going to Ethiopia if the opportunity arose. In other words, the PCI had begun setting in place an informal intelligence network in the African colonies to monitor the situation, attempting to contrast fascist influence in the North and East African regions. This is confirmed by Anatra's account: "In Egypt there was a lively group of anti-fascist Italians; Spano [another future *partigiano*] had completed a mission there, directed towards the Italian troops that were in transit through the Suez Canal, around December 1935."¹¹²

But the peak of the anti-colonial activism of the PCI was an extraordinary mission that sent two or three emissaries to organize the Ethiopian resistance against the fascist colonial army. Del Boca affirms that from 1938 onwards, the Ethiopian resistance movement was sustained by external help, namely by English and French intelligence.¹¹³ The first two

PCI emissaries to be sent to Ethiopia were two Italian communists who had fought in Spain: the aforementioned Ilio Barontini and Paolo Bargili. According to Del Boca, this mission was a joint venture of the Communist International, French and English secret services, and emissaries of the deposed Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie. But there is absolutely no mention of the joint role of French and British intelligence, either in the official PCI documents documenting Barontini's mission or in the first-hand account of the mission published in the Marxist magazine *Rinascita* in 1966.¹¹⁴ There seem to have been two separate PCI missions to Ethiopia, and Barontini spent a total of two years there, between 1938 and 1940, training the Ethiopian rebels. Del Boca comments that the mission produced important results for British intelligence because it let them find out the following things: (1) that the Italian army did not have sufficient means to withstand the British army stationed in the neighboring British colony of the Sudan; (2) that the Ethiopian resistance, which had been contending in part of the country against the Italians for the past five years, if adequately supported, could paralyze the entire fascist military apparatus in Ethiopia; (3) and that Haile Selassie was certainly the most suitable personality to take up the revolt and to govern the country.¹¹⁵

For the PCI, on the other hand, the missions played a very important role in their plan to use the Ethiopian war as a tool for anti-fascist propaganda. Since the war had failed to provoke a popular uprising against Mussolini, action had to be taken on site.

While he was in exile in Bath, Haile Selassie apparently nominated Ilio Barontini Vice-Emperor of Ethiopia, according to an article published in the PCI newspaper *L'Unità* in 1970.¹¹⁶ Barontini, the future *partigiano*, had been fighting in Spain among the International Brigades in the late 1930s, along with a number of other PCI members. In his account published in *Rinascita*, Anton Ukmar, a comrade, tells how the idea of going to Ethiopia to help organize anti-colonial resistance had first been mentioned while they were all in Spain. Barontini left for Ethiopia in December 1938, after making contact with relatives and collaborators of Selassie, the Ethiopian emperor in exile. Among these was Lorenzo Tazaz, the secretary of the emperor and Ethiopia's representative at the League of Nations. The fact that an Italian communist would be fighting in the name of a despotic emperor such as Selassie shows the extent to which improbable anti-colonial alliances were forged on the eve of the Second World War in Ethiopia.

Taezaz was to accompany two other companions, Pietro Rolla and Anton Ukmar, on their trip to Ethiopia to join Barontini, who was already there. The route they took began in Marseilles, and continued via Cairo and Khartoum. In Cairo, Rolla, Ukmar and a French colonel, Paul Robert Mounier, contacted the British Intelligence Service. Mounier told the two PCI members that the British knew that the three of them (including Barontini, who was already in Ethiopia) were communists. Once arrived in Ghedaref, in the Ethiopian desert, they proceeded to the villages where they finally made contact with Barontini as well. Their main purpose was to unify Ethiopian resistance forces and to help them change their combat tactics. So far, the Ethiopians had been prevalently fighting in large bands of 1000/2000 men, which were easily targeted by the Italian army. Barontini, Rolla and Ukmar urged the Ethiopians to fight in smaller, more mobile units, much like guerrilla groups. They also prevailed upon them to stop killing their prisoners, but rather to disarm them and then let them go free. The Italians also impressed upon the Ethiopians the importance of maintaining the freed territories. Ukmar recounts how Ethiopian insurgents had lost all trust in the promises of the colonial authorities, which had never been kept. There had been an increase in sugar prices, the imposition of a salt tax and the substitution of the silver dollar with bank notes. Men had been obliged to hand in their weapons, which was said to be inconceivable for an Ethiopian “free man”, and Coptic priests had been persecuted and killed for their support of the anti-Italian struggle.¹¹⁷

Barontini, in the meantime, was establishing good relations with the local resistance forces. In a letter to PCI headquarters, Barontini noted how his presence had had a huge effect on the Ethiopians:

I am surprised because I have never found a more attentive audience than here, these peasants are very intelligent, they learn well and after my speeches they show a real adoration for me. I think that my mere presence here is a success, one regains confidence [...] Tomorrow we will fight, the natives are formidable combatants, I have seen a peasant give a cow in exchange for two cartridges for his weapon.¹¹⁸

Barbieri claims that when Haile Selassie appointed Barontini Vice-Emperor of Ethiopia, the various chiefs were satisfied with this decision since it meant that none of their rivals would gain power.¹¹⁹ British and French intelligence did not particularly appreciate this gesture on the part

of Haile Selassie, but Selassie did not revoke it. Barontini, Rolla and Ukmar, also known to their Ethiopian allies under the names of the Apostles Paulus, Petrus and Johannes, respectively, had been entrusted with the following mission: “to maintain the contacts between the heads of the revolt, to coordinate their actions, to avoid the conflict between the various formations, to do what was possible in order to bring peace among the armed groups, and to address every effort against the occupying army”.¹²⁰ It was made clear to them that they were *not* there to do work for the Communist Party, nor to present themselves as Italians. Thus the international aspect of this anti-colonial, anti-imperial struggle taking place in Ethiopia, Italians against Italians, emerges quite strongly from the archives of the PCI. But equally this anti-colonial mission, sponsored by the PCI and possibly by British and French intelligence, and, of course, backed by Haile Selassie himself, could be read as a prehistory of Italian anti-fascist resistance. The same men who went to Ethiopia on an anti-colonial mission were there fighting against some of their fellow Italians, foreshadowing the civil war that would mark the *Resistenza* between 1943 and 1945.

The two-year mission ended in 1940, when the Italian fascists began to be defeated by the British and Ethiopian troops combined. And yet, the PCI would continue to operate both in East Africa and in Libya, even after the fall of the Italian colonies, as we shall see in Chap. 6. The erstwhile colonies would prove a fertile terrain for the PCI to try out some of its national politics outside the borders of Italy itself.

CONCLUSION

The oppositional narrative that emerges out of the PCI documents I have analyzed above is a crucial counterpart to the repression of Italian colonialism within public memory, on the one hand, and to the extensive scholarship on Italy’s empire that has emerged over the past thirty years or so, on the other. Studies of Italian colonial history and culture have generally not tended to focus on opposition to empire, but rather on the historical, political and cultural constitution of Italian colonial discourse. What I have tried to draw out here is an anti-colonialism located within the metropole and yet radically marked by a condition of exile: the PCI members who actively took part in the anti-war campaign were all working from outside Italy, as fascist censorship prohibited open demonstrations against its colonial enterprise. Gramsci was a keen

observer of empire but was in prison during the Ethiopian war and would die in 1937 shortly after its conclusion; the PCI was in exile in France, though it was also active in the colonies of Tunisia and Libya. Arguably, its first major anti-fascist campaign was waged around Ethiopia, not within Italy. Thus Ethiopia constituted a “critical event” for the development of anti-fascism. The PCI’s organization of the Barontini mission in Ethiopia as well as their prescient and accurate analysis of Italian imperialism are fundamental, if forgotten, aspects of the way anti-fascist and anti-colonial discourse developed as a unified counter-hegemonic politics in the 1920s and 1930s. This connection took place precisely because the PCI was in exile and was thus in a different situation from that of other European communist parties; it likely facilitated the development of internationalist sympathies for colonized peoples and also aimed to show up the similarities between the conditions of the large Italian immigrant populations in European colonies, who were mainly manual laborers, and those of colonized peoples. Moreover, the brutal economic and political oppression of the Italian working class, especially the peasants of the South, highlighted the parallels, and hence the possible solidarity, between the Italian and the colonized subalterns. Let us not forget that the term “subaltern” was being elaborated precisely in those years by the imprisoned Gramsci, a term whose semantic applicability transcended class oppression to embrace many other forms of it, and whose comparability with racial oppression was made all the more visible by the practice and discourse of fascist colonialism.

As we shall see with the activism of Sylvia Pankhurst, metropolitan anti-colonialism, as exemplified in this chapter by the PCI, enlarges the horizons of a progressive nationalism that saw fascism and colonialism as “twin evils” (to use Nehru’s words) preventing the revolution. For the PCI, the Italian nation had to be internationalist in its outlook in a way that eschewed imperialism: what we might call a non-imperial cosmopolitanism. So imperialism is a threat to the very constitution of an emancipated, revolutionary nation-state; this is how we must understand metropolitan anti-colonialism. In the following chapters, we will examine how the Ethiopian war was a “critical event” for Pan-Africanism both in terms of catalyzing a transnational sentiment of solidarity for the Ethiopians and also in fuelling the development of anti-colonial nationalisms in different African and Caribbean colonies.

NOTES

1. See Richard Pankhurst, *Sylvia Pankhurst: Counsel for Ethiopia. A Biographical Essay on Ethiopian, Anti-fascist and Anti-colonialist History, 1934–1960* (Hollywood, CA: Tschai, 2003), 2.
2. Veena Das, *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 5.
3. François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 22.
4. According to the historian Angelo Del Boca, Britain displayed the most opposition to the war of all the European countries. See *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale: La conquista dell'impero* (Rome: Mondadori, 2001), 330, henceforth referred to as *La conquista dell'impero*. In Chaps. 3 and 4, I examine the writings of Pan-Africanists in relation to the invasion, as well as the more general reactions to the war within the African diaspora, including those of African Americans.
5. See Romain Rainero, *L'anticolonialismo italiano da Assab ad Adua. 1869–1896* (Milan: Edizioni di Continuità, 1971).
6. See Daniel Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War: 1935–1936* (London: Temple Smith, 1975).
7. See Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, “Memories and Legacies of Italian Colonialism”, *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*, ed. Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 15.
8. Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, “Introduction”, *Italian Colonialism*, ed. Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 3.
9. See the diatribe between Del Boca and Montanelli on this issue, as reported by Michele Brambilla (“Montanelli, Del Boca e l’Etiopia: le guerre non finiscono mai”, *Corriere della Sera*, October 1, 1996). Montanelli denied, in the face of all evidence, that Italians had used nerve gas against civilian populations in the invasion of Ethiopia. The Geneva Convention, established in 1925 after the horrors of the First World War involving poison gas, explicitly prohibited its use. Montanelli finally admitted he had been wrong after Del Boca presented him with incontrovertible evidence from the Italian State Archives testifying that the use of poison gas had been authorized by the commanding officers (see also Angelo Del Boca, *I gas di Mussolini. Il fascismo e la guerra d’Etiopia*, Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1996).
10. Brambilla, 31.
11. Angelo Del Boca, “Gli studi sul colonialismo italiano”, *L’impero fascista: Italia ed Etiopia (1935–1941)*, ed. Riccardo Bottoni (Bari: Laterza, 2008), 26–27.
12. An important publication in this rapidly emerging field of Italian postcolonial studies is *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*, ed. Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (2012).

13. See Fuller, "Italy's Colonial Futures: Colonial Inertia and Postcolonial Capital in Asmara", *California Italian Studies* 2:1, 2011, (3–19), and also Michela Wrong, *I Didn't Do It For You: How the World Betrayed a Small African Nation* (London: Harper, 2005).
14. See Nicola Labanca, "Guerra coloniale in Africa orientale 1935–1941; un progetto totalitario?", unpublished paper.
15. Giorgio Rochat, *Le guerre italiane 1935–1943. Dall'impero d'Etiopia alla disfatta* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005), xiii. Rochat speaks of a "fragmented memory" relative to these wars, which tended to be the preserve of military memoirs and the like, rather than part of a wider political national history (see xiv).
16. Two volumes by Giuliano Procacci stand out in this respect: *Dalla parte dell'Etiopia. L'aggressione italiana vista dai movimenti anticolonialisti d'Asia, d'Africa, d'America* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1984) and *Il socialismo internazionale e la guerra d'Etiopia* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1978).
17. See J. Ayodele Langley, *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa: 1900–1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973); S.K.B. Asante, *Pan-African Protest: West Africa and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis* (1977); Joseph E. Harris, *African-American Reactions to War in Ethiopia: 1936–1941* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1994); Penny von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans Against Anticolonialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Diaspora and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Susan D. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton University Press, 2009).
18. Fikru Negash Gebrekidan, *Bond Without Blood: A History of Ethiopian and New World Black Relations, 1896–1991* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005), 3. The term "Afrocentric" has a contested and complex legacy in the context of historiographical studies; Gebrekidan remarks that the reactions against the use of the term have more to do with reflexes than with thought-out responses. These are scholars who believe that the term relates more to a dogmatic approach (resembling other "isms" like Zionism, Marxism, etc.) rather than rational scientific enquiry, a *parti pris* position, as it were.
19. George Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle for Africa* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1956), 17.
20. See Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare: Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), 62–64.
21. However, Fabrizio De Donno examines a counter-narrative relating to the Risorgimento and colonization in the work of Alfredo Oriani, an early supporter of Italian colonialist ventures. He argues that Oriani and other

- followers of Giuseppe Mazzini felt that post-unification Italy had a duty to bring progress and liberalism to oppressed countries, much as the Risorgimento had been about liberating Italy from a foreign oppressor (see De Donno, “La razza ario-mediterranea”, *Interventions* 8:3 (2006), 400).
22. See Labanca, *Oltremare*, 71, and Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere* [*Prison Notebooks*], ed. Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), Q19§24, 2018–2019.
 23. See Giovanna Tomasello, *L’Africa tra mito e realtà: storia della letteratura coloniale italiana* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2004), 26.
 24. Rainero, *L’anticolonialismo italiano da Assab ad Adua*, 173–174.
 25. Labanca, *Oltremare*, 81.
 26. Labanca, *Oltremare*, 83.
 27. Del Boca, *L’Africa nella coscienza degli italiani: Miti, memorie, errori, sconfitte* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002), 113.
 28. Labanca, *Oltremare*, 153.
 29. *Ibid.*, 154.
 30. Mirella Mingardo, “‘Pace’, ‘lavoro’, ‘civiltà’: propaganda e consenso nella stampa periodica durante la guerra d’Etiopia”, *Ti saluto e vado in Abissinia: Propaganda, consenso e vita quotidiana attraverso la stampa periodica, le pubblicazioni e i documenti della Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense* (Milan: Vienneperre, 1998), 24.
 31. *Ibid.*, 30.
 32. See Michela Wrong, *I Didn’t Do It For You*, for an account of the impact of the Ethiopian war on the Eritrean colony, and Marco Barbon, *Asmara Dream* (2009), a collection of stunning, delicately tinted Polaroid photographs of Italian modernist architecture in Asmara, which survives largely intact to this day. Mia Fuller presents an excellent analysis of the way in which contemporary Eritreans experience and remember the legacy of Italian colonial architecture on their understanding of their own national heritage. She also critiques volumes like Barbon’s and those of other European photographers who tend to fixate on the “nostalgic” and timeless dimension of Asmara’s architecture without taking into consideration how Eritreans themselves conceptualize this built environment. See Fuller, “Italy’s Colonial Futures”.
 33. See Mia Fuller, *Moderns Abroad: Architecture, Cities, and Italian Imperialism* (London: Routledge, 2007).
 34. Wrong, *I Didn’t Do It for You*, 5.
 35. Labanca, *Oltremare*, 197.
 36. Del Boca, *La conquista dell’impero*, 219–220.
 37. Rochat, *Le guerre italiane*, 21.
 38. See Rochat, *ibid.*, 21, and Del Boca, *La conquista dell’impero*, 247–290.

39. See Del Boca, *La conquista dell'impero*, 254.
40. Del Boca, *ibid.*, 256.
41. Del Boca, *ibid.*, 258.
42. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Il poema africano della divisione "28 ottobre"* (Milan: Mondadori, 1937), 29. Marinetti has plenty to say about the beauty of a war that "realizes the mechanical man". The fascist aesthetic, for him, is perfectly embodied in this conflict. He also volunteered to fight in Ethiopia.
43. Rochat, 25.
44. "He and the other Great Schoolmaster and Radio Speaker in Rome went around saying that the war was made to order for the benefit of the peasants of Gagliano, who soon would have all the land they wanted, and such good land that all you had to do was to put seeds in it and the crops would shoot up without further aid. Unfortunately the two schoolteachers talked so much of the grandeur of Rome that the peasants had no confidence in anything they said [...] They had no faith in a promised land which had first to be taken away from those to whom it belonged; instinct told them that this was wrong and could only bring ill luck. The 'fellows in Rome' didn't usually put themselves out on their behalf and this latest undertaking, in spite of all the fuss made over it, must have a remote purpose in which they had no part." See Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, transl. Frances Frenaye ([1945]; London: Penguin, 2000), 130–131.
45. Del Boca, *La conquista dell'impero*, 256.
46. See, for example, Simona Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani sotto il regime, 1929–1943* (Bari: Laterza, 1991); Patrizia Caccia and Mariella Mingardo, *Ti saluto e vado in Abissinia: Propaganda, consenso, vita quotidiana attraverso la stampa periodica, le pubblicazioni e i documenti della Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense* (Milan: Vienneperre, 1998); Paul Corner, "L'opinione popolare italiana di fronte alla guerra d'Etiopia", *L'impero fascista (1935–1941)*, ed. Riccardo Bottoni (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), 167–186; Enrica Bricchetto, *La verità della propaganda. Il "Corriere della Sera" alla guerra d'Etiopia* (Unicopli, 2004).
47. Paul Corner argues that people were generally not very convinced by the war and that even the great crowds that turned up on October 2, 1935, when the war against Ethiopia was declared, were actually made up of people who had been forced to be there ("L'opinione popolare italiana di fronte alla guerra d'Etiopia", *L'impero fascista*, 173–174).
48. Charles Burdett, *Journeys Through Fascism: Italian Travel Writing Between the Wars* (New York: Berghahn, 2007), 118.
49. See Del Boca, *La conquista dell'impero*, 347. He refers to Alberto Asor Rosa, *Storia d'Italia*, vol. 4, *Dall'Unità a oggi*, Part II, *La Cultura*,

- (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), 1567–1577, and Anna Panicali, “Vittorini e l’alienazione negli anni trenta”, *Ideologie*, n. 7, 1961, 5–16.
50. Alberto Asor Rosa, *Storia d’Italia*, vol. 4, *Dall’Unità a oggi*, Part II, *La Cultura* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), 1576–1577.
 51. He notes that neorealism, as exemplified by Vittorini’s work, also failed to interrogate this “left fascist” matrix of its own formal and political enquiry. He argues that there was a process of repression involved towards this phase of youthful fascist activity among these writers (Asor Rosa, 1577).
 52. Vasco Pratolini, *Il Bargello*, VIII, 20; cit. in Asor Rosa, *ibid.*, 1574.
 53. Elio Vittorini, “Ragioni dell’azienda collettiva”, in *Il Bargello*, VIII, 40; cited in Asor Rosa, *ibid.*, 1575. Capitalized words are in the original. Burdett also comments on Vittorini’s argument that “the colony offered the ground for a ‘totalitarian corporatist experience’” (*Journeys Through Fascism*, 123).
 54. Evelyn Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia* ([1936]; London: Penguin, 2000), 166.
 55. Evelyn Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia*, 166–167.
 56. See Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 17.
 57. Labanca, *Oltremare*, 409 and Francesca Locatelli, “La comunità italiana di Asmara negli anni trenta tra propaganda, leggi razziali e realtà sociale”, *L’impero fascista*, 369–391.
 58. See Michele Strazza, “Il fascismo e l’emigrazione negli Stati Uniti”, <http://www.storiain.net/arret/num139/artic1.asp>. Strazza mentions that Mussolini changed his policy towards emigration in 1926–1927 and also decided to call emigrants “*Italiani all’estero*” instead of “*emigranti*”. Silone in his 1933 novel *Fontamara* documents what a tragedy it was for poor Southern peasants when emigration to the US was closed off to them during fascism (also due to more restrictive immigration laws in the United States).
 59. Carla Ghezzi remarks that “*colonia*” and “*coloniale*” were ambiguous terms at the turn of the last century: there was a semantic slippage between Italian settlements outside national borders and the colonies of Somalia and Eritrea. This was a symptom of the simultaneous processes of emigration and imperialistic expansion taking place shortly after unification in 1861 (Carla Ghezzi, “Fonti di documentazione e ricerca per la conoscenza dell’Africa: dall’Istituto coloniale italiano all’Istituto Italo-Africano”, *Studi piacentini* 7 (1990): 167–192, 167). See also Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Harvard University Press, 2008), 2, for a discussion of the double meaning of “*colonia*” in the late nineteenth century.

60. See Mark I. Choate, "Tunisia, Contested: Italian Nationalism, French Imperial Rule, and Migration in the Mediterranean Basin", *California Italian Studies* 1(1), 2010, 1–20. Furthermore, Burdett insightfully identifies analogies between fascist rhetoric around land reclamation works in the Pontine Marshes, implemented by Mussolini, and nationalist discourses surrounding the "re-conquest of Ethiopia" after the defeat of Adwa: "The recovery of the Ethiopian land surface re-enacted the Fascist recovery of the nation" (*Journeys Through Fascism*, 121).
61. Paul Corner, "L'opinione popolare italiana di fronte alla guerra d'Etiopia", *L'impero fascista (1935–1941)*, ed. Riccardo Bottoni (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), 180.
62. Del Boca, *La conquista dell'impero*, 714.
63. Del Boca, *La conquista dell'impero*, 717.
64. Cf. Del Boca, *La conquista dell'impero*, Rochat and Labanca for details of the massacre.
65. Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia*, 154.
66. Del Boca, *La conquista dell'impero*, 731.
67. Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*, 146–147.
68. Cited in Del Boca, *La conquista dell'impero*, 740–741.
69. "Emperor Haile Selassie at the League of Nations", *Ethiopia Observer*, vol. 3, n. 10 (September 1959), 315.
70. Richard Pankhurst, *Sylvia Pankhurst: Counsel for Ethiopia*, 63–64.
71. Barbara Sòrgoni, "Pratiche antropologiche nel clima dell'Impero", *L'impero fascista*, 415–428.
72. At the time, the PCI was in exile in France.
73. In its April–May issue of 1935, *Lo Stato Operaio*, the Paris-based journal of the PCI in exile, published a long series of testimonies by farmers, manual workers and soldiers against the Ethiopian war, presumably collected by party members. One testimony claimed that many Italian families were dead set against this new war because the memory of Italy's previous African wars, and of the massacres of Italian conscripts which had occurred there, was still very vivid among the population. See "I lavoratori italiani e la guerra (testimonianze)", *Lo Stato Operaio*, anno 9, numero 4–5, April–May 1935, 272–286.
74. Italian anti-Slavic sentiment has been connected to a "border racism" (*razzismo di frontiera*) that dates back to the nineteenth century and even earlier, when Italian nationalism was emerging in juxtaposition with national-ethnic communities in the Balkan region. See Marta Verginella, "Antislavismo, razzismo di frontiera?", *Aut-Aut*, special issue on "Il post-coloniale in Italia", n. 349 (Jan–March 2011), 30–49.
75. See Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, vol. 3, 2031–2032.

76. See Andrea Marabini, *La barbarie dell'imperialismo fascista nelle colonie italiane* (Paris: Edizioni Italiane di Cultura, 1939).
77. Marabini, 35.
78. See Fabrizio De Donno, "The Gandhian Mazzini: Democratic Nationalism, Self-Rule and Non-Violence", *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalisation of Democratic Nationalism, 1830–1920*, ed. C.A. Bayly and E. Biagini (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 430–461.
79. See Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, Q19§24, 2011.
80. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, "Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Question" (1920), <http://marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/lenin/works/1920/jun/05.htm>; and *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965).
81. For the historian Paolo Spriano, the importance of the *Theses of Lyons* was that they represented the most ambitious attempt to apply Leninist tactics and strategies to Italy. Spriano speaks of it in terms of a *translation* of the Soviet experience, a very sophisticated and advanced interpretation of the Russian revolution in an Italian key: a "research into the history of dominant groups and the class character of fascism. In this sense the *Theses of Lyons* are the most mature product of Gramsci and Togliatti's Leninist theoretical approach/development [*sviluppo*]" (Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano. Da Bordiga a Gramsci*, vol. 1 (Turin: Einaudi, 1967), 495). The Third Congress, held in Lyons, was also when the PCI definitively ostracized Bordiga and his supporters within the party, and Gramsci and Togliatti's current became dominant.
82. See Spriano, *Storia del Partito comunista italiano. Da Bordiga a Gramsci*, vol. 1, 495.
83. *Le Tesi di Lione. Riflessioni su Gramsci e la storia d'Italia*, ed. Leone Cafagna et al. (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1990), 135.
84. *Ibid.*, 135.
85. "Verbalì delle sedute dell'III Congresso del PCI, relazione della Centrale al congresso, 1926-01, Relazione sulla Quistione Agraria", UA 382, 113, Archivio Storico del PCI, Istituto Gramsci (Rome).
86. *Tesi di Lione*, 142.
87. *Tesi di Lione*, 146.
88. *Ibid.*, 146.
89. In *The Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci argued that the imperial aspirations of the new nation-state were linked to the Southern question and Italian economic policy after 1861. Gramsci notes how Italy's need for agricultural land and space for demographic expansion fuelled the desire for colonies among Italian statesmen at the end of the nineteenth century, especially the Prime Minister Francesco Crispi, who was in office from 1887 to 1896, with one interruption (*Quaderni*, Q19§24, 2019).

Gramsci observes that, in classic “imperial” fashion, Crispi presented the “mirage” of African colonies to the Southern Italian peasant as a diversionary tactic to avoid having to effect a more equitable redistribution of land in Italy itself (*Quaderni*, Q19§24, 2018) and to consolidate the hegemony of the political ruling class over the rural masses of the South. Colonization follows the flow of capital invested in different countries and is never due purely to the need to “place” excess population (*Quaderni*, Q8§80, 986; Q19§6, 1991). For Gramsci, Italian imperialism was “passionate and rhetorical”, without any real economic basis, since it lacked capital to invest in overseas markets.

90. See Del Boca, *La conquista dell'impero*, 322ff.
91. *Tesi di Lione*, 147.
92. *Tesi di Lione*, 156.
93. Ruggero Grieco, “Articoli delle tesi politiche del VI congresso con annotazioni manoscritte di Togliatti; rapporto di Grieco (Garlandi) alla ‘Commissione dell'Oriente prossimo’ sul partito nel lavoro nelle colonie, 1928-07-04”, UA 644, Archivio Storico del PCI, Istituto Gramsci (Rome). I am indebted to Tom Langley for this document. He located it in the archives of the PCI at the Istituto Gramsci of Rome and very kindly passed it on to me. I quote from his transcription of the text, a scanned copy of which is held in the archive.
94. No mention is made of this crucial document by Paolo Spriano, author of one of the most well known historical accounts of the PCI, *Storia del Partito Comunista Italiano*.
95. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, Q12§1, 1527–1528. Gramsci was writing about black intellectuals in 1932, according to the dating of the *Notebooks*.
96. Labanca argues that the Ethiopian war, which isolated Mussolini internationally, inevitably brought about his alliance with Hitler (*Oltremare*, 197).
97. Paolo Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano. I fronti popolari, Stalin, la guerra*, vol. 3 (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), 49.
98. Folder 1309, 1935, Archivio Storico del PCI, Istituto Gramsci (Rome).
99. Folder 1320, 1935, Archivio Storico del PCI, Istituto Gramsci (Rome).
100. Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano*, vol. 3, 48.
101. Colarizi, 202.
102. Carlo Rosselli (1935) folder 1286, Archivio Storico del PCI, Istituto Gramsci (Rome).
103. Patrizia Caccia and Mirella Mingardo, “Dissenso e opposizione nella stampa politica antifascista”, *Ti saluto e vado in Abissinia*, 79.
104. Tasca (1935) in Caccia and Mingardo, *ibid.*, 78.
105. Folder 1356 (1935–1936), Archivio Storico del PCI, Istituto Gramsci (Rome).

106. Colarizi, 207.
107. Quoted in Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano. I fronti popolari, Stalin, la guerra*, vol. 3, 62.
108. Remigio Barbieri, "Ilio Barontini, Partigiano in Etiopia", *L'Unità*, November 12, 1970, 3.
109. Bruno Anatra, "Uno dei nostri colla resistenza abissina", *Rinascita* 19 (1966), 18.
110. An important aspect of Mussolini's foreign policy was his support for Arab nationalisms, in particular in Egypt and Palestine, against British colonial interests. In 1930, Mussolini's monthly magazine *Gerarchia* suggested that the era of colonialism might be over, so that white and native peoples now needed to be treated as absolute equals. Denis Mack Smith notes that "Mussolini here came close to tapping one of the big revolutionary forces of the century, before falling back on the easier and less imaginative doctrines of imperialism and racial supremacy" (Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (London: Longman, 1976), 34).
111. Folder 1312, Archivio Storico del PCI, Istituto Gramsci (Rome).
112. Bruno Anatra, "Uno dei nostri colla resistenza abissina", *Rinascita* 19 (1966), 18.
113. See Del Boca's account of the Barontini mission in *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La caduta dell'impero* (Milan: Mondadori, 1992), 333–340, henceforth referred to as *La caduta dell'impero*.
114. See Anatra, "Uno dei nostri colla resistenza abissina", *Rinascita* 19 (1966), 17–18.
115. Del Boca, *ibid.*, 333–340.
116. Barbieri, "Ilio Barontini, partigiano in Etiopia", 3. However, this account is dubious since it is not even mentioned by Del Boca, the major Italian expert of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, in his discussion of the Ethiopian resistance to Italian colonialism. He does mention Barontini, but never the fact that Haile Selassie nominated him vice-emperor in his place (see Del Boca, *La caduta dell'impero*, 333–340).
117. Del Boca recounts a particularly ferocious massacre of Coptic clergy in the convent-village of Debrà Libanòs, in which 449 priests were gunned down by Muslim troops under the orders of the Italian vice-roy Graziani. Del Boca comments that these deacons were "youthful martyrs that Christianity does not remember and does not mourn, because they were African and different" (Del Boca, *La caduta dell'impero*, 106).
118. Ilio Barontini, letter dated 6/2/1939, contained in folder 1498, Archivio Storico del PCI, Istituto Gramsci (Rome).
119. Barbieri, "Ilio Barontini", 3.
120. Anton Ukmar, "Partigiano sulle rive del lago Tana", *Rinascita* 19, 19.

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“Ethiopia’s Cause Is Our Cause”: Black Internationalism and the Italian Invasion of Ethiopia

The repercussions and significance in Italy of the Ethiopian war as a “critical event” have been discussed in the previous chapter. In this chapter, and in Chap. 4, I focus on the generic variety of black-authored representations that sought to appropriate this event for the development of an Afrocentric historical narrative of liberation. Even more than the event itself, it was its deployment by black writers in the service of an emancipatory ideal that conferred upon it its critical status. This chapter is divided into several sections and moves from a general discussion of Ethiopia’s significance for black internationalism to a more specific one on anti-colonial thinkers, in order to illustrate how Pan-Africanism had its germination in the unprecedented impact of the Ethiopian war on black communities around the globe. In the first part of the chapter, I argue that by triggering a shared solidarity among diasporic Africans the Ethiopian war offered the occasion for articulating a transnational discourse of black liberation. This built on much older religious narratives of Ethiopia as an ancestral homeland prevalent among diasporic groups (most notably African Americans and African Caribbeans). Having set up the wider context of African diasporic sympathy for Ethiopia, the chapter then moves on to analyze the writings of two major Caribbean thinkers, Padmore and James, in relation to the Ethiopian war. This event had a galvanizing effect on their own political development by prompting them to form the International African Friends of Abyssinia (IAFA; later the IASB),

forerunner of the Pan-African Association. In response to the war, Padmore developed an in-depth critique of the Communist International, given its manifest failure in supporting Ethiopia's sovereignty at an international level against the Italian invasion, and he thoroughly questioned the Comintern's ideological stranglehold over black liberation struggles. In his 1956 book *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*, he proposed to his readers an autonomous political programme for African nationalism that sought to distance itself from European and Soviet-sponsored communism. James was to elaborate his major works of black historiography in the wake of the Ethiopian war, namely *The Black Jacobins* and *A History of Pan-African Revolt*, both published in 1938.¹ Christian Høgsbjerg evokes the expression "class struggle Pan-Africanism" to describe James's political ideology in this period.²

ETHIOPIA AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PAN-AFRICANISM

The incredibly widespread, surprisingly transnational reactions to the Ethiopian war yield conflicting and shared, opposite and diverse accounts of an event which was called a "colonial war" by some and a conflict between sovereign states by others. In other words, when comparing narratives of the Ethiopian war that highlight its status as a "critical event" for a specific national or ethnic community, we can see how such a comparison is characterized by a form of *heteroglossia*, with a range of different political meanings that contribute to different and often irreconcilable historical interpretations of the invasion. A holistic version of all these accounts has yet to be presented, though, as already noted, Italian historians such as Del Boca and Giuliano Procacci have done much to present a more broadly transnational version of this war than the one offered to us by much Italian historiography, which tends to subsume it within the more "national" history of Mussolini's fascism (see Chap. 1 for a fuller discussion of this point). But the war was not just a major event in what has been, until recently, a nearly forgotten strand of Italian history, namely the history of Italian colonialism. This war was also a fundamental event in the history of Pan-Africanism—"possibly the single most important event in black internationalism"—and, more broadly, it figured prominently in the fashioning of narratives about an Afrocentric past, the writing of which—and the recuperation of which—was to be a major undertaking of the most prominent black intellectuals of the twentieth century.³

For Frank Furedi,

the response of the black diaspora to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia showed at once the intensity of resentment towards imperialist domination and of the aspiration for freedom. Ethiopia became a symbol of independence from Western control for the colonies, and their reaction to the invasion revealed a depth of passion which caught everyone unawares. Throughout Africa, Black America and the Caribbean, the invasion became a *cause célèbre*. What was unique about this response was its generalized character. This was probably the first instance of a Third World-wide reaction to an instance of Western intervention.⁴

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia happened at a significant moment in the history of empire, in the high era of anti-colonial nationalism. It was also a significant moment in the history of internationalism. As we shall see, both anti-colonialism and communist internationalism would play a significant role in the agitations around Ethiopia. What was very much at stake, as the reactions to this war show, was a debate about the meaning of “civilization” and “barbarism”, and the very meaning of the “civilizing mission” itself, which was, of course, the ideological underpinning of European imperial projects. The Italian invasion represented an explicit breach of the principles underlying the League of Nations because Italy had invaded a sovereign state, Ethiopia, that was a member of the League. The outrage felt by black communities all over the world, from Harlem to London, from Port of Spain to Accra, was fuelled both by the act of the invasion itself and by what was perceived to be the betrayal of a black nation by its white so-called allies in the League of Nations. The League’s failure to uphold sanctions against Italy, including the Soviet Union’s continued sale of oil to the country, was deemed almost as culpable and despicable as Mussolini’s declaration that Ethiopia represented for Italy its much-deserved “place in the sun”. The invasion contributed much to strengthen support for anti-colonial movements both within the metropole and within the colonies, and it also played a key role in the development of Pan-Africanism. It was around the time of the Ethiopian war that many diasporic blacks began to identify explicitly as “Africans”, though the articulation of Ethiopia as a black homeland had ancestral roots in black liberationist and religious movements. As Claude McKay noted in his popular history of Harlem, “To the emotional masses of the American Negro Church the Ethiopia of today is the wonderful Ethiopia of the Bible. In a religious sense it is far more real to them than the West African lands, from which it is assumed that most of the ancestors of Aframericans came.”⁵ The challenge to Ethiopia’s independence posed by Italian fascist

imperialism, enacted in front of a global audience and exacerbated by Ethiopia's membership in the League of Nations, enabled many blacks, for the first time, to identify with a black sovereign state. For obvious reasons, such forms of national identification had been precluded to diasporic black communities, perhaps most notably to African Americans (and to Africans under colonial rule); such exclusions foreshadowed Toni Morrison's assertion that "America has always meant something other to me—they. I was not fully participant in it and I have found more to share with Third World peoples in the diaspora; maybe it's for political reasons."⁶

Ethiopia, as a black nation under threat, encouraged this form of national identification among the diaspora, arousing transnational sympathies and internationalist fervour that soon translated into demands for concrete action in support of Ethiopia. It is also worth remembering that within Ethiopia itself support for the national cause was not undivided, and there was great shock among Ethiopians when Haile Selassie left the country after the proclamation of Italy's empire.⁷ Indeed, some Ethiopians joined the Italian side and others attempted a compromise, though Italians brutally rejected any compromise and often executed any leaders or nobles who surrendered to them or came to them for a parley.⁸

A focus on the stories told around and after the invasion, in black historiography, the black press and black literature, allows us to retrieve it as part of an occluded, forgotten history of the African diaspora whose narrative truly necessitates the method for subaltern histories that Gramsci so eloquently wrote about in *The Prison Notebooks*.⁹ It also attempts to address the erasure of global black histories, which is to say it attempts to recuperate the fragmented narrative of black internationalism regarding Ethiopia. As Michael O. West and William G. Martin argue, the "intellectual segregation" of postwar and Cold War historiography across diverse objects of enquiry "generally precluded investigation of shared black or African experiences".¹⁰ This chapter argues that the Ethiopian war is an event whose holistic reconstruction can bring to light this shared experience across divided historical narratives relating to Pan-Africanism, communism, and Italian and, more broadly, European imperialism.

Another story that this event can tell us about is that of the complex and evolving relationship between Marxism and anti-colonial movements, a story that hasn't been sufficiently examined.¹¹ Internationalism, at times an ambivalent and contradictory ideal, is at the root of this connection. In what follows, I examine the development of black internationalism between the two wars in relationship to Ethiopia, as it emerges out of

publications by black activist authors and journalists, including those of the Trinidadian George Padmore. I argue that black international support for Ethiopia is best understood through its representation in the black press, from the radical articles of Padmore to the more popular appeal of the African American newspapers. Such an examination reveals how contemporary readers coproduced ideas of black liberation and race consciousness with their intense engagement with the coverage of the Ethiopian war by newspapers they read, across national boundaries and social classes.

TRANSNATIONALISM AND BLACK POLITICAL THOUGHT BETWEEN THE TWO WARS

It is helpful to draw on transnationalism when examining the intellectual and affective underpinnings of black internationalism. Transnationalism, as the historical context of the Ethiopian war shows, is *not* post-national. As John McLeod remarks, "transnationalism does not delineate or celebrate a mode of interaction which bypasses the problematic limits of nation, race, class, or culture in establishing purely affiliative nomadic relations freed from the emotional compulsion of national or ethnic 'roots'."¹² On the contrary, at the heart of transnational connections is an enduring engagement with the problematic of the nation and its fascist or imperialist tendencies. Like McLeod, I will suggest that the Ethiopian war allows us to see how "historically situated networks of transnational relations were integral to the problematic of anticolonial nationalism."¹³ The productive relationship between nationalism and internationalism in the black diaspora is a point also made by Brent Hayes Edwards: "discourses about black *national* autonomy—such as Ethiopia—played a formative role in the formulation of black *internationalist* initiatives."¹⁴

The 1930s are a particularly interesting period in which to trace the trajectories of transnational anti-colonial resistance because at the time communism had a strongly internationalist emphasis and because the struggle against fascism had a transnational character, as is exemplified by the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War. Similarly, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia provoked unprecedented waves of support for Ethiopia in black communities from both sides of the Atlantic.

A transnational theory of anti-colonial connections, in which anti-colonial activists were forging resistance in metropolitan centres like London and Paris, displaces the centre-periphery model that tends to

locate all resistance as exclusively emanating from the colonial margins. Edwards argues that it was in the diaspora, in the colonial metropolises such as London and Paris, that Africans and Afro-Caribbeans began to think in terms of racial political unity amongst themselves. As the British Guianian T. Ras Makonnen (another leading black activist operating in London in the interwar years) says in his autobiography, *Pan-Africanism from Within*, “Africans were not only compelled to think out the position of their own people, but were forced by the pressures of the times into making alliances across boundaries that would have been unthinkable back home.”¹⁵ Certainly George Padmore, the Caribbean political activist who was one of the founders of Pan-Africanism, functioned in transnational rather than national terms.¹⁶ This chapter examines black intellectuals, and black-authored texts, who focused on the Italo-Ethiopian war as a key event for going *beyond* nation as a unifying factor for political action and consciousness, partly because Western nations looked at their black inhabitants as either despised minorities (as was the case in the US and to a lesser extent in Europe) or as colonized subjects without rights (as was the case for the Caribbean and colonial Africa). Forms of black nationalism articulated in the 1930s could not but be transnational in scope, since nationalism as an ideology continued to be hijacked by racist and ethnicist discourses, especially with the rise of fascism in Europe and with the enduring power of European empires. Transnational organization and pooling of intellectual resources, then, were crucial for those who were attempting to construct a black autonomous political thought. The 1930s merit examination because these are the years in which such thought was formed; Leslie James speaks of this period as an “anti-colonial ideological laboratory”¹⁷ which laid the basis for the profound and widespread development of black thought in the postwar period, when it became much more mainstream and generally recognized as a significant intellectual movement in the Western public sphere. James recalls Stuart Hall’s argument that before the 1960s in Britain (at least), “black politics was not an autonomous political arena to which you could relate but instead was subsumed within debates about class and empire.”¹⁸

The role of the Ethiopian war, and, more broadly, Ethiopia, in providing a key site for the articulation of black diasporic thought the world over has been extensively commented on by many historians. J. Ayodele Langley argues that the “main impetus to the new utopian thought-style in the mid-1930s” among black activists and intellectuals in Europe and the US was provided by Mussolini’s aggression against Ethiopia.¹⁹ Kwame

Nkrumah, the future leader of Ghana, vividly evokes his electric reaction when he learned from an excited newspaper boy that Mussolini had invaded Ethiopia:

That was all I needed. At that moment it was almost as if the whole of London had declared war on me personally. For the next few minutes I could do nothing but glare at each impassive face wondering if those people could possibly realize the wickedness of colonialism, and praying that the day might come when I could play my part in bringing about the downfall of such a system. My nationalism surged to the fore; I was ready and willing to go through hell itself, if need be, in order to achieve my object.²⁰

Nkrumah's "nationalist epiphany" is a curious awakening when we consider that it is a transnational sentiment for a far-off country he experiences in a diasporic location, London; and yet this melding of nationalism and internationalism characterized a common reaction to the Ethiopian war.

The war was also the moment in which many black Marxists, disillusioned by the passivity of the League of Nations and by the passive attitude of the Communist International towards the invasion, began searching for an alternative ideology to both communism and capitalism. Penny Von Eschen comments:

As D.G. Kelley has argued, the Communist Party often provided, if inadvertently, spaces in which black nationalists were able to carve out considerable autonomy. Thus, by the 1930s, not only had the left helped to reshape nationalist thought, but the internationalism of the left—responding to assertions of black nationalism—had already been transformed by its appropriation of Pan-African thought.²¹

At the same time, the Ethiopian war was also the high point of popular support for the fascist regime in Italy, and for Mussolini in particular; and, finally, it was the major point of convergence between PCI activism against the fascist regime and, more generally, the reactions of the European left.

There was a complex series of reasons why the Ethiopian war provoked such a widespread reaction both among the European left and the black diaspora. One of the reasons has to do with the anomalies of Italian colonialism. Italian colonialism, short-lived though it was, somewhat shakes up the well-known conceptual paradigms of modern capitalist imperialism, which are mainly based on the British and French imperial

models; Italy's empire is marked by the particular nature of its historical process and its difficult, often obscured, legacy in the present. One distinguishing factor of Italian colonial discourse is that, for a few years, Italian colonial policy was dictated—literally—by the ideological principles of Mussolini's fascism. Mussolini's colonial policy rejected both the French system of *assimilation* and the British one of indirect rule. In essence, Mussolini aimed to create a sort of apartheid state, complete with racial laws and direct, brutal, colonial rule.²² This meant that fascist imperialism, the unholy alliance between colonialism and fascism, gave rise to a particularly cruel and inhumane form of political domination in Ethiopia and the other Italian colonies. Despite its being considered a short-lived and insignificant empire, the extremely high number of its African victims, numbering around 400,000, as well as the appalling methods employed to exterminate them, which included massive use of poison gas against civilian populations, singles Italy out as one of the most bloody and brutal among all the imperial powers. Moreover, the period in which Italy expanded its dominions overseas spanned the period of both maximum expansion of French and British imperial power and their rapid decline with the onset of World War II and decolonization. This era coincided with the rejection of colonial discourse on the part of burgeoning anti-colonial movements, and a widespread questioning of the supremacy and civilizational superiority of Europe.

In other words, the reactions to Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in many cases stood as a proxy for a wider attack on imperialism *per se* as a system and racism as its grounding ideology. This is certainly true of Padmore's intense political activism and the many books he wrote around the time of the Ethiopian war. He seized upon the war as a way to direct metropolitan attention to the problems faced by colonized people across the world, and, in the aftermath of the invasion, he cofounded with James the IAFA, later the IASB, which was the forerunner of the Pan-African Association.²³ The invasion allowed Padmore and James to mount a more general critique of imperialism, which, as played out in its Italian avatar, gave such a critique a transnational edge. As James remarks of Padmore's 1936 book *How Britain Rules Africa*, "Padmore's attention was thus placed squarely on imperial designs over the African continent [...] For example, by linking events in Ethiopia to South African demands for territorial expansion."²⁴

Padmore knew that transnational support for Ethiopia in the wake of the Italian invasion was helped by the links being made in the international

press and in public opinion between colonialism and fascism. These two processes lent themselves to evident comparison, given the particular characteristics of Mussolini’s imperialism (though, of course, the differences between liberal and fascist imperialism in Italy are less noticeable than their continuities).²⁵ “What those opposing fascism needed to recognize, Padmore insisted [in 1936], was that ‘the colonies are the breeding ground for the type of fascist mentality which is being let loose in Europe today’.”²⁶ This was the same type of argument being made by Sylvia Pankhurst in her broadsheet *NTEN*, where she consistently portrayed photographs and accounts of the Loyalists’ fascist atrocities against civilians in the Spanish Civil War alongside reports and images of Italian fascist atrocities against Ethiopians after the invasion (see Chap. 5). Pankhurst was one of the patrons of the International African Service Bureau.²⁷ The labour riots that broke out in Trinidad in 1937 (the island of Padmore’s birth) “served to solidify the arguments about fascism and colonial rule being made by Padmore and the IASB”.²⁸

Padmore and James founded the short-lived but significant periodical *International African Opinion* in 1938, two and a half years after the Italian invasion. The activities of the journal are an example of what Edwards calls the *practice* of black internationalism, representing “an anti-colonial project pursued through a transnational organization”.²⁹ Christian Høgsbjerg remarks that, from the start, the journal began to circulate widely among anti-colonial activists in Africa, thanks to I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, who worked with James and Padmore but had returned to Sierra Leone in that period.³⁰

International African Opinion carried in its first issue an essay on the West Indies, in which one subheading was “Colonial Fascism”. The article began in the following manner:

From time to time we read of sentences being passed upon workers in Germany and Italy and are appalled by their severity. “That could only happen in a fascist country,” smugly declare the Communist, the Socialist, the Liberal, and even Tory humanitarians, and pass on to the cricket scores. But could it? What about this ‘democratic’ British Commonwealth of Nations?³¹

In the US, meanwhile, the journalist George S. Schuyler, among many other prominent African American intellectuals, did not fail to note the singular analogies between the oppression faced by his community and the fascism that was being so decried in the European press at the time. For

African Americans, fascism wasn't a novelty, as they experienced it themselves daily: "The simple truth of this matter is that we already have fascism over here and have had it for some time, if by fascism one means dictatorial rule in the interest of a privileged class, regimentation, persecution of racial minorities and radicals, etc."³²

These perceived connections between colonialism and fascism were drawn by journalists and activists partly in order to elicit engagement from metropolitan audiences who may have been less sympathetic to the evils of imperialism than to those of fascism. But such ideological connections also led to connections and alliances being made among diverse activist groups in the interwar period. The reactions of Padmore, Pankhurst and the exiled PCI (as we have seen in Chap. 2) could be seen to have some points in common: the anti-fascist Italians wanted a free, socialist and democratic Italy; Pankhurst, a non-imperialist Britain and a Europe liberated from fascism; and black diasporic activists, a free Ethiopia, which was seen as a sort of spiritual homeland for all black peoples around the world and therefore as symbolic of a wider movement for international black liberation. Pan-Africanism was seen as a race consciousness that aimed to provide the black diaspora with a form of ideological unity, but it was also at the same time a struggle for the national self-determination of various African peoples—it was both internationalist and nationalist at the same time, much like communism itself in the 1930s. However, as I discuss below, in the wake of the invasion, and indeed because of the lack of Western support for Ethiopia, many prominent black intellectuals sought to distance themselves from communism, while retaining its internationalist spirit and its organizational methods. In the words of Padmore, "Pan-Africanism was an independent political expression of Negro aspirations for complete national independence from white domination—Capitalist or Communist."³³

The Ethiopian war provided the first important platform for the PCI to articulate its anti-fascism on an international scale. Anti-fascists were hoping to see fascism collapse through the Ethiopian war because this act had isolated Mussolini internationally, with the imposition of sanctions on Italy on the part of the League of Nations. The Ethiopian war, for the PCI, promised to offer a real opportunity for toppling the regime, if public opinion could be swayed against it. To this end, the PCI attempted to multiply negative propaganda among Italians abroad, in Chicago, Marseilles, New York and even Algeria, by staging demonstrations, distributing flyers and manifestoes condemning fascist aggression against

Ethiopia, and by asking Italians to rise up against the regime (see Chap. 1). The archives of the PCI reveal a wide-ranging set of connections made by its members with various pro-Ethiopian groups in France and Britain, including the Abyssinian Association founded by Sylvia Pankhurst. Pro-Ethiopian groups had sprung up all over Europe, including revolutionary Spain—another example of how the Spanish and Ethiopian causes were shown to be linked in the internationalist anti-colonial public mind. In the 1935 issues of *Stato Operaio* (*Workers’ State*), a publication of the PCI, we find many articles minutely analyzing the political and economic motivations of Italian imperialism, and opposing the war. One article urges the Italian proletariat to support Ethiopia’s war of independence against Italian occupation, as the Ethiopian people have a “common interest” with them: namely that of defeating the fascist government.³⁴ Unlike the pro-Ethiopian Pan-African positions, the language of these articles is couched in terms of class solidarity rather than race solidarity and posits a rediscovery of the Italian radical nationalist tradition beyond fascism.³⁵

A prominent example of this language was the speech pronounced by the leader of the PCI, Palmiro Togliatti, about Ethiopia at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International held in the summer of 1935, a few months before the start of the invasion (though in general the Seventh Congress spent little time discussing the Ethiopian question, leading to the disillusionment of many of its “colonial” members).³⁶

And I assure you that if Abyssinia’s Negus, in disrupting Italian fascism’s plan of conquest, helps the Italian proletariat to land a *coup de grâce*/crippling blow against the regime of the black shirts, no one will reproach him for being “backward”. The revolutionary traditions of the Italian people, the traditions of Garibaldi’s volunteers—these traditions in the name of which the first Italian internationalists enlisted with naïve enthusiasm in Poland and Hungary, in Greece and South America, anywhere a flag went up for the struggle for national freedom—lead Italian workers to side with the peoples of Abyssinia against the bourgeois fascists.³⁷

As this quotation demonstrates, the decade of the 1930s was a period of important transnational alliances between communists and anti-colonialists, though, at the same time, such alliances were riven by divisions and a perceived sense of betrayal; on the one hand, the Communist International reached out to anti-colonial nationalists by invoking shared class interests using the Ethiopian war to forge such alliances (as in the case of pro-Ethiopian associations founded by American communists in Harlem),

and, on the other, the black diaspora and Pan-Africanists felt betrayed, especially by the Comintern, over the outcome of its response to the war and, more broadly, to the plight of black people all over the world. Procacci, in his exhaustive analysis of European left reactions to the Ethiopians, notes that both international socialism and communism viewed the conflict from a substantially Eurocentric perspective, evaluating it as an international issue rather than a specifically colonial one. The left was less concerned with the rights of Ethiopia than with the possible repercussions of the invasion on international security and with a possible world conflict.³⁸

The invasion of Ethiopia provoked huge waves of unrest on Caribbean plantations among Afro-Caribbean workers, who became more radicalized after this, since “it gave shape to an unconscious resentment towards colonial life.”³⁹ The popular character of the response shows that it was not limited to small groups of urban intellectuals and nationalist activists. There was a huge groundswell of popular support for Ethiopia in Harlem. However, transnationalism did not only work in one direction, towards the establishment of anti-colonial, anti-racist and anti-fascist solidarities; it also brought out violent clashes between African Americans and Italian Americans throughout 1935 and 1936. New York witnessed an interesting example of a “transnational” riot; Italian Americans sided preponderantly with Italy, and there were clashes between African Americans and Italian Americans in the streets of Harlem, home to both communities. A boxing match between the aging Italian American champion Primo Carnera and the rising young African American Joe Louis was presented as a symbolic enactment of the clash between Mussolini and Haile Selassie, and added fuel to the fire of resentment between the two communities, which had its roots in the Great Depression and their different histories of disadvantage and marginalization in the United States. Joe Louis’s victory was seen as a symbol of collective black redemption against white racism and imperialism, which at the time was most powerfully represented by the Italian invasion of Ethiopia.⁴⁰

As regards the Ethiopian war, the seeds for this radicalization of an anti-colonial stance in the Caribbean were sown by the spread of Rastafarianism, a religion that sprang up in Jamaica with the coronation of the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie, previously known as Ras Tafari, in 1930.⁴¹ Further back, Ethiopianism and Ethiopian Baptist Churches were at the roots of a race consciousness among North American slaves and slaves in the Caribbean. Already in the eighteenth century, black converts to Christianity

made references to Ethiopia as a land of freedom, citing the famous verse from Psalms 68:31: “Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God.” Such verses helped strengthen an emerging narrative of origins and racial pride by early African American authors and spiritual leaders, from the poet Phillis Wheatley to the Reverend Peter Williams, the nineteenth-century founder of the African Methodist Zion Church, to David Walker of Boston, author of an 1830 *Appeal* consisting of a “militant declaration of black rights”, which claimed an Ethiopian identity for all enslaved blacks in America.⁴² These references depicted blacks in a dignified and human light and held forth the promise of emancipation from slavery. Such narratives also suggested that African peoples had a proud and deep cultural heritage that predated European civilization, rooted in the ancient Ethiopian kingdom of Kush.⁴³ Unsurprisingly, European colonial authorities regarded Ethiopianist churches, which had also spread to Africa, and their leaders as anti-Christian rebels against the colonial system. When Marcus Garvey summoned the first convention of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in New York in 1920, the name *Ethiopia* was adopted as the focal point of identity for blacks the world over.⁴⁴ Garvey’s strategic use in the 1920s of Ethiopia as a “mythic geography” for people of African descent coincided with Haile Selassie’s attempt to present his country as modernizing, innovative and more than fit to stand as a sovereign member state of the League of Nations.

In his 1956 book *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*, Padmore tells how the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 brought together a number of leading black intellectuals in an unexpected but extremely important transnational alliance. Padmore himself was particularly active in the political activism taking place in London around the invasion of Ethiopia. As mentioned earlier, he cofounded with C.L.R. James the International African Friends of Abyssina. The main purpose of this organization was to arouse the sympathy and support of the British public for Ethiopia as a victim of fascist aggression and “to assist by all means in their power in the maintenance of the territorial integrity and political independence of Abyssinia”.⁴⁵ Members of the IFAF were major exponents of anti-colonial activity in Africa and the Caribbean, some of whom would go on to become political leaders of African states: C.L.R. James; Jomo Kenyatta; and Mrs. Amy Ashwood Garvey, former wife of Marcus Garvey. Padmore recounts how “the society organized a reception for the Emperor and other members of the Ethiopian Royal Family when they arrived at Waterloo Station in 1936, to spend years of exile in Britain.”⁴⁶ The Abyssinia Association, headed by Sylvia Pankhurst,

also organized a reception for Emperor Haile Selassie when he arrived in Britain. The Abyssinia Association was instrumental in keeping alive the Ethiopian cause to British and international public opinion even in the years following 1935. Pankhurst and her associates founded the *NTEN*, a remarkable publication, in the format of a broadsheet, that reported on the plight of the Ethiopians and on the state of the sanctions, on the doings of the Ethiopian royal family and on various connected events relating to the fight against fascism. Haile Selassie's autobiography, published by Richard Pankhurst, Sylvia's son, also mentions the numerous other international organizations that greeted him at Waterloo, a list of which reads like a cross-section of the international face of anti-colonialism at the time: the Pan-African Federation, the Gold Coast Aborigines Protection Society, the Negro Welfare Association, the British Guiana Association, the League of Coloured Peoples, UNIA (founded by Marcus Garvey), the Gold Coast Students' Association, the Coloured Seamen Association, the Kikuyu Association of Kenya (Kenya was under British rule at the time, of course) and the Somali Society (Somalia was under Italian rule in 1936).⁴⁷ The importance of connected locations in this story of transnational groupings around the Ethiopian war cannot be overstated: here in 1936 we are in London, where support for Haile Selassie was very strong (as it was more broadly among the British public), and later on in the chapter we will move to Harlem, another key site of transnational support for Ethiopia.

PAN-AFRICANISM OR COMMUNISM?

The complex germination of interwar Pan-Africanism from communist political thought, and the subsequent distancing of the former from the latter, has its seeds in the Ethiopian war.⁴⁸ As J. Ayodele Langley remarks:

By 1936, with the demise of the Pan-African movements in the United States, in West Africa, and in Paris, together with Negro disenchantment with the performance of the Comintern in the colonial sphere, and the rise of the fascist movement in Europe, Pan-African ideas and activity had come to be centred around a small group of West Indian and African intellectuals and agitators in Britain. Pan-African thought and activity during these years can therefore be seen both as the reaction of politically disillusioned young Negroes and as a radical protest movement against fascism and colonialism. In 1936 this group began to formulate a new ideology of colonial liberation designed to challenge existing ideological systems, including Communism. The key figures in this new movement were 'renegades' like Padmore and

CLR James, Jomo Kenyatta, T. Ras Makonnen of British Guiana, ITA Wallace Johnson (Sierra Leone), and Sam Manning (Trinidad).⁴⁹

Padmore had been a member of the International Communist Party until he was expelled from it in 1934; he had long been “accused of having a black ‘nationalist-deviationist’ point of view concerning issues involving Africa and the West Indies”.⁵⁰ Padmore had received orders from Moscow “to end his propaganda efforts in France’s colonies and soften criticism of imperialism in the *Negro Worker*”, a Comintern-funded publication that Padmore edited until 1933.⁵¹ But he decided not to tone down his fierce critique of imperialism, and he was thus expelled from the party.⁵² The departure from the Party cemented his decision to work only with Africans or people of African descent. After leaving the Communist Party, “Padmore never joined any non-African organization, though he worked closely with the Independent Labour Party and the Fabian Society, to attack the system of colonialism and imperialism.”⁵³ Ethiopia’s invasion provided a larger impetus for the development of Pan-Africanism, since the International African Service Bureau, founded by James and Padmore, later became the forerunner of the Pan-African Federation. A non-party organization, the IASB owed no affiliation or allegiance to any political party, organization or group in Europe: “they orientated themselves to pan-Africanism as an independent political expression of Negro aspirations for complete national independence from white domination—Capitalist or Communist.”⁵⁴

Padmore and James made it clear that this organization was to be composed solely of Africans or diasporic Africans, as was explained in the first issue of the IASB’s newsletter, *International African Opinion*:

The Bureau styles itself African, and membership of it is limited to Africans and to persons of African descent. In addition our appeal is openly to the great masses of the Negro people. The reason for this is not racial chauvinism. [...] we do not believe that African emancipation is to be achieved in isolation from the rest of the world. But the freedom of the African or any other people can be won only by those people themselves. [...] Secondly, recent political experience shows us that European organizations tend to ignore the African struggle and to use the colonial movement merely as a decoration for their own for ceremonial occasions. Quite often they manipulate it unscrupulously for their own narrowly-conceived self-interests.⁵⁵

These words uncannily echoed the positions of the American National Association of Colored People (NAACP); already back in 1935, the

Association had been wary of overtures from white socialist or anti-fascist organizations to create a “united front” in support of Ethiopia in the US, and pushed for an all-black delegation to Washington and to the League of Nations.⁵⁶ These positions formed the historical basis for McKay’s novelization of African American reactions to Ethiopia in *Amiable with Big Teeth*, which I will discuss in Chap. 4.

The other main driver of Padmore and James’s decision to found their own organization in defense of black national and international interests in the wake of the Italian invasion was the commitment to prove wrong white political leaders about black capacity for self-determination, or that “Africans can do nothing except under tutelage”:

The basic propaganda of our enemies is our inability to manage our own affairs. It is the set policy of imperialism to instil this slander into both blacks and whites alike. [...] this constant subordination is a handicap that inadvertently poisons the minds of the white races, rich and poor alike, against the blacks and weighs heavily on the morale of our people. This evil precedent must at all costs be broken: hence our organization is AFRICAN.⁵⁷

In a later issue of *International African Opinion*, the Executive Committee of the IASB (which included both Padmore and C.L.R. James among its members) attacked further this notion of tutelage by taking aim at the socialist Sir Stafford Cripps’s suggestion that Africans be placed under trusteeship. The article, entitled “Sir Stafford Cripps and Trusteeship”, was critical of the suggestion that, while India in 1938 was deemed by the socialists to be ready for freedom, Africa would still need to be governed by some sort of international mandate. “It is clear that Sir Stafford Cripps has the typical vice of many European socialists, even revolutionaries. He conceives Africans as essentially passive recipients of freedom given them by Europeans.”⁵⁸

This article by the IASB Executive Committee is significant for the relationship it outlines between revolutionary masses in the metropole and colonized masses in the peripheries, rejecting the hegemonic notion of the Comintern that it was the European proletariat that should lead the colonial peoples. The authors proposed an alternative by drawing on a “historic parallel”, namely the Haitian Revolution of 1791, led by the former slave Toussaint Louverture:

In six years illiterate slaves were Generals of division and able administrators. Toussaint Louverture was Commander-in-Chief and Governor of an island as large as Ireland, appointed as such by the French Revolutionary

Government, and he could not spell three words of French. The African slaves will do more at the prospect of a new existence. Without them and the other colonial masses, the British worker can win at most only temporary success.⁵⁹

Obviously C.L.R. James's influence can be felt in this historical reference, as 1938 was the same year in which he published two seminal works of Afrocentric history, *The Black Jacobins* and *The History of Pan-African Revolt*.⁶⁰ Høgsbjerg attributes the authorship of these editorials in the journal entirely to James.⁶¹ We can see how Haiti, Ethiopia and Liberia (the only independent African republic) came to figure so prominently in the political writings of black anti-colonialists, as they presented fundamental historical precedents for black self-determination and showed the way to black leaders and masses alike what could be done in the present. As Brent Edwards says, "discourses about black national *autonomy*—especially as filtered through the passionate interest in the three independent black states, Haiti, Liberia, and Ethiopia—played a formative role in the formulation of black *internationalist* initiatives."⁶² The act of history-writing, of fashioning black-authored, Afrocentric narratives about the colonial past were thus central to the entire project of black nationalism in the interwar era, with *The Black Jacobins* representing perhaps the most significant text in this historiographical canon.⁶³

Contemporary fascism is frequently mentioned in *The Black Jacobins*. In narrating the successful revolt of the black slaves of San Domingo led by Toussaint L'Ouverture against the French, and the subsequent founding of the Haitian Republic, James draws a series of striking parallels between the racist ferocity displayed by the white slave-owners against their rebellious slaves and that of Nazi Germany's persecution of the Jews. These parallels helped to give James's account of black liberation a comparative and transhistorical dimension, drawing together fascist and racist/colonialist violence into a recognizable commonality for its contemporary readers.⁶⁴ For example, he makes an analogy between the white backlash against the assimilation of the Mulattoes into the eighteenth-century settler society of San Domingo and Hitler's racial laws against German Jews:

And as the Mulattoes began to press against the barriers, white San Domingo passed a series of laws which for maniacal savagery are unique in the modern world, and (we would have said up to 1933) not likely to be paralleled again in the history. The Council of Port-au-Prince, holding up the race question

as a screen, wanted to exterminate them. Thus the whites could purge their system of a growing menace, get rid of men from whom they had borrowed money, and seize much fine property.⁶⁵

James continues to develop the parallel with Hitler's persecution of the Jews by recounting the oppressive laws passed against Mulattoes to humiliate them and mark them out as inferior to whites: they "were forbidden to wear swords and sabres and European dress"; "forbidden to meet together 'on the pretext' of weddings, feasts or dances"; "forbidden to play European games". "In 1781, eight years before the revolution, they were forbidden to take the titles of Monsieur and Madame. Up to 1791, if a white man ate at their house, they could not sit at table with him."⁶⁶

There are many more examples in the book of these transhistorical connections between eighteenth-century slave society and 1930s fascist regimes. In describing the betrayals of the French, who had been vanquished by Toussaint L'Ouverture's army but who continuously plotted to overthrow his regime and bring back slavery to the island, James makes a bitter analogy between the good faith of the white officer Vincent working for the black resistance and that of British public opinion in the wake of the Italian aggression against Ethiopia:

To him [Vincent] the restoration of slavery was unthinkable. He expected it as little as millions of British people expected the intrigues of Baldwin, Hoare and Eden with Laval and Mussolini after the denial of arms to Abyssinia and the grandiose promises of fidelity to the League of Nations and the idea of collective security.⁶⁷

In 1980, James, commenting on his own work, explained that his wish to write *The Black Jacobins*, the first authoritative account of the only black slave revolt in history, was due to the fact that

I was tired of reading and hearing about Africans being persecuted and oppressed in Africa, in the Middle Passage, in the USA and all over the Caribbean. I made up my mind that I would write a book in which Africans or people of African descent instead of constantly being the object of other peoples' exploitation and ferocity would themselves be taking action on a grand scale and shaping other people to their own needs.⁶⁸

James and Padmore aimed to convince their readers that, without black workers "and the other colonial masses, the British worker can win at most

only temporary success”. Padmore and his colleagues tried to appeal to a white socialist and working-class audience as well as to like-minded black activists across the world:

the surest way to lay up infinite trouble, not only for Africans but for Europeans, is to encourage reactionary ideas like trusteeship for backward peoples. The bureaucratic mentality which displays itself so blatantly in regard to people abroad can be trusted to show itself at home. *It must be fought by Africans and European workers alike in their common interests.*⁶⁹

This point of arrival in Padmore and the IASB’s thinking around the political autonomy of African-descended peoples predated the Ethiopian war, though this would come to represent *the* critical event for Pan-Africanism. The first text by Padmore that sought to delineate a separate political pathway for black self-determination was laid out in his immensely successful *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*, published in 1931. Together with *The Black Jacobins* and *A History of Pan-African Revolt*, this pamphlet is one of the seminal texts of Pan-Africanism; it established a common identity for diasporic Africans around the world through their situation of oppression and struggle. It was written before Padmore was “excommunicated” from the Comintern, and the clearly pro-black stance of this pamphlet did not do much to endear him to the communist cadres. The appeal to a white working-class audience, later also stressed in the publications and speeches of the IASB, was evident in this book as well, which attempted to show how terrible the working conditions of black workers were. Leslie James argues that the book was written for a white audience, though its market and appeal were for a black one.⁷⁰ The intent of the book was to make white workers take more than a sentimental interest in the struggles of black workers:

For it is only by knowing these facts will the revolutionary working classes in Europe and America realise the danger ahead of them. It is also necessary for the workers in the capitalist countries to understand that it is only through the exploiting of the colonial workers, from whose sweat and blood super-profits are extorted, that the imperialists are able to bribe the reformist and social-fascist trade union bureaucrats and thereby enable them to betray the struggles of the workers.⁷¹

Padmore warned his communist comrades against the perils of ignoring the plight of “colonial workers”. *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*,

then, functioned for a binary audience, both black and white, as Leslie James explains:

The double audience Padmore cultivated stemmed from the argument he was making. [...] For Padmore, both audiences required an understanding of this fact: black workers needed to appreciate their own importance and challenge the system effectively, and white workers needed to confront their role in black enslavement and use their power from the centre to challenge the primary beneficiaries of imperialism.⁷²

Padmore's book also provided important documentation on the conditions of the 250 million blacks around the world, most of whom were workers or peasants and who thus emerged as an important global workforce here. Padmore clearly identified the two forms of oppression they were subject to and the two countries where this oppression was worst:

The oppression of Negroes assumes two distinct forms: on the one hand they are oppressed as a class, and on the other as a nation. The national (race) oppression has its basis in the social-economic relation of the Negro under capitalism. National (race) oppression assumes its most profound forms in the *United States of America*, especially in the Black Belt of the Southern States, where lynching, peonage, Jim-Crowism, political disfranchisement and social ostracism is widespread; and in the *Union of South Africa*, where the blacks, who form the majority of the entire population, have been robbed of their lands and segregated on Reserves, enslaved in Compounds, and subjected to the vilest forms of anti-labour and racial laws (Poll, Hut, Pass taxes) and colour bar system in industry.⁷³ We clearly see the double audience address at work here. On the one hand, Padmore speaks authoritatively about the problem of the conjoined racial-class oppression besetting blacks, which white readers may not know about. On the other, Padmore attempts to raise political consciousness among black workers themselves, urging them to take charge of their own emancipation. Padmore provides a masterly overview of the oppression of black workers all over the world—in Africa, the Caribbean, the United States. Padmore keeps the twin focuses of race and class in mind in this pamphlet. Regarding racial consciousness, he strongly critiques the American Federation of Labour for not allowing blacks to join trade unions and argues that reformist labour movements in the US play up racial differences so that workers don't unite: "The only trade unions that admit blacks on the basis of *full political, social and economic equality*

are the revolutionary unions affiliated with the Trade Union Unity League under the influence of Communist party leadership.”⁷⁴

Padmore throughout his political life constantly questioned the European bias of communist internationalism. He astutely pinpointed the “white chauvinism” of the white labour movement as the biggest obstacle to unity within communist groups in his day. He appealed to the importance of unity among workers regardless of colour in order to show working-class supporters and members of the Comintern that racial solidarity was completely within their interests. On the other hand, however, Padmore was careful to warn his black readers against black chauvinism as represented by the movement of Marcus Garvey, whom he called the “national reformist mis-leader”.⁷⁵ He proclaimed that “the Negro workers must take a more active part in the revolutionary struggles of the working class as a whole. They must make a decisive break with all bourgeois and petty-bourgeois movements.”⁷⁶ Interestingly, he included W.E.B. Du Bois among such “American Negro petty-bourgeois reformists”. In the pamphlet, Padmore seems to be charting a complex course between communism and black self-determination; or rather, he seems to be trying to develop a political strategy that is broadly Marxist in outlook but sensitive to the specifically race oppression suffered by blacks. Garveyism was seen as a real threat to the black working-class, as “in its class content Garveyism is alien to the interests of the Negro toilers. Like *Zionism* and *Gandhism*, it is merely out to utilize racial and class consciousness for the purpose of promoting class interests of the black bourgeoisie and landlords.”⁷⁷ It is quite striking that Padmore groups together mass movements for Jewish, Indian and black self-determination, thus possibly reflecting the line of the Comintern on many anti-colonial movements in the 1930s, which it branded as “bourgeois nationalist”.

While Padmore was very critical of Garvey in 1931, he would rehabilitate him somewhat after the Second World War, acknowledging the important role played by Garvey’s movement in creating Pan-Africanism.⁷⁸ Padmore’s 1956 book, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*, written at the height of the Cold War, is a fiercely critical indictment of the way communism had treated anti-colonial movements and the nationalist awakenings in Africa, including the emerging transnational movement of Pan-Africanism. He is also very critical of the prevalent Euromarxist idea that Pan-Africanism developed “thanks” to communist inspiration, seeing this as an implicitly racist ideological position.⁷⁹ He decides to tell the history of Black Nationalism in this book to counter these claims. Padmore’s

writing can be seen as a form of *subalternist historical writing*—wresting away historiography from Western authority, whether on the left or on the right. For Padmore, “The dynamic forces of post-war anti-colonialist movements which are challenging the political economic domination of the West are the spontaneous expression of the hopes and desires of the Africans, looking forward to a place as free men in a free world.”⁸⁰ His history of Pan-Africanism thus aims to place blacks at the centre of their own history and to construct them as autonomous agents. This was in line with other classic anti-colonial nationalist histories, such as Jawaharlal Nehru’s *The Discovery of India* (1946), which retold the history of India from the perspective of Indians as the historical protagonists of their pasts, explicitly writing against British histories.

In relationship to Padmore’s emphasis on the independent trajectory undertaken by black nationalists, it is important to understand black internationalism in Europe and in the diaspora not as a mere variant of Western radicalism, whose proponents happened to be black; rather, “its main ideological imperative is ideological autonomy.”⁸¹ According to Padmore, it was in the 1930s that black intellectuals began to foreground the “ideological autonomy” of their movement, make a detailed and systematic study of European political theories and systems, and evaluate those doctrines objectively—accepting what might be useful to the cause of Pan-Africanism and rejecting the harmful. Interestingly, Padmore also rethinks the history of the Russian revolution from a racialized and ethnic perspective: he argues that the very success of the Soviet revolution depended on the fact that the Bolsheviks enlisted the support of the non-white peoples of the Russian empire: “The significant thing to remember is that this alliance came about as a result of Lenin’s departure from orthodox Marxism, which was a Western European doctrine to be applied to an industrialized society.”⁸² By contrast, most European socialists “looked upon colonies as necessary economic appendages of the Western capitalist system”.⁸³

Pan-Africanism had a fundamentally transnational scope and was premised on race solidarity, but it was also a movement that was difficult to define in terms of a single intellectual pedigree. It was certainly helped by communism but, of course, drew extensively on preceding movements of racial solidarity, most preeminently that of Garvey. But it is important to remember that it was also the other way around: the European left was also shaped by Pan-Africanism.⁸⁴ Nowhere would this be more evident than in the political activism unleashed by the Italian invasion of Ethiopia.

Padmore eventually fell out with the Comintern, precisely over the issue of Ethiopia. The story that Padmore tells in *Pan-Africanism or Communism?* is that Russia always placed its own interests ahead of those of colonial peoples, and especially black peoples. More specifically, the Soviet Union had provided oil to Italy for the invasion of Abyssinia. Robert Young, in speaking of Padmore’s break with the Communist Party, explains it in terms of the fact that African and Caribbean communism rejected the dogmatism of Euromarxism and integrated it with “the self-reliant nationalism that formed the dominant anti-colonial ideology”.⁸⁵ Leon Trotsky sharply criticized the Soviet Union’s stance towards Ethiopia, while the Soviet diplomat Litvinov “expressed his gratitude to the diplomats of France and England for their efforts in behalf of peace, efforts which so auspiciously resulted in the annihilation of Abyssinia, oil from the Caucasus continued to nourish the Italian fleet”.⁸⁶

Many black nationalists viewed the invasion of Ethiopia as a skirmish in a race war of European (and Japanese) colonial expansion, in which Ethiopia was the last holdout of real independence in Africa. Black nationalists also viewed as racist the indifference of Western nations to a clearly fascist attack. Communists, in contrast, through the Provisional Committee for the Defense of Ethiopia (PCDE) in Harlem, attempted to redirect anti-white sentiment towards a critique of fascism.⁸⁷ Leslie James offers the opinion that “the milieu of Third Period internationalism was inhibited by Comintern strictures, but it also allowed Padmore to move toward alternative views of black liberation that remained within a Marxian analytical framework.”⁸⁸ Like Pankhurst, as we shall see, Padmore grew to be skeptical of Marxism as the ultimate liberationist ideology for anti-colonial struggle, though he retained many of its basic principles and organizational methods, including his perception of the importance of propaganda and the dissemination of the political message through print. James points out Padmore’s extreme flexibility both as an activist and as a political thinker; he made strategic alliances across ideological beliefs and across race. This also helped in questioning the doctrinal monolithism of Marxist ideology that had consolidated under Stalin.

There is evidence that the profound changes being wrought by anti-colonial struggles to the hegemonic narratives of Western Marxism were perceived by Eurocommunists as well. As I have discussed in Chap. 1, the archives of the PCI yield proof that there was a good deal of respect for anti-colonial movements as political actors. Ruggero Grieco, a major party cadre, had already noted in 1926 that

Operating in the colonies is becoming more and more important for the revolutionary working class. Our generation is witnessing the independence movements in the colonies. What should be the communists' position towards these events? We must see the colonial problem in the context of the struggle that the proletarian class wages against the capitalist regime. The colonial peoples, like the peasantry, represent a powerful ally for the proletariat. Leninism teaches us how to connect the struggle of the proletariat against capitalism to the struggle that the people of the colonies wage against capitalism.⁸⁹

It is evident that the colonial problem, which was so aptly identified by Lenin in his writings, had a significant impact on the shaping of communist international ideology and political strategy, though this aspect of twentieth-century Marxism is rarely remarked upon in recent critiques of postcolonial studies, which accuse its scholars of having ignored Marxism and capitalism as structuring movements in the history of anti-colonialism's history.⁹⁰

Padmore's *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*, which Leslie James defines as his "response to the Cold War",⁹¹ appeared in the same year in which Aimé Césaire broke dramatically with the French Communist Party.⁹² Padmore's book contained postwar reflections on the fraught relationship between communism and anti-colonialism, which had never been straightforward, and whose contradictions emerged clearly in the 1930s. In other words, communism did not always support anti-colonialism, and indeed, especially in the postwar period, it often clashed with exponents of national liberation movements, as would be the case during the Algerian war, when the French Communist Party sided with the French government and did not support the Algerian struggle for independence. The statements of the PCI towards Italian ex-colonies (especially Somalia) just after the end of the war reveal an underlying colonialist rhetoric that lays claim to the erstwhile colonial territories in the name of national self-determination and expansion.

In the next chapter, I analyze the writings of Claude McKay, George Padmore, George S. Schuyler and C.L.R. James, who, in their roles as prominent black intellectuals, writers and journalists, emerged as outspoken critics of communism.

CONCLUSION

The role of the black press in disseminating anti-colonial and Pan-African ideas among the black diaspora in Europe, the Caribbean and the US was crucial. Padmore was a key publicist and disseminator of the more political

aspects of Pan-Africanism. He also wrote on the strikes in the Caribbean, begun in 1937 and 1938, that took place partly as the result of the Ethiopian war. Padmore played a dual role as a journalist and activist. The IASB brought issues affecting the peoples in the British colonies before the House of Commons—for example, the conditions of the Ethiopian refugees in Kenya.⁹³ Pankhurst’s *NTEN*, which I discuss in Chap. 5, also carried a report of this fact, suggesting that Pankhurst must have had some knowledge, if not contact, with Padmore’s International African Service Bureau.

Generally speaking, the development of black political thought in the 1930s, its sharp criticism of communism and its attempt to develop its own autonomous agenda also in epistemological terms, can also be traced to the failure of the Communist International as a project when it was confronted with the rise of the Popular Front movements, as C.L.R. James outlines in his book *World Revolution 1917–1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (1937). In *World Revolution*, James outlined how the Third International, and more broadly left internationalism, supported an alliance between the colonial and the proletarian masses, though the Western proletariat was meant to lead the former, as the Manifesto of the Third International declared:

The liberation of the colonies will only be feasible in conjunction with the liberation of the working classes in the mother countries. Not until the workingmen of England and France have overthrown Lloyd George and Clemenceau will the peasants, not only in Annam, Algiers, and Bengal, but also in Persia and Armenia, have a chance of an independent existence.⁹⁴

James commented on this commitment seventeen years later by sarcastically contrasting these promises with what had been substituted for them:

as tattered and torn a collection of outworn political rags as can be found in the footnotes of any old Liberal school-book. A strong, free and happy France; merry England; the Popular Front, with progressive individuals and right-thinking persons; and *despite the stench from the corpse of Abyssinia*, the League of Nations and Collective Security. They dare not publish to-day the old documents of the International and for years have suppressed them, for many years it should be noted, and not since 1935.⁹⁵

Padmore also had bitter words for the betrayal on the part of the Comintern of the anti-colonial movements as soon as the threat of World

War II and the tide of fascism became imminent. It is also undeniable that while communism had not had a particularly strong kind of hold over black diasporic masses, “race consciousness”, as triggered by the Ethiopian war, did, as became evident in the huge support of Harlem for Ethiopia. It was part of the “black chauvinism”, perhaps, that Padmore had warned against in *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*. The complex path that Padmore, James and others attempted to chart for Pan-Africanism was also connected to the sense that it was closer to Lenin and Marx’s original ideas than European Communism, especially in its Stalinist avatar. It was also aligned with Leon Trotsky’s “unrepentant commitment” to anti-imperialism, which deeply influenced James, as Høgsbjerg remarks.⁹⁶ James, writing in 1969 about Tanzanian socialism in the Epilogue to his 1938 work *The History of Pan-African Revolt*, ends with the following words:

It is sufficient to say that socialist thought has seen nothing like this since the death of Lenin in 1924, and its depth, range and the repercussions which flow from it, go far beyond the African which gave it birth. It can fertilize and re-awaken the mortuary that is socialist practice in the advanced countries. ‘Marxism is a Humanism’ is an exact reverse of the truth. The African builders of a humanist society show that today all humanism finds itself in close harmony with the original conceptions and aims of Marxism.⁹⁷

James’s words are very reminiscent of the conclusion of Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, written in 1961, which ends by evoking a new “man”.⁹⁸ The Padmore-James line, espoused by many prominent African leaders such as Kenyatta, Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere (president of Tanzania), differed sharply, however, from the folk, oral and religious narrative about black liberation that ran parallel to Western-centric histories of colonialism and slavery, such as Ethiopianism and the huge influence of Ethiopia as the spiritual heartland for blacks the world over. Ethiopia was a popular image that black people could associate with, and indeed had for centuries. The next chapter explores the more popular and literary dimensions of black responses to the Ethiopian war.

NOTES

1. The latter text was originally published with the title *A History of Negro Revolt*; James later changed the title in the 1969 edition to better present the events recounted as part of the history of Pan-Africanism.

2. Christian Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 67.
3. Michael O. West and William G. Martin, “Contours of the Black International: From Toussaint to Tupac”, *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International Since the Age of Revolution*, ed. Michael O. West, William G. Martin, and Fanon Che Wilkins (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 14.
4. Frank Furedi, *Colonial Wars and the Politics of Third-World Nationalism* (I.B. Tauris, 1994), 23.
5. Claude McKay, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* (New York: Harvest, 1968 [1940]), p. 176.
6. Paul Gilroy, “Living Memory: A Meeting with Toni Morrison”, *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1993), 180.
7. See Charles McClellan, “Observations on the Ethiopian Nation, Its Nationalism, and the Italo-Ethiopian War”, *North-East African Studies*, 3:1 (1996), 62. See also George Steer’s detailed explanation of why Haile Selassie was forced to leave Ethiopia through a combination of factors, which included Ethiopian political commanders’ lack of initiative and the insistence of his wife the Empress to flee the country under the threat of war. See Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia* (London: Faber, 2009 [1936]), 364–369.
8. See McClellan, 61; Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa orientale. La conquista dell’impero*, 60. Del Boca gives a detailed account of the cruel fate suffered by the Kassa brothers, who had surrendered to the Italian army in the course of the conflict in the hope of saving their lives by promising to reveal key information about the Ethiopian forces and an alliance. But the officer to whom they surrendered ordered their execution.
9. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 202.
10. West and Martin, “Contours of the Black International”, 3.
11. Robert Young in *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (London: Blackwell, 2001) provides a detailed account of this relationship in the context of postcolonial studies, especially with regards to Third-Worldist Marxism and tricontinentalism in the postwar period (see p. 161–307). Hakim Adi offers a comprehensive account of the Comintern with respect to Pan-Africanist anti-colonialism in *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora 1919–1939* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2013).
12. John McLeod, “A Night at ‘The Cosmopolitan’: Axes of Transnational Encounter in the 1930s and 1940s”, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 4:1 (2002), 59.

13. McLeod, "A Night at 'The Cosmopolitan'", 59.
14. Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 10.
15. T. Ras Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism from Within*, as recorded and edited by Kenneth King (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1973), 155.
16. Leslie James, *George Padmore and Decolonization from Below: Pan-Africanism, the Cold War, and the End of Empire* (London: Palgrave, 2015), 12.
17. James, *George Padmore*, 3.
18. Quoted in James, *George Padmore*, 14.
19. J. Ayodele Langley, *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa: 1900–1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 327.
20. Kwame Nkrumah, *The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957), 27.
21. Penny M. von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism 1937–1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 10.
22. Angelo Del Boca, "Le leggi razziali nell'impero di Mussolini", in Angelo Del Boca, Massimo Legnani and Mario G. Rossi (eds.), *Il regime fascista: Storia e storiografia* (Bari: Laterza, 1995), 338.
23. For a detailed account of the founding of *International African Opinion*, see Christian Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 120–124.
24. James, *George Padmore*, 40.
25. See Labanca, *Oltremare*, and Del Boca's four-volume history of Italians in East Africa, *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale*, for the best accounts of these continuities in Italian colonialism.
26. Padmore quoted in James, *George Padmore*, 40.
27. Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*, 112.
28. James, *George Padmore*, 44.
29. Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 304.
30. Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*, 120.
31. Editorial, "Notes on the West Indies", *International African Opinion* 1:1 (1938), 12.
32. Schuyler, "It Has Happened Here", unpublished manuscript, quoted in Robert A. Hill, "Introduction" to George Schuyler, *Ethiopian Stories*, compiled and edited by Robert A. Hill (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994), 38.
33. George Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle for Africa* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1956), 148.
34. Editorial/Anonymous, "Problemi essenziali dell'ora", *Lo Stato Operaio: Rassegna di Politica Proletaria*, 9:3 (March 1935), 167.

35. See for example L. Gallo, "Per la disfatta dell'imperialismo italiano", *Lo Stato Operaio: Rassegna di Politica Proletaria* 9:2 (February 1935), 99. Gallo writes: "The Italian people wants to fraternize with all peoples, especially those that Italian imperialism oppresses and has oppressed. We wish to collaborate fraternally with the Arab, Bedouin, Somali, Abyssinian populations. The primordial condition for this fraternal collaboration is that these populations be given back their independence. A people that oppresses another people is not worthy of freedom. Fascism has deprived us of every freedom. In fighting for its own emancipation, our proletariat must also fight for the emancipation of all the populations oppressed by Italian imperialism: colonial populations and national minorities."
36. See Giuliano Procacci, "Le Internazionali e l'aggressione fascista all'Etiopia", *Annali* 18 (Milan: Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, 1977), p. 42–48.
37. Palmiro Togliatti (writing as Comrade Ercoli), "L'aggressione dell'Italia fascista contro l'Abissinia e l'acutizzazione della questione coloniale", *Lo Stato Operaio* 9:9 (September 1935), 596.
38. Giuliano Procacci, *Dalla parte dell'Etiopia: L'aggressione italiana vista dai movimenti anticolonialisti d'Asia, d'Africa, d'America* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1984), 259–261.
39. Furedi, *Colonial Wars and the Politics of Third-World Nationalism*, 24.
40. Nadia Venturini, *Neri e italiani ad Harlem: Gli anni Trenta e la guerra d'Etiopia* (Rome: Edizioni Lavoro, 1990), 114–118.
41. The founding father of Rastafarianism is Leonard Howell, a street preacher who proclaimed that Ras Tafari, or Haile Selassie, was the true ruler of Jamaica, and not King George V (at the time, Jamaica was a British colony). His resistance to Mussolini "further underscored his divine status". Howell created a self-sufficient economic community, Pinnacle, partly founded on the cultivation of "ganja", that welcomed Jamaicans who wished to "re-patriate" to Ethiopia, and named it the Ethiopia Salvation Society. Howell had spent some time in Harlem, where he had been influenced by the Pan-Africanist movement and by his meeting with black activists, including Marcus Garvey (see Lucy McKeon, "The True Story of Rastafari", *New York Review of Books*, 6/1/2017, <http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2017/01/06/the-true-story-of-rastafari/>).
42. William R. Scott, *The Sons of Sheba's Race: African Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935–1941* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 12–22. Scott notes that early African American men and women of letters "adopted the long-standing Western custom of using the word 'Ethiopian' as a generic term for all African peoples" (13).
43. Frederick Douglass, in 1865, delivered a learned paper in which he proclaimed that "the arts, appliances and blessings of civilization flourished in

- the very heart of Ethiopia, at a time when all Europe floundered in the depths of ignorance and barbarism" (qtd in Scott, 19).
44. Scott, 22. Garvey later became hostile to Haile Selassie because he felt he was too trusting of white advisors and politicians, and had betrayed his country by fleeing it when the Italians invaded (see McKay, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis*, 175–176).
 45. Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*, 145.
 46. Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*, 145.
 47. Richard Pankhurst, "Emperor Haile Selassie's Arrival in Britain: An Alternative Autobiographical Draft by Percy Arnold", *Northeast African Studies* 9:2 (2002), 6–7.
 48. See Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, especially 174–185.
 49. Langley, *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa*, 326.
 50. Carol Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa: Writers in a Common Cause* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 4.
 51. Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa*, 4. See also Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, 155.
 52. See Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, 155–161, for a detailed account of the circumstances surrounding his expulsion, based on archival documents. Adi argues that the main reason he was expelled from the Comintern was because he "had refused to act according to the discipline of the Communist Party", though the official reason given was his purportedly excessive "Negro nationalism" (Adi, 160–161).
 53. Rodney Worrell, "George Padmore: Pan-Africanist Par Excellence", *George Padmore: Pan-African Revolutionary*, ed. Fitzroy Baptiste and Rupert Lewis (Kingston: Ian Randle Publisher, 2009), p. 28 (22–36).
 54. Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*, 148.
 55. Padmore, "Editorial", *International African Opinion*, 1:1 (July 1938), 2.
 56. See Scott, *The Sons of Sheba's Race*, 129.
 57. "Editorial", 2.
 58. The Executive Committee, International African Service Bureau, "Sir Stafford Cripps and Trusteeship", *International African Opinion*, 1:3 (1938), 3.
 59. Executive Committee, "Trusteeship", 3.
 60. Robin Kelley argues that the genesis of both books can be linked to the pivotal effect that the Ethiopian war had on James's thinking and writing: "The events surrounding the invasion and the failure of Western democracies to come to Ethiopia's defense pushed James beyond European Marxism towards a deeper understanding of the traditions of black resistance" (Kelley, "Introduction", C.L.R. James, *A History of Pan-African Revolt*, 14).
 61. Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*, 122–123.

62. Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 10.
63. Robert A. Hill also notes that *The Black Jacobins* "was probably the most important factor in the evolution of the strategic perspective of the International African Service Bureau, which became the premise that *armed struggle* would be the form of the African revolution" (Hill, "In England 1932–1938", *C.L.R. James: His Life and Work*, ed. Paul Buhle, London: Allison and Busby, 1986, 77). This perspective was to change after the war, when the group began to support mass-led peaceful action in African nationalist movements.
64. I am indebted to James Procter for drawing my attention to these allusions to 1930s fascism in *The Black Jacobins*.
65. James, *The Black Jacobins* (London: Penguin, 1980 [1938]), 33.
66. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 33–34.
67. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 218.
68. James, "Foreword", *The Black Jacobins*, xv. Christian Høgsbjerg argues that "critical to James's movement towards Pan-Africanism was to be the six months he spent during the winter of 1933 in France, researching the Haitian revolution in the archives in Paris" (Høgsbjerg, "Introduction", *C.L.R. James, Toussaint L'Ouverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History: A Play in Three Acts*, edited and introduced by Christian Høgsbjerg, Durham: Duke University Press, 2013, 9).
69. Padmore, "Trusteeship", 3, emphasis added.
70. James, *George Padmore*, 37.
71. Padmore, *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers* (London: RILU Magazine for the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, 1931), 6.
72. James, *George Padmore*, 37.
73. Padmore, *Life and Struggles*, 5.
74. Padmore, *Life and Struggles*, 47.
75. Padmore, *Life and Struggles*, 6.
76. Padmore, *Life and Struggles*, 124.
77. Padmore, *Life and Struggles*, 126.
78. Colin Grant in his biography of Garvey recalls that in the 1930s, Padmore and James "had mounted a rising campaign against the older man, heckling him at Speakers' Corner and at political meetings, and seizing every opportunity to harass and pour scorn on his head". Apparently, Padmore had also spread false rumours of Garvey's death in 1940. See Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (London: Vintage, 2009), 1–2.
79. Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*, 17–18.
80. Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*, 17.
81. Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 304.

82. Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*, 300.
83. Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*, 320.
84. "By the 1930s, not only had the left helped to reshape nationalist thought, but the internationalism of the left—responding to assertions of black nationalism—had already been transformed by its appropriation of Pan-African thought" (von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 10).
85. Young, *Postcolonialism*, 232.
86. Leon Trotsky, quoted in Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*, 101.
87. See also Venturini's discussion of the ways in which the communists attempted to stop the boycott of Italian shops and businesses in Harlem on the part of pro-Ethiopian black Harlemites (*Neri e italiani ad Harlem*, 181–183).
88. James, *George Padmore*, 28.
89. "Verbali delle sedute dell III Congresso del PCI, relazione della Centrale al congresso, 1926-01, Relazione sulla Quistione Agraria", UA 382, p. 113, Archivio Storico del PCI, Istituto Gramsci (Rome).
90. See, for example, Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (2011) and Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capitalism* (2013).
91. James, *George Padmore*, 137.
92. See his 1956 letter to M. Thorez, leader of the French Communist Party, published in English in 1957: "A Distinguished Martinican Leaves the Communists", *The Crisis* 64:3 (1957), 154–156.
93. See Polsgrove and Edwards on this point.
94. Manifesto of Third International, quoted in James, *World Revolution* (1937), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/world/>.
95. James, *World Revolution*, emphasis added.
96. Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*, 75.
97. James, "Epilogue", *The History of Pan-African Revolt*, 136.
98. "For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we can make a new start, develop a new way of living, and endeavor to create a new man" (Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Richard Philcox, New York: Grove Press, 2004, 239).

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Harlem's Ethiopia: Literary Pan-Africanism and the Italian Invasion

The victory and emancipation of the proletariat was very much the basis of communist ideology. But animating black radical thought was a profoundly felt ideology of liberation, which drew its main substance, and many of its imaginative tropes, from the past of slavery. The idea of black liberation predated the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, but in the years around the invasion we notice a clear reconfiguration of notions of race and nationality in the evolution of political consciousness among diasporic Africans, which was triggered by Mussolini's act. What was most astounding to onlookers, political observers and elites was the unprecedented wave of black support for Ethiopia, which cut across location, nationality and class positioning; it was truly a global reaction. Among black intellectuals, we witness the emergence of figures like Padmore and James, who tried to write forms of transnational history based on the black political subject as actor of his own history and performer of his own liberation.

This chapter continues the work of retrieval of black narratives that were told around the invasion and form such an important part of the fragmented history of the black diaspora. Whereas the previous chapter focused more on black historiography and political activity, in what follows I examine African diasporic literary narratives of the Ethiopian war by authors of the Harlem Renaissance. In the imaginations of Claude McKay and George S. Schuyler, and in the writing of African American intellectuals

such as J.A. Rogers and Willis Nathaniel Huggins, Ethiopia and Harlem gain the status of imagined and interconnected transnational homelands where blacks are free and sovereign. The first part of the chapter offers a brief history of the impact of the war in the African American press, looking at the debates it triggered around ethnic and national identity, such as a rethinking of blackness among African Americans. These debates are set against the concomitant “blackening” of Ethiopians within Italian fascist discourse in the lead-up to 1935. The chapter then moves on to examine texts that are examples of “literary Pan-Africanism”.¹ I offer one of the first readings of McKay’s *Amiable with Big Teeth: A Novel of the Love Affair between the Communists and the Poor Black Sheep of Harlem*, a recently discovered novel that was written by McKay in 1941 but only published in 2017.² I also look at Schuyler’s *Ethiopian Stories*, two novellas that were serialized in the prominent African American newspaper *The Pittsburgh Courier* between 1935 and 1939, around the time of the invasion.³

In *Amiable with Big Teeth*, writing history is presented as a coproduction of various black groups. This chapter traces the intertwining of literary and political narratives, which attempted to produce a form of alternative history for a black subjecthood, what I’ve been calling a subalternist history. Thus genres that do not normally take on the “burden” of historical representation—e.g., the novel, the novella, the political pamphlet and treatise—emerge as multigeneric texts that display a deep intertextuality with the genre of historical writing. *Amiable with Big Teeth* is a political, heteroglot novel, much like the debates and narratives that were staged around Ethiopia itself. The war was an event, as we have seen, that was represented in different genres authored by black writers, including the historical novel (*Amiable with Big Teeth*), the popular detective and adventure story (Schuyler’s *Ethiopian Stories*), the historical text (James’s *The Black Jacobins*), the play (James’s *Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History*) and, of course, journalism, including that of Padmore and Schuyler. *Amiable* attempted to present an Afrocentric narrative of the war, which by implication also meant a rethinking of the relationship between communism and black political movements.

ETHIOPIA, BLACK FREEDOM AND THE DEBATE ON RACE

Padmore’s pronouncements on African emancipation in the late 1930s would have been impossible without the preceding movements supporting black liberation that began in the nineteenth century and were carried

forward by such diverse figures as W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey with his Back to Africa Movement and the founding of UNIA in 1914. In the histories of black liberation and literature about race consciousness being written in the 1930s and earlier, the fight for freedom figures prominently. The only three black nations in the world that were independent and sovereign in 1935 were Liberia, Haiti and Ethiopia; and the latter already had great symbolic value the world over. Haiti was also a nodal site for imagining and recording black resistance, as is exemplified in C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* (1938) and McKay's 1928 novel *Home to Harlem*. Jake, a protagonist of McKay's novel, is a handsome, uneducated young black American man full of vitality. He takes a job working on the railroad, and there he meets a Haitian intellectual, Ray, who tells him about the famed slave revolt that led to the establishment of the republic of Haiti. From him, Jake learns that

the universal spirit of the French Revolution had reached and lifted up the slaves far away in that remote island; that black Hayti's [*sic*] independence was more dramatic and picturesque than the United States' independence and that it was a strange, almost unimaginable eruption of the beautiful ideas of the "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité" of Mankind, that shook the foundations of that romantic era.⁴

The novel stages a lesson in black history between Ray and Jake. The didactic purpose of this passage is almost over-determined, as if to underline how little blacks know about their own history and how important it is that they learn about it:

Jake felt like one passing through a dream, vivid in rich, varied colors. It was revelation beautiful in his mind. That brief account of an island of savage black people, who fought for collective liberty and was struggling to create a culture of their own. A romance of his race, just down there by Panama. How strange!⁵

Such a history of black identity is not located in a single nation; Ray's lesson quickly moves on from Haiti to Africa, and puts paid to Jake's stereotypical notions of African savagery, which are mediated through white culture: "The waiter told him that Africa was not jungle as he dreamed of it, nor slavery the peculiar role of black folk" (134). Ray asks if Jake has ever heard of Liberia, "founded by American Negroes", or "Abyssinia, deep-set in the shoulder of Africa, besieged by the hungry wolves of

Europe? The only nation that has existed free and independent from the earliest records of history until today! Abyssinia, oldest unconquered nation, ancient-strange as Egypt, persistent as Palestine, legendary as Greece, magical as Persia.”⁶ Locations matter immensely in this recuperation and remembrance of a black political history that has been forgotten by or excluded from white-authored accounts of the Caribbean and Africa. Similarly, in George S. Schuyler’s story “Revolt in Ethiopia: A Tale of Black Insurrection Against White Imperialism”, which was serialized in the prominent African American newspaper *The Pittsburgh Courier* between July 1938 and January 1939, the black protagonist Dick Welland, while watching the ancient dance of Coptic priests, is moved to admiration of Ethiopia’s culture, which the author renders via a passage of free indirect discourse:

It all moved Dick profoundly and made him feel rewarded for venturing on such a risky undertaking. Here was a Negro civilization older than any other except India and China; a civilization that had flourished before Greece and Rome, before Carthage, yes, before Egypt. Here were all the forms, the elaborate ritual, the culture that had made Ethiopia the admiration of the ancient world. Here it survived in spite of Mussolini, in spite of perfidious England, in spite of Ethiopia’s desertion by the traitorous League of Nations.⁷

In this serialized novella, the predominantly black readers of the *Courier* could identify with the rich and handsome African American Dick Welland, who takes pride in the fact that Ethiopia’s civilization is older than that of Europe. The valorization of Ethiopian culture as predating that of white societies translated directly into a sentiment of racial uplift; what we witness here is the appropriation of a past, and an ancient and glorious one at that, for the African American community, whose minoritarian status in America was profoundly linked to this perceived lack of a history beyond slavery.

In black writers’ literary evocation of Ethiopia in those years, we can also trace the articulation of an imagined homeland for the hopelessly uprooted diasporic African. Such a homeland, I argue, was articulated in transnational terms by the authors of the Harlem Renaissance, and brought together the remote and the familiar, the African and the American, the neighbourhood and the nation. Black liberation finds its home in two places: Harlem and Ethiopia. A letter from G.D. Perry of Fort Worth,

Texas, to the *Pittsburgh Courier*, on March 9, 1935, on the eve of the Italian invasion, may help to explain such attitudes:

I have been reading lately of Italy's meanness toward our homeland. All of our forefathers were stolen from all parts of Africa, including Ethiopia, so I take the honour of calling that country my homeland. I was born in Texas, however. I should like to know if there is a fund or committee with the purpose of raising money to build an Ethiopian air force?⁸

Here is another reader, Reverend S. Jerome Jenkins, from Memphis, Tennessee, reminding readers that "America is for Americans, yes, but that does not include Americans of color. [...] I, for one, laud Ethiopia and regard her as the motherland. The Jews were in exile for about 350 years in Egypt, yet they still hold Jerusalem in high regard and always want to go back."⁹

Ethiopia, as mentioned earlier, had been considered a black homeland in the long tradition of dissident, underground religious formations among black slaves and later among emancipated blacks. It was a land of profound religious and spiritual significance for diasporic Africans, and it was not by chance that the name of the most famous and prominent church in Harlem, which would later host many well-attended rallies and meetings in favour of Ethiopia, was the Abyssinian Baptist Church. Robbie Shilliam draws attention to the key role played by Garvey in the dissemination of Ethiopianism:

it was primarily through the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) that Ethiopianism became the hermeneutic of a mass public and political movement of descendants of enslaved Africans across the Americas but especially in the US and the Caribbean. [...] The UNIA's national anthem was entitled 'Ethiopia Thou Land of our Fathers' and Psalm 68:31 was the most biblical passage preached at meetings with its official UNIA catechism being: that negroes will set up their own government in Africa with rules of their own race.¹⁰

The ideology of black liberation and the designation of Ethiopia and Harlem as two key sites of an imagined community where blacks were free (Harlem was one of the few places in the United States where a black culture was able to flourish) had profound roots in the refashioning of concepts of race among twentieth-century black diasporic peoples, especially

those who lived in North America. Chiming in part with Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined national communities, whose development in the minds of their would-be citizens owed much to newspapers and novels, such media played a hugely important role in shaping an imagined national community for the black diaspora.¹¹ However, unlike Anderson's idea of nation, based on the notion of a vast territorial unity and a shared homogeneous national time in which its reader-citizens moved, worked and lived, the black imagined community drew on the resources of a neighbourhood of New York (whose racial borders were heavily policed) and a far-away, little-known empire in East Africa which held rich symbolic associations for blacks, while self-evidently remote from the ordinary lives of most African Americans and African Caribbeans. Place, nationality and race were inextricably linked for the black diaspora; in Caribbean colonies such as Trinidad, Barbados and Jamaica, skin colour gradations had everything to do with a person's place in society. But the Caribbean and the US were perceived as societies where blacks were not free; in Ethiopia, they appeared to be so. No wonder, then, that black ideologies of liberation fixed on Ethiopia as such a potent symbol of Pan-African uprising.

And yet, as David Forgacs has recently shown, the racial discourses pertaining to Ethiopians—indeed their very racial classification—were quite complex and often subject to deliberate appropriation on various sides of the Italy-Ethiopia conflict. In examining these racial discourses, it emerges quite clearly that the Italian invasion provoked a profound rethinking of blackness both among Italians and among the black diasporas, though, of course, such reconsiderations built on preexisting debates that had flourished during the Harlem Renaissance and within Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association.

It is possible to distinguish three strands of racial debates regarding Ethiopia that emerged around the time of the invasion: firstly, the "blackening" of Ethiopians on the part of those, like the Italian fascist regime, who desired to justify the invasion as a civilizing mission (with a consequent "whitening" of Italians themselves, as Forgacs argues); secondly, the black diasporic claim that Ethiopians were "blacks" and thus could represent a truly free black people; and thirdly, the racial discourse that Ethiopians held about themselves and partially attempted to disseminate among African Americans on the several trips that Ethiopian official delegates paid to the Harlem black community.¹²

Forgacs draws on the writings of prominent Italian nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century anthropologists to demonstrate that, prior to the invasion, Italians did not consider Ethiopians to be exclusively black but either white or of Semitic descent, “una estesa gamma etnica che va dal bassissimo tipo negro all’altro tipo semitico” (“an extensive ethnic scale that goes from the lowest negro type to the high Semitic type”).¹³

Cesare Lombroso went further and claimed that, over many hundreds of years, there had been “a transformation of the Negro race into a white race through the mediation of the Semitic and Hamitic races”.¹⁴ This position in many senses reflected the self-perception of Ethiopians themselves, as the famous Italian anthropologist Alberto Pollera observed in 1922:

As is well-known, the Abyssinian knows he is not of black origin, and indeed he does not admit of any discussion on this point. To tell an Abyssinian he is black would be a mortal insult. They do not even want to confess that they originate from cross-breeding of Semites and blacks; they attribute to themselves a red complexion to distinguish themselves from whites, blacks and other races.¹⁵

Garvey accused Haile Selassie and Ethiopians more generally of dissociating themselves from black movements abroad because they did not consider themselves “Negro” and of acting white, trusting in white advisors and in the white League of Nations, all of which led to their downfall.¹⁶

But when Italy began planning the invasion, the moral justification came from a complex racial discourse that drew on different theories from those that had sustained the British and French empires. Italian racist thought under fascism constructed the idea of the Mediterranean race as somehow partaking of both Aryan features and something of the “Southern European” or “Latin” stock.¹⁷ The imperial model here, of course, was classical Rome, and not modern Britain or France; since Italy was trying to place itself internationally as an imperial competitor among European nations, it also had to construct a colonial and civilizing discourse that differed from its competitors. But imperial expansion was upheld also by the “whitening” of Italians; and the *Manifesto della Razza* (*Manifesto of the Race*), published in 1938, classified all Italians as Aryans, doing away with previous racial distinctions between Northern and Southern Italians. Only in this way could the conquest of Ethiopia, as a population of “darker”, African peoples, be justified ideologically and

morally in the context of a broader European colonial discourse of conquest. Additionally, Mussolini also intended to revise the racial record of Italians abroad, especially those living in North America, who were perceived as “dark” whites (and being Catholic, of course, didn’t help them to assimilate much into white Protestant America). Thus the whitening of Italians also went hand in hand with the transformation of Italians abroad from “diasporic” and “migrant” to colonizers. This also meant that Semitic and African peoples had to be clearly separated racially from the Italian Aryans. The cover of the Italian fascist magazine *La difesa della razza* showed three profiles: the head of a Roman statue, the head of what was clearly supposed to be a “Semitic” statue and the photograph of a young African woman in tribal dress. A white hand holding a sword separated the Roman bust from the “Semitic” and African heads. The symbolism was clear: Italians were clearly neither Semitic nor African (despite earlier racial theories linking Italians to Africans), and indeed would be justified in waging war against such peoples in future, also in order to defend the “purity” of their race.

While Italian fascism was hard at work, with the help of anthropologists and colonial officers, to “blacken” Ethiopians and the other East Africans under their rule (i.e., Eritreans and Somalis) in order to portray them as racially inferior and thus to lend further justification to their conquest, an inverse appropriation of Ethiopians’ racial features was happening within the black diaspora. The Trinidadian labour activist Uriah Butler, who drew on widespread public support for Ethiopia among black Trinidadians to contextualize the labour struggles of 1937 within a broader history of imperialist oppression, was reported to have said that exploitation of colonized workers rested on “the principles of enslavement and it is for you to set yourself free. The black man in Trinidad is the same as in Ethiopia.”¹⁸

With the invasion, there was an instant, spontaneous racial solidarity on the part of many African diasporic communities with the Ethiopians; they saw Ethiopians as black, and hence as their brothers. At the same time, such identifications prompted a rethinking of race itself and a growing consciousness, especially among African Americans, that the term “Negro” was often reviled by Africans as pertaining to slaves and a shameful past of slavery. Letters of readers to prominent African American newspapers of the time, such as the *Pittsburgh Courier*, reveal the extent to which African Americans were beginning to redefine themselves in relation to a common African descent (this process, of course, had started earlier, with Garvey’s Back to Africa movement), and to Ethiopia in particular. Robert

G. Weisbord draws attention to the movement of "Abyssinianism" in Chicago of the 1920s, "a movement blending religion and black nationalism". "Adherents referred to themselves as 'Ethiopians' or 'Abyssinians' but disdained the terms 'Negro' and 'colored'. [...] One of the principal goals of the movement was the emigration of black Americans to Ethiopia, particularly Africa."¹⁹

Debates about racial definitions were integrated into the ongoing discussions around the need to recuperate a black history. J.A. Rogers, the popular historian of African American pasts, was at the center of these debates. Hattie Edwards, in a letter to the *Courier* of February 1935, praised his text *Your History*, which had helped reestablish Ethiopia as a locus of racial pride for African Americans. J.A. Rogers played a key role in presenting the history of Ethiopia to the African American public and championing the cause of black-authored history, and he was also special correspondent of the *Courier* in Ethiopia during the invasion. "Please, editor, drop the word 'Negro'. Do use our own real name 'Ethiopians'. Africans absolutely refuse to be called Negroes. Why should we continue to hold on to the slave-given name?"²⁰ "Negro" was increasingly associated with the specifically American form of racial degradation that whites reserved for blacks in the US under Jim Crow laws, and was associated with the shameful past of slavery. Increased encounters with black people of different nationalities and a new openness to international understandings of blackness helped provincialize the term "Negro" (the reader Hattie Edwards claimed to have spent four years in Ethiopia "and felt the effects of the U.S. 'cracker' over there" due to the world-wide propaganda of the Ku Klux Klan).²¹

An open letter from an Ethiopian Prince, Ras Abdul Joseph Mohamed, to J.A. Rogers on the use of the term "Negro" further intensified such debates. The letter published in the *Courier* on June 15, 1935, on the eve of the Italian invasion, and released by the "Ethiopian Press Syndicate" may have been part of the various diplomatic "outreach" operations the Ethiopian government attempted to make towards the US and, in particular, the African American community to gain sympathy and support against the Italians. The letter, entitled "Criticizes J.A. Rogers for using word 'Negro'", sought to correct the historical record on the meaning of the term. Abdul Joseph Mohamed appealed to "authoritative" historical sources in the British Library, in particular a book called *The British Slaves of North America*, to establish that "Negro" was coined to distinguish North American slaves from others of the black race. Furthermore, he argued that

the term “Negro race” had been invented “to or with the intention of hiding or fooling American slaves from knowing their connections with the black race”.²² Mohamed stated that “No race who maintains, supports or protects itself calls itself Negro.” Defining himself as a “member of the ‘Ruling House of Ethiopia’, and one hundred per cent black”, Mohamed asked Rogers to stop calling Ethiopians “Negroes” in his popular histories of the country. “Definition of Negro race by me—A black man with white psychology. A black man that loves a white man better than himself.”²³

This letter produced a flood of responses from *Courier* readers, in particular a group from Toledo, Ohio, who wrote *en masse* to the newspaper stating that, henceforth, black people should be correctly identified as “Asiatics”, and not even as African or Ethiopian. Inventive, imaginative versions of black origins were being bandied about in the sphere of print, and the Ethiopian contribution was fundamental here. Stephanie Newell, in a very different context, that of West Africa in the 1920s and 1930s, speaks of “print subjectivities”, namely African self-fashioning through print.²⁴ This form of self-fashioning is strikingly similar to that of African American readers of black newspapers such as the *Courier*; readers were actively involved in the coproduction of black identity through print, which as a medium helped to construct an imagined community in what could be defined as a “counterpublic”.²⁵ The emergence of black readerships and communities led to the development of a political racial consciousness. As George S. Schuyler remarked in 1935:

The Negro press more than any other single agency has welded the colored folk into a compact, race-conscious group and thus enabled them to more effectively deal with the problems confronting them. Wherever these newspapers are widely circulated and read, there the group is most advanced. To kill the Negro press is to cut off the Negro’s eyes and ears.²⁶

Rogers was quick to explain why Ethiopians rejected the term “Negro” and, rather, considered themselves African:

Negro has a meaning quite special to the United States. One as blond as a Scandinavian may be classed as Negro in America. African peoples, being of the same color, do not think in color terms but in national or tribal ones. [...] Hence, when an Ethiopian, West African, Brazilian or British West Indian denies he is a Negro, it does not necessarily mean he is denying racial kinship with Aframericans so much as that he refuses to swallow the ridiculous American ‘Negro’. Most Aframericans need to clarify their thinking on this point.²⁷

Rogers turned Garvey's accusation against Haile Selassie into a positive: far from rejecting racial solidarity with African Americans, Ethiopians actually urged blacks to reject the term "Negro" and identify as Africans.²⁸ J.A. Rogers was a popular public figure in Harlem and keen to recuperate a black history, an Afrocentric history that could be used by African Americans to think of themselves differently. He was later memorialized in McKay's novel *Amiable with Big Teeth*.

The Ethiopian contribution to the race debate among African Americans continued into 1936. *The Chicago Defender*, another prominent African American newspaper, carried an article on Tasfaye Zaphiro, Ethiopian envoy to New York, who sent a message to all African Americans about their racial status. The article was entitled "Black Peoples Learn of True Racial Status: Ethiopian Tells Harlem Their Real Identity."²⁹ Addressing a meeting of 4000 people in the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem on Christmas Eve, he asked:

Who told you that you were Negroes? You are sons and daughters of Africa. Africa, your motherland, which calls you now to aid her last surviving free people. Our emperor regards himself as the symbol of the hopes of black men and the guardian of their interests. We invite you to come and help Africa and help us to build the Ethiopia of the future.³⁰

These stirring words, and indeed the entire meeting, would be later fictionalized in McKay's 1941 novel, which I discuss below.

BLACK LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ETHIOPIAN WAR

The Ethiopian war featured prominently in English, African American and Italian literature of the 1930s, and yet it has received little attention in critical studies of the period. Here I trace the connections between depictions of the war and the heated debates around the purpose and form of black art and literature that took place in the context of the Harlem Renaissance and shortly afterwards.

The political consciousness arising out of the Ethiopian war had an impact on debates around the role of black-authored art. According to Robert A. Hill, the African American writer and journalist George S. Schuyler radically revised his view that black art needed to be autonomous from politics after the advent of the Ethiopian war.³¹ W.E.B. Du Bois's famous 1926 essay "Criteria of Negro Art", published in *The Crisis*

(of which he was editor), provocatively declared that, for a black author, “all art is propaganda and ever must be” since “until the art of black folk compels recognition they will not be rated as human. And when through art they compel recognition then let the world discover if it will that their art is as new as it is old and as old as new.”³² Du Bois’s position on black art generated significant discussion among artists and writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Less than ten years later, the Ethiopian war would exert an even stronger influence on some of them. Schuyler turned to writing science fiction and adventure stories about Ethiopia, which were published in instalments. He used genre fiction as an effective way to get across the racial message and to present a popular appeal for Ethiopia through these stories. As a journalist for the *Courier*, he also probably drew on letters sent to the newspaper. Readers often wrote in asking what African Americans could do for Ethiopia. Their imaginative suggestions worked their way into Schuyler’s fantasy fiction and included such proposals as this one by the railroad chef G.D. Perry, from Fort Worth, Texas, who asked:

I should like to know if there is a fund or committee for the purpose of raising money to build an Ethiopian air force? There are plenty of wealthy colored men in this country who would be able to buy a plane or at least contribute to a fund to help the cause?³³

Almost in a form of wish fulfilment for *Courier* readers, Schuyler’s novella “Revolt in Ethiopia” features a rich young African American who charts a plane to go to Ethiopia and help the resistance against the Italians. Schuyler’s Ethiopian novellas thus interact dynamically with readers’ letters, aligning with Newell’s description of newspapers (in the colonial West African context) “as vehicles for specifically print-mediated forms of subjectivity”. Especially relevant for the analysis of the ways in which Schuyler’s periodical fiction emerged out of the *Courier*’s coverage of the Ethiopian war is her observation that newspapers are “productive literary forms with the power to generate (and to be modified) by particular types of discourse [...] and they represent a literary field in which readers participated in debates about moral, cultural, economic, aesthetic, historical, and political issues.”³⁴ Newell’s study is specifically concerned with West African newspapers during British colonial rule, but her words ring true for the forms of print subjectivity—literary, political and more broadly journalistic—which emerged in the wake of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia.

THE GREAT ETHIOPIAN WAR NOVEL? *AMIALE WITH BIG TEETH*

Perhaps the greatest novel to be written about the Ethiopian war is Claude McKay's recently discovered novel *Amiable With Big Teeth: A Novel Concerning the Love Affair Between the Communists and the Black Sheep of Harlem* (out from Penguin in 2017). Jean-Christophe Cloutier, the scholar who discovered the unpublished typescript with autograph corrections by McKay, dates it to 1941, a year after the publication of McKay's masterful popular history of Harlem, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* (indeed some archival material, and many of the ideological arguments warning African Americans against international communism that McKay presents in the latter, are reworked in *Amiable*).³⁵ The narrative power of *Amiable* comes from McKay's extraordinary style: he adeptly combines an easy-to-follow, compelling tale of social life and relationships in Harlem featuring a series of fascinating characters with a profound critique of, and debate on, the huge impact of the Ethiopian war on the African Americans of Harlem as it related to attempts by communists to coopt the latter's political struggles into their movement. (As the evil communist plotter Maxim Tasan says to his docile white American subordinate, Dandy Nordling, "Let's drink to the Aframerican minority and its conquest by the Popular Front."³⁶) Detailed set pieces of Harlem nightlife and romantic liaisons are interspersed with complex intellectual debates around the relationship between communism, black nationalism and black colonized peoples. This relationship is variously characterized as a betrayal of the latter on the part of the latter, whose most potent contemporary symbol is the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935.

The debates in the novel, usually staged as conversations among characters with different political perspectives and agendas on race and the Ethiopian war, clearly expose the inherent racial prejudice of white communists, despite their protestations of class solidarity and support for African Americans and Africans more generally. Maxim Tasan is cast as the Comintern manipulator, of indeterminate racial origin and yet essentially white in his outlook, who attempts to infiltrate the all-black Hands to Ethiopia Committee in order to win it over to the Popular Front. The apparent anti-racism and egalitarianism of the Comintern and its push towards racial integration between white and black Americans reveals itself to be based on a solid bedrock of deeply held racial prejudice, as is evi-

denced in Tasan's fierce quarrel with Lij Alamaya, the Ethiopian envoy who has come to Harlem to help raise funds for Ethiopia. Lij Alamaya accuses the Comintern of being "just a drove of contemptible pigs eating slops out of the Soviet trough". Early on in the novel, Lij Alamaya had been equally contemptuous of the League of Nations in a conversation with Pablo Peixota and Newton Castle: "The League of Nations is like those curious creatures that I hear exist in Haiti—the zombies. Dead nations which act as if they were living without knowing they are dead."³⁷

Tasan is outraged, but more than anything he is caught off-guard: "despite his professions his real attitude towards Africans and Aframericans was still influenced by childish fairy-tale pictures of them as primitives. Alamaya's sharp penetrating appraisal of the Comintern and Soviet Russia was totally unexpected." Tasan proceeds to call "Africa the black plague of Europe" and admonishes Lij Alamaya: "You ought to be glad and grateful if the Comintern takes only a human interest in Ethiopia."³⁸ Under the veneer of racial and class solidarity, Tasan reveals the colonialist and racist assumptions of communist discourse in relationship to black and anti-colonial movements. The inherently colonialist mindset of Eurocommunist internationalism also emerged in postwar documents produced by the PCI that aimed to convince the United Nations to give Italy the trusteeship of Somalia (an ex-Italian colony), and would also be evident in the French Communist Party's support for France against Algeria during the Algerian war.³⁹ The novel's withering views of communism chime closely with Padmore's condemnation of Communist Party tactics in the US that aimed to infiltrate African American political groups and to manipulate anti-imperialist movements for their own purposes.⁴⁰

McKay's novel is astonishingly important for its acute contemporary analysis of the way in which the Comintern viewed African American political movements and struggles; it is possibly the only novel that has offered such a stark critique of communism's utter betrayal of black struggles, though we have seen such critiques foreshadowed in Padmore's and James's writings in *International African Opinion*. This betrayal was also extensively analyzed in McKay's nonfictional work *Harlem: Negro Metropolis*, especially in its carefully researched, brilliantly argued chapter on Abdul Sufi Ahmed and the organization of labor in Harlem in the 1930s.

There is an extraordinary passage in *Amiable* that features two young black women with strong, charismatic personalities discussing racial politics and the Popular Front. Seraphine Peixota, who is so extremely fair she

passes for white, has recently had a romantic relationship with Lij Alamaya, the Ethiopian envoy. Matters have become complicated because Seraphine is the daughter of Pablo Peixota, the chairman of the Black Hands to Ethiopia Committee, and Pablo and Lij Alamaya have had a falling out. Seraphine and Lij Alamaya, as a consequence, are not speaking to one another, and she has left home to move in with her friend Bunchetta Facey, renting an apartment in Greenwich Village. As Seraphine says to Bunchetta:

Mother and father are content, but I won't be content with Harlem. All of us crowded together in the same pen. I love plenty of space and change of scenes. I want to feel free to live my life like any American girl.⁴¹

Obviously, it is easier for her to do that than for other African American women because she passes for white. Seraphine and Bunchetta have a discussion about "passing", which in this passage reveals itself to be a distinctly American concept, bound up with the history of slavery and white fears of miscegenation. Bunchetta, who is sold on the communist ideal of the Popular Front, tries to convince Seraphine to frequent more white people who are committed to social causes. Seraphine frankly remarks to Bunchetta that perhaps she fancies Alamaya precisely because he is so fair:

"Once I said to him that it was nice that we two could 'pass' together. He didn't understand, so I explained to him what 'passing' was and he was very angry. He said he was not 'passing', he was proud to be an Ethiopian. I told him he couldn't live in the Santa Cruz [a hotel] if he were a dark Ethiopian. He said he didn't care where he lived and he thought 'passing' was cheapening to the person who was 'passing' if he had any pride in being himself. He couldn't understand the American point of view."

"He's perspicacious," said Bunchetta. "The human point of view is more important than the American point of view. It is the American point of view, the German point of view, the British point of view and all the different nations' point of view that makes [*sic*] a mess of the world. *Now we have the Popular Front to which all peoples with the right human point of view can belong.*"⁴²

The passage showcases several issues close to McKay's heart, especially the profound differences among African Americans and other Africans. McKay campaigned extensively for strong racial solidarity and group spirit among African Americans (according to Cloutier, this novel is a demonstration of

such efforts), but his fiction also chronicled the intensely felt hierarchies among black groups in the diaspora, as we see in his 1929 novel *Banjo*, set in Marseille.⁴³

McKay's work often highlights the racial prejudices of black-on-black. But in the above passage from *Amiable*, he shows how the arrival of the Ethiopian envoy to Harlem can actually teach his African American friend something about her own identity: "passing" is an American concept that does not exist in Ethiopian society. Being black in America is different from being black in Ethiopia—such an obvious point is nevertheless the one that McKay makes throughout the novel. It also offers its own thoughtful, fictionalized contribution to the raging debates in the black press around the question of whether Ethiopians considered themselves black, and thus united in solidarity with African Americans, or whether Garvey's accusations of race betrayal directed against Haile Selassie were well-founded. Bunchetta's reply to her friend Seraphine says everything we need to know about the Comintern's reaction to the race and nation issue. She identifies the communist view with the *human* view—there can be no other perspective. All nationalist and racial struggles need to be subordinated under the communist banner, and Bunchetta has been indoctrinated properly in this sense. The idea that "all peoples with the right human point of view" are the ones that belong in the Comintern implies that there is only one way of being "rightly" human—other forms of imagining humanity, such as the ones being advocated by black groups or anti-colonial groups of the period, were not considered to be "rightly" human. Communist racial integration clearly placed the interests of the white proletariat above all others.

McKay's position on the communist notion of humanity had undergone an interesting reversal since his early years of militancy in the Communist Party, which saw his contribution to several socialist and communist newspapers, such as Sylvia Pankhurst's *Workers' Dreadnought* and the *Crisis*, edited by W.E.B. Du Bois. In 1923–1924, he published an essay in the *Crisis* entitled "Soviet Russia and the Negro" in which he described the exhilarating welcome he received from Russians during his trip to Moscow in November 1922.⁴⁴ He noticed the absence of any sense of racial superiority on their part, accompanied by a keen sympathy for the plight of the discriminated and oppressed black minority in the United States. He noted that Lenin had made it a priority to "promote the cause of the exploited American Negro among the Soviet councils of Russia", and generally his essay was a much more positive appraisal of the commu-

nist attitude towards blacks than he would offer in later years. Part of the reason for Russian acceptance of his racial difference was due to its being a “country where all the races of Europe and Asia meet and mix”, nor was Russian society marked by the “fierce racial hatreds” that existed in the Balkans, for example.⁴⁵ Most remarkable to McKay was the fact that for the members of the Russian proletariat whom he met, “the common workers, the soldiers and sailors [...] I was only a black member of the world of humanity.”⁴⁶ This aspect of communist ideology, the understanding of “humanity”, would be completely turned on its head in *Amiable with Big Teeth*, which was written nearly twenty years later, after the death of Lenin and the triumph of Stalin and his regime’s much more oppressive approach to the question of persecuted minorities in the Soviet Union.

McKay’s early reflections on what international socialism could bring to the black cause found one of its most articulate expressions in an early piece he wrote for Pankhurst’s *Workers’ Dreadnought* newspaper. Aimed at a white working-class and socialist audience, the weekly was one of the more radical organs of the newly founded British Communist Party, and Pankhurst one of the most radical left militants in Britain at the time (see Chap. 5 for a full account of Pankhurst’s ideological trajectory from suffragette, to socialist, to anti-colonial campaigner, and the role played by periodical print in this trajectory). In “Socialism and the Negro”, published on January 31, 1920 (and so before “Soviet Russia and the Negro”, which came out in 1923–1924), McKay laid out for a white British reader the benefits of international socialism for blacks. He started off the piece with a description of the work of the NAACP, founded by W.E.B. Du Bois ten years earlier in 1910. McKay highlighted the middle-class nature of the NAACP and said that the group, “palpably ignorant of the fact that the Negro question is primarily an economic problem, evidently thought it might be solved by admitting Negroes who have won to wealth and other intellectual and other attainments into white society on equal terms” (1). He dates the spread of communism among African Americans to the beginning of World War I, thanks to the work of socialist propaganda, noting that “the rank-and-file Negroes of America have been very responsive to the new truths” (1). However, the major obstacle to the spread of socialism, especially in the South where the majority of blacks lived, was white racial hatred, which prevented the unification of the white and black working classes. With his signature humour and attention to the gendered aspect of interracial relations, he suggested that white women should be sent into the South for propaganda purposes, as the best ambassadors to

bring together black and white workers. This was thanks to the South's supposed great chivalry towards white women, as everyone else, including white men from the North, would be lynched. "Will they [white women] rise to their duty?" he asked jokingly.

The reflections of McKay in this essay resonate with his core concerns about the condition of the black masses and what their material and ideological needs might be for true economic and political emancipation. This is why even in 1920 he took an independent stance towards the relationship between nationalism and communism, and held out praise for Garvey, despite the fact that he wasn't a socialist, because his message was so popular amongst African Americans, and his movement numbered more than two million members:

Some English Communists have remarked to me that they have no real sympathy for the Irish and Indian movement because it is nationalistic. But, to-day the British Empire is the greatest obstacle to International Socialism, and any of its subjugated parts succeeding in breaking away from it would be helping the cause of World Communism. In these pregnant times no people who are strong enough to throw off an imperial yoke will tamely submit to a system of local capitalism. The breaking up of the British Empire must either begin at home or abroad; the sooner the strong blow is struck the better it will be for all Communists. Hence the English revolutionary workers should not be unduly concerned over the manner in which the attack should begin. Unless, like some British intellectuals, they are enamoured of a Socialist (?) British Empire! Unless they are willing to be provided with cheap raw materials by the slaves of Asia and Africa for the industries of their overcrowded cities, while the broad, fertile acres of Great Britain are held for hunting and other questionable pleasures.⁴⁷

This is an extraordinary passage for McKay's keen critique of socialism from a racial and anti-colonial perspective, and foreshadowed his much harsher and more bitter exposés of the failures of international communism towards black political struggles for emancipation in *Amiable with Big Teeth* and *Harlem: Negro Metropolis*, which Cloutier calls "McKay's twin works of the 1940s".⁴⁸ Here McKay was still trying to find a middle ground between socialism and racial loyalty; he also impressed upon his white audience the importance of securing black mass participation in the socialist movement by a careful attention to their specific needs, which included the goal of racial equality and economic uplift. McKay reminded the socialist readers of the *Workers' Dreadnought* that British imperialism

remained the biggest threat to the triumph of international socialism, and that "The breaking up of the British Empire must either begin at home or abroad; the sooner the strong blow is struck the better it will be for all Communists" (see above quote). Anti-imperialism had to be a priority for British workers, as Padmore would also try to impress upon the white audience of his 1931 pamphlet *Lives of Negro Toilers*, discussed above.

McKay's pieces for the *Workers' Dreadnought* often included sociological critiques of white communist attitudes to race. What allegedly brought McKay to Pankhurst's attention was his response to E.D. Morel's ferocious racist attack on the "French employment of black troops in the subjection of Germany".⁴⁹ In the aftermath of the First World War, when the Ruhr was occupied by the French army, E.D. Morel, the journalist who had exposed the Belgian colonial exploitation of the Congo (later the source of inspiration for Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*), published an essay entitled "Black Scourge in Europe" in the British socialist newspaper *The Daily Herald*, which warned against the unrestrained, dangerous sexuality supposedly unleashed by these black soldiers against the women of the region. It was clearly an anti-French propaganda piece at the expense of blacks, and "A Black Man Replies" was McKay's impassioned and lucid response, which the *Herald* declined to publish but which Pankhurst did. McKay was advised to send his letter to Pankhurst, who was often quite critical of the editorial policies of the *Daily Herald* and who produced a very active and well-informed broadsheet of her own, the *Workers' Dreadnought*. Moreover, her weekly had already published articles critical of British racist violence, such as "Stabbing Negroes in the Dock Area", published on Saturday June 7, 1919.⁵⁰ Such articles essentially aimed at combating racism among white socialists and promoting cross-race class solidarities.

McKay invokes psychology in trying to understand Morel's racist attacks on black workers in Germany, thus implicitly presenting them as pathological, and narrates how his letter led to his first meeting with Pankhurst:

Sylvia Pankhurst must have liked the style of my letter, for she wrote asking me to call at her printing office in Fleet Street. I found a plain little Queen-Victoria sized woman with plenty of long unruly bronze-like hair. There was no distinction about her clothes, and on the whole she was very undistinguished. But her eyes were fiery, even a little fanatic, with a glint of shrewdness.⁵¹

McKay's description of Pankhurst and her activities is simultaneously patronizing, sympathetic and markedly gendered as descriptions of revolutionaries go (though, to be fair to McKay, his descriptions of both men and women were mainly very attentive both to gender and race). But it is undoubtedly the case that she was one of the few white editors who consented to publish journalism and poetry by a black author before the outpouring of work of the Harlem Renaissance, and the collaboration between the two was to prove fruitful. McKay contributed at least five articles and half a dozen poems to the *Workers' Dreadnought*, and many other pieces under various pseudonyms, including Leon Lopez, Hugh Hope, E. Edwards, C.E. Edwards and Ness Edwards, but "all these 'contributors' disappeared from the *Dreadnought*, never to reappear, after McKay left England at the end of 1920."⁵²

Amiable with Big Teeth must be understood in the light of McKay's enduring experience of militancy within international communism, on the one hand, and his complex views on the relationship between art and politics, on the other. Cloutier notes that McKay had always privileged "his allegiance to the artistic over the political [...]" yet by the time he wrote *Amiable* in 1941, McKay seems to have forced his aesthetic hand to adopt a more 'mixed' approach, even though he may have been reluctant to admit it."⁵³ It is, in many ways, a *roman à clef*, and the story McKay tells of the efforts to aid Ethiopia and the multiple political conflicts it generated within Harlem's African American community is largely based on historical fact, with its characters based on composites of real figures who featured prominently in the various Aid to Ethiopia campaigns of the 1930s.

As always, McKay's imagination is both localized and transnational. His descriptions of the crowds and parades on the streets of Harlem effectively convey the Harlemites' consciousness that the significance of their support for Ethiopia goes far beyond this small, distant country. Their outpouring of emotion is powerfully symbolic of the wider, transnational and increasingly globalized black struggle for emancipation.

The novel's narrative voice often wrestles with the question of why the support was so heartfelt and widespread:

It was a little bewildering to many that the vague religious sentiment for Ethiopia existing among Aframericans should suddenly be transformed into a positive organized action and that that country should appear on the horizon as an embarrassing new Canaan. But the events of two decades must

have been slowly working on the minds of the people. The First World War and the ill-starred theatrical pan-African movement had enormously increased the interest in African lands. And Ethiopia specifically swung into the international spotlight when it was admitted to the League of Nations in 1928, after its abolition of slavery. In 1930 the barbaric splendor of Haile Selassie's coronation was world excitement. Also it attracted a number of Aframericans to emigrate to Ethiopia.⁵⁴

In analyzing this rather non-novelistic passage, which gestures more towards political and ideological writing, it may be helpful to return to Cloutier's point about McKay's more "mixed" approach in this novel compared to his previous, and his preoccupation with recuperating an alternative black history of this conflict. In many ways, this could be said to be a "press-inspired" novel, drawing heavily on the documentary and the archive, and based on the many newspaper stories that strove to create and reinforce a pro-Ethiopia consciousness among African Americans.⁵⁵ Equally, popular support for Ethiopia was documented by many newspapers of the time. And as *Amiable's* narrator says, "thus the biblical legendary Ethiopia and earliest Christian state was revealed as a reality with a new significance in the minds of Aframericans."⁵⁶

The Ethiopian envoy, Lij Alamaya, is himself rather puzzled, yet exalted, by this outpouring of support:

The religious exuberance, the fermenting emotional elan of the Aframericans in their manifestation for Ethiopia, was strange and perplexing to him. Yet it was sincere, Lij Alamaya believed. He had felt its warmth like the heat of the African sun, so different from the pale and tepid European expressions of goodwill and sympathy for his people. He craved and prayed for a real understanding with these Aframericans.⁵⁷

Lij Alamaya is one of the few rounded Ethiopian characters in English-language fiction of the time; other examples include the Ethiopian prince and princess at the center of George S. Schuyler's now forgotten *Ethiopian Stories*, mentioned earlier, novellas published in instalments in the *Pittsburgh Courier* and belonging to what Robert A. Hill calls "a phase of literary Pan-Africanism".⁵⁸ These encounters between African Americans and Ethiopians, and attempts by black American novelists to portray the interior life of an Ethiopian, were marked by fruitful contradictions, efforts at racial connection and solidarity, and also much artistic speculation. But Lij Alamaya emerges as a convincing character, replete with his own inter-

nal conflicts and a hidden past of militancy within the Communist Party, a fact that holds him hostage to the machinations of the evil Maxim Tasan, the Comintern agent, who is truly a cartoon-like villain. It is worth comparing Lij Alamaya with the two-dimensional, stereotypical characters of Waugh's African narratives, especially *Black Mischief*, a comic novel transparently based on an East African kingdom that suspiciously resembles Ethiopia (or Abyssinia, as Waugh liked to call it).

Amiable is both a historical novel and a novel about *writing black history*; and this is why two experts of African history are such central characters in the novel, namely Professor Koazhy and Dorsey Flagg. Koazhy is a self-styled "professor" who strategically deploys his erudition with regard to African customs and culture in order to bring about the downfall of the evil Maxim Tasan. It is significant that African culture, and especially Koazhy's *knowledge* of it, kills the European communist who is plotting to take over Harlem for the purposes of the Communist International.

As an Afrocentric narrative that attempted to restore both centrality and significance to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in the development of a black political consciousness, the novel, if it had ever been published by McKay at the time of its writing, would have emphasized to African American readers the importance of knowing one's own history, and indeed of researching it actively. The novel suggests that historical knowledge about Africa is essential in order to develop unity and foster belief in a confident African American identity, with Professor Koazhy, the unorthodox historian, claiming that, in Harlem, he gave history "to those who were hungry for it".⁵⁹ At the fund-raising event for Ethiopia we find at the opening of the novel, Professor Koazhy urges the huge audience in the Abyssinian Baptist Church to "learn about the past as it relates to you and use it to do something about the present."⁶⁰ McKay may have thought that the novel form, and especially a *roman à clef* like *Amiable*, could be the most apt way to disseminate the message about the importance of writing and researching one's own history. His previous book, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis*, a carefully researched piece of social history about Harlem, had been a critical and commercial failure. *Amiable* was perhaps intended to rectify this and convey more forcefully than the previous volume the need to build racial solidarity through an imagined community constructed textually. As a novel of ideas and debates, *Amiable* presents itself as a self-reflexive narrative about debates within the black community around race, political mobilization and the diversity that characterized the African diasporic experience, also in terms of alternative historical trajec-

ries that led to different self-conceptions of identity in Harlem compared with that of Ethiopia, for example. McKay was keenly interested in exploring the differences that characterized and defined twentieth-century blackness, which was far from a monolithic identity.

"I have given many years to the study and teaching of African history", says Professor Koazhy to the crowd. "They said I was funny in the head, that I had an obsession, because I said that African history was as noble and great as European history. To them African history was just an unimportant chip off of European history."⁶¹ He explains to his black audience why such knowledge of Ethiopia should be so important for them: "But I tell you, my friends, excited and exalted now about Ethiopia, if you knew African history, you would be better equipped to help Ethiopia. How many of you know anything of the real Ethiopia?"⁶²

Professor Koazhy's question in the novel corresponded to a real desire to know more about Ethiopia among African Americans. In the 1930s, around the time of the Italian invasion, the many pages sympathetic newspapers, such as the *Pittsburgh Courier* and *NTEN*, dedicated to it attested to the public's desire to know more about Ethiopia. "The dynasty of Ethiopia is older than Solomon; it is older than the Bible. [...] the Empire of Ethiopia extended to Egypt across Judea into Persia and India", says Koazhy.⁶³ Even the Ethiopian envoy Lij Alamaya learns something from his speech, which he feels contains "authoritative and profound statements". For Alamaya, Koazhy's impressive knowledge of Ethiopia is aligned with the surprising enthusiasm "Aframericans" (as McKay calls them) have for his country. The setting of Harlem and the imagined community the novel conjures up tap into a rich textual canon with an implied Harlemite reader at its centre, including McKay's *Home to Harlem* and *Harlem: Negro Metropolis*; Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929); and, perhaps more controversially, Carl Van Vechten's novel *Nigger Heaven* (1926).

The history Koazhy teaches his fellow Harlemites is admittedly make-shift, oppositional and unacknowledged. Koazhy and Dorsey Flagg, the other historian of Africa who dominates the novel, were based on historical figures very active in the Harlem of the 1930s and in support movements for Ethiopia. Koazhy in particular seems to have been based on Willis Nathaniel Huggins, a singular intellectual who advocated in favour of Ethiopia and eventually went to the League of Nations in Geneva to make a speech on behalf of the beleaguered country.⁶⁴ Koazhy and Flagg may have been based on another historian, J.A. Rogers, who, as previously

mentioned, published extensively on racial and African history, and covered the Ethiopian war for the *Pittsburgh Courier*.⁶⁵

The novel's framing of the Ethiopian war in the context of African American culture, identity and history works against the event's cooption within a narrative of communist-led resistances to empire. Most of the narrative focuses on the attempt by the communists to take over the black "Hands to Ethiopia Committee" in order to infiltrate them, and the stout resistance of the black organization to their plotting. In particular, Dorsey Flagg, a popular figure in the black movement, is targeted by Maxim Tasan because he is seen as a Trotskyist. The communist orthodoxy of Tasan is contrasted with Peixota's robust defense of Flagg and his keen awareness that trivial disagreements within international communism must not wreck the racial unity his Committee has achieved. Moreover, when the question arises as to whether the Committee should include whites, Peixota is keen to respect the desires of the community: "the masses of the people had vociferously opposed the inclusion of a white" (18). Not everyone agrees: Newton Castle, influenced by the communists and under the thumb of Maxim Tasan, thinks it was a mistake to exclude white people from the committee. But Peixota replies:

"The common people feel that Ethiopia was betrayed by the white nations," said Peixota. "And you've got to respect their feelings. It is unfair to say their stand is chauvinism. Ethiopia is fighting alone and I'm sure you'll get a lot more out of an all-colored organization. You've got to sell it to them: one little black nation, single-handed, almost unarmed fighting against a mighty white nation."⁶⁶

Newton Castle is presented as a pro-Soviet communist, as he is always defending the Soviet Union, saying that it helped with joining the sanctions against Italy. When Dorsey Flagg objects that Soviet Russia is "selling more war goods to Italy than any other nation" (19), Newton Castle brands him a "Trotskyite"; by referencing debates around the Soviet Union and its role in the Ethiopian war, the novel highlights a more general crisis of faith in communism as an emancipatory ideology that can serve blacks' best interests. These debates were held regularly amongst members of the black intelligentsia, and the question of Pan-Africanism or communism was hotly debated. Black intellectuals were divided as to which ideology was the best for the purposes of their political activism in liberating blacks. As for the "masses", which appear now and then in the

novel as crowds that flock to the rallies and pageants held in Harlem in support of Ethiopia, they believed in Garveyism and Haile Selassie. As Padmore reminded his readers in his 1931 pamphlet *Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*, "Garveyism continues to exert some influence among *certain* sections of the Negro masses."⁶⁷

Throughout this hot argument between Newton Castle, the "orthodox" communist, and Dorsey Flagg, the "Trotskyite", Peixota, the chairman of the Black Hands to Ethiopia Committee, remains adamant that

our aim is to help Ethiopia. That is the mandate of today's meeting. And we must work in unity and harmony to achieve anything. We must not be confused and divided by the issues of the white world. I don't know what is a Trotskyite; I don't know anything except that it is a Communist country and I am not a Communist nor is Ethiopia.⁶⁸

McKay's procedure in showing up the deceptions practiced by communists against the African American community is achieved through dialogue and debate, whilst intricately bound up with the burning question of the color line. Seraphine Peixota, after falling out with her family and leaving Harlem for Greenwich Village (a "white" area of Manhattan), is drawn into the web of intrigue and manipulation of Maxim Tazan, who seeks to coopt her into his own organization. As mentioned earlier, Seraphine, "an arresting type with an extraordinary personality", easily passes for white. Seraphine and Lij Alamaya flirt, and her mother wants him to marry her and live in America in case Haile Selassie is vanquished by Mussolini. Her pragmatic reasoning is that this way Seraphine can marry into nobility and can embroider his coat of arms on her bed linen. Seraphine says she doesn't know how interested he is in her, but her mother retorts: "Even though he is an African, he is not so different from others. All the world loves American women" (63). Perhaps because Seraphine is practically white, Kezia thinks that to an African like Lij Alamaya, she will appear American. Kezia would prefer to have Seraphine in Harlem close to her, rather than in that "barbaric land", namely Ethiopia, "where he can sit all wrapped in silk and satin on a golden stool, with his docile native women grovelling at his feet" (63). Kezia's Orientalist imagination is meant to represent the superiority some African Americans felt towards Africans, documented elsewhere in McKay's fiction.⁶⁹

While living in Harlem, Seraphine always considered herself black (also because, thanks to the "one-drop" rule, she *was* black according to racial

norms governing American society). Her decision to align herself with a “white” movement such as the Comintern seems to suggest that, for McKay, racial identity is at heart a political choice for mixed-race or “high-yellow” (fair-skinned black) people, and conversely, political choices are always racialized. Once Seraphine starts working for Maxim Tasan, he attempts to indoctrinate her into the ways of the Soviet Union and the Popular Front, which, contrary to appearances, is, in his words, “a Soviet ship and the officers and crew are all Soviet” (196). Seraphine is not particularly political, but she does remember the conversations held at the dinner parties and meetings of her very politically minded father, Pablo Peixota. She rather innocently asks: “Tell me, Maxim, how will Aframericans figure in the Popular Front, what place will they get? My father says that the Popular Front will help them about as much as the League of Nations helped Ethiopia” (196). This is obviously a highly charged political analogy, aligning the Popular Front with the perceived inefficacy and underlying racism of the League of Nations. Maxim Tasan all but confirms Pablo’s suspicion of the Popular Front when he explains to Seraphine that “the Popular Front will *give* Aframericans their Second Emancipation and end all prejudices and discrimination” (197, emphasis added). Worthy of note is that according to Tasan’s worldview, it is the Popular Front that will bestow liberation upon blacks, and not the other way around.

Lij Alamaya is constructed in the novel as the perfect example of an African who was taken in by the emancipatory promises of the Comintern only to discover, to his cost, how little interest it had in Ethiopia’s emancipation. “I joined [the Popular Front] when the idea of the Popular Front was sweeping up the world,” confesses Lij Alamaya to Peixota at the end of the novel, in a decisive *dénouement* of the plot.

Lij Alamaya, believed by everyone in Harlem to be the special envoy of Haile Selassie thanks to a letter he has from the emperor, reveals that the letter, stolen from him by Maxim Tasan to discredit him, is “authentic, but it was not genuine” (251), a comment that reflects more widely on the fictionalized and deceptive layers of the story McKay presented to his public. At Peixota’s question—“Then you were not a representative of Ethiopia?”—Alamaya replies that he identifies more with “the secret organization of the progressive Youth of Ethiopia than of the official moribund Ethiopia” (251–252). But now that his official status has been revealed as spurious (though he manages to retain the good will and sympathy of Peixota), Alamaya interestingly considers himself an “ordinary refugee” in America, akin to the German refugees from fascism encountered earlier in

the novel at a mixed-race party in Harlem. Incidentally, at this party Alamaya becomes the target of a specifically German form of Orientalism when the anthropologist Professor Jacob Fischer, a refugee, claims that "Ethiopians are not really an African people in the sense that Aframericans are, they are a Semitic people like the Arabs" (41). Alamaya coldly replies that Ethiopians "call themselves a black African nation", thus clearly signalling the novel's position on the contemporary debates as to whether Ethiopians saw themselves as black or not.

On these race debates, *Amiable* markedly differs from Garvey's opinion that Haile Selassie did not see himself or his people as African or black, and instead solidly identifies Ethiopians as black Africans. This may have been part of McKay's strategic positioning of the debates around the Ethiopian war as part of a narrative of black nationalism. It is also significant that the novel is, in some respects, a *retrospective* look at these debates, having been written in 1941.

GEORGE S. SCHUYLER'S ETHIOPIAN THRILLERS

McKay's novel is possibly the most accurate and in-depth novelistic approach to the debates raised within the African American community by the invasion of Ethiopia. It is not, however, the only instance of what Robert A. Hill has called "literary responses to Pan-Africanism".⁷⁰ In the years immediately following the Italian invasion, George S. Schuyler produced two novellas, heavily romanticized and sensationalized takes on the Ethiopian war and its impact on African Americans. Both stories feature a love story and African American heroes who, through gradual arrival at political consciousness, support the Ethiopian cause. Like McKay, the novellas also draw heavily on contemporary debates around the relationship between Ethiopians and African Americans, and the question of Ethiopia as a free black homeland. The stories are now collected in a single volume, *Ethiopian Stories*, edited by Robert A. Hill.

The first novella is entitled "The Ethiopian Murder Mystery" and was serialized in the *Courier* between October 1935 and February 1936, thus coinciding precisely with the beginning of Mussolini's campaign.⁷¹ The plot revolves around the killing of an Ethiopian prince, Haile Destu, who has visited Harlem. The beautiful Crissina Van Dyke is suspected of having killed him, though in actuality she has been helping him. Her admirer, the young journalist Rod Bates, and the hero of the story, is in love with

Crissina and tries to help prove her innocence. It turns out that Crissina is an ardent supporter of Ethiopia.

Schuyler's story uses genre fiction, in this instance the form of the detective story, to shape an absorbing, entertaining and informative tale about Ethiopia-related intrigues in Harlem, showcasing at the same time interracial relationships and black middle-class characters in positions of relative power (policemen, journalists). Fiction may have seemed for Schuyler, as it did for McKay, the most apt mode to convey a strongly racialized message about Ethiopia to a wider African American readership. Schuyler and McKay were among the very few authors of the Harlem Renaissance who engaged directly with African reality in their fiction; as Hill notes in his introduction to *Ethiopian Stories*, Africa retained a largely symbolic valence within works of the Harlem Renaissance. By contrast, Hill argues, for Schuyler, Africa represented an "agent for change, to which he viewed African-Americans as tied in a common opposition to imperialist domination and the myths of white supremacy and black inferiority".⁷²

In the interwar period, Schuyler was one of the most prominent anti-fascist African Americans, rivalled perhaps only by Langston Hughes. But because Schuyler later became a vitriolic anti-communist, this side to his politics is less well known, "like the broader African-American contribution to the worldwide movement against fascism".⁷³ Schuyler also knew Padmore quite well, and he was certainly influenced by his anti-fascist ideas and his intense campaigning in favour of a free Ethiopia. His two novellas about the Ethiopian war also marked Schuyler's attitude towards the intense debates raging within the African American artistic community, which was largely based in Harlem, concerning the status of black art in relationship to politics. From the perspective of African-American literary production, Schuyler's novellas represent a vindication of W.E.B. DuBois's position, published in *The Crisis*, that "I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda."⁷⁴ The politicization of Schuyler's literary efforts around the Ethiopian war foreshadow McKay's novel *Amiable with Big Teeth*, which was more "archival" and historically oriented than his previous novels, reflecting a new sensibility and attention to events affecting African Americans and to how such events might be incorporated into a novelistic structure.

The three ethnic groups that feature most prominently in Schuyler's novellas are African Americans, Ethiopians and Italians. Harlem allowed the strange commingling of these three disparate communities, thanks to the presence of Ethiopian envoys during the war, who tried to drum up

sympathy for Ethiopia among African Americans, and the presence of Italian Americans who lived in Harlem. In "The Ethiopian Murder Mystery", the black policeman labels the Italians with the pejorative term "wops", liberally drawing on American national prejudices against this group: "You know how it is, you can never get anything out of them wops."⁷⁵ The "wops" always speak with an accent, both in this novella and in "Revolt in Ethiopia", to underscore their foreignness, their accented dialogue acting as an othering device within the text. As in McKay's novel *Amiable*, the text features extensive commentary on racial distinctions (the terms "high yellow", "brownskin", "dark black", etc., abound) and many descriptions of Harlem: the rooftops, the subway cars crossing the area, the various neighbourhoods, all places that not only made "Negro Metropolis" (to borrow McKay's expression for Harlem) come alive to *Courier* readers but also, in many cases, were instantly recognizable to them, if they lived in Harlem.

Schuyler's whodunit is well plotted, and at the end we discover that Ethiopian secret agents are the murderers of the Ethiopian prince Haile Destu and of several nefarious Italians roaming around New York. They have killed Haile Destu because he was about to betray them thanks to his love for a white woman. Moreover, the Ethiopian agents are carrying "the complete plans for setting up and using Professor Tankkard's death ray which will annihilate the Italians who have invaded our country. The most important part of these plans he turned over to Destu that night."⁷⁶ This novella, like the other one about Ethiopia, features a secret weapon against the Italians that promises to help the Ethiopians liberate their country. In both stories, it is the valiant help of the African American hero that enables their plans to succeed. The conclusion of the detective story in many ways defies the conventions of the genre, as it does not end with the capture and arrest of the culprits. Rod Bates, the journalist who has helped investigate the murder, asks the Ethiopian secret agents, as they depart, how they will get away with their acts, as murder is an extraditable crime in the US (they have been aided in their endeavours by a mysterious "Professor Tankkard" who appears at this moment in the narrative):

But Meester Bates, there is no record that we are HERE. We are secret agents. We come and go about the world without the ordinary formalities. We change our names as often as our shirts. We forge or steal passports as we need them. We are, Meester Bates, a law unto ourselves. Our only allegiance is to Ethiopia. Our only enduring enemy is stupidity. Well, make yourself comfortable. Goodbye, Professor Tankkard. It has been so good knowing you.

He opened the door, walked out and closed it behind him. In the outer office they heard him say, "Come Sadja, we mustn't miss our plane."⁷⁷

These are the last words of the novella. It ends by striking a technologically advanced note: Ethiopia appears here as a modern cosmopolitan nation, whose government agents are used to travelling by plane and outwitting Italian fascists as well as American policemen on their trail. Despite being a detective story, where normally the murderer is apprehended and caught (along the lines of a modern morality story), this time the schema of legality and culprits brought to justice is subverted. Striking out against the Ethiopian traitor Haile Destu and the Italians is an act of war, and so the implicitly nationalistic endorsement of the legal system is here superseded by the claims of Ethiopian nationalism. The novella ends with sympathy for the murderers, though this is not explicitly said. Both the policeman and the journalist investigating the murder are black, and very capable (they are indeed the protagonists of the novella). But the murderers are also black (albeit Ethiopian), and, this time, they "get away with it" instead of being handed over to the law through the cleverness of the detectives. This appears as a symbolic victory for Ethiopia—the narrative of the Ethiopian war thus gets retold.

Schuyler's second novella dedicated to Ethiopian themes, entitled "Revolt in Ethiopia: A Tale of Black Insurrection Against Italian Imperialism", was serialized in the *Courier* between July 1938 and January 1939. This story, unlike the previous one, is not set in Harlem, and much of the action takes place in Ethiopia itself. It features a young, recently wealthy African American, Dick Welland, whom we first encounter on a cruise ship in a "leisurely journey around the world". "Yes, he was one American Negro with money who did not intend to waste his time in prejudice-ridden America. Not a chance in the world" (125). Though he probably represented an aspirational character for the upwardly mobile black readers of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, his desire to travel recalls the more down-and-out characters of McKay's fiction, like the writer Ray in *Banjo* and Jake in *Home to Harlem*, which also feature black Americans leaving their country and touring the world. But Dick's plans for a world tour are derailed when he meets and falls in love with Princess Ettara, Haile Selassie's niece, on the cruise ship. Like Crissina van Dyke in "Ethiopian Murder Mystery", Ettara is fighting for Ethiopia's freedom and enlists his help against the dastardly machinations of Ras Resta Gusa, a traitor working for the Italians.⁷⁸ At first, Dick tries to seduce the beautiful Princess

Ettara, but she sternly rebuffs him, saying love cannot be permitted to interfere with her political work. This encounter with the Ethiopian princess triggers the politicization of Dick Welland, which begins with a transnational appeal to his race consciousness:

"I'd like to help you, but after all I'm just on a pleasure trip, and I've never been interested in politics."

"You don't wish to see Ethiopia free?" she challenged, her eyes flashing. "You do not wish to see the Italians beaten and driven out? You are unsympathetic with the aspirations of black men?" Her face was flushed with excitement. Her voice was cold and accusing. She half rose from her chair.

Now that she seemed definitively angered with him, he became alarmed and his first impulse was to mollify the beautiful creature.

"Of course I want to see all colored people free," he replied soothingly, "and I'd like nothing better than to see the Italians beaten and driven out of your country."

"Then why do you say you are not interested in politics? That is politics, and it is dangerous politics. I, a woman, am willing to risk my life. Why should you hesitate?"

"Now, Princess, don't get melodramatic. After all, this isn't my funeral. I didn't come on this trip to fight any wars, and I'm eager to live a lot longer and enjoy myself. Of course I'm sympathetic with the Ethiopians but frankly I can't see how they can win, so why waste time?"

"They can win" she almost hissed. "They've already penned the Italians in the cities and towns. In the countryside black men control. They can drive out the invaders if supplied with arms and ammunition."⁷⁹

The Princess appeals to his Americanness, by citing "that pioneering spirit that conquers, that spirit which has made our people in America the most progressive Negroes in the world" (135). In many of the debates around the African American relationships with Ethiopians, this idea that the former represented the most "advanced" national group among blacks, and hence were in a position to lead the opposition to Italy, circulated widely. Their positionality vis-à-vis Africa also helped to strengthen their racial consciousness and pride, as possible leaders of the black race worldwide.

Eventually, Dick is won over to the Ethiopian side, and proves himself to be a valiant and resourceful combatant and helper, hiring planes to fly himself, his servant and Ettara into Ethiopian territory. There is a subplot revolving around Dick's servant, Bill Sifton, who, unlike the other black characters, speaks in an accented African American idiolect, thus defining

him in class terms and implicitly consolidating the middle-class pretensions of the *Courier's* audience. As the narrator describes him, "Bill Sifton was one of those rare Negro servants who never forgets that he is an employee and did not presume upon his master's good nature" (126). In the early part of the novella, Bill is caught up in a steamy interracial romance with "Donia Gabrelli", a mysterious, exotic and high-class Italian girl from Naples, who speaks a thickly accented English and turns out to be a spy for the Italians. The narrator implies that their sexual attraction to each other stems from their respective racial difference. After tumultuous sex in the ship's cabin, Donia asks Bill if he would take her to America, whereupon he reflects: "Where wouldn't he take a gal like that. Then he thought of a whole lot of places where he wasn't allowed even to think of beauties like Donia, let alone going around with them. But there was no use discouraging her. He wanted to see her again" (138).

Bill is the trusty lower-class black character who saves the day because he manages to hide the treasure that will save Ethiopia inside a bar of laundry soap and brings it safely to Europe. Making a minor hero out of the black servant may have been a way for Schuyler to appeal to a wider black readership coming from different social classes, while steadfastly maintaining the hierarchies between them.

In Schuyler's story, Ethiopians are presented as a people who combine the most ancient civilization in the world with modern technology, such as Maxim silencers to kill their enemies, airplanes and short-wave radio. The figure of Lieutenant Julian, the black aviator who offered his services to Haile Selassie and flew numerous times in Ethiopia, and who also makes an appearance in McKay's *Amiable with Big Teeth*, was possibly the inspiration behind the prominence of the aviation motif in the story.

C.L.R. JAMES AND THE ETHIOPIAN WAR

C.L.R. James, in a 1974 essay, reconstructs a compelling picture of interwar black intellectuals in Britain as a group that crystallized its identity around the event of the Ethiopian war, mobilizing intensely around it: "We wanted to form a military organisation which would go to fight with the Abyssinians against the Italians. I think I can say here with confidence that it would have been comparatively easy to organise a detachment of blacks in Britain to go to Ethiopia."⁸⁰ In this essay, James also draws up a list of books that can be said to compose an interwar canon of black anti-colonial writing in English; notably, they all engage critically with major

Western political ideologies of the time, namely fascism, imperialism and communism, seeking to delineate a space for black intellectual autonomy and to carve out an area of ideological manoeuvre for black political subjects through synchronic and diachronic accounts of imperialism and black resistance. The texts James mentions are ones I discuss in this book, including James's *World Revolution 1917–1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (1937), *The Black Jacobins* (1938) and *A History of Pan-African Revolt* (1938); Padmore's *How Britain Rules Africa* (1936) and *Africa and World Peace* (1937); and Padmore and James's newsletter *International African Opinion*. To this canon we could add Padmore's 1931 tract *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers* and James's play about the Haitian revolution.

In 2005, Christian Høgsbjerg discovered James's play *Toussaint L'Ouverture: The Story of the Most Successful Slave Revolt in History*, which was first performed in 1936 in London and preceded the publication of his more acclaimed oeuvre *The Black Jacobins*. The well-known black actor and communist Paul Robeson starred as Toussaint L'Ouverture.⁸¹ Høgsbjerg contextualizes the play in terms of the Ethiopian war and James's ardent support of the Ethiopians against the Italians; it is worth remembering that 1935 was the year in which the IAFA was cofounded by James and Padmore (see above). James gave several impassioned speeches at the IAFA's public meetings, proclaiming to all who attended that "Ethiopia's cause is our cause and we will defend it by every means in our power."⁸² James imagined that the Ethiopians needed to defeat the Italians the way Toussaint L'Ouverture had defeated the Europeans, "through a ruthless guerrilla war". James publicly declared in August 1935 that the Ethiopians "should destroy their country rather than hand it over to the invader. Let them burn down Addis Ababa, let them poison their wells and water holes, let them destroy every blade of vegetation."⁸³ In a letter to the *New Leader*, James had also expressed his intention of travelling to Ethiopia to offer his military services to the country against the Italians. Høgsbjerg remarks that James's speeches in 1935, on the eve of the invasion, "also give a sense of how his desire to fight in Ethiopia reflected the way his study of the Haitian Revolution clearly fired his imagination about how the coming war against Italian imperialism might be won."⁸⁴

James's words, of course, recall those of the African Americans who desperately wanted to go fight for Ethiopia, poignantly recorded in the many letters sent to newspapers and magazines in the immediate aftermath of the invasion. It is striking that James should hit on the dramatic format

to publicize the story of Toussaint L'Ouverture, but the 1930s were an era in which black representation, both political and artistic, was at the centre of activist efforts: "James's play not only represented a much-needed antidote to such imperial propaganda, but also symbolized in an important sense the Ethiopian resistance to Mussolini."⁸⁵ Certain lines must have resonated deeply with the audience, as well as with the funders of the performance, the Stage Society. The structure of the play, with its charismatic black leader and the account of his successful slave revolution seen from the contrasting points of view of black and white characters, dramatizes the struggle to establish a truly black-centred interpretation of the importance and significance of Toussaint's war against the colonizers. *Toussaint* the play also sets, in some sense, a blueprint for the "anti-colonial narrative"—whether history, novel or film. Recalling David Scott's argument in *Conscripts of Modernity* about the need to rethink the form in which anti-colonial stories have been told (the need to turn away from the preferred mode of romance), it can be observed that tragedy is the preferred mode for James's anti-colonial tale.⁸⁶ Toussaint, in the end, despite being an enlightened and brilliant leader of an enslaved population and successfully leading them to freedom and independence, is vanquished by his excessive belief in the erstwhile colonizers, the French. They, on the other hand, betray him and imprison him. Dessalines, his second-in-command, who has never trusted them, carries on Toussaint's revolution on his own by relying entirely on the black population of Haiti. The theme of the play throughout is freedom and the difficulty of achieving this fully and authentically, even after emancipation. Such a theme would have resonated strongly with an audience in London attuned to the events happening in Ethiopia, especially given the impact the invasion had had on the British public, and their sympathy for the Ethiopians against the Italians.⁸⁷ When the French arrest Toussaint through treachery, he proclaims: "In destroying me you destroy only the trunk. But the tree of Negro liberty will flourish again, for its roots are many and deep."⁸⁸ The defeat of Ethiopia would not mean the defeat of the anti-colonial movement, or indeed of the Pan-African movement, but would act as a spur for consolidating black diasporic politics into a recognizable and widespread organization, with branches all over the colonized world.

Gillo Pontecorvo's 1969 film *Burn!*, starring Marlon Brando and the non-actor Evaristo Márquez, has uncannily echoes of *Toussaint* in its depiction of a slave uprising on a Caribbean island. The political reflection on what it takes to achieve true decolonization and the particular position of

slaves and colonized subjects in the world economy has clear links to Fanon's essays on neocolonialism in *The Wretched of the Earth* (especially, for example, "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness") and to the lengthy political debates on stage in *Toussaint*. Anti-colonial political theatre and film allow for the unfolding of a dramatic event, such as an anti-colonial revolution, while simultaneously highlighting the complexities of how slaves or the colonized arrive at political consciousness. But above all, it can be suggested that such representations function as *allegories* for the wider global struggles that are united in their transnational rejection of European imperialism. The message of *Burn!* shares something with James's *Toussaint*: the idea that freedom must be won and not handed over by the colonizer. When Dessalines begs Toussaint to forsake a French alliance and accept the offer from the British to become king of the island of San Domingue, he says to him: "If we had depended on education and religion we would never have got our freedom. Education and religion, but freedom first."⁸⁹ Toussaint still feels that "we need the French as much as they need us", but he is proven wrong.

In *Burn!*, the English *agent provocateur* William Walker (played by Marlon Brando, in a foreshadowing of his later role as the quintessential colonial agent Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now*) begs the leader of the slave revolt to accept freedom from hanging. But the leader refuses the offer because it would mean a false freedom. *Burn!* came out at the height of 1960s decolonization struggles, in the aftermath of Algeria and during the Vietnam war. The location—a Caribbean island colonized by the Portuguese—was less significant than the political debates about decolonization and freedom the film stages. Proof of this may be the fact that Pontecorvo had been forced to change the original setting of the film, namely a Spanish island, to one dominated by the Portuguese. This had to do with political factors relating to the ongoing colonial empire of Spain in the 1960s and to fears on the part of the funders that a controversial setting might prove detrimental to the film's success and sales.

A brief mention of James's *The History of Negro Revolt*, published in 1938, the same year as *The Black Jacobins*, but relatively forgotten compared to James's more famous text, is appropriate here in order to further tease out the complexities of the IASB's relationship to Marxism and its role in black liberation movements. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Ethiopian war marked a turning point in James's thinking about the relationship between communism and black political movements. As Kelley observes, "James had come to the conclusion that the European

working-class movement could not win without the African masses (nor the latter without the former), and that only the African masses—workers, peasants, perhaps some far-sighted intellectuals—fighting on their own terms would destroy imperialism.”⁹⁰ James’s short, eloquent book weaves together into a single narrative episodes of transnational black revolt that would otherwise be disconnected and lie ignored or unrecognized for their revolutionary potentiality, in white colonial historical records. He begins with the Haitian revolution then devotes chapters to slave rebellions in North America prior to the Civil War and to black participation in the Civil War itself as a way for American blacks to wage their struggle against slavery. He touches upon revolts in Africa, in both earlier centuries and the twentieth century, and also covers labor strikes and riots in the British Caribbean. Always mindful of racial hierarchies and internal racism at work within the wider black community, James trains his focus on the role of black masses in these revolts, examining the development of a revolutionary spirit among black slaves, and then the black industrial working class in the mines of South Africa and the ports of the Caribbean (to give two examples from the many James offers). He often comments on the extraordinary acts, the capacity for self-organization and the political initiatives that illiterate black and oppressed workers undertook to achieve liberation.

The book does not have pretensions to a strict ideological coherence but rather presents itself as a historical work that is hugely sympathetic to Marxism while subtly moving away from its doctrinal orthodoxy to include an examination of race sentiment in the history of black revolt. James even has kind words to say about Garvey, who was reviled by Padmore before the war and was generally considered a populist ideologue by most black intellectuals of James’s calibre: “One thing Garvey did do. He made the American Negro conscious of his African origin and created for the first time a feeling of international solidarity among Africans and people of African descent.”⁹¹ As Matthieu Renault remarks with regard to James’s attitude towards Eurocentrism, he grasped “both the autonomy and complementarity of socialist and Pan-African struggles”. In particular, Renault argues that James saw the Haitian revolution as a world-historical event that had universal significance for the updating of revolutionary struggle; in other words, James promoted a nonhierarchical model of revolution, in which black and white masses were equally equipped to lead.⁹²

This chapter has attempted to show that in the combined political and literary activity of Padmore, James, Schuyler and McKay, all of which

coalesces around the critical event of the Ethiopian war, anti-colonialism emerges as a practice of resistance that is translated into different idioms and genres of struggle and protest. Increasingly, the contradictions of Marxism and communism as a universal, one-size-fits-all ideology of liberation were beginning to be apparent to prominent black intellectuals, so much so that they would be the subject of McKay's last novel. In the next chapter we will examine the activity of the metropolitan anti-colonial intellectual Sylvia Pankhurst, who shared with these thinkers both a history of past militancy within the Communist Party and a growing detachment from its doctrines in light of the Italian invasion.

NOTES

1. See Robert A. Hill, "Introduction", George S. Schuyler, *Ethiopian Stories*, compiled and edited by Robert A. Hill (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994), 1.
2. Claude McKay, *Amiable with Big Teeth: A Recently Discovered Novel*, ed. Jean-Christophe Cloutier and Brent Hayes Edwards (New York: Penguin, 2017). Though the novel has been published with this title, I will continue to refer to it using McKay's original sub-title, *A Novel of the Love Affair between the Communists and the Poor Black Sheep of Harlem*.
3. George S. Schuyler, *Ethiopian Stories*, compiled and edited by Robert A. Hill (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994).
4. Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987 [1928]), 131.
5. *Home to Harlem*, 134.
6. *Home to Harlem*, 135. The imperialist aims of the European powers over Ethiopia were already evident in 1928, as is also proven by Grieco's report to the PCI, discussed in Chap. 1.
7. George S. Schuyler, "Revolt in Ethiopia: A Tale of Black Insurrection Against White Imperialism", in *Ethiopian Stories*, 182.
8. "Here are Attitudes of *Courier* Readers on the Ethiopian-Italian Crisis", March 9, 1935, *Pittsburgh Courier*, A2.
9. "Support Ethiopia, Our Fatherland, Reader Urges", *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 1, 1935, A2.
10. Robbie Shilliam, "Intervention and Colonial-Modernity: Decolonising the Italy/Ethiopia Conflict through Psalms 68:31", *Review of International Studies* 39:5 (December 2013), 1143 (1131–1147).
11. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined National Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

12. See David Forgacs, *Italy at the Margins: Social Exclusion and Nation Formation since 1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 109ff, for a discussion of the “whitening” of Italians around the time of the invasion.
13. Aldobrandino Mochi, qtd in David Forgacs, *Italy at the Margins*, 98.
14. Lombroso qtd in Forgacs, *Italy at the Margins*, 100.
15. Pollera qtd in Forgacs, *Italy at the Margins*, 102. Ethiopians used racial classification to distinguish between the ruling Amhara group (whose skin color they defined as red, *qey*) and the inhabitants of the Southern regions (who were considered *t’equr*, black), who were subordinated to them and who were often also enslaved populations (Forgacs, “The Blackening of East Africans in Italian Ethnographic Discourse, 1890–1940”, unpublished paper, 2016, 1).
16. See Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (London: Vintage, 2009), 440–441.
17. See Fabrizio De Donno, “‘La razza ario-mediterranea’: Ideas of Race and Citizenship in Colonial and Fascist Italy, 1885–1941”, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 8:3 (2006), 394–412.
18. Shilliam, “Intervention and Colonial-Modernity”, 1146.
19. Robert G. Weisbord, “Black America and the Italian-Ethiopian Crisis: An Episode in Pan-Negroism”, *The Historian* 34:2 (February 1, 1972), 232.
20. Hattie Edwards, “Your History”, *The Pittsburgh Courier* (February 2, 1935), 10.
21. Edwards, “Your History”, 10.
22. Abdul Joseph Mohamed, “Criticizes J.A. Rogers for Using word ‘Negro’”, *The Pittsburgh Courier* (June 15, 1935), B2.
23. Mohamed, B2.
24. Stephanie Newell, *The Power to Name: A History of Anonymity in Colonial West Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2013), 1–25.
25. Laura Brueck, in the context of Hindi Dalit literature in India, finds the notion of counterpublic useful in examining a field of circulation for a form of writing opposed to the codes and canons that exclude Dalits: “The Hindi Dalit literary counterpublic—defined previously as the combination of printed and circulated literary texts, literary and activist institutions, media outlets, writers, critics, and readers of Dalit literature, as well as the shared spaces of public performance in the form of literary conferences, readings, and organizational meetings—provides a shared space where in theory any Dalit has right of access and may freely express his or her commonalities and differences” (See Laura Brueck, *Writing Resistance: The Rhetorical Imagination of Hindi Dalit Literature*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, 31).

26. George S. Schuyler, "Views and Reviews", *The Pittsburgh Courier* (December 14, 1935), 10.
27. J.A. Rogers, "J.A. Rogers Tells Why We Should Help Ethiopia", *Pittsburgh Courier* (July 20, 1935), 4.
28. Scott argues that Rogers's effort to explain to African American audiences why Ethiopians rejected the term "Negro" was in part in order to address the growing disaffection for the Ethiopian cause, which was due to a sense that Ethiopians did not consider themselves black (*The Sons of Sheba's Race*, 198–207). It did not help that Marcus Garvey had bitterly attacked Haile Selassie in 1936 for failing to accept the aid and support of blacks around the world, and for effectively denying a shared racial identity with them. Garvey directly blamed the defeat of Ethiopia at the hands of the Italians on the exclusivist racial attitudes of Haile Selassie (Scott, *The Sons of Sheba's Race*, 205).
29. *Chicago Defender*, January 4, 1936.
30. Tasfaye Zaphiro, "Black Peoples Learn of True Racial Status: Ethiopian Tells Harlem Their Real Identity", *Chicago Defender* (January 4, 1936), 1.
31. Robert A. Hill, "Introduction", *Ethiopian Stories*, 14.
32. W.E.B Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art", *The Crisis* (October 1926), reprinted in *The Crisis Reader: Stories, Poetry and Essays from the NAACP's Crisis Magazine*, ed. Sondra Kathryn Wilson (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 323–325 (317–325).
33. "Here Are Attitudes of Courier Readers on the Italian-Ethiopian Crisis: Italy's Greed," *The Pittsburgh Courier* (March 9, 1935), A2.
34. Newell, *The Power to Name*, 5–7.
35. Jean-Christophe Cloutier, "*Amiable with Big Teeth*: The Case of Claude McKay's Last Novel", *Modernism/Modernity* 20: 3 (September 2013), 561.
36. *Amiable*, 197.
37. *Amiable*, 19.
38. *Amiable*, 216.
39. See Partito Comunista Italiano, Sezione di Mogadiscio, "Memoriale" all'Onorevole Commissione d'inchiesta per l'assegnazione fiduciaria dell'ex Colonia Fascista della Somalia", January 1948, "Fondo Mosca 312", Folder 275, Archives of the Italian Communist Party, Istituto Gramsci, Rome.
40. See Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*, 303–332. Hakim Adi, on the other hand, argues that the role of the Comintern regarding the black question has been fundamentally misunderstood, both by Padmore and by later commentators. In his book *Pan-Africanism and Communism* (which is clearly a deliberate rephrasing of Padmore's title), Adi states that the recent opening of the archives of the Comintern in Moscow has led to a

revising of the narrative that the Comintern failed to develop strong revolutionary movements in Africa or the US because of its dependence on the “vagaries of Soviet foreign policy” (Kanet qtd in Adi, xv). Adi states that the Comintern had taken up the “Negro Question” ever since its inception under Lenin in 1919. Adi argues that, unlike Garvey’s UNIA or Du Bois’s Pan-African Association, the Comintern had actually developed a detailed programme of action in the colonies: “From Lenin’s time, the Negro Question for the Comintern was related to the struggles of people throughout Africa, the Caribbean and elsewhere to end colonialism and to establish the right of all nations to self-determination” (Adi, xix).

41. *Amiable*, 163.
42. *Amiable*, 165 (emphasis added).
43. McKay, *Banjo: A Story without a Plot* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2008 [1929]), 47.
44. McKay, “Soviet Russia and the Negro” (published in the December 1923 and January 1924 issues of *The Crisis*), reprinted in *The Crisis Reader: Stories, Poetry, and Essays from the Stories, Poetry and Essays from the NAACP’s Crisis Magazine*, ed. Sondra Kathryn Wilson (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 276–287.
45. McKay, “Soviet Russia and the Negro”, 281.
46. McKay, “Soviet Russia and the Negro”, 282.
47. McKay, “Socialism and the Negro”, *Workers’ Dreadnought* (January 31, 1920), 2.
48. Cloutier, “*Amiable with Big Teeth*: The Case of Claude McKay’s Last Novel”, 564.
49. McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, ed. and with an introduction by Gene Andrew Jarrett (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 62.
50. The unsigned article denounced the stabbing of black men on the part of whites, “an attack springing from a particularly sordid cause”, namely that prostitutes were going with black rather than white clients since the former could pay them, whilst white discharged soldiers could not. The author asked: “We submit a few questions to those who have been negro-hunting:- Do you think the British should rule the world or do you want to live on peaceable terms with all peoples? Do you wish to exclude all blacks from England? If so, do you not think that blacks might justly ask that the British should at the same time keep out of black peoples’ countries?” The article ended with the following question: “Do you not think you would be better employed in getting conditions made right for yourself and your fellow workers than in stabbing a blackman, who would probably prefer to bring a black wife over with him if he could afford to do so; and would probably have stayed in Africa if the capitalists had left him and his country alone?” “Stabbing Negroes in the Dock Area”, *Workers’ Dreadnought* (Saturday June 7, 1919), 1354.

51. McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, 63–64.
52. Wayne F. Cooper, *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 117.
53. Cloutier, “*Amiable with Big Teeth*”, 561.
54. McKay, *Amiable with Big Teeth*, 28.
55. As we shall see in Chap. 5, the Ethiopian conflict was the subject of fictional treatment especially in terms of its press coverage, which was unprecedented for an event of its kind, making it one of the biggest media events of twentieth-century history, barring the two World Wars. Contemporary commentators noted that the number of war correspondents and journalists who were trying to get into Ethiopia to report on the conflict was astounding. Evelyn Waugh’s 1938 novel *Scoop* is partly based on his own experience as a war correspondent in Ethiopia and is a satirical take on the fierce competition for the latest scoop about the war that could satisfy the avid curiosity of Western audiences.
56. *Amiable*, 27.
57. *Amiable*, 13.
58. Hill, “Introduction”, George S. Schuyler, *Ethiopian Stories*, 32.
59. *Amiable*, 9.
60. *Amiable*, 10.
61. *Amiable*, 9.
62. *Amiable*, 9.
63. *Amiable with Big Teeth*, 8.
64. The meeting described in the novel where speakers addressed an audience of thousands in support of Ethiopia in the Abyssinian Baptist Church appears to have been based on a real event of this kind, which featured Huggins as one the six speakers: “On the evening of March 7, 1935, the Provisional Committee for the Defense of Ethiopia (PCDE) held its first public meeting at Harlem’s Abyssinian Baptist Church. This organization was a ‘united front’ of Garveyites, communists, journalists, streetcorner orators, liberal Black organizations, socialists, clergymen and Africana scholars who were seeking to mobilize community outrage into a disciplined force to support Ethiopia and challenge American neutrality to the Italo-Ethiopian war. Huggins was one of six speakers that thrilled a crowd of approximately 3000 who filled Harlem’s largest Black church in spite of foul and inclement weather.”
 Ralph L. Crowder, “Willis Nathaniel Huggins (1886–1941): historian, activist, and community mentor.” *The Free Library*. 1 July 2006. Retrieved 19 January 2017 <[https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Willis Nathaniel Huggins \(1886–1941\): historian, activist, and...-a0148463511](https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Willis+Nathaniel+Huggins+(1886-1941):+historian,+activist,+and...-a0148463511)>.
65. Jean-Christophe Cloutier and Brent Edwards, who have edited the recently published version of *Amiable with Big Teeth*, state in their introduction to

- the novel that, in addition to Huggins, Koazhy may have also been based on “another black bibliophile and independent historian”, Charles C. Seifert, for whom McKay had worked as a research assistant (see Cloutier and Edwards, “Introduction”, *Amiable*, xxii).
66. *Amiable*, 19.
 67. Padmore, *Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*, 125–126.
 68. *Amiable*, 20.
 69. In *Home to Harlem*, prior to Ray’s informative lesson regarding Haiti and Ethiopia, Jake “as an American Negro looked askew at foreign niggers. Africa was jungle, and Africans bush niggers, cannibals. And West Indians were monkey-chasers” (134).
 70. Hill, “Introduction”, 1.
 71. See Robert A. Hill, “Introduction” to *Ethiopian Stories*, p. 3.
 72. Hill, “Introduction”, *Ethiopian Stories*, 6.
 73. Hill, “Introduction”, 38.
 74. Du Bois, “Criteria of Negro Art”, 324. Such a strongly worded position, published in 1926, differed markedly from Du Bois’s earlier essay published in the *Crisis*, where he was more critical of African Americans who “insist that our Art and Propaganda be one”. See Du Bois, “Negro Art”, *The Crisis* 128 (June 1921), 55 (55–56).
 75. George S. Schuyler, “The Ethiopian Murder Mystery”, in *Ethiopian Stories* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994), 93.
 76. Schuyler, “The Ethiopian Murder Mystery”, *Ethiopian Stories*, 121.
 77. Schuyler, “The Ethiopian Murder Mystery”, 122.
 78. He was very likely based on the real-life traitor Haile Selassie Gugsu, who had married one of the Emperor’s daughters and met secretly with Italian officials before the invasion, promising to secure certain areas of Ethiopia for their side (see Angelo Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa orientale. La conquista dell’impero*, vol. II, 236).
 79. “Revolt in Ethiopia”, *Ethiopian Stories*, 135.
 80. CLR James, “Black Intellectuals in Britain”, *Colour, Culture, and Consciousness: Immigrant Intellectuals in Britain*, ed. Bhikhu Parekh (London: Allen and Unwin, 1974), 158 (154–163).
 81. For one of the first critical readings the play, see Fionnghuala Sweeney, “The Haitian Play: CLR James’s *Toussaint Louverture*”, *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 14:1&2 (2011), 143–163.
 82. Quoted in Høgsbjerg, “Introduction”, *Toussaint*, p. 23. This speech by James was reported in the *Nottingham Evening Post* on August 26, 1935.
 83. Quoted in Høgsbjerg, “Introduction”, p. 23.
 84. Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 97.
 85. Høgsbjerg, “Introduction”, p. 26.

86. David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 7–8. “They have tended to be narratives of overcoming, often narratives of vindication; they have tended to enact a distinctive rhythm and pacing, a distinctive direction, and to tell stories of salvation and redemption” (7–8).
87. See Daniel Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War: 1935–1936* (London: Temple Smith, 1975).
88. James, *Toussaint*, 122. Act II, Scene 3.
89. James, *Toussaint*, 95. Act II, scene 1.
90. Kelley, “Introduction”, James, *A History of Pan-African Revolt*, 14.
91. CLR James, *A History of Pan-African Revolt*, with an introduction by Robin D.G. Kelley (1938; repr. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 94.
92. Matthieu Renault, “Decolonizing Revolution with C.L.R. James Or, What Is to Be Done with Eurocentrism?”, *Radical Philosophy: A Philosophical Journal of the Independent Left* (199), September/October 2016, 5.

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A Partisan Press: Sylvia Pankhurst, British Anti-colonialism and the Crisis of Empire

This chapter examines the complex panorama of responses to the Ethiopian war in Britain and among the wider network of anti-colonial activists operating both within the metropole and in the colonies. It focuses specifically on the role of the press in shaping public interpretations of the war and in eliciting feelings of both sympathy and empathy for Ethiopians among British metropolitan audiences. By considering in detail the “print activism” around the war, in particular the writing of two prominent British journalists and anti-colonial campaigners, Sylvia Pankhurst and George Lowther Steer—a comparative analysis that has not been conducted before—we can gain a better understanding of the popular reception of colonialism in interwar Europe.¹

I am interested in the ways in which British reactions were specifically shaped by the characteristics of *fascist* colonialism, and how groups and constituencies with differing ideological and political agendas easily identified fascism and colonialism as linked ideological processes. One of my arguments is that the Ethiopian war allowed strategic alliances to emerge between anti-fascists and anti-colonialists, who otherwise may not have seen their struggles as commensurate, precisely because the modes of conducting and justifying this war explicitly linked together Mussolini’s fascist ideology with imperialism. It also made some radical observers go so far as to say that imperialist powers such as Britain and France were merely *quantitatively* different from Germany and Italy, and that fighting fascism

was merely a more extreme version of fighting imperialism and capitalism. In this profoundly internationalist era, Ethiopia as an imagined homeland for the black diaspora also became a “victim” country of fascism. In the thinking of anti-fascists, any country that became a victim of fascism deserved transnational and international sympathies. Many anti-fascist activists in the 1930s supported Republican Spain and Ethiopia against the fascist threat, and a number of them went on to join the Republican forces during the Spanish Civil War. In Chap. 2, we saw how Ilio Barontini and his comrades had been sent by the PCI to provide support and help to the Ethiopian guerrilla fighters against the Italians. These examples of anti-fascist transnational resistance prefigure the partisan fighters of the Second World War, who would engage in combat against Nazi Germany and fascist Italy.

My narrative of British anti-imperialist thought between the two wars develops the trope of the partisan, linking it to the activity of the precursors mentioned above but adapting it to the political writing of British anti-colonialists. The term “partisan”, as I use it here, retains a strong connection to resistance fighting, but it also describes journalism that sought to shape European public opinion towards an anti-fascist position by denouncing the atrocities of Italian imperialism in Ethiopia. The partisan is defined in Carl Schmitt’s political theory as the “irregular combatant” who presents himself or herself as the polar opposite of the enlisted soldier. To be a partisan, according to Schmitt, is “precisely to avoid carrying weapons openly, the partisan being the one who fights from ambushes, who wears the enemy uniform and whatever insignia serves his turn, as well as civilian clothing, as decoys”.² As a conservative thinker and jurist, Schmitt is at times deeply suspicious of the partisan, whom he sees as an emblematic figure of twentieth-century conflicts, especially in relationship to civil war and colonial war.³ Schmitt constantly highlights the difficulty in assigning a precise juridical status to the partisan, because it blurs the distinctions between friend and enemy as they are categorized in ordinary warfare between nation-states.

My use of the term *partisan* here departs from Schmitt’s because I assign positive values to camouflage and irregularity, suggesting that they represent the characteristics of a transnational resistance in the interwar period, a form of internal dissidence that found expression in anti-colonial solidarity and active collaboration with oppressed nationalities such as Ethiopia. As embodied in the historical figures of Sylvia Pankhurst and George Lowther Steer, and invested with profoundly symbolic connota-

tions in the context of the encroaching fascisms and imperialisms in the interwar period, the idea of the partisan, and of partisanship, can help to make sense of the motivations behind the widespread support in Britain for the Ethiopian cause. It also prefigures later mobilizations in favour of Republican Spain against Francoist fascism and resistance struggles against Italian fascism during the Second World War, though obviously during these conflicts partisanship, unlike the work of Steer and Pankhurst, took on different characteristics, most notably that of active combat. If, as we have seen in the previous two chapters, the mobilization of black diasporic movements and peoples in favour of beleaguered Ethiopia necessitated exhaustive explanation and discussion with relation to black internationalism, then an understanding of motivations seems all the more necessary for white British political activists and “ordinary” citizens of one of the major Empires on earth, who expressed widespread condemnation of the Italian aggression and sided, often quite viscerally, with the Ethiopians. As Leela Gandhi outlines in her study of “minor narratives of cross-cultural collaboration between oppressors and oppressed [...] the time is ripe to refuse the ambivalent mantle of citizenship in order to foment a new politics of anti-imperialism, closely attentive to forms of transnational or affiliative solidarity between diffuse groups and individuals.”⁴ An examination of the transnational networks between metropolitan and colonized anti-imperialists can serve to break down the imperial binarism of colonial versus colonized sensibilities/subjectivities that has structured much of the scholarship in postcolonial studies.

Support for Ethiopia was not limited to intellectuals and political activists in Britain. A pamphlet published in June 1936 by the League of Nations Union (a month after Mussolini declared that Ethiopia had been “conquered” by Italy) collected a large number of readers’ letters to the *Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* and other major British newspapers denouncing the Italian act of aggression and asking for sanctions to be imposed on the part of the League of Nations against Italy. Most of the letters criticized Britain’s lack of support for the sanctions and urged the British government to do the right thing by Ethiopia. Arnold Toynbee, noted historian of the rise and fall of civilizations and adviser to the British Foreign Office, began his letter to the *Times* with the question: “Which would we rather be? The Abyssinians or our European selves?”⁵ This question opens up the possibility for a range of reflections on what it might mean for the British to experience feelings of empathy towards and solidarity with Ethiopians at a time when British colonial rule was sustained

by a bedrock of shared racialized assumptions about the implicit superiority of Western civilization over many African and Asian peoples.

Partisanship as I use it here is a concept that is not founded on a “physical” or, as Schmitt calls it, “tellurian” territorial idea of nationhood but rather on the utopian ideal of a non-fascist and non-imperialist society. Such an ideal animated the political work of the anti-colonial activist Sylvia Pankhurst and, in different ways, that of the journalist George Steer. I am interested in tracing the forms of empathy and connection such writers constructed with Ethiopians, rejecting “the idiom of their own colonizing culture” and testing their own capacity for “self-othering”.⁶ This is not to say that their writing does not display their racial prejudices or Orientalist views of Ethiopian culture and politics; but they did attempt to forge cross-cultural solidarities, for example, by travelling to Ethiopia, reporting extensively on the conflict, denouncing the brutality of Italian fascist aggression in the press, questioning their own identity as “colonizers” and using their writing to represent the feelings of their Ethiopian friends while under Italian attack, in order to evoke emotional identification in the reader. On a broader level, the British public’s strong support for the Ethiopian side of the conflict did not appear contradictory, despite the fact that the members of this public were subjects of a vast empire. On the contrary, readers’ letters to newspapers link their outrage on behalf of Ethiopia to a sense of patriotic shame for Britain’s failure to protect it: “One feels ashamed to belong to a civilized nation which allows an innocent victim to be savagely attacked by a ruthless aggressor.” “I am ashamed of my country for standing by and letting this devilry continue.”⁷ The outpouring of sympathy among *Times* readers in particular may have also been due to the attentive reporting of an outstanding journalist, George Lowther Steer, whom we shall meet later on.

At the same time, however, the responses to the war in Britain were varied and diverse, and cannot be limited to a pro-Ethiopian stance. There were those who quite explicitly sympathized with Mussolini and fascist Italy (Evelyn Waugh, Muriel Currey, Bernard Shaw), those who were pro-Ethiopia (Pankhurst, Steer and the influential Abyssinia Association) and the general population, which was largely sympathetic to Ethiopia (as Daniel Waley has demonstrated through an analysis of the responses to the 1935 Peace Ballot).

Mussolini’s invasion, it seemed, fired the indignation of anti-fascists, anti-racists and anti-colonialists alike. Already on the eve of the Second World War, the profound ideological connections between fascism and colonialism were beginning to become apparent, and alliances between

anti-colonialists and anti-fascists were beginning to be forged. However, it is also important to emphasize that positions on race and “civilization” were by no means homogeneous among these groups, and black activists such as Padmore often accused the European left of outright racism and betrayal of the Ethiopian cause.

One important connection we can make, however, between European anti-fascist groups and black Pan-Africanists, is that transnational resistance could be seen not only as shared solidarity among colonized or oppressed peoples but also as a will on the part of anti-colonial activists to redefine the nation from within, an anti-fascist Italy and an anti-imperial Britain, as we have seen with Steer. One example among the many stands out in terms of this transnational and transpolitical alliance between anti-fascists and anti-colonialists: African Americans who went to fight in Spain in support of the Republican cause, having previously wanted to go to Ethiopia to fight in favour of Haile Selassie and his people. But they saw the two conflicts as commensurate, and, in the words of one African American fighting in Spain, “This ain’t Ethiopia, but it’ll do.”⁸

My particular focus here is on the activists who developed distinctive anti-colonial methods of struggle through their strategic use of the press and their position as political journalists. The Ethiopian war was primarily fought on two fronts: the Ethiopian front, of course, and the European “front”, where it became a war about representation, a war for competing versions of the conflict through print, and one which sought to influence international arbitration of the dispute on the part of the League of Nations. In many cases, it was the liberal empires (Britain and France) that reported favourably for the Ethiopian side in order to counteract the fascist propaganda from the Italian Ministry of Popular Culture that sought to influence European public opinion against Ethiopians. The “print war” over the actual war stages the wider significance of Italy’s aggression as a fascist act; Europeans were very afraid of the threat Mussolini posed to international security, a possible precursor to total war.

This chapter also examines the ways in which, in connection to the war, Europe and its “civilizing mission” were being argued over and discussed by both anti-colonial and anti-fascist political activists in Britain and elsewhere in the interwar period. In particular, the debates that arose around Mussolini’s war of aggression against Ethiopia in 1935 provoked profound reactions among intellectuals and activists in terms of Italy’s “right to conquest” vis-à-vis that of other European colonial powers, such as Britain and France. The internationalism prevailing in the 1930s was instrumental in making this war into a “critical event”, a term borrowed

from François Furet, an event that, as discussed in Chap. 2, instituted new modes of political action and prompted a critical reorientation towards hegemonic discourses and ideologies.⁹ The “critical event” of the Ethiopian war questioned and destabilized a belief in empire and the meaning of civilization.

Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia, and later the Spanish Civil War, contributed to a deepening sense of crisis around the very concept of European civilization, which was put into question by a profound shift in attitudes towards empire and imperialism in the 1920s and 1930s, and which would culminate with world war.¹⁰ This was linked, arguably, to a growing sense that if European civilization, with all its high promises, had led to fascism in Spain and Italy, then perhaps it was nearing its terminal end point. This battle over the meaning of civilization was primarily mediated through the press, which assumed an increasingly partisan role in these tense years before the Second World War.

Imperialism, in other words, was beginning to seem like a form of barbarism (a notion that became more generally widespread in the 1930s than in earlier periods). The historian Richard Overy links the idea of “civilization” in Britain in the 1930s with “the prejudices and expectations of the educated classes [...] intimately bound up with the conception of empire as it had evolved during the course of the nineteenth century”.¹¹ Overy connects a “crisis of race” with the perceived “crisis of civilization”.¹² He contrasts two views of imperialism in relationship to current notions of civilization in the interwar period. Firstly, the view of Lord Cromer was that the motive power uniting both ancient and modern imperialists was “to be found in the spread of ‘progress and civilization’, whose benefits, he thought, were enjoyed rather than practiced by the fortunate peoples of the Empire”.¹³

Secondly, against this prevailing view of the British empire as a civilizing force, Leonard Woolf, in his book *Imperialism and Civilization* (1928), argued that European expansion overseas “was a belligerent, crusading, conquering, exploiting, proselytizing civilization [...] Imperialism hitherto, by imposing it on subject peoples at the point of a gun [...] has heavily overweighted the blessings with a load of war, barbarities, cruelties, tyrannies and exploitations.”¹⁴ The discourse around European and specifically *Italian* civilization in the 1930s was integrally connected to the crisis of empire during this period, then, and to the fact that major decolonization movements were gaining prominence in India, West Africa and North Africa, as well as in the metropole itself.

Part of the reason why the invasion of Ethiopia attracted so much attention was that the country was a member of the League of Nations and the only sovereign state in Africa, i.e., not under colonial rule. Hence, it had the status of a “modern”, or at least modernizing, nation, and its emperor Haile Selassie actively promoted an image of his own country as modernizing, industrializing, trying to shed the yoke of feudalism by introducing reforms in social, political and agricultural fields.

On the other hand, fascist Italy saw colonialism and colonization as part of what could help to define *it* as a modern civilization. Mussolini’s aim was to demonstrate to other European powers that not only was Italy an international player in world politics but that Northern Europeans needed to rethink their stereotypes about Italians. It fed into discourses about new myths of the nation, which amounted to an assertion of Italy as modern, strong, warlike, new and civilized, with a deliberate emphasis on racial theories to support this ideology.¹⁵ So there were two sides to the debate around civilization and colonialism. On the one hand, for Italian fascists, it was important to see themselves as *civilizers*. This characterization fed into a more properly “European” idea of Italy as opposed to its being seen as a poor nation whose citizens were forced to emigrate to richer countries in search of a better life. On the other hand, however, there was a persistent doubt as to whether fascism was civilized, and whether, in fact, fascism signified a crisis in the idea of European civilization. Also, slowly the idea of a war on fascism in order to *save* civilization began to take shape, especially in the aftermath of the Ethiopian war and the Spanish Civil War.¹⁶ Such ideas could rapidly influence the public sphere thanks to print and other forms of modern media. Indeed, Overy argues that the increase in mass communication in the 1930s meant that the concerns of politicians, intellectuals and scientists could easily become common property: “The development of a special language for communicating these concerns [...] in the repetition of terms such as ‘decay’, ‘menace’, ‘disease’, ‘barbarism’—invaded the frontier between public and private and became embedded in a common, if temporary, culture.”¹⁷

A PARTISAN PRESS: BRITISH REPORTING OF THE ETHIOPIAN WAR

As we have already seen in Chap. 2, becoming a colonial power was an aspiration that marked even the early years of Italian unification (which took place in 1861) and was accompanied by a sense that, if Italy was to

be perceived as a “Great Power”, along the lines of Britain and France, then it needed to have colonies.¹⁸ It was a marker of international prestige and contributed to Italy’s self-identity as a nation. As Mia Fuller observes:

The overall project of national self-construction in the colonial context was conditioned by Italian perceptions that the Italian nation-state, and its standing among European peers, was weak. For Italy, perhaps even more than for other modern European colonial powers, the colonial project was integral to the struggle for greater modernity and state legitimacy.¹⁹

This position was reflected in the attitude of British Italophiles and British fascists towards Italy, who saw it as a “new” civilization and emerging nation in contrast with the supposed decline and fall of Britain.²⁰ This perception was partly linked to the fact that Italy *was* a relatively new nation in the wider context of European state formations. The proliferation of Modernist architecture in the colonial capital of Asmara, Eritrea, in the 1920s and 1930s revealed the extent to which Italians projected their fantasy of a new civilization and a potent, dynamic idea of nationhood onto the colony.²¹

So, as Evelyn Waugh remarked in 1936 about Italian colonial aspirations in the Horn of Africa, “the Italians were waiting to demonstrate their new virility.”²² In the many accounts of the war among British writers and journalists, there was a distinct sense that Italy was finally a military and political force to be reckoned with—its standing as a “modern” nation was intimately bound up with its capability in conquering, and then administering, colonial possessions. Two writers stand out for their admiration of the Italian colonial enterprise. The first is Muriel Currey, a travel writer with great sympathy for Mussolini and the author of a book entitled *A Woman at the Abyssinian War* (1936); and Waugh, whose experience as a war correspondent for the *Daily Mail* in Ethiopia led to a nonfiction book called *Waugh in Abyssinia* (1936) and to one of his most acclaimed comic novels, *Scoop: A Novel About Journalists* (1938). *Scoop* is set in the fictional land of Ishmaelia, loosely but unmistakably based on wartime Ethiopia, and features the misadventures of a reluctant, clueless British war correspondent adrift in a confusing African country beset by civil war and bristling with rival Western journalists.

In her 1936 travel book about Ethiopia, Currey mentions that the Italians felt they had done away with slavery that had existed under the Negus (a claim that was untrue) and that they had managed to make the

natives more “advanced”.²³ Throughout the book, Currey constantly emphasizes (or implicitly reveals) her belief in the “civilization” and the modernity of the Italians, who will bring progress and humanity to the backward Ethiopians. As Claudia Baldoli notes, “Currey did occasionally mention that this ‘wonderful colonisation’ also involved a war”, but generally Currey’s attitude towards Italians was that they were invariably efficient, cheerful colonizers and excellent, able soldiers, thus wholeheartedly buying into the myth of the “*Italiani brava gente*” already discussed in Chap. 2.²⁴

Both Currey and Waugh present admiring and wonderstruck accounts of the Italian colonizing mission, and both exhibit a particular obsession with road-building, an activity that was heavily emphasized in Italian fascist propaganda around the war. “I wonder if the soldiers of the Roman Empire were as proud of the roads they made as the men of the Army of East Africa?” remarks Currey.²⁵ Waugh’s book on Ethiopia ends on a bizarrely messianic, religious note, which contains strong overtones of adoration for the Catholic civilization that Italy promises to bring to the country it has invaded (we should not forget, of course, that part of Waugh’s admiration for Italy stemmed from his own Catholicism):

And from Dessye new roads will be radiating to all points of the compass, and along the roads will pass the eagles of ancient Rome, as they came to our savage ancestors in France and Britain and Germany, bringing some rubbish and some mischief [...] but above and beyond and entirely predominating, the inestimable gifts of fine workmanship and clear judgement— the two determining qualities of the human spirit, by which alone, under God, man grows and flourishes.²⁶

Waugh had been to Ethiopia before, in 1930, to cover Haile Selassie’s coronation. He had written two books about his experience in Africa, *Remote People* (1931), a travel book about Ethiopia and British Africa, and *Black Mischief* (1932), a novel. When the Ethiopian war occurred, he was very keen to obtain a position as a war correspondent: “As a popular novelist with Abyssinian experience, Waugh hoped for a correspondentship, and with it the chance of writing a really ‘big’ book about the conflict.”²⁷ The Italo-Ethiopian war ranked among the top-ten leading news stories of 1935, according to the British publication *World’s Press News*.²⁸ No wonder Waugh was anxious to cover it. But he was far from being the only ambitious writer to wish to do so.

The coverage of the Ethiopian war by British journalists can be read as an example of *partigianeria*, an Italian word I use here in the sense of expressing partisanship through a form of writing that perforce departed from conventional journalistic standards of “impartial” or “neutral” reporting. These were, after all, the years of “Authors Take Sides On the Spanish War”, a questionnaire compiled by Nancy Cunard in 1937, which asked a number of famous writers to state whether they sympathized with the Republicans or the Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War.²⁹ In what follows, I compare two books about the war, both published in 1936, *Waugh in Abyssinia* and the journalist George Lowther Steer’s extraordinary account of the war, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, in order to examine closely the features of a “resistance aesthetic” in the latter text. That Steer and Waugh took polar opposite approaches to the Ethiopian question and its supposed civilization or barbarism highlights the avowedly partisan nature of their writings. *Partigianeria*, the taking of sides, can have very negative connotations in Italian precisely because of its supposed lack of balance and neutrality; it finds analogies with the Amharic word *shifta*, which can mean “bandit”, “rebel” and “guerrilla fighter” at the same time, and *shiftanet*, which can alternatively mean both “banditry” and “guerrilla war”, a word that circulated extensively in Ethiopia during the war. Like the word *partisan*, both *shifta* and *shiftanet* are ambiguous terms, at the borderline between legality, illegality and resistance. And yet, it was the illegal nature of Mussolini’s invasion that was central to most debates around the Ethiopian war. Steer’s outstanding and empathetic portrayal of the war, as it was suffered and fought by Ethiopians, focuses attention on the ways in which the emperor and his army chose to fight a conflict against an overpoweringly superior force in terms of technology, men and matériel. Steer, who was from South Africa, covered the war as the correspondent for the *Times*, and his clear taking of sides with the Ethiopians found immediate resonance with the British public, versus the pro-Italian reporting of Waugh. Donat Gallagher remarks that it is precisely because of Waugh’s stance on the invasion that *Waugh in Abyssinia* was a failure, and he failed to secure a book deal for it in the US, having gained a reputation for unintelligent prejudice against Ethiopians.³⁰

It is important to place Steer’s book on Ethiopia in context. He completed it while reporting for the *Times* in Nationalist Spain (the Introduction is dated “Burgos, 1936”). Steer’s *Times* article on the bombing of Guernica by German airplanes (he was the first to break the story of Nazi involvement in the Spanish Civil War) caused a global outcry and inspired Picasso

to paint one of his most famous works of art, *Guernica*.³¹ Steer prefaces *Caesar in Abyssinia* by stating that the use of poison gas by the Italians demoralized Ethiopians and caused the breakdown of their society. He thus rejects suggestions that the sack of Addis Ababa after the Italian conquest was due to Ethiopians' "barbaric" nature:

Precisely the same thing will happen in the capital of any European state that is defeated. War against the civilian population breaks it up into its warring parts. It seems to me important that our leaders should understand this. Ethiopia is nearer to Europe than they think.³²

Steer refers here to attacks against the civilian population by the pro-Franco Nationalist faction of Spain. Civil war and colonial war are aligned; the relations of metropolitan centre and colonial periphery are also rejigged, so that Ethiopia doesn't appear as such a "distant" war after all. In speaking of the people killed in the sack of Addis, Steer argues that "of the many that I saw dead or dying, there is not one of them whose blood does not lie on the head of Mussolini. He is the deliberate murderer of all of them."³³

Steer's book is structured around a few clear and recurring points of interpretation that sought to refute pro-Italian positions. Firstly, the Italians won the war because they had a much bigger army and they had modern weapons, including an air force already tried and tested in the First World War, and, before that, during Italy's 1911 invasion of Libya.³⁴ Secondly, the war was illegal, as it defied the rules governing the Covenant of the League of Nations. Thirdly, much like that of his contemporaries McKay and Padmore, Steer's writing conveys the sense of betrayal provoked by the League of Nations among Ethiopians. Haile Selassie, recalls Steer, never thought he would win against the Italians, given the inferiority of his military power, "as war goes to the machine", but had trusted in the League to intervene in support of his country.³⁵ Fourthly, Steer is at pains to present Ethiopians as modernizing, not barbaric, and as a unique people who stood out from other African societies. Steer is generally scathing of Italian protestations about their right to a "place in the sun", and indeed the very title of his text parodies fascist imperial discourse that drew on Roman antecedents to bolster Italy's self-image as a colonizing power. He defines Italy's colonial policy as "expansion into waste places in order to satisfy the elementary needs of the Italian people. Recasting Tacitus, the new Caesar made a few more deserts and called them an Empire."³⁶

Civilization and barbarism, as in many texts about the Ethiopian war, appear as an eternally warring duo, which Steer deploys to ironic effect: "To suggest that Italy was preparing an act of aggression was incorrect; she was preparing an act of civilization, to improve Ethiopian manners."³⁷ Steer was not devoid of racist or patronizing attitudes towards Ethiopia, defining it as a "country which for centuries has lived quite statically and contentedly on the border-line between savagery and civilization".³⁸ But he also presents it as the most advanced country in Africa, its people alone among sub-Saharan populations in possessing a written language, Amharic. The book is structured partly around his personal experience as a journalist covering the war and partly as a travel account of Ethiopia. He spent many months in Addis Ababa, becoming close to the emperor and his American adviser, Everett Colson, and then travelled to the Muslim city of Harrar, to Jijiga and to the Ogaden region with the emperor's army. His book displays an insider's knowledge of Ethiopia's military resources, often commenting on the undoubted bravery of the troops who were, however, ultimately defeated by modes of combat that were previously unknown to them and therefore terrifying, such as aerial bombing and the use of yperite (mustard gas). Against Italian fascist propaganda celebrating the military exploits of Marshal Badoglio and General Graziani, Steer remembers the unsung Gerazmatch Afewerk, Director of the region of Jijiga and the Ogaden, an outstanding commander, described in terms of his intellectual and cultural hybridity:

He liked cleanliness, order, technical ability, in addition to the normal African taste for book learning. But he wanted his country to fend for itself, and was ready to resist any foreign intrusion, whether the method were peace or war. Other Ethiopians who resisted European influences did so on the basis of conservatism. They wished to preserve ancestral usages. To Afewerk these meant little: the Western accretions upon him were not superficial. A black man, he knew the value of thinking for himself outside the customary circle of the Ethiopian mind. The Italians he knew wanted to rob him of his country and basically, he felt, all these Europeans with their common tradition whatever their collective promises, would stick together. He felt sure that no European nation would take Ethiopia's side if Italy attacked her. Ethiopia was too remote for pledges to her to have any value. In all his dealings with Europeans he saw their clannishness sticking out a yard. He detested them all.³⁹

Steer presents Afewerk to us as an example of Ethiopian modernity that eschews both cultural traditionalism and European civilization. Haile Selassie's internationalist way of handling the dispute with Italy through an appeal to a supranational body had failed because of fascism's disregard of international law. The emperor's "modernity", modelled more closely on European notions, appears here more naïve and less autonomous than Afewerk's. Steer's obituary of Afewerk in the book is exceptionally moving, again deploying irony to condemn the racist neglect of the death of "just another African":

Afewerk is forgotten as Ethiopia is forgotten. The great soldiers before whom Europe bows are those who have hundreds of aeroplanes, oil, petrol, artillery heavy and light, thousands of machine-guns, lorries and tractors, trained staffs, wireless, Army Corps after Army Corps. If they succeed, like Badoglio, they are acclaimed as the geniuses that they are always said to be: if they make little headway like Graziani, circumstances are said to have been against the display of their genius. (173) [...] But enough of this tedious subject. The wounds of this unknown black man are beginning to smell even more than he used to smell alive. Let us bury him quickly and forget his unfortunate intrusion into Valhalla, which only the white materialists are fit to occupy. [...] I have not bothered to find out where he was buried. After all, I was a journalist, and who in England wants to know?⁴⁰

The tone is increasingly bitter as Steer goes on to describe the defeat of the Ethiopians at the hands of a much better armed and equipped modern European army. The rightness or wrongness attributed to Italy's act of aggression revolved around the question of who told the better story, and Steer was very conscious of this. Steer's text is thus partisan in the most ethical way possible. Leela Gandhi's question regarding the position of metropolitan subjects faced with the unethicallity of their own national or cultural community is relevant to Steer: "Does loyalty to 'my own' liberate me of ethical obligations to all those who are not of my own nation, family, republic, revolution, etc.?"⁴¹ Steer would most likely have answered with a resounding "no". Where Gandhi deploys the trope of friendship to explain how "humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging", I use the trope, and the very real figure, of the partisan, in order to read metropolitan anti-colonial writing about the war, and Steer's sense of community with Afewerk.⁴² Steer's affiliative claim on Afewerk stems from the fact that they were both born in Africa: "I thank God that

made me and Africa, and bound us together in such a bitter union, that once in my life I had met this man.”⁴³

Incidentally, Waugh was very jealous of Steer and his book, which was the one he had wanted to write about Ethiopia.⁴⁴ He gave it a sniffily dismissive review in the *Tablet*, belittling his sources, using Steer’s African origins against him by playing to his implied readers’ racial stereotypes about Africa: “He has great sympathy, I think it is not unfair to say affinity, for those nimble-witted upstarts who formed the Negus’s entourage, like himself African born, who had memorized so many facts of European education without ever participating in European culture.”⁴⁵ Such “affinity”, which the imperially-minded Waugh points out as a fault, a lack of civilization, as it were, is deployed by Steer to assert his “non-identical” commonality with Afewerik and the other Ethiopians.

Though I describe it as partisan, Steer’s prose throughout is very sober and factual, compared to the comic extravagance of Waugh’s account, whose aristocratic, worldly quips convey an unquestioning belief in the rightness of the Italian colonial enterprise. Where Steer uses subtle, searing irony to undermine the certainties of colonial discourse and to destabilize racial stereotypes as a form of “readerly knowledge”, Waugh uses comedy as a way to put down Africans. In Waugh’s novel *Scoop*, a fellow journalist tells the hapless William Boot what his own editor told him when sending him off to Ishmaelia to cover the civil war:

“A lot of niggers are having a war. I don’t see anything in it myself, but the other agencies are sending feature men, so we’ve got to do something. We want spot news,” he said, “and some colour stories. Go easy on the expenses.” “What are they having a war about?” I asked. “That’s for you to find out,” he said, but I haven’t found out yet. Have you?⁴⁶

The comic effect of Waugh’s novel leans heavily on its racially charged jokes; it can be juxtaposed to the irony in Steer’s writing, which has the effect of unmasking and questioning precisely those racial certainties that supposedly ensure the laughs to Waugh’s punchlines. In other words, Steer makes a mockery of colonial discourse, using irony to distance its practices and beliefs through the technique of estrangement. Here is how he describes the coming of Italian “civilization” to Ethiopia, which fascist propaganda praised for having rid the country of slavery:

Over the thorn and stones of the Tigre and its scattered patches of thin cultivation, the status of slavery was abolished. For roads had to be made. Those who had lounged about in the big man's compound, supplied with a regular daily amount of bread and beer by his womenfolk, now had to earn an honest living. It was wonderful to see their shining faces, wrote the Italian Press, when they realised at last that they were free ... The enjoyable prospect of ten hours a day knocking mule tracks into lorry roads warmed many a dark man's heart as well, for the African loves to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow.⁴⁷

The irony is so subtle, the rhetoric mimicking Waugh's triumphalist celebration of imperial road-building so close to the real thing, that it is almost possible to be tricked into believing that Steer is an imperialist. Instead, Steer ferociously satirizes the news framing and stereotypes that journalists relied on to construct the story of Italian civilization in the region and to justify the Italian invasion. What takes place in this book is a critique of attitudes towards Ethiopia as they are constructed by the press and for newspaper readers. As in many other pro-Ethiopian accounts of the war, it is an attempt to correct the hegemonic narrative.

What makes the contrast between Steer and Waugh all the more striking is that, in terms of their background and education, they were quite alike. They both came from comfortable middle-class families and went to public school and then to Oxford (though Waugh famously graduated with a Third in History, and Steer with a Double First in Classics). *Waugh in Abyssinia* and *Caesar in Abyssinia* display remarkable similarities in terms of narrative structure and the events that befall both journalists; as they both travel to Harrar and Jijiga, they endure the increasingly belligerent meetings of the Foreign Press Association and describe what it is like trying to file news stories when there is no news to be had. They both bemoan the lack of sanitation in the only hotel in Harrar. Waugh describes the W.C. as a "chamber of ineffable horror", and Steer quips that "Tharaud (*Paris-Soir*), Helsey (*The Journal*), Lavoix (*Havas*) leant every day over their balcony and imagined that an anti-European atmosphere was rising among the Harraris. But the only atmosphere that rose was due to the Greek drainage system: in every way possible, the proprietor made them pay through their noses."⁴⁸

However, Steer's and Waugh's accounts of Ethiopian modernity as represented by the nation's emerging urban spaces, envisioned by Haile

Selassie as showpieces of his nation's progress, differ radically. Steer thus describes Addis Ababa on the day the Italians invaded:

Amazing town—squalor and natural beauty sprawling side by side. For all its irregularity the African lived in Addis Ababa a happier, freer, cleaner life than in any other town of the continent. Accra, Free Town, the “locations” of Cape Town and East London, Djibouti passed through my mind: all the gifts of the white to the black were far more crowded, stank more, more gravely offended the eyes than the gift of Menelik and Haile Selassie to unconquered Ethiopia.⁴⁹

Compare this depiction with Waugh's dismissive description of Addis and the emperor's new buildings:

The ambitious buildings in the European style with which Haile Selassie had intended to embellish his capital were still in the same rudimentary stage of construction; tufted now with vegetation like ruins in a drawing by Piranesi, they stood at every corner, reminders of an abortive modernism, a happy subject for the press photographers who hoped later to present them as the ravages of Italian bombardment.⁵⁰

The phrase “abortive modernism” seems to sum up Waugh's diagnosis of Ethiopia in the 1930s (he always calls it “Abyssinia”—which, in the usage of the time, usually, though not always, signalled a certain European patronizing attitude—as opposed to the more respectful and egalitarian “Ethiopia”). Throughout his text, he consistently outlines the primitive backwardness of the “Abyssinians”, masked by futile efforts to achieve progress, versus Steer's praise of their qualities as strong, heroic and modernizing people. For Waugh, “they had no crafts. It was extraordinary to find a people with an ancient and continuous habit of life who had produced so little.”⁵¹ In contrast, Steer constantly outlines how Ethiopians are superior to other Africans, though they still possess shortcomings that to him show they are not yet fully “modern”: “The Ethiopian has many points which mark him out above other Africans. More discipline, more seriousness, more tactical sense, more administrative ability, a written language, an inherited pride in his race. But he cannot read a map.”⁵²

Steer's reporting most strongly enters the canon of resistance writing I have delineated in the course of this book when he mentions the use of yperite against Ethiopian troops in December 1935, a practice that had been outlawed by the Geneva Convention of 1925: “For the first time in

the history of the world, a people supposedly white used poison gas upon a people supposedly savage. To Badoglio, Field Marshal of Italy, must be attributed the glory of this difficult victory.”⁵³ Steer mentions that the “Italian Press” had appeared to justify any means necessary (including gas, apparently) to combat the “barbarism” of the Ethiopians. Del Boca, in his four-volume history of Italians in East Africa, supports Steer’s point when he quotes an article from an Italian fascist newspaper, *Il giornale di Roma*: “*Il nemico, con le sue atrocità spaventose, ci obbliga a fare uso di tutti i mezzi possibili.*” (“The enemy, with his horrific atrocities, forces us to use all means possible against him.”)⁵⁴ Steer damningly recalls how he reported the use of mustard gas by the Italians regularly in the *Times*; evidence of its use had been seen by the British Red Cross, but the British Government “did not consider it worth their while to examine the Red Cross Unit which they knew had dealt with gas cases”.⁵⁵

Steer describes the war between the Ethiopians and the Italians as a conflict between two different systems of warfare, two languages of war that were at odds with each other. For this reason the Ethiopians lost, because they did not know how to wage a modern Western war and lacked the technology, the means of communication and the chain of command that structured the Italian military. This was an intercultural war. Very few Ethiopians had been trained in the Western military tradition and hence were able to understand the tactics behind Italian manoeuvres. Most ruinous of all on the morale of the Ethiopian troops was aerial bombing:

Italian air supremacy made of the Ethiopians a rabble that could not think for itself. It demolished, in fearful explosions and vibrations of the solid earth, the aristocracy which was the cadre of their military organization. The people’s support of that framework was very physical. It kissed its feet, hung on to its mule, crowded behind it in the streets, touched it when it walked, helped its limbs in every activity. The aerial supremacy of Italy abolished all these contacts in war for ever.⁵⁶

Here the term and practice of *shifanet* makes its reappearance. Precisely because the Ethiopians could not fight a modern colonial war, the emperor wanted his military leaders to fight a guerrilla war rather than one between two armies on an open battlefield.⁵⁷ The word *shifita* means “bandit” in Amharic, and there were plenty of *shiftas*, especially in areas (e.g., Southern Ethiopia) that were not fully under the control of the emperor. General Konovaloff (whose account of the war is included in Steer’s book) men-

tions that the emperor asked Ethiopian commanders to use more guerrilla tactics, which Ethiopians called *shiftanet*, because this method of fighting was akin to what the bandits did when waylaying travellers through ambushes. As a result, they were reluctant to engage in it, as it wasn't seen as proper warfare or battle.

It is worth pausing over the meaning of *shiftanet* and its relations with transnational forms of resistance, such as European partisan fighting against the fascists. As this was fighting without official insignia, and without international backing, it could often seem like civil war and hence appear lawless, immoral or illegal. When does a war of national defense become a partisan war, a form of *partigianeria*? Banditry and *shiftanet* share shifting borders with resistance fighters: at some points they trail off into lawlessness and looting; at other points they defend the territory against invaders. See, for example, the morphing of the retreating Ethiopian army in Addis from soldiers to *shiftas* in Steer's account:

The men from Addis Ababa were stealing back into their city every night for food, by twos and threes. Of the rest, those who were not directly under the hand of Dedjaz Aberra Kassa, Kassa's son, were splitting off under their captains of fifty and ten into *shifta* bands.⁵⁸

The breakdown of civil society that would take place in Europe a few years hence is here prefigured in the haunting images of looted Addis, which Steer memorializes through his more recent experience of the Spanish Civil War. He ends the book with his promise to his Ethiopian friend Lij Andarge Masai.

He seemed doubtful of the future but I reassured him. After all, I said, we may have been slow, but we English do keep our word. We have solemnly signed a Covenant which guarantees, *guarantees* to you your independence and territorial integrity. We have said many times that we stand by our signature and that we will uphold the Covenant in its entirety. Lij Andarge really believed what I said.⁵⁹

The ending of the book focuses on the "triumphal" entrance of Badoglio's entirely excessive army into Addis. Its sharply sarcastic tone is partly directed against the empty promises of international solidarity with Ethiopia, a tone that strongly recalls that of McKay in his novel *Amiable With Big Teeth*, examined in Chap. 4. Steer is as critical of his own govern-

ment in failing to uphold the sanctions and oppose Mussolini's aggression as McKay was critical of the Comintern in failing to support Ethiopia. Steer can be said to represent an embryonic utopian nationalism, a dream of a different, non-imperialist Britain, that emerges from his anti-colonial and anti-fascist sentiment and is grounded in a radically internationalist conception of nationhood, one that cannot but extend its solidarity to others. How this might square with a British imperial identity is a matter still very much open to question.

SYLVIA PANKHURST'S *NEW TIMES AND ETHIOPIA NEWS*

Leela Gandhi reminds us that as far as transnationalism is concerned, "our solidarities simply can't be fixed in advance."⁶⁰ Among outstanding examples of partisan press in support of Ethiopia, alongside Steer we should place Sylvia Pankhurst's broadsheet *NTEN*, which campaigned in favour of a free Ethiopia and aimed to keep Britain informed of the atrocities being committed by the Italians.⁶¹ Pankhurst is best known for her feminist and socialist politics, but she spent more than twenty years of her life devoting herself to the Ethiopian cause and ended up dying in Ethiopia, where she received a state funeral. She was very close to the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie, and indeed to the entire imperial family. Pankhurst realized early on that British public opinion needed to be kept up-to-date about the conflict if it were to sway in any significant way the decisions of government. Her publication, while devoted mainly to the Ethiopian war, often ran news about other fascist conflicts and, from August 1936, began to carry articles about the Civil War in Spain and the murders committed by the Francoist troops there. Parallel photographs of Spanish fascist and Italian colonialist atrocities aimed to suggest links between the two conflicts and, in the process, create among the British public a sympathetic equivalence between the Spanish and Ethiopian victims of these wars.

Pankhurst's family background and early campaigns had prepared her well for what her son Richard would call "a life-long cause", namely her political support for Ethiopia. Sylvia was the daughter of Emmeline Pankhurst and the sister of Christabel Pankhurst, both founders of the Suffragette movement, into which Sylvia threw herself wholeheartedly for many years.

Contemporaries viewed Pankhurst's dedication to the Ethiopian cause as strange and unfashionable, but then her political activism had always been of a type that ran against the grain and eschewed any regimentation

within set parameters or party lines. Kathryn Dodd says that the received opinion of her was that of an “eccentric unbelonging”.⁶² Her previous militancy in the suffragist and communist movements prepared her well for her pro-Ethiopian campaign, which was to occupy most of the second half of her life. The shift in focus in her political causes, which moved from feminism to communism to anti-fascism and anti-colonialism, should not be viewed as disconnected or impulsive. On the contrary, these issues were all profoundly connected in her mind. She was ahead of her contemporaries in that she grasped that the struggles for gender, class and racial equality could not be separated from one another and needed to be tackled together. While throwing herself wholeheartedly into each of these causes, she also was a strong critic of what she perceived to be the exclusionary boundaries of their agendas. For example, she was outraged at the increasingly middle-class dimensions of the struggle for women’s suffrage, some of whose female proponents, including her own sister, Christabel, wanted to restrict the vote to propertied women. Pankhurst fought to keep the public eye on the terrible conditions of working-class women, arguing that they, out of all their gender, needed the vote most urgently.

Her depth of feeling and solidarity with the working class were inseparable from her feminism. She also had important experience in running a broadsheet prior to *New Times and Ethiopia News*. In 1914, she began to publish the *Woman’s Dreadnought*. The founding of this newspaper was the culmination of years of work among working-class women in the East End of London, where Pankhurst, together with other collaborators, had started the East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS).⁶³ As Barbara Winslow tells us, the *Woman’s Dreadnought* was mainly written by East End women, with Pankhurst acting as editor and making a substantial contribution to each issue.⁶⁴ As we shall see with the Italian activist Giovanni Pirelli, who published numerous books of testimonies by Algerians involved in the war of liberation against the French, Pankhurst used print to give a voice and a platform to the people whose rights she fought to defend: in this case, working-class women. Of her role as editor, Pankhurst said that she “took infinite pains in correcting and arranging their manuscripts, endeavouring to preserve the spirit and unsophisticated freshness of the original”.⁶⁵ Thus the newspaper was not merely a way to communicate ideological positions about working-class and feminist politics; it was also a way to allow the dispossessed to speak for themselves about their own struggle. This approach to newspaper editing later informed her work for the *Workers’ Dreadnought*, when she asked black

and Asian writers such as the Jamaican Claude McKay and the Indian communist activist M.N. Roy to write pieces about the impact of socialism on the Pan-African movement and on Indian nationalism. Even more explicitly, it was to inform the structuring of *NTEN*, which became a vehicle for African nationalist politics in the late 1930s. The huge significance of *NTEN* for publicizing the anti-colonial movement in Africa has been remarkably under-studied, perhaps because Pankhurst's Englishness has made her invisible, "camouflaged", and thus unavailable to a more conventional postcolonial narrative of resistance, which tends to focus on colonized activists. But the importance of *NTEN* for anti-colonial Africans is testified by the many letters the newspaper received from readers from all over the African continent and from further abroad, for example, in the Caribbean and Asia.

In 1917, Pankhurst changed the name of her broadsheet to the *Workers' Dreadnought* to signal the impact of the Russian Revolution on her politics. In those few short years, her outlook had changed quite radically. From campaigning for the vote for women with the government—and thus interacting constantly with politicians such as the Liberal Prime Minister Lord Asquith—she came to adopt a hardline anti-parliamentarian, anti-Labour Party position, advocating the formation of a communist party in Britain that should follow the example of the Russian one.⁶⁶ In 1920, she evaded Special Branch surveillance in order to travel to Moscow on a perilous journey to attend the Second Congress of the Third International, where she met Lenin. It was a momentous encounter for her, which she described in a vivid portrait of the Russian leader for the *Workers' Dreadnought*.⁶⁷ Pankhurst's radical anti-parliamentarianism earned her a famous rebuke from Lenin, who thought that communist activity in Britain should affiliate with the Labour Party and engage in parliamentary action. The sum of his critique emerged in his 1920 pamphlet, *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*.⁶⁸ Pankhurst's left communist stance prompted the Communist Party of Great Britain to ban her broadsheet, the *Workers' Dreadnought*; she strenuously opposed this attempt, arguing that "in the weak, young, little-evolved Communist movement of this country discussion is a paramount need, and to stifle it is disastrous."⁶⁹ This line is characteristic of Pankhurst's style and principles; all her life she was never afraid of embracing the unpopular or neglected aspect of a political cause and of debating at length with those who sought to stifle her outspoken views. The *Workers' Dreadnought* is also characterized by a distinctly internationalist viewpoint, open to the

wider world, unlike other newspapers of its kind.⁷⁰ Eventually, Pankhurst was expelled from the Party, after which she retired to private life for a period, before resuming her activism in anti-fascist campaigning and eventually pro-Ethiopia work.

Pankhurst's politics could be said to be characterized by a form of gendered resistance, in the sense that her gender often made her maverick stance against the party line, the government, the fascists and other opponents even more unpopular. Arguably, it was her deep involvement in the women's suffragist movement *and* her commitment to class struggle that allowed her to have empathy with the victims of colonial fascism, as was the case with Ethiopia. In her imagination, the subaltern had the multiple dimensions that it was to take in Gramsci's writing: oppression came from class, gender *and* race.

Considering her remarkable achievements, it is surprising that she is not more well known as an anti-colonial activist within postcolonial scholarship. As is the case with other figures I examine in this book, her anti-colonialism was inseparable from her anti-fascism. As with George Padmore, Claude McKay, Giovanni Pirelli and Gillo Pontecorvo, her connection to communism in the context of the anti-fascist struggle led her to reject the former and develop the latter in the direction of an anti-colonial political and cultural expression. That, for Pankhurst, anti-fascism and anti-colonialism were inseparable is proven by her insistence on keeping the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and the Civil War in Spain at the forefront of her broadsheet *The New Times and Ethiopia News*.⁷¹ Some readers wanted her to focus exclusively on Ethiopia, others on Spain. Witness, for example, these two letters she received as editor of *NTEN*, within barely five months of each other (which also testifies to the huge diversity and geographic scope of the broadsheet's readership). The first letter is from Lord Auckland, who is presumably writing through his secretary and haughtily addresses Pankhurst in the third person:

Lord Auckland will be glad if the Editor of the Ethiopian News will discontinue to send him that paper, as it has now evidently degenerated into a pro-Communist sheet and is full of inaccuracies regarding the situation in Spain and the Balearic Islands.

If the Editor sees fit to consolidate the Ethiopian cause with that of the Communists of Spain, she will go a long way towards losing the sympathy of those, Lord Auckland included, who in the past have been sympathetic towards Ethiopia and her cause.⁷²

The typewritten letter seems to have been sent from His Lordship's yacht anchored in Cannes (though the previous address, crossed out, was based in Palma de Mallorca). Lord Auckland was not the only reader of the paper who wished that Pankhurst would keep her pro-Ethiopian campaigning separate from her anti-fascist campaigning.

By contrast, a few months later Pankhurst received a letter addressed to her by Augustin Souchy from the *Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo Federacion Anarquista Iberica, Oficina de Propaganda Exterior* in Barcelona. The letter is dated March 31, 1937:

... we are glad to see that you are also working in favour of our struggle in Spain. Don't you think it would be better to devote most of your activity to Spanish affairs at the moment? Surely you will agree [*sic*, obviously typo for *agree*], that the Spanish antifascist war is at present the most important thing in the world and of the greatest consequence. If we can win this war it will mean the defeat of international fascism, and through it your Ethiopian case will gain a lot, as Italian imperialism will then be beaten.⁷³

But the paper kept its sights firmly trained on both conflicts. Pankhurst first became involved in anti-fascist politics when the Italian MP Giacomo Matteotti was murdered by fascists in 1924. She founded an anti-fascist pressure group, the Women's International Matteotti Committee. She also acted as the only regular foreign correspondent for Gramsci's publication *L'Ordine Nuovo*, "for which she wrote at least eight articles between August 23, 1919 and July 1920".⁷⁴ Her feminist and anti-fascist campaigning prepared the ground for her anti-colonial activism. On May 5, 1936, as the first issue of *NTEN* went to press, the Italian army victoriously entered Addis Ababa. She regarded Ethiopia as the first victim of fascism, after Italy itself.⁷⁵ Pankhurst partly founded the broadsheet to counter the pervasive fascist propaganda about the war. Mussolini's main line of justification for the invasion of Ethiopia, and for the consolidation of the Italian empire, was that Italians needed their "place in the sun" just like all the other European nations. In letters to the press, Pankhurst rebutted Italy's claims that it needed an empire for its surplus population; she said that Italians had no desire to settle in Africa and had always flocked to the US and not to the colony of Eritrea.⁷⁶ Pankhurst's dismissal of Italy's demographic justification of colonialism tallied with the PCI's assessment and interpretation of Italian colonialism. Pankhurst had a clear sense of the anti-fascist Italian position on the topic because of her links

with the activist Carlo Rosselli, founder of *Giustizia e Libertà*, an important anti-fascist organization, as well as with other Italian anti-fascists opposed to the invasion. Her partner was the Italian anarchist Silvio Corio, who helped her find the funds to finance *New Times and Ethiopia News*. The couple never married, and their son Richard took his mother's surname, Pankhurst. He became quite a well-known historian of Ethiopia and taught for many years at the University of Addis Ababa (he passed away in February 2017). According to Richard and her biographer Shirley Harrison, the circulation of *NTEN* was 10,000 copies weekly and eventually achieved a peak of 40,000 copies, with a widespread distribution across Africa. For Richard Pankhurst,

Access to *New Times and Ethiopia News* was of Africa-wide significance, not only because it articulated the continent's support for Ethiopia, but also because it helped break down parochialism, as Sylvia was later proud to recall, in the different colonies. This it did by galvanizing many readers into support for a distant Victim Motherland, with whom they could identify.⁷⁷

Here Richard Pankhurst suggests that his mother's paper helped articulate anti-colonial sentiment across West Africa, via solidarity for Ethiopia. Indeed, colonial authorities feared the publication as a possible cause for sedition; Sylvia was surprised and upset when the Colonial Secretary H.R.R. Blood in Freetown, Sierra Leone (a Crown Colony), placed it on a list of banned publications. But the ban served to endear her to many Africans living in Britain and elsewhere.⁷⁸

It is difficult to overstate the importance of this publication in demonstrating how an *internationalist* anti-racist and anti-colonial discourse developed in the 1930s. A reading of its articles in the course of 1935–1936 testifies to the very wide range of voices opposed to the war. They came from every corner of the British Empire and beyond. African nationalists, including, of course, Ethiopians; Marcus Garvey; Jawaharlal Nehru; Algerian patriots; and Trinidadians all contributed pieces to the broadsheet. The analysis of racism and colonialism contained in these pages is extraordinary for its prescience and for the way it predated many contemporary theorizations of these concepts. There were plenty of articles on the “modernizing” tendencies of Ethiopia. For example, the June 13, 1936, issue carried an interview with Haile Selassie and what he wanted from the League of Nations. “Q: What do you regard as the most important achievement of your reign? A: The construction of schools, hospitals, roads; financial reforms; the purchase of the bank of Abyssinia and its

transformation into a state bank; the fight against slavery and establishment of schools for free slaves.”⁷⁹ Because Italian propaganda consistently portrayed Ethiopians as barbaric and practicing both feudalism and slavery, Pankhurst’s broadsheet sought to counteract that image by running numerous articles on Ethiopian culture and society, as well as portraits of the imperial family. Princess Tsahai of Ethiopia, daughter of the emperor, worked as a nurse in a London hospital and was given great prominence in the publication. The paper also regularly ran articles and letters by well-known anti-colonial and anti-racist activists, testifying to the broadsheet’s wide and politically varied constituency. (However, it also carried articles by colonial policy-makers, who argued for Ethiopian independence as a measure that would strengthen British influence in East Africa.) On October 17, 1936, the paper published a letter by Marcus Garvey denouncing the screening of a film, *The Song of Freedom*, as it “libelled and slandered the Negro race”.⁸⁰ Garvey told of the efforts to have the film effectively banned in Britain; and he concluded his letter by saying that “should the showing of such pictures be continued, a Test Case for Libel and Slander against the race be instituted [...] and that the Colonial Negro peoples of Great Britain be called upon in their respective colonies to send legal representatives to Great Britain” to prosecute the libel. The letter demonstrates the acute awareness black activists had of the effect of mediatic and visual representations on anti-black prejudice. The paper sought to portray pro-Ethiopian solidarity from a number of angles, from within and outside Europe.

The endorsement of Ethiopian humanity seems a mainstay of anti-colonial discourse in *NTEN*, echoing the passionate prose of Steer in *Caesar in Abyssinia*. An article entitled “An African View”, written by W.A.R. Waddy from French Guyana, underlines the international solidarity felt towards Ethiopia by “Negroes in general, but especially those of English, French, Dutch and American Colonies”.⁸¹ The article berates European dictators such as Mussolini for being guilty of crimes against Ethiopians, which the author considers to be “crimes against humanity”, though he knows that colonial authorities don’t consider them as such. “No nation cares! O ignominy! Why this continued indifference from those who are our sentinels?” he asks, referring to the lack of interest shown in the Ethiopian cause by British and French powers, the colonial “sentinels”:

Sentinels who have taken possession of our heritage, and have drunk of our water and tasted of our salt; deceptive sentinels who consider us as peculiar

hybrid-animals, the offal of humanity, not subject to the feelings and sentiments of the human race!⁸²

The hypocrisy of European nations towards the fascist invasion of Ethiopia sharpened awareness among diasporic African nationalists about the inherent inhumanity of colonialism itself. It was indeed a catalyst and a rallying-point for anti-colonial resistance and especially for Pan-Africanism in the 1930s, but it also inspired thought processes and development of a notion of humanity that sought to counteract the dehumanizing representations of colonized subjects. “Fools are they who infer that blackness of skin degrades noble souls or lessens their essential passions of love and hate”, argues Waddy in his article for *New Times and Ethiopia News*. The very basis of colonial discourse, premised on “European civilization”, was vacillating, partly triggered by the perception that fascism and colonialism were ideologically linked discourses. The invasion of Ethiopia—such a symbolic location for the African diaspora worldwide—highlighted this shared discursive similarity, which was founded on the concept of race justifying the inhumanity of “man towards man”, to use Waddy’s phrase.

Denunciation of Italian colonialism in the paper also came from a contributor whom we have already met in the previous chapter and who acted as special correspondent to Ethiopia for the African American newspaper *Pittsburgh Courier*—the prominent black journalist and historian J.A. Rogers. The fact that he had either been commissioned to write this article by Pankhurst or that it was being republished from the *Courier* shows the level of interaction and exchange among periodicals devoted to supporting Ethiopia’s struggle. Rogers, in a front-page article published in *NTEN* on August 15, 1936, refuted the claim that Ethiopia would benefit from Italian civilization because any improvement made in the Italian colonies had been for the sole benefit of its white colonizers. Moreover, there was a system of apartheid, imposed by Mussolini’s racial laws in the colonies, which he predicted would have deleterious effects on the independent status of Ethiopian women in particular:

Mussolini knows full well that his prohibition against race mixing will not work. The Ethiopian woman enjoyed a greater degree of all-round freedom, perhaps, than any other of her sex on earth. If the Fascists retain their hold, she is doomed to become a far worse sexual slave to the white man than even the economically dependent black women of our Southern states.⁸³

Rogers also pronounced a left denunciation of imperialism *tout court*, mentioning the capitalist exploitation of Africa:

The Italians, so far, have been the worst, the most cruel, the most barbarous of all the colonial exploiters. This is not because they are inherently different from the English, the French, the Belgians and the others, but because they are the poorest. It is the hungriest mosquito that stings the sharpest.⁸⁴

There was a clear sense here that Italian colonialism had its own peculiar characteristics, born of Italy's unusual status amongst European powers as a relative newcomer that also harboured a "semi-colonial" situation within its own borders, given the huge disparity between the North and South. Italy's poverty and underdevelopment thus boded ill for its being able to bring a "civilizing light" to the supposed darkness of Ethiopia.

Rogers's analysis differs substantially from Waugh's effusive eulogy of the Italian presence in Ethiopia and his great appreciation of the brutal and vicious Vice-Roy Rodolfo Graziani, whom he called "one of the most amiable and sensible men I had met for a long time".⁸⁵ Civilization in the context of Italian colonialism acquired a range of contradictory meanings which brought to the fore the deep ambivalence around Empire in those years. For Waugh, what was needed was a "new type of conquest" that emulated Britain's imperial glories of old but updated it from the perspective of a new European nation, Italy, full of young, strong, if relatively impoverished, citizens.⁸⁶ For Sylvia Pankhurst, Italy's imperialist tendencies testified all the more strongly to the evils of fascism and to the importance of upholding the value of democracy in the West. For her, anti-colonial struggle was as much about liberating Ethiopia as it was about refashioning a more "civilized" version of Europe and of Britain in particular. See, for example, the interesting debate between Pankhurst and Indian nationalists in an article entitled "The Moors", in which a leading anti-colonial journal, *Light*, published in Lahore, took *NTEN* to task for claiming that the broadsheet stood for "International Justice", on the basis that "the Orient knows too much by now to associate justice with a western people." "Western democracy is as diabolical as fascism, and the East has nothing to choose between the two." The response of *NTEN* was to say, "We would advise the editor of *Light* to attentively read our serial by Pankhurst, now in the course of publication, where he will see that the principal aim of Fascism, when it began in Italy and when it now causes civil war in Spain, was to destroy democracy. Further, Western democracy

has always defended the cause of the Oriental peoples, and their oppression is in inverse ratio to the power of Democracy in the several Western powers.”⁸⁷ An anti-fascist and pro-democratic stance at home was one with an anti-colonial stance, as was the case for Italian communists in exile mobilizing in favour of the Ethiopian cause.⁸⁸

The debate around civilization gains particular prominence in an essay entitled “My Country” by an “Ethiopian Student”, which appeared in *NTEN* on January 16, 1937.⁸⁹ The essay had been originally published a couple of weeks before in *Giustizia e Libertà*, the Italian anti-fascist weekly of Carlo Rosselli, with the title “*L’Etiopia come è e come sarà.*” (“How Ethiopia Is and How It Will Be.”) (the author was presented in the Italian paper as “a young Abyssinian of European culture”).⁹⁰ In this essay, the student not only declares Ethiopian sympathy for Spain, but also rejects the suggestion that it is more worthy to sustain the Spanish than the Ethiopian cause, due to Ethiopia being perceived as a backward, feudal country, whereas “In Spain, on the contrary, they are fighting for us.” The author of the piece refutes this passionately—“We shall not be unjust to Spain, by being just to Ethiopia.” He also addresses left objections to support for Ethiopia by remarking, “Marx and Engels never attacked, under pretence of being true to Socialism, movements for independence of peoples then also semi-feudal” (1). He then embarks on a discussion of the meaning of “civilization”; is it really true, he asks, “that Africa, and more especially Ethiopia, has nothing to offer civilization?” He argues that on the contrary, Ethiopia is “a civilization, independent, of long standing, capable of evolving” (1). His analysis of Italy is perceptive, as he recognizes that it is a relatively new “modern nation”, whose progress only began in the late nineteenth century (3). He then proceeds to give a new definition of civilization, which is premised on what seems to be a neohumanist mode of reasoning emerging out of anti-colonial discourse, though he claims to derive it from the “great modern thinkers of Europe”: “Civilization is consciousness of the universality of the human race” (3). In relationship to this notion of civilization, he also gives a definition of barbarism: “The barbarians are those peoples who only believe in the irrational power of their own particular race. The civilised are the people who believe in universal principles” (3).

Strikingly, this analysis of race, barbarism and civilization does not share any traits with a concept developed in the same period, *Négritude*, premised on the idealization of a black racial essence and on the idea of an

inherent cultural difference between Africa and Europe that needed to be enhanced and valorized. On the contrary, the author invokes the principles of humanism and universalism to promote his anti-colonial cause. Moreover, he turns the more mainstream discourse of what constitutes “civilization” in those years on its head: rather than associating it with a racial identity, he liberates it from colour, foreshadowing the position of Third-Worldist intellectuals such as Fanon, who was violently opposed to *Négritude*. This new understanding of civilization as distinct from the race that considered itself to possess it in superior quantity and quality was probably also because fascism was increasingly showing up the inherent brutality at the heart of racialist discourses shared by both fascism itself and by imperialism. It is a crucial question as to what extent *fascist* colonialism in particular precipitated this awareness among left-leaning European political activists and African and Asian nationalists of the barbaric charge contained in racism. In Italian pro-racist publications of the time, such as *La difesa della razza*, first published in 1938, the association of racial superiority with the ability to produce a civilization acquires parodic and increasingly unconvincing dimensions, as is testified by the frankly absurd photographs of different “races” in Africa and in Europe. It is almost as if the racial imaginary conjured up by fascism is finally revealing its grotesque, unreal underpinnings. What may have been hidden within a more benign-seeming colonial discourse, sheltered by the much-touted democracy of liberal empires, is now laid bare: the racialist discourse at the heart of European nation-states becomes increasingly shrill through its fascist avatar as its non-European opponents acquire strength and vigour in their discursive opposition to colonialism.

As we have seen, popular sympathies in Britain were on the side of the Ethiopians. Such sympathy extended to representations in British popular culture, echoing Schuyler’s *Ethiopian Stories*, published serially in the *Pittsburgh Courier* between 1935 and 1939, and discussed in Chap. 4. In the 1936 children’s book *Flying for Ethiopia*, a young boy, Pip, flies for the Ethiopian air force against the Italians. In the process, he undergoes a rethinking of his standard racist categories about Africans:

Pip resolved to take a more serious view of the [Ethiopian] Court and its head. He had seen pictures in the newspapers, of course, and had regarded the Abyssinians indulgently as a lot of niggers; pleasant enough, according to Uncle Bob, but more comic than important. But if his father regarded the Emperor as a man to be respected there must be something big in him.⁹¹

Despite the apparently “liberal” tone of this adventure novel, in *Flying for Ethiopia*, unlike *Caesar in Abyssinia*, Ethiopians are never granted full agency. *Flying for Ethiopia* is on the side of the international participants in the defense against the Italians, and is full of comments on how the Ethiopians need to be civilized and modernized, either by the already educated Ethiopian upper class, which includes the emperor, or by the British and Americans flying for Ethiopians in the air force. In this “semi-colonial fiction”, the dialogue between the English boy Pip and the young Ethiopian prince Makonnen, the son of Emperor Haile Selassie, goes as follows:

The prince grinned. “We have the telephone here, you know!” he said, and Pip flushed.

“Jolly good staff work,” he said lightly.

“Yes, isn’t it? That is my father’s doing. The Ethiopian, if left to himself, is lazy and takes no trouble, but we are changing all that.”

“Which is right—Ethiopian or Abyssinian?” asked Pip innocently. “I’ve heard both used about your people.”

“Ethiopian, of course!” said Makonnen impatiently. “The term Abyssinian is slang—not at all the proper thing! This is the Empire of Ethiopia—the most ancient Empire of the world!”⁹²

In this passage, Prince Makonnen equates “Ethiopia” with both tradition and modernity, an ancient Empire whose millennial traditions have been equipped with a sufficient cultural heritage, with sufficient *civilization*, to be able to modernize and adapt into becoming a “modern”, “civilized” nation. Waugh, on the other hand, consistently uses the term “Abyssinia” in his reportage of the country, even in the very title of his book.

The title of Pankhurst’s newspaper was inspired by Charlie Chaplin’s film *Modern Times* and suggested an urgent sense of contemporaneity linked to the publication. And use of the word “Ethiopia” in the title served to mark the sympathetic position of the paper, as it was the preferred term of supporters of Haile Selassie, whereas the international press used the word “Abyssinia”.⁹³ “Ethiopia” evoked the nation’s evolving modernity, but “Abyssinia” was used most often to connote a view of the country as feudal, backward, exotic.

Of course, there wasn’t a completely strict separation of the terms *Ethiopia* and *Abyssinia*, and Sylvia Pankhurst helped to found the Abyssinia

Association, which was very active in promoting the Ethiopian cause and also welcomed the emperor when he arrived in Britain in exile. The story of the Abyssinian Association is in itself very interesting for the tensions it reveals among the different British sympathizers for the Ethiopian cause. Its chairman, Stanley Jevons, had a complex relationship with Pankhurst, and they often disagreed strongly on the political direction each felt the Association should take. Pankhurst sought to contextualize the Ethiopian war within the broader struggle against fascism, and Jevons wanted to keep the attention only on Ethiopia, so as not to alienate the more conservative members of the Association, which included members of the nobility and the clergy. In a letter to Pankhurst dated February 28, 1936, Jevons explained that he was afraid he couldn't cooperate with the Women's International Matteotti committee (headed by Pankhurst) because the Abyssinia Committee (its previous name) couldn't be seen to be associated with anti-fascism: "Our members dislike Fascism as anybody, but they feel that linking the question of protests against the War [i.e., the Ethiopian war] and assistance to Abyssinia with condemnation of fascism is impolitic."⁹⁴ Pankhurst retorted:

I wish to say, however, quite definitely that I think your view is utterly wrong. After all, it is Fascism which is making war on Abyssinia, and no-one else. [...] I feel very strongly that all who have Peace loving and democratic views must take the Fascist menace more seriously in future than they may have done in the past. It is not just a government of any sort. It is a move to destroy all democracy and create a military state of the most backward sort. You see what has just happened in Japan; it is exactly what has happened elsewhere.⁹⁵

Pankhurst had a very clear and prescient view of what the fascist threat meant in 1936, which was not shared by her contemporaries. Indeed, *N TEN* was seen by some of its readers who came from the Abyssinia Association (for a while members received a subscription to the broadsheet as part of their membership) as too propagandistic, indeed too "partisan", in its anti-fascist stance. Pankhurst's name was excluded from the list of members of the Council of the Association printed on its letterhead. Naturally, given her indefatigable activity in favour of Ethiopia, she took great exception to this.⁹⁶ In his reply to Pankhurst dated December 10, 1936, Jevons said her name hadn't been included because he felt it would put off potential sympathizers from the centre-right, as she was seen to be

a communist, and would indeed put off actual members of the Abyssinian Association as well. He also says something quite significant: "Unfortunately the Labour Party and people of the Left generally, have not come forward to support the Association."

Pankhurst's paper kept her international readership up to date about the wars, battles and news in Ethiopia; she clearly must have had first-hand information of some kind, most likely from the Ethiopian royal family, with whom Pankhurst was in very close contact. According to her, *NTEN* was the only British paper to offer the public objective, first-hand information about the situation in Ethiopia: "all the great newspapers of Britain get their news of Ethiopia from official Italian sources in Rome. Not one has a correspondent in Ethiopia."⁹⁷ Certainly by 1937 all British correspondents had left Ethiopia (both Waugh and Steer departed in 1936, shortly after the conquest). Pankhurst's paper provided an important corrective to the onslaught of fascist propaganda about the war that often dominated public perceptions and minimized Italian atrocities while constantly highlighting the great civilization Italy was bringing to Ethiopia.

Pankhurst's special correspondent was Wazir Ali Baig, originally from the Punjab, and thus a British colonial subject, who had lived in Ethiopia for more than 27 years. He seems to have been a member of the Indian trading community that did business in Ethiopia until the arrival of the Italians. When Italy invaded, he seems to have taken refuge in Djibouti (French colonial territory), from where he wrote most of his dispatches to Pankhurst. He acted as special correspondent for *NTEN* from 1936 until 1941, the year of his death from illness. He also happened to be Waugh's informant in Addis Ababa; in *Waugh in Abyssinia*, Waugh describes him as "an imposing old rascal with the figure of a metropolitan policeman and the manner of a butler. He wrote and spoke nearly perfect English" and "had a natural flair for sensational journalism", which he supplied to most of the American and British correspondents in Addis during the war.⁹⁸

His letters, though they often contained old news (as remarked upon by Pankhurst herself in marginal annotations to his letters), would often correct official reports of Italian victories.⁹⁹ Far from being conquered, most of Ethiopia was ridden with uprisings and insurgencies. Wazir Ali Baig keeps mentioning revolts, especially in the letter dated May 12, 1937, at which time most of the country was up in arms against the Italians. He concludes this letter by saying: "Addis Ababa is cleaned of all the trees and military posts have been erected every 20 metres. This is what the Italians describe as having conquered the whole of Abyssinia" (p. 3). In this same letter he mentions a valiant woman warrior, Waizaru Balainish (2), whom

no one dares to stop. Wazir Ali Baig would often comment scathingly on the so-called "Italian civilization" which perpetrated so many atrocities and injustices against the local population.¹⁰⁰ He would not fail to note that the Indian community in Ethiopia was targeted as well, and that, despite Mussolini presenting himself as a protector of Islam, Muslim cemeteries and mosques were desecrated by the Italians, especially in Harrar: "These Muslim Harraries who were well treated by the Ethiopians and especially the Emperor who respected them are shedding tears of blood."¹⁰¹

A major instance of Italian brutality in Ethiopia was occasioned by the attempt by two Eritrean patriots to assassinate Vice-Roy Rodolfo Graziani on February 19, 1937, in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa. This attempt on his life provoked a ferocious reprisal against the population of Addis Ababa, in which about 3000 Ethiopians died, according to Angelo Del Boca.¹⁰² What was particularly horrifying about this massacre of innocent Ethiopians was that much of the civilian population gleefully took part in it, torching local dwellings and knifing or shooting any natives they saw. Many Italians, as Del Boca notes, had never taken up arms in any situation whatsoever, but there was absolute impunity and they felt they could act as they wanted.¹⁰³ Del Boca's account dates from 1982; but, even in 1937, Pankhurst attempted to present the full atrocious picture of the massacre. *New Times and Ethiopia News's* reporting of the episode collated a series of testimonies from eye-witnesses such as foreign journalists and bureaus stationed in Addis and in Djibouti (March 13, 1937, p. 2 and p. 7). The paper also reported how the censored Italian press attempted to suppress/distort news of the attempt on Graziani's life. It also mentioned in detail the atrocities committed against the local population by Italian settlers and Blackshirts:

With rifles, pistols, bombs, knives and clubs served out for the occasion, gangs of Blackshirts and workmen went through the native quarters killing every man, woman and child they came across. Others, with flame-throwers and tins of petrol, fired the flimsy huts and houses and shot down those who tried to escape.¹⁰⁴

Wazir Ali Baig gave an interesting interpretation of the Addis Ababa massacre that is worth pausing over. Baig says that none of the reports in the British papers about the massacre

have given any accurate account of innocents killed there. Certainly more than 14 thousand men, women and children were killed and no native quarters left standing, all were gutted and burnt. I have heard some Italian agents

say here that Mussolini declares there is not room enough for his 15 million Italians with families to establish themselves in Addis Abeba so he must wipe out all the black races of the country. On any small pretext gas and bombs will therefore be used to finish the Abyssinians.

The Abyssinia Association, the IAFA founded by Padmore and C.L.R. James, much of the Independent Labour Party, as well as a substantial portion of British public opinion, were all behind Ethiopia and her independence. But ultimately the League of Nations failed to uphold the sanctions, and Britain was very ambiguous about its support for Abyssinia throughout. This could be explained by its fear that an independent Abyssinia would risk destabilizing the other colonies the British had in Africa. They had good reason to think this, as Ethiopia provided many burgeoning independence movements with a shining example of anti-colonial resistance and Italy's aggression, an egregious example of colonialist oppression. But there was also colonialist/fascist Italian propaganda on the part of Italian political groups in Britain, such as the supplement to *Italia Nostra*, called *The British-Italian Bulletin*. Its target audience was the Italian community living in Britain. The quite large Italian colony in London showed much sympathy for the Italian invasion.¹⁰⁵

The discourse being used here, again, is that of "civilization". An article by Charon in *The British-Italian Bulletin* focuses constantly on this point:

In considering Italy's aspirations we must not forget that if they are directly based on the absolute necessity of existence, they also have a foundation by no means material. Every other civilised Power has undertaken the task of civilising the various backward races of the world, to the great benefit of those races as well as of the civilising power. It was Kipling who first spoke of "the white man's burden".¹⁰⁶

Colonial discourse, premised on the rhetorical pairing of civilization versus barbarism, reappears here, as in most of the publications on the war examined so far. As always, the debates as to whether Italy had a right or not to invade Ethiopia revolved around the question of whether the latter was a "civilized" or "primitive" nation that needed the guidance and governance of the more civilized European powers. George Bernard Shaw, for example, to the question posed by a publication of the time, "Is Italy right?", answered yes. In referring to Italy's claims over Ethiopia, Shaw remarked,

to claim such an advance of civilization an act of aggression on the same footing as an unprovoked bombardment of Venice by the R.A.F. or of Portsmouth by the Italian fleet, is a most dangerous abuse of language and confusion of thought.¹⁰⁷

Norman Angell, an active member of political agitations in favour of Ethiopia, replied that Shaw's description of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia as "an advance of civilization" [...] seems to have overlooked the needs of Europe in that respect; the need, first of all, of civilizing the civilizer." He thus redeploys Shaw's discourse of civilization in order to accuse Italy of being uncivilized. Angell remarks that Mussolini justified his war of aggression against Ethiopia by wanting "expansion" for Italy, "to be free to do in the twentieth century what Britain did in the seventeenth or eighteenth century: build up a great Empire". This is no justification, rebuts Angell:

if political methods are never to change, if what one country did in the seventeenth century is to be taken as justifying similar conduct by another country in the twentieth, then let us all give up all idea of improvement of any kind, of a League, of new order, of peace.¹⁰⁸

The debate over Ethiopia's fate, and its appeal to the League of Nations, reveals an unstable and shifting discourse about the legitimation of empire in the period between the two wars. Ideological links between fascism and empire were beginning to surface. Arguments in favour of Ethiopia's sovereignty, and of Italy's unjustifiable invasion, were also made by imperialists.

As Richard Pankhurst says, Sylvia's broadsheet was, of course, a form of propaganda in favour of the Abyssinian cause. As propaganda, it sought to engender in British readers sympathy for Ethiopians; only by presenting them as human (and, by implication, civilized, relatable to Europeans) could they hope to create empathy for their cause. Thus this form of rehumanization of the Ethiopian on the pages of Pankhurst's newspapers was essential for creating a sense of solidarity among a population whose country was an empire.

Anti-imperialist sentiment, as Jim House has commented in a different context, needs to build on recognizable bonds of commonality and shared memories. Anti-racism and anti-colonialism are complex phenomena that need to be historicized and related to the specific context of their emergence. In France, another major colonial empire, House argues that anti-racism

developed historically from a denunciation of anti-Semitism to include a more inclusive anti-racism after World War II, when the fight against “colonial racism” was allied with a fight against anti-Semitism. But the experience of the Holocaust and of resistance to the Nazis seems to have been crucial for provoking this conjunction. House argues that memory of the Vichy regime and its rounding up of the Jews was used by pro-Algerian organizations after World War II as a “rhetorical strategy” to compare it with the situation of Algerians in France. This was because the French at the time had little awareness of anti-colonialism or colonial violence; hence “the only way of approaching the racialized colonial power relations affecting Algerians in France was often through an analogy with apparently ‘noncolonial’ forms of racism practiced during the Occupation.”¹⁰⁹ We could extend this insight to the strategies adopted by Pankhurst in her broadsheet, relating to the ways in which she tried to mobilize support among British and international opinion for the Ethiopian cause. She ran articles both by imperialists and by anti-imperialists/anti-colonialists, irrespective of ideological bias. It is pretty clear that her position on the invasion stemmed from an anti-fascist rather than *explicitly* anti-racist perspective, though Mary Davis in her biography of Pankhurst rightly notes that Pankhurst was different from many feminists of her time, who were often racist and pro-empire.¹¹⁰ She was certainly ahead of her time, and indeed of many left political activists of the period, when she denounced the racist attitude of the League of Nations in abandoning Ethiopia to its fate rather than defending its sovereignty through the reinforcement of economic sanctions against Italy.

The debate about Ethiopia’s civilization was also a debate about the redefinition of humanity and the concept of a shared solidarity in the context of ongoing colonialism and imminent fascist threats. In Britain, anti-colonial sentiments had been active and lively at least since the second half of the nineteenth century, if not earlier. J.A. Hobson’s *Imperialism: A Study*, widely considered a major anti-imperial text from a liberal viewpoint, came out in 1902. The Boer War, Amritsar and the “Congo scandal” of the 1890s, as it was denounced in British public opinion by Sir Roger Casement, all paved the way for Pankhurst’s successful raising of sympathies in favour of Ethiopians in 1936. There was a growing recognition of the “humanity” of colonized peoples and their right to self-recognition. This was also largely due to the prominence of anti-colonial activists coming from the colonies themselves.

CONCLUSION

In the readings presented here, the Ethiopian war was a critical event for the articulation of transnational, anti-colonial and anti-fascist sentiments. The advent of fascist colonialism in the late era of imperialism contributed to profound shifts in conceptions of “European civilization” during the war, foreshadowing the catastrophic destruction of certainties in World War II. At the same time, however, the pictures of the Ethiopian war that emerged out of official Italian documents and accounts of the time were symptomatic of the profound investment Italians had in their idea of themselves as “modern” and “civilized”, because *civilizing*. I have shown how British intellectuals and activists of the time seized on the war to debate the status of British imperialism and nationhood, with Pankhurst, on the one hand, seeking to deflect the threat of fascism hanging over Europe and Britain in particular, and Waugh, on the other hand, seeing Italy as a “newer” civilization that might be able to save Europe and its civilizing mission from inevitable decline. Here Steer and Pankhurst are considered partisans in both the historical and metaphorical meanings in which I have been using this term throughout the chapter. They were “irregular combatants” for the cause of Ethiopia, in the sense that, though they were not Ethiopian themselves, their publications displayed an anti-colonial empathy and solidarity that they actively tried to communicate to their metropolitan readers, with the broader aim of influencing public opinion about the conflict. In many senses, their anti-colonialism was a form of education imparted by Ethiopians themselves, many of whom Steer and Pankhurst knew and frequented. In challenging the binary narrative that situates all resistance as emanating exclusively from the peripheries, a British partisan stance against Italian aggression in Ethiopia, as evidenced in the writing that has been analyzed here for the first time, shows how imperialism can be seen as unravelling from within.

NOTES

1. Among recent works that examine popular metropolitan attitudes to colonialism, see Kalypso Nicolaïdis *et al*, eds., *Echoes of Empire: Identity, Memory and Colonial Legacies* (London: IB Tauris, 2015); and J.M. Mackenzie, ed., *European Empires and the People: Popular Responses to Imperialism in France, Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Italy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009). See Giuseppe

- Finaldi's chapter in particular for a discussion of Italian imperialism and its reception: "The Peasants did not think of Africa': Empire and the Italian state's pursuit of legitimacy, 1871–1945".
2. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan: A Commentary/Remark on the Concept of the Political*, translated by A.C. Goodson (1963; English translation, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004), 26.
 3. Schmitt, 7.
 4. Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-siècle Radicalism, and The Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 6 and 10.
 5. *The Tragedy of Abyssinia: What Britain Feels and Thinks And Wants. A Selection of Some Recent Expressions of Feeling and Opinion by British Men and Women. Letters, Resolutions, Speeches, Cartoons* (London: June 1936, League of Nations Union), p. 5.
 6. Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 7.
 7. *The Tragedy of Abyssinia*, 38–39.
 8. See Danny Duncan Collum, ed., *African Americans in the Spanish Civil War: "This Ain't Ethiopia, but It'll Do"* (New York: G.K. Hall, 1992).
 9. François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 22.
 10. In the editorial for the first issue of *International African Opinion*, the publication that spearheaded black activism in Britain in the interwar period and was edited by the IASB (described in Chap. 2), the editors proclaimed, "The crisis of world civilisation and the fate of Ethiopia have awakened black political consciousness as never before" (*International African Opinion*, vol. 1, n. 1, p. 2).
 11. Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilization 1919–1939*, 23.
 12. Overy, 98. In his chapter on Anne-Marie Stopes, Overy discusses Stopes's eugenics movement, which was partly premised on the perceived need to uphold the "imperial race". Unsurprisingly, the high point of the eugenics movement took place between the world wars (Overy, 105).
 13. Cromer, quoted in Overy 24.
 14. *Imperialism and Civilization*, 16, quoted in Overy, 27. Woolf took a great interest in the "Ethiopian question" and the problems it posed for international law and collective security of nations under the League of Nations Covenant. In a subsequent book, a pamphlet entitled *The League and Abyssinia*, Woolf argued that the League had been created essentially to put a stop to European colonizing aspirations, which he called "the old methods of imperialism": "The old methods of imperialism and the 1906 agreements, which authorize Great Powers to conquer, control, and exploit the weaker Powers, are inconsistent and incompatible with the

- League system, which excludes conquest and guarantees independence and territorial integrity to weaker states" (Woolf, *The League and Abyssinia*, London: Published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press), 16.
15. See Chap. 2 for a fuller discussion of Italian colonial discourse and racial theories.
 16. Overy, *The Morbid Age*, 5.
 17. Overy, *The Morbid Age*, 6.
 18. It was especially the Prime Minister Francesco Crispi who aggressively pushed for Italian colonial expansion in the Horn of Africa, and under his premiership Italy founded its first colony, Eritrea, known as the "colonia primogenita", in 1890.
 19. Fuller, *Moderns Abroad*, 6.
 20. See Claudia Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism: Italian Fascists and Britain's Italians in the 1930s* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 103.
 21. See Chap. 2 for a fuller discussion of this.
 22. Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia*, 33.
 23. Muriel Currey, *A Woman at the Abyssinian War* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1936), 88.
 24. Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism*, 111.
 25. Currey, *A Woman at the Abyssinian War*, 106.
 26. *Waugh in Abyssinia*, 169.
 27. Donat Gallagher, "Political Decade: Introduction", in Evelyn Waugh, *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Donat Gallagher (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 156.
 28. Michael Salwen, *Evelyn Waugh in Ethiopia: The Story Behind Scoop* (Lewiston: Mellen, 2001), 94.
 29. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/authors-take-sides-on-the-spanish-war>. Retrieved March 3, 2017.
 30. Gallagher, "Introduction", 157.
 31. See Nicholas Rankin, *Telegram from Guernica: The Extraordinary Life of George Steer: Reporter, Adventurer and Soldier* (London: Faber, 2003), 1–6.
 32. George Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia* (1936; repr. London: Faber, 2009), 9.
 33. Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, 393.
 34. See Gabriele Proglia, *Libia 1911–1912. Immaginari coloniali e italianità* (Milan: Mondadori, 2016), for an exploration of the impact of the Libyan war on Italy's colonial imaginary.
 35. Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, 102.
 36. Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, 15.
 37. Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, 47.
 38. Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, 66.

39. Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, 90.
40. Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, 174.
41. Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 25.
42. Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 26.
43. Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, 107.
44. See Rankin, *Telegram from Guernica*, 45.
45. Waugh, "A *Times* Correspondent" (1937), reprinted in Waugh, *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, 188.
46. Waugh, *Scoop: A Novel About Journalists* (London: Penguin, 2003 [1938]), 64.
47. Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, 151.
48. Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, 180.
49. Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, 136.
50. Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia*, 47.
51. Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia*, 49.
52. Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, 190.
53. Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, 233.
54. Del Boca, *La Conquista dell'Impero*, 495.
55. Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, 282. Sylvia Pankhurst's weekly newspaper dedicated to Ethiopia, *NTEN*, reviewed Steer's book very favourably and mentioned the episode recalled by Steer in which the British Military Attaché picked up the shell that had been found to contain yperite. In commenting on this episode, the reviewer F. Beaufort Palmer, remarked, "It is not untrue to say that the conduct of the British Government throughout the Abyssinian affair amounts to a criminal betrayal not only of the electorate but of democracy in general, and of our international obligations" (*NTEN*, January 16, 1937, 2).
56. Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, 269.
57. Del Boca also agrees that Ethiopians might have been able to defeat the Italians if they had fought a guerrilla war, which would naturally have played to their strengths and intimate knowledge of Ethiopia's mountainous and desert terrains. See Del Boca, *La conquista dell'impero*, 379–380.
58. Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, 361.
59. Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, 407.
60. Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 31.
61. The first few issues carried the subtitle "We stand for international law and justice." This was later changed to "For the independence of Ethiopia", possibly signalling a shift of focus from general to specific causes, which tended to include most fascist atrocities, from Ethiopia to Spain.

62. Kathryn Dodd, "Introduction: The Politics of Form in Sylvia Pankhurst's Writing", in *A Sylvia Pankhurst Reader*, ed. Kathryn Dodd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 3.
63. See Barbara Winslow, Chap. 3, "The East London Federation of Suffragettes", *Sylvia Pankhurst: Sexual Politics and Political Activism* (London: UCL Press, 1996), pp. 41–74. Winslow shows how ELFS represented a radical split from mainstream suffragette activism, as it presented itself from the start as "a radical, militant, working-class, feminist organization", whose political work not only involved the fight for women's right to vote but combined it with a desire to improve the socio-economic conditions of working-class women (41). Pankhurst was also involved in armed struggle in the East End, founding a workers' army (Winslow, 56). This tendency towards armed and more radical forms of struggle prefigured her later opposition to parliamentary politics in the context of the Communist Party of Great Britain.
64. Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, 68–69.
65. *Woman's Dreadnought*, January 2, 1915, quoted in Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, 69.
66. Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, 105.
67. Pankhurst, "Soviet Russia as I saw it in 1920: the Congress in the Kremlin", *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 16 April 1921, reprinted in Dodd, *A Sylvia Pankhurst Reader*, 108–115.
68. Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, 158. As Winslow points out, events bore out Pankhurst's position; when in 1921, the Communist Party applied to join the Labour Party, they were rejected by them (161).
69. Pankhurst, "Freedom of Discussion", *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 17 September 1921, reprinted in Dodd, *A Sylvia Pankhurst Reader*, 120.
70. See Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, 135–136.
71. Mary Davis refers to a letter by Pankhurst to Stafford Cripps detailing her views on Ethiopia and Spain as a single common struggle against fascism. See Mary Davis, *Sylvia Pankhurst: A Life in Radical Politics* (London: Pluto, 1999), 110.
72. Letter from Lord Auckland to Sylvia Pankhurst, November 10th, 1936, ADD 88925/5/1: 1936–1938, General correspondence, etc., relating to the *New Times and Ethiopia News*, Pankhurst Papers, Western Manuscripts Collection, British Library.
73. Letter from Augustin Souchy to Sylvia Pankhurst, March 31st, 1937, ADD 88925/5/1: 1936–1938, General correspondence, etc., relating to the *New Times and Ethiopia News*, Pankhurst Papers, Western Manuscripts Collection, British Library.
74. Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, 136. Pankhurst was in "close touch with Gramsci", among other communist leaders of the time. She contributed

to *Avanti* (organ of the PSI) as well as *L'Ordine Nuovo*. Gramsci ran a column in his paper entitled "*Vita politica internazionale*" ("International Political Life"), in which his constant interest for the internationalist dimensions of class struggle was evident. In one issue, the column ran a piece on the English proletariat; in another, on the American proletariat. In the June 7, 1919, issue, Gramsci published a very poetic and impassioned defense of the colonies and their contribution to the war effort. In her articles, Pankhurst outlined the situation regarding revolutionary efforts in England and police repression of trade unions and communists. She gave much attention to Lloyd George and the Labour Party, as well as to proposals to nationalize the mining industry (proposed by Judge Sankey). Her first piece began thus: "*Al presente noi assistiamo in Gran Bretagna a un notevole incremento tra le masse di un inconscio spirito rivoluzionario*" ("In Great Britain we are presently witnessing a notable increase of unconscious revolutionary spirit among the masses"). One essay ended with the conclusion that the only way forward was communism.

75. Richard Pankhurst, *Sylvia Pankhurst: Counsel for Ethiopia. A Biographical Essay on Ethiopian, Anti-fascist, and Anti-colonialist History, 1934–1960* (Hollywood, CA: Tsehai Publications, 2003), 2. Pankhurst's position on the Ethiopian war closely recalls that of the Italian communists, such as Ruggero Grieco, who was heavily involved in anti-Italian campaigning regarding the Ethiopian war. He remarked in a report to the PCI's Central Committee: "*La guerra d'Africa è il punto d'approdo di tutta la politica del fascismo.*" ("The Ethiopian war is the culmination of fascism's entire politics") (see Procacci, *Annali* 1977, 139).
76. R. Pankhurst, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, 11.
77. R. Pankhurst, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, 80.
78. R. Pankhurst, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, 84–85.
79. *NTEN*, June 13, 1936, 1.
80. *NTEN*, October 17, 1936, 8. *The Song of Freedom* was a 1936 British film starring the black actor Paul Robeson. It was remarkable for its depiction of black people living in Britain, and for its portrayal of slavery as historically interconnected with contemporary black diasporas.
81. W.A.R. Waddy, "An African View", *NTEN*, August 28, 1936, 5.
82. W.A.R. Waddy, "An African View", *NTEN*, August 28, 1936, 5.
83. J.A. Rogers, "Italian 'Civilisation' Will Desolate Ethiopia: Oppressor Will Take All, Leave Natives Nothing", *NTEN*, August 15, 1936, 1.
84. J.A. Rogers, "Italian 'Civilisation' Will Desolate Ethiopia: Oppressor Will Take All, Leave Natives Nothing", 1.
85. Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia*, 154.
86. See, for example, the racial discourses implied in Currey's idealization of Italian soldiers.

87. "Ethiopian Independence", *NTEN* 27, November 7th, 1936.
88. This reflected Italian exiles' debates about social and liberal democracy more generally; see Claudia Baldoli, "With Rome and Moscow: Italian Catholic Communism and Anti-Fascist Exile", *Contemporary European History* 25: 4 (2016), 619–643.
89. An Ethiopian Student, "My Country", *NTEN*, January 16, 1937, 1 and 3.
90. Africano, "L'Etiopia come è e come sarà", *Giustizia e Libertà*, January 1, 1937, 2. The article was prefaced by the following editorial note: "*Di un giovane abissino, di cultura occidentale, riceviamo il presente articolo che ci sembra degno d'interesse. Particolarmente giusta ci pare la sua critica a coloro che si illudono di poter fare qualcosa per il popolo spagnolo sacrificando ai ricatti mussoliniani il popolo abissino.*" ("We have received the following article by a young Abyssinian of European culture. We find him to be particularly right in his criticism of those who delude themselves that they can do something for the Spanish people by sacrificing the Abyssinian people to Mussolini's blackmail.")
91. E. Malcolm Shard, *Flying for Ethiopia* (London: The Popular Library, 1937), 28.
92. E. Malcolm Shard, *Flying for Ethiopia* (London Popular Library, 1937), p. 43.
93. R. Pankhurst, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, 21.
94. Letter from Stanley Jevons to Sylvia Pankhurst, February 28, 1936, Pankhurst Papers: Abyssinia Association, British Library, ADD Ms 88925/1/22.
95. Letter from Sylvia Pankhurst to Stanley Jevons, February 29, 1936, Pankhurst Papers: Abyssinia Association, British Library, ADD Ms 88925/1/22.
96. Letter from SP to Stanley Jevons, December 2, 1936, Pankhurst Papers: Abyssinia Association, British Library, ADD Ms 88925/1/22.
97. *NTEN*, February 27, 1937, 5.
98. Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia*, 68–69.
99. All of Wazir Ali Baig's letters to Pankhurst are contained in the Pankhurst Papers held in the Manuscripts Collection of the British Library. They delineate the figure of an Indian diasporic subject with shifting and multiple allegiances towards, for example, the British Empire, whose protection he invoked when he felt threatened by the Italian authorities. However, his devotion to Ethiopia and indeed his patriotism shine clearly through his writing.
100. See, for example, his letter dated April 16, 1937.
101. Letter to Sylvia Pankhurst, August 19, 1938, Wazir Ali Baig, Pankhurst Papers, Manuscript Collection, British Library, ADD Ms. 88925/5/4.

102. Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La caduta dell'impero*, vol. III (Mondadori, 1992), pp. 81–88.
103. Del Boca, *La caduta dell'impero*, p. 85. See also David Forgacs, "Italian Massacres in Occupied Ethiopia", *Modern Italy*, 21:3 (2016), 305–312. In this essay Forgacs reviews a number of recent publications on Italian colonial massacres, including a documentary.
104. "Addis Ababa Massacre Reports", *NTEN*, March 13, 1937, p. 7.
105. Daniel Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War, 1935–36* (London: Temple Smith, 1975), 123.
106. *The British Italian Bulletin*, March 28th, 1936, 3.
107. "Is Italy Right?", *Abyssinia, A Newspaper of the League of Nations in Action* (January 29, 1936), p. 4.
108. "Is Italy Right?", *Abyssinia, A Newspaper of the League of Nations in Action* (January 29, 1936), p. 4.
109. Jim House, "Memory and the Creation of Solidarity During the Decolonization of Algeria", *Yale French Studies* 118/119 (2010), p. 24.
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Internationalism and Third-Worldism in Postwar Italy

This chapter emphasizes the enduring internationalism of postwar Italy that was, in part, the legacy of its anti-fascist struggle. The years after 1945 witnessed the culmination of decolonization movements in various parts of the world. Influential anti-colonial theories emerged in these years, developed by Third-World intellectuals attempting to chart a future course of action for nations fighting for their independence against colonial rule. The liberation movements in Algeria, Vietnam and Cuba demonstrated the ever-increasing fault-lines between orthodox, Eurocentric communism and what came to be known in those years as “Third-Worldism”.¹ In this chapter, I examine the fertile connections Italian intellectuals made between anti-colonialism and anti-fascism in the postwar period, and explore the ways in which perceived analogies between these two positions and the influence of Third-Worldism led to a renewal of Italian radical culture, especially in the realms of literature and film. I delineate a group of diverse texts that are all, however, characterized by a “resistance aesthetics”, as I call it here. But this chapter also emphasizes the point that Italian attitudes to colonialism have varied significantly in the course of its national history, and draws attention to the ambivalence of the Italian left. While Italian leftists stood alongside supporters of the Algerian struggle for independence, they also made no comment on Italy’s own colonial history, which had seemingly been erased from public memory after the Second World War. Moreover, the PCI campaigned for trusteeship of

Somalia in the post-war period, arguing that this was Italy's due "as just moral compensation" for the anti-fascist forces' contribution to the war effort.²

Throughout this book, I have outlined the forms that left internationalism assumed when taking up arms (whether literally or metaphorically) in support of anti-colonial struggles. But I have also stressed the radical divergences between communism, on the one hand, and Pan-Africanism, on the other, which gained in strength and autonomy also as a reaction to communism's perceived Eurocentrism with regards to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia.³ In Chap. 5, I examined metropolitan anti-colonialism in Britain through a focus on its support for Ethiopia, arguing that forms of cross-cultural solidarity on the part of British anti-fascists such as Sylvia Pankhurst and George Steer promoted an alternative vision of their own nation. By making a political intervention in the British public sphere through their journalism, they put pressure on their government to aid Ethiopia. In doing so, these activists implicitly rejected imperialist or fascist tendencies in British nationalism and proclaimed the importance of an internationalist outlook, sketching out a radically anti-colonial future for Britain. In this chapter, I trace the hidden history of an Italian internationalism that is the obverse of the aggressive colonialism Mussolini promoted in the interwar years and that imagined, as with Steer and Pankhurst with regards to Britain, an alternative vision for Italy. It is possible to identify certain key moments of an Italian "internationalist" thinking that links in one direction to Antonio Gramsci's notion of cosmopolitanism, as elaborated in the *Quaderni del carcere* (*Prison Notebooks*), and, more broadly, to interwar internationalism that united anti-colonial and anti-fascist activists in a common front of struggle (as was the case with the Italian communists who supported Ethiopia against Mussolini). If we then look to the postwar period, this internationalism relates to the formation of an Italian "Third-Worldism" that emerged out of dissatisfaction with PCI cultural politics, creating new forms of solidarity with Marxist and anti-imperialist decolonization movements outside Europe. Both moments may have a lot to tell us about the ways in which anti-colonial struggles were brought to bear on the internal situation of Italy itself, but they also highlight an inherent internationalism at work in Italy's own history. This is one of the factors that make its contribution to postcolonial studies so significant.

As Perry Anderson notes, "Few political notions are at once so normative and so equivocal as internationalism. [...] its implication is virtually

always positive. But the price of approval is indeterminacy.”⁴ Anderson argues for a dialectical relationship between nationalism and internationalism, so that it is more correct to speak of different forms of internationalism corresponding to the different historical manifestations of nationalism. “Historically, the term may be applied to any outlook, or practice, that tends to transcend the nation towards a wider community, of which nations continue to form the principal units.”⁵ This is a useful definition for my purposes here, but at the same time I am also interested in the ways in which internationalist thinking inflects *nationalist* thinking: how relating national struggles to those of the wider world can change the way we think about the nation itself. I am also very mindful of the strong utopian charge inherent in internationalism: the political theorist Tom Nairn, for example, considers it quite self-righteous and more than a little unrealistic. But at the same time, Nairn points to an important ethical dimension to internationalism that perhaps is shared by liberal and socialist internationalists alike and could be seen as its core feature: “Internationalism poses a moral alternative to the way the world has actually gone.”⁶ The utopian dimension of internationalism finds an apt expression in Gramsci’s elaboration of cosmopolitanism.

As is well known, Gramsci speaks against the figure of the “cosmopolitan intellectual” in the *Prison Notebooks*. Historically speaking, he argues, Italian intellectuals have been “cosmopolitan” in a negative sense; they have embraced an international dimension to the detriment of their connection with Italian indigenous cultural traditions and expressions, and have thus fatally impeded the development and consolidation of a truly “national-popular culture.”⁷ But Gramsci in the *Notebooks* also delineates a positive notion of cosmopolitanism which can be traced in Italy’s radical intellectual tradition: an internationalist solidarity with oppressed classes and colonized peoples that transcends nation, perhaps precisely because Italy came to nationhood so late, prefiguring or accompanying nationalist anti-colonial struggles.⁸ I will focus on this “openness” of Italian radical thought to the wider world, and specifically to trajectories of global anti-imperialist struggles, and I will map the visible traces of Italy’s cultural and political engagement with internationalism and Third-Worldism after the end of World War II.

Through my readings in this chapter, it becomes possible to imagine Italy as a nation in an internationalist dimension, whose true potential is only realized through international and transnational solidarities.⁹ The fact that, in Italy, decolonization ends with fascism reveals a particular

truth about colonial discourse, distinctly illustrated by the Italian example (though Portugal and Spain also offer similar examples in their colonial projects): the profound links between fascism and colonialism which were evident to forward-thinking anti-fascists already in the 1930s. Thus Gramsci and the PCI, as well as many African and Asian nationalists, had this connection very clearly and firmly in mind already in the 1930s. Moreover, forms of anti-colonial thought were developing in Italy alongside, and often in opposition to, Italy's colonial expansion overseas (though this history has been largely forgotten). Italy's status as a late-comer to the game of empire-building among European powers meant that its anti-colonialism was in dialogue with socialism, which was beginning to develop its own form of internationalism.¹⁰

"ITALIAN THEORY" AS POSTCOLONIAL THEORY?

Italian anti-colonialism is grounded in the consciousness of a shared experience between anti-fascists and Third-World militants, namely the practical and political experience of resistance struggle. This postcolonial approach opens up Italy, whose national boundaries would seem to be defined by its instantly recognizable territorial shape, to the wider world. It expresses the idea of *italianità*, or an Italian national identity that is conceived in the diaspora and in the absence of a sovereign state. I would like to relate Gramsci's understanding of Italian nationhood as inherently internationalist to the insights of contemporary "Italian Theory", represented by philosophers such as Roberto Esposito and Antonio Negri, among others.¹¹ This does not mean losing sight of the question of the nation; but rather, "a nation is such—a living body, that is—when, instead of shutting itself up in its own territorial identity, it is able to de-territorialize itself, to look at itself from the outside, and to take from the outside world whatever aids in renewing and developing its own roots, rather than obstructing them."¹² Esposito suggests that Italy's late coming to modernity may have equipped it better than other philosophical traditions to analyze the dynamics of the globalized world that characterize the post-modern era; he calls it a "geo-philosophy", a *filosofia civile*, that was born out of a lack of a national state, out of a need to address the pressing problems of a political situation that was always in flux, always to be defined, a de-territorialized idea of philosophy: "Italian philosophy neither influenced nor was influenced by the formation of the national state."¹³

For Esposito, the Italian philosophical tradition was characterized by an “original plurality” (*originaria pluralità*) precisely because it lacked the national centre (as represented by a centralized state power) that other European nations possessed.¹⁴ But while Esposito sees this as a sign of the uniqueness, strength and adaptiveness of Italian thought, Antonio Negri is very negative about it: “if Italy does not have a center, Italian philosophy is not even provincial: it is just weak (*debole*), it has always been a weak philosophy, weak in the face of politics and bosses, dictators and popes.”¹⁵ Negri salvages from this nihilistic overview of Italian thought very few thinkers, one of whom is Gramsci. For Negri, Gramsci in particular “re-established philosophy where it should have remained, in the life and struggles of ordinary people”.¹⁶ Most importantly for the purposes of this book, it is worth bearing in mind Negri’s remark, *à propos* of Gramsci, that “it is resistance that produces philosophy.”¹⁷

Can Italian thought, then, have a specific contribution to make to a contemporary theory of global resistance, as a national philosophy that presents itself as available for export because it can be defined as not having conventionally nationalist characteristics? Is it possible to decouple territory from nation? Can it act, in other words, as a postcolonial theory, if we understand such thinking as interested in making a radical political intervention on issues of global social justice through a historical awareness of colonialism’s enduring effects in the present? Sandro Mezzadra’s work helps us address this question by making visible the interconnections between Italian radical thought and Anglophone postcolonial studies. As he observes, an awareness of the “postcolonial” in Italy began long before the new wave of non-European immigration in the 1990s (though he acknowledges that this event prompted his own “arrival” at postcolonial studies).¹⁸ In Mezzadra one can identify a confluence of shared political interests and a sense of urgency that predate the transformation of Italian society through migration since the late 1980s. It thus becomes important to distinguish between the “postcolonial condition” and postcolonialism as a theoretical-political position. Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo argue that the Italian postcolonial condition is “one of the main factors that affects lives and shapes cultures in contemporary Italy”.¹⁹ The postcolonial condition, then, can be a way of understanding Italy itself. How do Italian theories act as *postcolonial* theories, and, vice versa, how can postcolonial theories act as Italian theories? *Operaismo*, or workerism, presents crucial intersections with the anticolonial project, and Mezzadra acknowledges that it was this tradition that shaped his own theoretical

formation.²⁰ On the one hand, his own elaboration of *operaismo* has been profoundly transformed by the influence of postcolonial studies, especially Dipesh Chakrabarty's critique of the "stagist" view of capitalist development that has shaped historiographical interpretations of India's past.²¹ On the other hand, *operaismo* has informed his own thinking about anti-colonialism:

In my analysis of anti-colonial struggles, I have tried to retain a method that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri had already projected on a global scale in *Empire*: namely that in order to understand development, one must first of all look to the struggles [*le lotte*].²²

This "globalization" of a theoretical method animated by political struggles in the 1960s and 1970s in Italy can be related to Esposito's argument that political conflict is central to the reflections of the Italian philosophical tradition, which, for this reason, offers a possible pathway towards the reinvigoration of philosophy as a constructive intervention: "Coming from this angle, then, contemporary thought—still stuck in the postmodern celebration of its own end—may just find some leverage to resume functioning in an affirmative mode."²³

GRAMSCI'S DIASPORIC ANTI-COLONIALISM

To fully develop this connection between Italian Theory, with its focus on resistance as the key driver of philosophical production, and the formulation of an Italian anti-colonialism, it is necessary to take a step back in time and reexamine certain historical debates relating to Italy's relationship to diaspora and colonization. Gramsci's anti-colonial theory stems from an acute analysis of the shortcomings of Italian imperialism. Shortly after unification in 1861, the Italian state simultaneously pursued the economic and political policies of emigration and colonial expansion to consolidate Italy's international prestige abroad. Mark I. Choate argues that Italians became "pioneers in establishing a 'global nation', beyond imperial control and territorial jurisdiction, held together by ties of culture, communications, ethnicity and nationality".²⁴ Early Italian colonial theories, by championing what Choate calls "emigrant colonialism", emphasized the ways in which Italy could become an internationally significant power in the world through the exportation of its labour and the dissemination of typically "Italian" cultural and social traits abroad; it could also boost its

economy thanks to the remittances that emigrants sent back home. The word *colonia* held two meanings in this early period; it meant both Italian emigrant communities abroad (for example, in North and South America) and Italian colonial territories in East Africa: “by peaceful means, Italy was creating a new empire overseas, rather than subjecting African nations to a short-sighted and expensive military occupation”, a tendency that gained political traction most notably after the defeat of Adwa in 1896.²⁵ It made complete economic and political sense for Italy to pursue such a policy because, unlike France and Britain, it lacked capital to invest in establishing colonies abroad. Such an approach to colonialism shakes up conventional understandings of hegemonic versus subaltern relationships; in British and French colonial theories, it was through territorial conquest that the colonizer’s culture could spread and dominate over that of the colonized.

This idea of colonization, which would later be replaced by Enrico Corradini’s and Mussolini’s idea of the proletarian nation that needed its “place in the sun”, would shape Italian national identity in profound ways, and made it distinctly international. However, this internationalism was contrasted by opposing imperialist tendencies on the part of the Italian state. Italy’s foreign policy changed abruptly after the Turko-Libyan war of 1911–1912, which saw Italians as the new protagonists of a colonial conflict.²⁶ The push for a more aggressive foreign policy and a privileging of territorial colonies over emigrant settlements came primarily from the cultural sphere: the writer Enrico Corradini and the poet Giovanni Pascoli, among others, promoted the notion of a Greater Italy. Their campaigning came to a head around the Libyan invasion in 1911. Pascoli penned a famous speech, “*La grande proletaria s’è mossa*” (“The great proletarian nation stirs”), a couple of months after the invasion. Pascoli’s speech was a moral and political justification of the invasion from a socialist outlook; he characterizes Italy as a “great proletarian nation”, in need of its place in the sun, thus prefiguring Mussolini’s imperialist rhetoric. Pascoli, writing against decades of Italian foreign policy that saw emigration and territorial colonialism as two sides of the same coin, establishes a marked contrast between diaspora and colonization. Using a strongly identificatory “we”, Pascoli argues that the war will restore a sense of greatness to the Italian people, too long crushed under foreign rule on their own land and subject to foreign hegemonies when they were forced to emigrate: “They had become a bit like Negroes in America, the compatriots of he who had discovered it; and like Negroes, who at times were placed outside the law and

humanity, they were lynched.”²⁷ But the colonization of Libya, promises Pascoli, will bring back Italy’s civilizing mission and put a stop to the forced homelessness and exploitation of Italian emigrant workers, who abroad are “*non più d’Italia*” (“no longer of Italy”). In Libya, an erstwhile Roman colony, they will be “*agricoltori*”, or settler farmers, on the soil of the homeland, and “will not be forced to renounce the name of the homeland [...] Rome is also over there” (Pascoli 1911). The colonial territory is home for the Italian worker; while the diaspora, most manifestly, is not.

Socialist endorsements of imperialism, and their championing of the colony as an extension of the “patria”, ultimately aimed at substituting extensive Italian emigration with colonization and would form the basis for Mussolini’s notion of Italian colonialism as the “empire of labor”. I have explored in Chap. 2 the ways in which Italy under Mussolini embraced aggressive colonial expansion through the establishment of an “Italian Empire” in East Africa and Libya. The “Greater Italy” tendency prevailed, and Mussolini privileged emigration to Africa and sought to limit the diaspora of Italians in the Americas. But the seeds of an Italian internationalism had been sown.

For Gramsci, the social imperialism of Pascoli and Corradini means that “the concept of ‘proletarian’ is transferred from classes to nations”; but he is scathing about it. He remarks parenthetically, as if it were obvious: “emigration is the consequence of the inability of the ruling class to give work to the population, and not of national poverty” (Q2§51, 205). In other words, colonialism simply cannot be justified by the need for *Lebensraum*; it is instead a product of internal hegemonies, which subject subaltern classes *within* the nation to economic and political exploitation.

In response, Gramsci outlines an Italian anti-colonialism that looks outwardly towards global solidarity with the oppressed, with migrant labor worldwide, because Italian emigrants have experienced first-hand discrimination and oppression. “*La grande proletaria s’è mossa*” is interpreted by Gramsci in an internationalist way, which is the only possible alternative to nationalist imperialism, if a nation is truly to progress. Labor and subalternity, and not ethnicist nationalism, must unite proletarians across the globe. Gramsci argued that a situation of profound internal colonialism was what had precipitated emigration in the first place, because the Italian elites kept the majority of the population in a state of economic and political subalternity. Imperialism could not be a satisfactory solution for Italy, impoverished as it was: “A state is a colonizer not because it is prolific, but

because it is rich in capital to be placed outside its own borders, etc.” (Q8§80, 986). In a paragraph of *The Prison Notebooks* entitled *Risorgimento* dating from 1932, Gramsci recuperates the idea of Pascoli’s “proletarian nation”, by turning it on its head. The quotation is long but deserves to be cited in full:

§ 127. *Risorgimento*. Must the national movement that brought about the unification of the Italian state necessarily result in nationalism and in nationalistic and military imperialism? This outcome is anachronistic and anti-historical; it is truly against all the Italian traditions, first Roman, then Catholic. These traditions are cosmopolitan. [...] the conditions for an Italian expansion in the present and in the future do not exist, and it does not appear as if they are in the process of being formed. Modern expansion is based on finance capitalism. The human element [*l'elemento "uomo"*] in present-day Italy is either human capital or human labor. Italian expansion is based on human labor, not on human capital and the intellectual who represents human labor is not the traditional intellectual, full of rhetoric and sterile thoughts of the past. Italian cosmopolitanism cannot but become internationalism. Therefore, one can state that the Italian tradition dialectically continues in the working people [*popolo lavoratore*] and in its intellectuals, not in the traditional citizen or in the traditional intellectual. A citizen of the world, not as Roman citizen or Catholic citizen, but as a worker and producer of civilization. The Italian people is, “as a nation”, the most interested in internationalism. Not only the worker, but also the peasant and especially the Southern peasant. To collaborate in the economic reconstruction of the world in a unitary manner belongs to the tradition of Italian history and of the Italian people, not in order to dominate it and appropriate the fruits of others’ labor, but to exist and develop. Nationalism is an anachronistic growth in Italian history, of people with their head turned backwards like the damned in Dante’s *Inferno* [...] The Italian people’s civilizing mission consists in reprising Roman and medieval cosmopolitanism, but in its more modern and advanced form. It may well be a proletarian nation; proletarian as a nation because it was the reserve army of foreign capitalisms, because together with the Slavic peoples it furnished manpower to the whole world. Precisely because of this it must join the modern front of struggle in order to re-organize the non-Italian world, which it helped to create with its own work.²⁸

Gramsci is normally highly critical of cosmopolitanism; Italian intellectual culture drew heavily on elite and foreign sources for the production of literature and art, rather than attempting to forge indigenous traditions into a “national-popular culture” that would find a wide audience among

the people, and could be a genuine expression of them.²⁹ Cosmopolitanism had prevented Italy from forming a strong and serviceable national culture in the wake of the Risorgimento and after Unification in 1861. But here, in a stunning reversal of the charges of cosmopolitanism he often levelled at Italy's intellectuals, Gramsci recuperates it as a positive value. Italian emigrants, neglected by the state and by the elites, can help to lead the anti-imperialist struggle because they are akin to the colonized themselves. In my view, Gramsci also racializes Italians in this passage. Italians are the "*brutta gente*" (the bad people), the dagos, the wops, the victims of racism in the rich American cities where they are forced to work; because of their shared condition of economic and cultural subalternity, they can forge alliances with the oppressed around the globe.

Against "imperial cosmopolitanism", which he so roundly denounces in his history of intellectuals, Gramsci posits a proletarian internationalism as a way of Italy's being in the world and being open to the world. He takes the language of Mussolini's imperialist rhetoric that constructed Italy as an "empire of labor", and Pascoli's "proletarian nation", and through a form of Marxist irony, succeeds in investing it with a revolutionary potential. What stands out in this quote is the diasporic dimension Gramsci recognizes in Italy's "labor-force for export", acknowledging that Italians abroad are much more in the category of diasporic migrants than in that of colonizers. The internationalist dimension as an essential part of a "progressive" nationalism can be said to characterize Italian ideas of national identity in the post-war period in relationship to an anti-fascist understanding of the nation. This then suggests a new form of thinking about anti-colonialism: it is not just a form of resistance emanating from the periphery but from the very heart of Europe, from an erstwhile imperialist power. Italians could see the analogies between their situation as colonized and oppressed under fascism and that of colonized peoples in the Third World. This was especially evident to left activists in the 1930s, but it also became more and more obvious to Italians in the postwar era, when World War II, in which European fascism played such a determining role, was recast as a war of liberation from and resistance to totalitarian oppression.

ITALY, DECOLONIZATION AND THE END OF WORLD WAR II

My analysis of cultural politics and Italian anti-colonialism in the postwar period works on the premise of Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan's claim that the postwar period was crucial in repressing memories of Italian

colonialism.³⁰ With the end of fascism, colonialism stopped being a focus of state propaganda as it had been in the heyday of empire, and thus “Italian Africa disappeared from the everyday horizon of Italians.”³¹ Added to this was the fact that a strong anti-colonial movement within Italy itself had not been able to make its voice heard due to fascist censorship.

Moreover, since Italy lost its colonies to Britain in 1941, it never had to face the force of anti-colonial uprisings and independence movements, and did not have to operate any form of critical revision towards its own role as a colonizing power. With the exception of its ten-year trusteeship of Somalia between 1950 and 1960, it was not forced to engage with emergent political subjects who claimed civilizational autonomy from the colonizer.³² It did not learn respect for these new political actors who had earned their national independence through long and protracted struggles against major European powers. Historians and critics, then, have argued that Italy’s “failed decolonization” is due to the fact that it did not have to confront its dehumanizing and brutal legacy in East Africa and Libya as Britain and France had to do.³³ By refocusing attention on this “hidden” or occluded history of a specifically *Italian* anti-colonialism, we can begin to address this “failed decolonization” of the Italian public sphere, and to bring to light alternative traditions of political struggle and radical thought that have existed in Italy almost since the beginning of its colonial enterprise. A way to address the gaps in Italy’s memory of its colonial past is to focus on the history of Italian anti-colonialism.

Why is looking at such an anti-colonial history so important? While it is well known that left and Marxist movements in Europe supported anti-colonialism, what has been less remarked upon is how anti-colonial movements profoundly influenced the development of left radical politics in the twentieth century. In particular, the PCI differs from other left parties in Europe in that it provided support and a real anti-colonial strategy at critical moments: namely, Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 and the Algerian war of independence against the French in 1954–1962.

Examining anti-colonialism in Italy also allows us to understand more clearly the contours of metropolitan anti-colonialism, which would crystallize into cross-reciprocal solidarities between anti-fascists and anti-colonialists in the lead-up to the Second World War. Indeed, anti-colonialism and anti-fascism are part and parcel of the same thing: a will to transform the nation from within, a new conception of *nation* that rejects imperialism and fascism in the same breath. If, for some, the Risorgimento

was the attempt to bring about a national revolution via the struggle for Italian unification, then arguably this strain of anti-colonial nationalism in Italian radical politics could and would easily coalesce into a unique support for anti-colonial movements (and specifically for Ethiopia and Algeria) and also identify the significant points of commonality with an anti-fascist stance in the 1920s and 1930s, and beyond.

Third-Worldism, like internationalism, is an elusive term, though it carries a similar ethical charge in that it has both a precise political significance and a wider, looser application as a sympathetic attitude held towards anti-imperialist struggles and revolutionary movements in what was formerly known as the Third World. Ideologically, Third-Worldism transcended Eurocentric Marxist positions to take into account the political work of anti-colonial thinkers and activists (most notably Mao, Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral and Che Guevara) who influenced the art and writing of numerous Italian intellectuals. Third-Worldism, then, represented the future of social and political progressivism, which was now located outside Europe, and served to provincialize European Marxism, which had long held a sort of cultural hegemony (especially within Western public opinion) over anti-colonial struggles (the Chinese Revolution had a huge influence on the 1968 generation of student activists). Italy's strong support for the Algerian FLN in the context of the Algerian war played a central role in this process. It is worth recalling a comment by the French general Raoul Salan, who at the time of Algeria's war with France remarked, "We now need to recognize that it was an error to deprive Italy of its colonies: now a breach has been created [between France and Italy]."³⁴ In other words, Italy may have been so strongly supportive of Algeria because it did not have colonies itself and was animated by a strong anti-fascist (and hence anti-colonialist) sentiment. The lack of colonies allowed Italy, in the *postwar* period, to express such strong support for anti-colonialism and Third-Worldism: this was the democratic and socialist left that had opposed fascism and now opposed colonialism as a manifestation of fascist tendencies of the state.

A film that highlights the complex, non-linear relationship between anti-fascism and anti-colonialism is *The Battle of Algiers*. It is significant for our exploration of Italian postcolonial attitudes that the most well known anti-colonial film was made by an Italian director. In this 1966 film, Gillo Pontecorvo creates a form of nationalist historical cinema by proxy: as a way to build a new conception of national identity, he narrates a war of liberation—that of the Algerians—which simultaneously allegorizes Italy's

own recent liberation struggle against fascism. Saadi Yacef, an ex-commander of the Algerian FLN who had recently founded a film production house called Casbah Films, had approached Pontecorvo and asked him to make a film about the Algerians' victorious struggle for independence against the French. Yacef had also approached two other renowned Italian directors: Francesco Rosi and Luchino Visconti, but neither was available.³⁵ At the time, Italian cinema was one of the most artistically influential in the world, and Yacef may have been struck by the effectiveness of neorealist films in portraying a war of liberation, as well as by the political commitment of its most well-known directors, including Pontecorvo.³⁶

At one of the numerous press conferences that punctuate the narrative of *The Battle of Algiers*, the French commander in charge of quelling Algerian resistance, Colonel Mathieu, is quizzed by reporters regarding the French army's use of torture against Algerian resistance fighters. His firm response aims to highlight the inherent hypocrisy of a liberal European public opinion that opposes torture but refuses to confront the actual reason why it is being used in Algeria. Mathieu asks the assembled journalists to focus on the real problem:

The FLN wants to throw us out of Algeria, and we want to stay. Now it seems to me that even with minor differences of opinion, you all agree we should stay. And when the FLN rebellion began, there were no differences at all. All the newspapers, including *L'Humanité* [the newspaper of the French Communist Party], demanded that it be crushed. We [the army] have now been sent here for this reason alone.³⁷

This episode highlights the ambivalence and contradictoriness of European colonial powers after World War II, in the context of both the Resistance, understood as a war of liberation from fascism, and decolonization. On the one hand, there is the fresh memory of anti-fascist struggle and, on the other, a colonialist nationalist mindset that makes Mathieu want to fight this war. It is as if these two parallel forms of oppression—fascism and colonialism—were seen as completely separate from each other. Michael Rothberg argues for a relatedness of historical and cultural memory of the Holocaust and of the Algerian war, especially in the 1960s but also in later periods, which he calls “the very particular, multi-directional forms of overlap in memory and discourse between the Holocaust and the Franco-Algerian war”.³⁸ Rothberg's comparative approach, which links a focus on

memories and representations of fascist and colonial violence, is extremely productive for my exploration of Italy's postwar fashioning of a "resistance aesthetics". Rothberg discusses at length the writing of French anti-colonialists who opposed the Algerian war:

for people like Vidal-Naquet and André Mandouze, an associate of Fanon in North Africa, the acts of testimony and resistance bridged the two wars. During World War II Mandouze was one of the founders of *Témoignage chrétien* (Christian witness), a group that saved Jewish children and whose magazine was active in resistance to the Algerian war. Years later Mandouze titled the first volume of his memoirs *D'une résistance à l'autre* (From one resistance to another) and thus testified to the persistence of the link between fascist and colonial violence in at least a certain segment of French collective memory.³⁹

However, the Algerian war cannot be understood only in terms of memory but should also be framed in terms of forgetfulness, or historical amnesia. French historians such as Benjamin Stora have remarked that in France it was a "war without a name", subject to a collective erasure: "This denial continues to gnaw like a cancer, like gangrene, at the very foundations of French society."⁴⁰ The historiography of the Algerian war in France was subject to forms of denialism, lack of access to official archives and a general sense that it was not an event that spoke to the present but one that already belonged to the nation's past, to be conveniently forgotten.⁴¹

In an ironic coincidence, Mandouze's memoir, mentioned by Rothberg, had the same title as that of George Bidault, "himself a World War II resistance figure who went on to become one of the most infamous opponents of Algerian independence and defenders of French Algeria".⁴² *The Battle of Algiers's* Mathieu, a fictional character, was based on several real-life French commanders who were involved in the Algerian war, including General Raoul Salan (mentioned earlier), a left-wing Republican who fought in the French Resistance and subsequently in Indochina and in Algeria against the *Front de Libération Nationale*. He then went on to found the right-wing organization *Organisation Armée Secrète* (OAS), preparing terrorist attacks against civilian targets in France and taking part in the military coup against the French President Charles De Gaulle in 1961. Schmitt offers a conservative reappraisal of the figure of the partisan as embodied by Salan, who went from republican left-wing general to

anti-state terrorist. To some extent, Salan can be said to be a “colonialist partisan”. He participated in the coup against De Gaulle because

he was bitterly disappointed in his expectation that De Gaulle would defend unconditionally the constitutionally guaranteed French territorial sovereignty over Algeria [...] The acts of violence of the OAS he characterized as mere reaction to the most hateful of all such acts, namely the one that snatches the nation from a people that does not want to lose this—their—nation.⁴³

Schmitt shows quite clearly the seamless ideological trajectory that links the defender of free France, the officer in charge of colonial counterinsurgency and the future terrorist on the home front. While Schmitt is highly sympathetic to Salan’s “patriotic” predicament, his analysis can also be used to show the enduring colonialist mindset of postwar France, which saw Algeria as yet another front to be defended against the enemy (namely the Algerians themselves).

Similarly to Salan, Colonel Mathieu in *The Battle of Algiers* does not show any consciousness of an ideological contradiction in his military experiences. When we first see him in the film, it is at the head of a military parade. Cheering crowds of white settlers greet the French army as it arrives in Algiers, sent there to protect them against the “terrorist” actions of the FLN and to quell the anti-colonial resistance. The loudspeaker accompanying the parade announces Mathieu as the veteran of campaigns that include Italy and Normandy: “member of an anti-Nazi resistance movement. Expeditions: Madagascar and Suez. Wars: Indochina and Algeria.” In subsequent scenes, Mathieu is shown as an officer who knows how to fight an underground guerrilla war (which is the one the FLN is fighting in Algiers) because he himself fought one against the Nazis, and, perhaps for this reason, he shows a grudging respect for his Algerian opponents. As he says to the journalists at the press conference interrogating him about the French army’s use of torture against FLN combatants:

We, gentlemen, are neither madmen nor sadists. Those who today call us fascists have forgotten the important part many of us played in the Resistance. Those who call us Nazis perhaps don’t know that some of us survived Dachau and Buchenwald. We are soldiers. And we have the duty to win. So, to be precise, it is my turn to ask a question: Should France remain in Algeria? If you still answer yes, then you must accept all the necessary consequences.⁴⁴

The camera, as if to illustrate the “necessary consequences” of Mathieu’s implacable colonial logic, then cuts to one of the most upsetting scenes in the film: a young Algerian being subjected to water torture, while an older woman is forced to look on in tears, to the soundtrack of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*.

In his mind, Mathieu is fighting in the name of France, and his position is perfectly consistent, presenting an unproblematic nationalist narrative of these conflicts to the journalists. What Rothberg leaves out from his celebration of postwar “multi-directional memory” is that an imperialist nationalism can easily erase or repress the connections of solidarity between colonized peoples and the victims of fascism. As Pontecorvo eloquently portrays, what is at stake is not only the decolonization of Algeria: it is the need to decolonize Europe itself (as Sartre’s preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* passionately argued). Janine Cahen and Micheline Pouteau’s 1964 history of French anti-colonialism and the Algerian war, written shortly after Algerian independence, collects numerous “perpetrator testimonies” of French conscripts sent to Algeria to take part in the colonial repression. The young soldiers resentfully asked their superiors: “We did not want to go. Why did you let the trains leave? Why did you let us become murderers?”⁴⁵

This erasure of the links between colonialism and fascism in official narratives of the postwar era reveals a profound split in France over not only the question of the colonies and the status of the colonial subject but also the identity of the nation itself.⁴⁶ The anti-fascist resistance that took place in France and in Italy produced divided and contested legacies. On the one hand, there is the communist intervention in and interpretation of the resistance—the fight for a new Italy and France, and the conception of anti-fascism as a form of total *liberation* of the nation from fascism. On the other hand, there are more centrist groups, such as the *Democrazia Cristiana* in Italy and Gaullists in France, who had less radical agendas but shared with the communists some aspects of the Resistance legacy. Many French anti-fascists fought bitterly against anti-colonial nationalists in Indochina and Algeria: indeed, these wars were seen as *continuations*, and not *antitheses*, of the anti-fascist wars of liberation. As Allison Drew notes in her history of communists in colonial Algeria, “for many Algerians anti-colonialism and anti-fascism were seen in oppositional terms”, because “the French Communist Party’s critical support for France’s Popular Front government led it to moderate its anti-colonial stance.”⁴⁷ There were only a few activists and intellectuals who were far-sighted enough to perceive the inherent similarities between fascism and colonialism; for

them, their anti-fascist struggle translated into anti-colonial struggle after 1945. In Italy, the filmmaker Gillo Pontecorvo, the writer Giovanni Pirelli, the politician Giorgio La Pira and the industrialist Enrico Mattei emerged as salient figures, all ex-Resistance fighters. Their political commitment in favour of decolonization did not necessarily always coincide with particularly radical positions within *European* politics (Mattei and La Pira, for example, were Christian Democrats). These intellectuals had taken their radicalism beyond the confines of Europe; Third-Worldism was seen as the future of radical social justice.⁴⁸

“RESISTANCE AESTHETICS”

Despite a collective amnesia about Italy’s role as an imperialist power whose colonial aspirations, as we have seen, dominated so strongly the newspaper headlines of the entire world in the mid-1930s, widespread forms of anti-colonial solidarity took root in the postwar period. Italy’s *mancata decolonizzazione* (failed decolonization) meant it never had to critically confront its colonial role because it had lost all its colonies to the British in 1941, in the course of the Second World War.

For Italy, the Second World War came to represent a war of liberation from fascism. It might be more accurate to say, perhaps, that this is what it came to represent in the course of the 1950s and 1960s, as more and more literary and testimonial texts around the Resistance came to define an idea, a lived experience and a narrative of Italy’s ruinous civil war, which took shape as *La Resistenza*.

The period following the end of the second world conflict in Italy has been a privileged object of study by political and cultural historians alike because of the profound societal changes Italy underwent after the end of the war. It was an era of political and economic reconstruction, in part due to foreign infrastructural interventions, such as the Marshall Plan, but it was also, and intensely so, a time of cultural reconstruction. In particular, the *idea* of the Italian nation was one that was hotly contested and debated in the years after 1945, as David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle have pointed out:

If it is true, as Silvio Lanaro has suggested, that at the end of the war there was also a “widespread conviction that the name and very idea of Italy had been irreparably sabotaged by Fascism” and that this tended to produce an emphasis both in public speeches and policy on a rejection of Italy’s immediate imperialist past and a turning outward to membership of a larger transnational

community, it is also true that the nation remained the key counter in political and cultural debate. It was the nation whose interests were articulated and fought over in the campaign for the 1948 election, the first election to Parliament under the new Constitution of the Republic. It was the nation whose culture political leaders and cultural activists sought to remake, whether by giving a new democratic identity to the institutions and media inherited from fascism, or by creating new organs or by promoting the idea of an enlarged, people's nation, as the Communist Party did, adopting Gramsci's slogan of the "national-popular".⁴⁹

In this context, the PCI played an important role in directing culture after the war, at a time when the very meaning of Italian nationhood had to be re-defined against its fascist constructions and representations, and reappropriated for the PCI's agenda. According to Stephen Gundle, the PCI had adopted a nation-bound approach to their cultural policy in the postwar period so as to establish their legitimacy as a national party.⁵⁰ They (and especially Palmiro Togliatti, the leader of the PCI) appropriated Gramsci's notion of the "national-popular" to produce a rather prescriptive idea of what national culture should be like; and it tended to look inward, rather than outward, unlike the great internationalist moment of the 1930s, when Italian anti-fascist culture and politics thrived on transnational connections with other left parties and other European and non-European movements. This cultural conservatism of the PCI in part explains the dissatisfaction at the beginning of the 1960s of young left-wing radicals, who were to lead the 1968 movement and looked to a future for Italian Marxism that was transnational and anti-doctrinaire in its developments. Quite naturally they embraced Third-Worldism, which they understood as an anti-fascism beyond the confines of Europe.

The PCI played a key role in attracting major artists and intellectuals in the postwar period, firstly, because it had been such an important force during the Resistance and, secondly, because it assumed an authoritative position in determining the direction culture would play in the postwar years.⁵¹ However, alongside the PCI's anti-fascist cultural nationalism, which played an important role in shaping the idea of the Resistance for the Italian public, there were other forces at work within the Italian left. In particular, anti-colonialism acts as a hidden cipher, an occult development of postwar anti-fascism that would find its most salient manifestation in the Third-Worldism that deeply influenced the subculture of the Italian left and offered a way out from the excessively restrictive ideological strait-jacket of Cold War Euro-Marxism.

The developments of an Italian anti-colonialism emerging out of postwar anti-fascism take shape in the “Resistance aesthetics” of narratives and representations (both textual and visual) by Italian intellectuals and artists who had fought in the Resistance and who now turned to anti-colonial struggle as an ideal continuation of their cause. Such texts were in dialogue with anti-colonial writing of this period, especially (and unsurprisingly) that of Frantz Fanon, who was a widely read author in Italian radical circles. Giovanni Pirelli, a writer and activist whose work I will discuss further below, and Pontecorvo, the director of *The Battle of Algiers*, were quick to perceive analogies between the Resistance and wars of decolonization. Italian *partigiani* fought both against the German occupying army *and* against Italian fascists. It was a case of rebuilding and rethinking the nation from within, and of “liberating” Italy from fascism—not from a foreign invasion. In this sense, the Resistance in Italy should be understood differently from the Resistance in other European countries, such as Poland, France, Belgium, Holland and Denmark. What was lacking in Italy was “the hatred for the foreign invader that is born out of the profound shock caused by the irruption of foreign troops in the territory of the homeland”, as the critic Enzo Agnoletti remarked in his preface to Pirelli’s collection of letters by Italian resistance fighters sentenced to death, *Lettere dei condannati a morte della resistenza italiana*.⁵² The Resistance represented a more complex, “less physical” idea of patriotism:

Patriotic motives, that are nevertheless there, and are profound, must be associated with a less elementary, less physical idea of the homeland than that which took place outside of Italy, an idea that does not only identify a common origin, but one type of society as opposed to another type of society.⁵³

Against Schmitt’s “tellurian” and ethnicist understanding of the partisan, Agnoletti’s understanding of the Resistance was inherently internationalist and de-territorialized. Thus postwar anti-fascism oriented Italian nationalism in the direction of an internationalism that I discussed earlier with reference to Gramsci and Esposito’s “Italian Theory”: a nation whose historical lack of state sovereignty and whose experience of emigration made it radically open to the world, diasporic and pluralistic.⁵⁴

The Italian Resistance was not actually a resistance in the sense of a “preservation of an ideal legacy”, but rather an “attack, an initiative”.⁵⁵

The Italian Resistance has been called, not uncontroversially, a “civil war”, a conflict in which the very meaning of Italy had to be rethought, reconceived and wrested back from fascism (and fascists). As the Italian politician Ugo La Malfa declared, “Between 28 October, 1922, and 8 September, 1943, Italy, as a great national state inherited from the Risorgimento, was destroyed.”⁵⁶ The historian Claudio Pavone, among the first to extensively analyze the *Resistenza* as a civil war, remarks that “The fact that Italians were fighting against Italians and that both were invoking Italy in fact made the reacquisition of a sure sense of the *patria* [homeland] more difficult, but also more tormenting.”⁵⁷ The Resistance was understood at the time, by those who were fighting it, as a “second Risorgimento”, signalling the reinvention of the nation and of the idea of patriotism that was taking place in fighting this war of liberation from fascism. The *partigiani* (partisans) taking part in this civil war against Italian fascists were not fighting in the name of a preexistent state, as the fascist state had ceased to have legitimacy over the national territory after September 8, 1943.⁵⁸ Like the anti-colonial partisans I have examined in the previous chapter, they were fighting in the name of an as-yet-to-be-realized nation or, concomitantly, in the name of a nation whose true ideals and origins had been betrayed or suppressed (according to Schmitt, two types of war are important to partisan struggle, and indeed are related: civil war and colonial war. “In the partisanship of our own time, this context is almost its specific characteristic.”⁵⁹) In calling the Resistance a “war of national liberation”, Italian anti-fascists were denying the nationality of their fascist compatriots, rejecting them as “anti-Italian”.⁶⁰ So, as Pavone observes, this civil war was much more than a confrontation between fascists and anti-fascists; it came to invest the very idea of Italianness itself; partisans wanted to erase fascism as “the autobiography of a nation”, in Piero Gobetti’s famous definition of the term.⁶¹

The “resistance aesthetics” that I outline in this chapter, and which draws on literary and artistic currents of the Italian postwar, such as realism and neorealism, played a central role in reimagining the Italian nation, both in anti-fascist and in internationalist, anti-colonial terms, and also widened the concept of resistance beyond Italy to encompass a shared solidarity with anti-colonial struggle. Italian “resistance aesthetics” also resonated with the centrality given to culture in anti-colonial struggle by Frantz Fanon, who traces the contours of a “literature of combat” in his essay “On National Culture”, later included in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). To draw an analogy between Italian resistance aesthetics, informed

by anti-colonialism and anti-fascism, and Fanon's writing on the importance of culture in the liberation struggles against colonialism is to acknowledge that there were historical and material circumstances that positioned these ideas as already in dialogue and linked to previous connections between anti-fascist and anti-colonial activists in the interwar period.⁶²

The features I sketch out below are not meant to be exhaustive, by any means, nor exclusive in any way; perhaps, more than an aesthetics, they can be said to outline a mood where themes and forms echo each other. The main focus of my discussion will be Gillo Pontecorvo's films *Kapò* and *The Battle of Algiers* (which I discuss in Chap. 7), in order to analyze the thematic shift from his representation of an episode of the Holocaust to that of the Algerian war. Pontecorvo would deal with anti-colonial struggle more generally in his 1969 film *Burn!*⁶³ His attention to the "wretched of the earth"—from the Jew of the concentration camp, to the inhabitants of the Algerian Casbah hunted down by the French army, to the slaves in the Caribbean colonial economy in *Burn!*—reveals how the colonial question becomes the late twentieth-century symbol of economic and political oppression for the Italian filmmaker. Pontecorvo's most famous films are all set outside Italy and have a resolutely international outlook; they also received widespread international acclaim, and subsequently influenced many filmmakers worldwide.⁶⁴ Pirelli's collection of testimonial writings about the Algerian War, *Lettere della rivoluzione algerina* (*Letters of the Algerian Revolution*), which I discuss in Chap. 7, presents a thematic trajectory similar to the work of Pontecorvo, as it evolves out of Pirelli's earlier works that collected testimonies from Italian and European resistance fighters sentenced to death.

ART AS TESTIMONY

Resistance aesthetics developed out of an ethical urgency connected to an educational aim attributed to literature and art in the immediate postwar era. In a famous speech to the PEN Club in 1955, Calvino spoke of the pedagogical role to be played by literature in those years: "the writer must aim to 'make history' while drawing on the reality of the country he loves and knows best, for a literature that can be an active presence in history, a 'literature as education'."⁶⁵ Primo Levi's *Se questo è un uomo* (*If This Is A Man*) (1947) and Carlo Levi's *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (*Christ Stopped at Eboli*) (1945), both testimonial texts that have become classics of Italian

anti-fascist fiction, are representative of this “literature as education” that Calvino spoke of, and were routinely included in school curricula. Pirelli’s *Lettere dei condannati a morte della resistenza italiana* (Letters of Italian Resistance Fighters Sentenced to Death) (1954) shares this feature of testimony and was also widely adopted in Italian schools.

Publishing houses and other cultural firms were key players in shaping the Italian cultural sphere after 1945, and focused attention on liberation struggles as well. The editor Giulio Einaudi in particular was instrumental in reconstructing Italian culture in the postwar period, and was a highly committed and politicized publisher, with links to the PCI and the more radical sections of the Italian left. Francesca Lolli remarks that “the Einaudi book was outwardly perceived as militant.”⁶⁶ Einaudi promoted a series of books on the Algerian war of liberation against colonial France, such as André Mandouze’s *La révolution algérienne par les textes* (published in Italian with the title *La rivoluzione algerina nei suoi documenti*, 1961), *La Question* by Henri Alleg (published as *La tortura* in 1958), Pirelli’s *Lettere della rivoluzione algerina* (1963), Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (published in Italian as *I dannati della terra* in 1962) and *A Dying Colonialism* (published in Italian as *Sociologia della rivoluzione algerina* in 1963). Most of the editors in the publishing house, especially Einaudi himself, were very supportive of the Algerian cause.

Einaudi played a determining role in promoting the idea of a “*letteratura della Resistenza*” between the 1940s and the 1960s (especially thanks to the editorship of Calvino). Einaudi in the early postwar years built up publishing lists that focused on stories and themes from the Italian Resistance, texts that subsequently became classics of Italian literature and were taught widely in schools (Calvino, Cesare Pavese, Beppe Fenoglio, Renata Viganò are but a few names among the many). The *Resistenza*’s historical and political meanings for post-war Italy were still being debated in the 1950s–1960s; but the publication of memorials and testimonies, as well as more straightforward literary texts about the Resistance by *ex-partigiani*, in many ways contributed to its construction. Calvino took an active lead in publishing Resistance writing.⁶⁷ He emphasized that Einaudi would privilege history and documentation as a decisive factor in the selection of texts dealing with the Resistance, whether these were novels, memoirs or histories.⁶⁸

Einaudi’s cultural work in those years helped give shape to a literary canon, *letteratura della Resistenza*, that took on a multigeneric, indeed multidisciplinary, nature. A look at the Einaudi catalogue of the 1940s and

1950s shows that narratives of the Resistance were not easily placed in a single series.⁶⁹ The very name of one series—*Saggi*, literally “essays”—obviously evoked what publishers today call “nonfiction”, and another series—*Coralli* (*Corals*)—was defined as “*narrativa*”, which in English would be translated as “fiction”.⁷⁰ Both Carlo Levi’s *Christ Stopped at Eboli* and Primo Levi’s *If This is a Man* (second edition, published in 1958) came out in the *Saggi*, as did all four of Pirelli’s collections of testimonies: two about the Italian and European Resistance, and two about the Algerian war. *The Diary of Anne Frank* was published in the *Saggi* in 1954, and Nuto Revelli’s grass-roots history of the Italian Resistance, *La guerra dei poveri* (*The War of the Poor*) in 1962 (the same year that Einaudi published *The Wretched of the Earth*). The mixture of documentary and narrative/fictional elements meant their genre shifted between the essayistic and the literary: choosing which Einaudi series to assign a book to took on a status that was analogous to defining its literary genre. Einaudi’s editorial process illustrates a national literature in the making through the work of publishing and canon-formation.

PONTECORVO’S *KAPÒ* (1959)

Literature of and about the Resistance assumed an educational function, with the aim to teach future generations about ethical resistance against fascism. This ethical impulse was connected to the central role played by testimonial literature. Pontecorvo’s film *Kapò*, made in 1959, drew on testimonial literature, especially Levi’s *If This is A Man*—a work about his experiences in Auschwitz—to become one of the first fiction films about the Holocaust.⁷¹ It was a great commercial success, was nominated for best foreign film at the Oscars and made Pontecorvo internationally known. But the critical reception of the film was almost entirely dominated by the debate on the ethics of representation and memorialization of the Holocaust. The debate was sparked by Jacques Rivette’s well-known critique of a travelling shot in the film, which follows a woman in the camp who commits suicide by throwing herself against the electrified fence:

Look, however, in *Kapò*, at the shot where Riva kills herself by throwing herself on an electric barbed-wire fence; the man who decides, at that moment, to have a dolly in to tilt up at the body, while taking care to precisely note the hand raised in the angle of its final framing—this man deserves nothing but the most profound contempt.⁷²

This comment by Rivette oddly reduces this complex narrative about a defining experience of postwar European consciousness to the exegesis of a single travelling shot. *Kapo* incorporates the moral reflections of Levi on the many ways in which the camp dehumanizes its victims, for example, by turning some of them into oppressors. This is the case of Edith, the fourteen-year-old Jewish girl who becomes a “Kapo”, an overseer for the Nazis, in order to survive the deadly regime of the camp. The many parallels between *If This is a Man* and *Kapo* reveal a substantial intertextuality that deserves further critical exploration. In line with Pontecorvo’s internationalism, the film opens in Paris, with Edith playing the piano at her teacher’s house. We soon find out she is Jewish; she is wearing a Star of David on her coat. When she returns home from her piano lesson, she sees her parents being rounded up by the Germans in a truck, to be deported to the concentration camps. Distraught, she runs to them and is herself captured and placed in the truck. Though the opening scenes establish Edith as French, her nationality is secondary; the film focuses on her as a Jewish victim of Nazism. Similarly, Levi’s journey through Auschwitz and after marks him out as stateless; he loses his nationality once he arrives in the camp, which is presented as a microcosm of pan-European Judaism. In the film, all the dialogues of the characters, who speak different languages, are dubbed in Italian. The only dialogues that are not dubbed are those in German spoken by the camp guards, placing the Italian audience in the situation of the uncomprehending prisoners, and echoing Levi’s observation that “The confusion of languages is a fundamental component of the manner of living here: one is surrounded by a perpetual Babel, in which everyone shouts orders and threats in languages never heard before”.⁷³ The film and the book internationalize the effects of fascist violence, and situate their resistance aesthetics beyond a national framework.

When Edith arrives at the *Lager*, she has the incredible good fortune to be saved by a doctor who gives her a camp uniform with a green triangle, which signals she is a criminal rather than a Jew, thus increasing her chances of survival. The scene in which she is made to wear the filthy uniform of a dead woman, and in which the doctor shaves off her hair, effectively transforms her into a *Häftling*, a prisoner, in much the same way that Levi describes the grotesque initiation rites that turn the newly arrived Jewish deportees into camp inmates: “Then for the first time we become aware that our language lacks words to express this offence, this demolition of a man.”⁷⁴ Edith is effectively given a new identity as she is now named Nicole, like the dead woman whose clothes she is wearing; as the doctor

tells her, "Here you forget about everything, except for the cold and the hunger." Levi also describes the gradual loss of any sense of the remote future, the focus of the *Häftling* being entirely focused on the problems of the near future: "how much one will eat today, if it will snow, if there will be coal to unload".⁷⁵ The moral reflection on how prisoners are dehumanized through their everyday and demeaning fight for survival in the camp is evidently mediated from Levi. Edith-Nicole is vocally exultant because she has passed the terrible *Selektion*, a periodical examination that assessed whether a prisoner was still fit for work or ready for the gas chamber. But other inmates have not been so lucky, and the camera trained on their faces shows their despair and resignation, while Edith excitedly informs them that she has escaped death. This recalls Levi's memory of his fellow inmate Kuhn, whom he sees praying after the *Selektion* day,

thanking God because he has not been chosen. Kuhn is out of his senses. Does he not see Beppo the Greek in the bunk next to him, Beppo who is twenty years old and is going to the gas chamber the day after tomorrow and knows it and lies there looking fixedly at the light without saying anything and without even thinking anymore? Can Kuhn fail to realize that the next time it will be his turn? Does Kuhn not understand that what happened today is an abomination, which no propitiatory prayer, no pardon, no expiation by the guilty, which nothing at all in the power of man can ever clean again?⁷⁶

Surviving in the camp—the central moral problem that Levi wrestles with in this book and in his subsequent book, *The Drowned and the Saved*—is always at the cost of one's own humanity and that of others. Edith-Nicole survives in the camp because she sleeps with some of the SS guards and because she becomes a Kapo. That we see her in warm clothes, well-fed, with her hair grown long again, only serves to underscore her radical loss of any human characteristics. The film has a redemptive finale: Nicole falls in love with a Russian prisoner of war and sacrifices herself so that he and other inmates can escape. She dies in the arms of a sympathetic SS officer, reciting a Jewish prayer, thus reconnecting with the identity she has so carefully hidden in order to survive.

With *Kapò*, Pontecorvo developed his signature visual style, which sought to render aesthetically the "testimony effect" and the documentary feel of the film, a commitment to realism that he called the "dictatorship of truth".⁷⁷ He experimented with a photographic technique that he

would later use with great success in *The Battle of Algiers*. He took the photographic negatives and made positive prints from them.⁷⁸ Out of this “duplicate negative” Pontecorvo produced the copies of the film, recreating the harsh, grainy look of the black-and-white newsreel and thus implicitly evoking its values of veracity and testimony. Both *Kapò* and *If This is a Man* effectively blur the lines between history, witnessing and fiction, merging their different rhetorics of representation.

THE CHORAL/COLLECTIVE NARRATIVE

A related aspect of “resistance aesthetics” to that of the ethical and testimonial aim is the focus on a choral, collective narrative. Calvino, in his 1964 preface to his first novel, *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (*The Path to the Spiders’ Nests*, originally published in 1947), speaks of writing about the resistance as emerging out of an “*anonimato*” (anonymity), which was the collective and shared experience of the civil war. This choral dimension evokes the idea of a collective authorship blending in with the testimonial aspect that was central to Resistance literature (*la letteratura della Resistenza*). Realism, an intimacy with the lived reality of an urgent political moment, and the urge to tell stories were of extreme importance to avowedly anti-fascist writers and artists after the period of fascist censorship, as Calvino recalls:

This is what strikes me most today: the anonymous voice of that age, which comes across more strongly than my own individual inflections which were still rather uncertain. The fact of having emerged from an experience—a war, a civil war—which had spared no one, established an immediacy of communication between the writer and his public: we were face to face, on equal terms, bursting with stories to tell; everyone had experienced their own drama, had lived a chaotic, exciting, adventurous existence; we took the words from each other’s mouths. The rebirth of freedom of speech manifested itself first and foremost in a craving to tell stories: in the trains that were starting to run again, crammed with people and bags of flour and drums of oil, every passenger would recount to complete strangers the adventures which had befallen him, as did everyone eating at the tables of the temporary soup-kitchens, every woman in the queues at the shops. The greyness of everyday life seemed something that belonged to another epoch; we existed in a multi-coloured universe of stories.⁷⁹

This awakening of a collective consciousness finds an echo in the writing of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (published just a few years prior to Calvino's preface), especially the first essay, "Concerning Violence", which eschews the authorial "I" in favour of the "we", speaking directly from and for the new, decolonized subjects of their own history. This emergence of a collective subject is especially visible at the end of the essay: "We must refuse outright the situation to which the West wants to condemn us. Colonialism and imperialism have not settled their debt to us once they have withdrawn their flag and their police force from our territories."⁸⁰

Thus Fanon transcends and progresses beyond the more visibly autobiographical writing of *Black Skin, White Masks*, where the "I" is more prevalent.⁸¹ *The Wretched of the Earth* in many ways is a collectively written book, articulating and expressing many ideas and manifestoes issued from the Algerian FLN, of which Fanon was the spokesman. Similarly, *The Battle of Algiers*, deeply indebted to *The Wretched of the Earth* and "Algeria Unveiled" by Fanon, is a collective narration. There are some exemplary figures, such as Ali La Pointe, whom the camera follows and whose characterization is rendered more vividly through the use of close-up, but the real protagonist is the Algerian nation (hence the visual emphasis on location and territory; the film's main locale is the Casbah, the heart of the urban revolution against the French colonizers). Resistance to both colonialism and fascism had united all classes, genders and generations in a common front of struggle, so committed writers and filmmakers sought to develop representational strategies to convey this collective consciousness to their audiences.

In this chapter, I have examined the formal features of resistance aesthetics of a post-war, internationalist Italy emerging out of the anti-fascist struggle and sympathetic to decolonization movements. In the next chapter, I analyze in more detail specific films and texts that deal with African decolonization, offering a reading of the ways in which they combine a subalternist history with an emphasis on formal innovation and testimonial narratives.

NOTES

1. As Robert Young notes, "Whereas in the west, left intellectuals have agonized over the relation of Marxism to nationalism, this has never been a problematic issue for tricontinentals who have generally regarded them as

- interrelating ideologies” (Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, 171).
2. Partito Comunista Italiano, Sezione di Mogadiscio, all’onorevole Commissione d’inchiesta per l’assegnazione fiduciaria dell’ex Colonie fasciste della Somalia, “Memoriale”, 4, Istituto Gramsci, Rome.
 3. This is not to understate the importance of Marxism for the development of anti-colonial thought in the twentieth century; we have already seen in Chaps. 2 and 3 how the Marxist orientation of James and Padmore shaped much of their political thought and action: “With some exceptions, Marxism historically provided the theoretical inspiration and most effective political practice for twentieth-century anti-colonial resistance. Its great strength was that its political discourse constituted an instrument through which anti-colonial struggle could be translated from one colonial arena to another.” (Young, *Postcolonialism*, 169).
 4. Perry Anderson, “Internationalism: A Breviary”, *New Left Review* 14 (March–April 2002), 5.
 5. Anderson, p. 6.
 6. Tom Nairn, “Internationalism: A Critique”, *Faces of Nationalism: Janus Revisited*, London: Verso, 1997, 30.
 7. “The past, including literature, is seen as an element of scholastic culture, not as an element of life; this then means that national sentiment is recent, if not still in progress, since literature in Italy has never been a national fact, but has a ‘cosmopolitan’ character.” See Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), § (16), 697. Gramsci calls Italian intellectuals “non-national leaders” (*dirigenti anazionali*), because they were connected to broader European and Christian culture rather than a specifically Italian cultural life: “*Distacco tra scienza e vita, tra religione e vita popolare, tra filosofia e religione*” (“Separation between science and life, between religion and popular life, between philosophy and religion”) (§ 55, 1130).
 8. Italy’s Risorgimento patriots and ideologues influenced both Irish and Indian nationalists. See *Nation/Nazione: Irish Nationalism and the Italian Risorgimento*, ed. Colin Barr, Michele Finelli, Anne O’Connor (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2013); and Fabrizio De Donno, “The Gandhian Mazzini: Democratic Nationalism, Self-Rule, and Non-Violence”, in *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalization of Democratic Nationalism, 1830–1920*, ed. C.A. Bayly & E.F. Biagini, E. F. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 375–398.
 9. Perry Anderson finds in Giuseppe Garibaldi, the Italian Republican who had previously fought for progressive causes in South America before leading important Risorgimento expeditions, an “embodiment of the best values of the European artisanate of [his] period, in which national and

- international impulses coexisted without strain" ("Internationalism", p. 11). The years following 1848 were characterized by an internationalism that coalesced around the First Workingmen's International, and by the mobility and "social racination" of the skilled artisans who formed part of this first wave of socialist internationalism.
10. Andrea Costa, an Italian socialist MP, declared in 1887 to the Parliament that Italy shouldn't contribute a penny or any manpower to "the mad ventures in Africa" (qtd in Romain Rainero, *L'anticolonialismo italiano da Assab ad Adua*, p. 135).
 11. See for example *The Italian Difference: Between Nihilism and Biopolitics*, ed. Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano (Melbourne: Re.press, 2009). Sandro Mezzadra similarly speaks of the "Italian effect" on the international academy, including Asian and African scholarship. See Mezzadra, *La condizione postcoloniale* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2008), 8.
 12. Roberto Esposito, *Living Thought: Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 193–194.
 13. Esposito, *Living Thought*, 18–19.
 14. Esposito, *Living Thought*, 15.
 15. Antonio Negri, "The Italian Difference", *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 5:1 (2009), 9.
 16. Negri, "The Italian Difference", 10. Esposito also focuses on Gramsci as one of the thinkers who reestablished the strength of Italian philosophical thought in the twentieth century. See Esposito, *Living Thought*, 157–160.
 17. Negri, "The Italian Difference", 11.
 18. Mezzadra, *La condizione postcoloniale*, 8.
 19. Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, "Introduction: Paradigms of Postcoloniality in Contemporary Italy", *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1.
 20. Mezzadra, *La condizione postcoloniale*, 8.
 21. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), Chap. 1.
 22. Mezzadra, *La condizione postcoloniale*, 12.
 23. Esposito, *Living Thought*, 10.
 24. Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 2.
 25. Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 51.
 26. See Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 151.
 27. Giovanni Pascoli, "Lagrandeproletarias'èmossa" (1911). Accessed August 27, 2017. https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/La_grande_proletaria_si_%C3%A8_mossa.

28. Antonio Gramsci, Notebook 9 § 127, *Quaderni del carcere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), 1190.
29. There is no space here to go into the connotations of the term “*popolo*” in the *Notebooks*, which would need further explication with reference to more Marxian terms such as *proletariat* and *masses*, as well as to the Risorgimento uses of this term.
30. Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, “Introduction”, *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2005), 14–16.
31. Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell’espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), 435.
32. See Valeria Deplano, *La madrepatria è una terra straniera. Libici, eritrei e somali nell’Italia del dopoguerra (1945–60)* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2017), 6.
33. See especially Labanca, *Oltremare*, p. 435.
34. Italo Petra, “Testimonianza di un giornalista italiano ad Algeri”, *Italia e Algeria: Aspetti storici di un’amicizia mediterranea*, ed. Romain Rainero (Milan: Marzorati, 1982), 253–254.
35. See Neelam Srivastava, “Interview with the Italian Film Director Gillo Pontecorvo, Rome, Italy, 1 July, 2003”, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 7:1 (2005), 108.
36. A classic example of neorealist cinema is Roberto Rossellini’s *Paisà* (1946), which recounts the advance of the Allied troops in Italy from the south to the north during World War II. Each episode of the film describes an encounter between the Allied soldiers and the local people, thus capturing the regional diversity of Italy unified by the tragedy of war and the resistance to fascism. This film allegedly inspired Pontecorvo to become a filmmaker. See Neelam Srivastava, “Anti-colonial Violence and the Dictatorship of Truth in the Films of Gillo Pontecorvo”, *Interventions* 7:1 (2005), 98.
37. Gillo Pontecorvo, *The Battle of Algiers* (1966).
38. Michael Rothberg, *Multi-directional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 179.
39. Rothberg, *Multi-directional Memory*, 194–195.
40. Benjamin Stora, *La gangrène et l’oubli. La mémoire de la guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1998), 8. Numerous works have been dedicated to the role of memory and the Algerian war’s place in French and Algerian national histories; see also Jim House and Neil MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
41. Raphaëlle Branche, *La Guerre d’Algérie: une histoire apaisée?* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 24.
42. Rothberg, *Multi-directional Memory*, 346–347, n38.

43. Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, 44–45.
44. Pontecorvo, *The Battle of Algiers*.
45. Janine Cahen and Micheline Pouteau, “Introduction”, *Una resistenza incompiuta. La guerra d’Algeria e gli anticolonialisti francesi 1954–1962*, 2 volumes (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1964), 4.
46. See, for example, Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel and Sandrine Lemaire, *La fracture coloniale: la société française au prisme de l’héritage colonial* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006).
47. Allison Drew, *We Are No Longer in France: Communists in Colonial Algeria* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 6.
48. There is no space here to go into the economic and political reflections on Third-Worldism in Italy. One prominent belief was that revolution could only happen in Europe if capitalist imperialism were vanquished. As the editors of the radical 1960s journal *Quaderni Piacentini* put it, “capitalism will not be defeated in Europe if it is not at the same time thrown out of Africa” (*Quaderni Piacentini* 3:1963, p. 21).
49. David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 23.
50. Stephen Gundle, “The Communist Party and the Politics of Cultural Change in Postwar Italy, 1945–50”, *The Culture of Reconstruction: European Literature, Thought and Film, 1945–50* (Macmillan, 1989), ed. Nicholas Hewitt, pp. 12–36.
51. Gundle, “The Communist Party and the Politics of Cultural Change”, 12.
52. Enzo Agnoletti, “Preface” to *Lettere di condannati a morte della Resistenza italiana*, ed. Piero Malvezzi and Giovanni Pirelli (Turin: Einaudi, 1954), 15.
53. Agnoletti, 15.
54. A quote by Gramsci is relevant here: “The national personality (like the individual personality) is a mere abstraction when considered outside the international (or social) nexus” (*Quaderni*, Q19 §2, 1962). Translation by Esposito, *Living Thought*, 195.
55. Agnoletti, 16.
56. Ugo La Malfa, quoted in Claudio Pavone, *A Civil War: A History of the Italian Resistance*, translated by Peter Levy with the assistance of David Broder, ed. with an introduction by Stanislaw G. Pugliese (London: Verso, 2013), 206.
57. Pavone, *A Civil War*, 209.
58. Pavone reminds his readers that at the time, during the war, Italian anti-fascist partisans were much more hostile to their fellow Italians on the fascist side than to the German occupying force. However, later, there was a general conflation between anti-fascist struggle and the war against

German occupation, thus eliding the specific nature of “civil war” that the partisan war had taken on among its combatants. “In fact, if we skim the most direct and spontaneous Resistance documents, hatred of the Fascists seems to prevail over that against the Germans” (Pavone, *A Civil War*, 322).

59. Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan*, 7.
60. Pavone, *A Civil War*, 319.
61. Gobetti, quoted in Pavone, *A Civil War*, 320.
62. Fanon delivered a part of this famous essay in Rome itself in 1959, at the Second Congress of Black Artists and Writers, held at the Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente.
63. I do not have the space here to analyze this film, which reprises the anti-colonial theme of *The Battle of Algiers*, but on a more universal and at times abstract scale. It follows the story of a slave revolt in a colonial island in the Caribbean, and, like Pontecorvo’s previous film, it featured great crowd scenes. Its dialogues, more explicitly inspired by Fanon and Marx on anti-colonial and anti-capitalist revolution, are, however, more didactic. The film famously starred Marlon Brando and a non-actor, Evaristo Marquez, a Colombian peasant, as the two leads. This controversial decision to use a non-professional was part of Pontecorvo’s working practice, which sought to revolutionize the very way of making films.
64. *The Battle of Algiers* influenced the development of Algerian national cinema after independence.
65. Calvino (1955), quoted in Francesca Lolli, “La Resistenza di un editore: Einaudi”, *Letteratura e Resistenza*, ed. Andrea Bianchini and Francesca Lolli (Bologna: Clueb, 1997), 82–83 (59–93).
66. Francesca Lolli, “La Resistenza di un editore”, 71.
67. One project he pursued with great determination was the publication of Roberto Battaglia’s important *History of the Resistance*.
68. In a 1953 letter to an aspiring author, Calvino explained his rejection of her work along these lines: “The Einaudi editions are working to valorize and disseminate new studies of the history of the Resistance and publications of documents, so as to provide every indispensable tool for the knowledge of that period [...] Our interests right now gravitate more towards historical research and documentation than towards testimonies of a—let’s not say literary, because the word would have a limiting sense here—but of a moral and sentimental nature.” See Calvino, quoted in Luisa Mangoni, *Pensare i libri. La casa editrice Einaudi dagli anni trenta agli anni sessanta* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999), 688.
69. *Le edizioni Einaudi negli anni 1933–1998* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999).

70. Primo Levi's *If This is A Man* was first published by Einaudi in the *Saggi* series in 1958 (the first 1947 edition had come out with a different publisher), and achieved a huge commercial and critical success. It was subsequently republished in the *Coralli* series, signalling its interchangeability across the historical, essayistic and fictional genres.
71. See Irene Bignardi, *Memorie estorte a uno smemorato. Vita di Gillo Pontecorvo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1999), 107. The genre of Levi's text is an open question: it can be considered to be part memoir and part testimony, and it shares many literary traits with fiction, including the careful framing of the narrative and its developed characterization.
72. Jacques Rivette, "On Abjection" (1961), translated by David Phelps with the assistance of Jeremi Szaniawski. <http://www.dvdbeaver.com/rivette/ok/abjection.html>. Retrieved 24/3/2017.
73. Primo Levi, *If This is a Man*, translated by Stuart Woolf (London: Abacus, 1987), 44.
74. Primo Levi, *If This is a Man*, translated by Stuart Woolf (London: Abacus, 1987), 32.
75. Levi, *If This is a Man*, 42.
76. Levi, *If This is a Man*, 136–137.
77. Massimo Ghirelli, *Gillo Pontecorvo* (Florence: Il Castoro, 1978), 8.
78. See Bignardi, *Memorie estorte a uno smemorato*, 113.
79. Italo Calvino, "Preface to *The Path of the Spiders' Nests*", *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*, translated by Archibald Colquhoun and revised by Martin McLaughlin (London: Penguin, 2009), 8. The novel was originally published in 1947, but Calvino added this retrospective preface in 1964 to a subsequent edition of the text.
80. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 57. The earlier part of the essay is characterized by a more analytical observer who speaks of the colonized in the third person, but the solidarity and identification of the speaker with their struggle is evident throughout: "But it so happens that for the colonized this violence is invested with positive, formative features because it constitutes their only work. This violent praxis is totalizing since each individual represents a violent link in the great chain, in the almighty body of violence rearing up in reaction to the primary violence of the colonizer" (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 50).
81. There are many examples of this, notably in the Introduction: "This book should have been written three years ago.... But these truths were a fire in me then. Now I can tell them without being burned" (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 11).

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African Decolonization and the Resistance Aesthetics of Pontecorvo, Orsini and Pirelli

In this chapter, I examine the representation of African decolonization in the works of Gillo Pontecorvo, Valentino Orsini and Giovanni Pirelli. I argue that this thematic focus is intimately connected to their “resistance aesthetics”: the expression of a particular conjunctural moment in Italian culture which transforms these works into internationalist texts aspiring to transcend their European perspective and, in doing so, become “world” texts. The voice and image of the colonized, and the ethical questions implicit in this representation, are at the centre of the poetic reflection in each of these narratives. It might be objected that these works unduly appropriate the voice of the subaltern, given the European subject-position of their authors. However, my purpose here is to demonstrate that a radical and effective anti-colonial politics can be conducted from metropolitan locations. Art assumes a privileged role in this politics because “art manifests a radical hospitality to what Adorno calls the singular and non-identical.”¹ Estrangement and empathy, rather than a Eurocentric assimilation, are key features of this resistance aesthetics. They also reveal the profound influence that anti-colonial theories and practices emanating from the Third World had on Italian intellectual culture: as I discuss below, with relevance to Pontecorvo, Orsini and Pirelli, anti-colonial revolution had a transformative, though underappreciated, impact on European left thought.

THE ALGERIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE, 1954–1962

The Algerian war of independence against France, in particular, features prominently in the narratives I examine here. This war has earned a special status in the numerous anti-colonial struggles that characterized the era of decolonization between the 1950s and 1960s. It was widely considered a model for other anti-colonial revolutions taking place across the African continent. As is well known, the war produced a profound split in the collective identity of the postwar French nation and provoked a strong counter-reaction from progressive citizens.² The use of torture on the part of the French army against Algerian militants, extensively documented by the French historian Raphaëlle Branche, “mobilized liberal and leftist opinion in France” and eventually led to the publication of a manifesto signed by 121 prominent French intellectuals, including Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Martin (who plays Colonel Mathieu in Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers*), “supporting Algerian independence and conscripts’ refusal to serve in the war”.³ The historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet connected the use of torture by the French army to deeper societal and state structures in France itself, warning his readers that torture was not simply a contingent method but symptomatic of a wider malaise, and that the principles underlying the justification of torture could easily be transmitted from military to civilian life.⁴

In Italy, as the Italian journalist Sergio Romano notes, the war “had an extraordinary moral and civil echo, a resonance that is only equalled by the Greek, Polish and Italian national events”.⁵ This solidarity for Algeria cut across the political spectrum; the *Democrazia Cristiana*, the party in power, supported a pro-Arab policy more generally, and the PCI was the most proactive of all European communist parties in providing both ideological and concrete support to the Algerian FLN, which led the country to independence.⁶ The FLN was provided with offices in PCI headquarters in Via delle Botteghe Oscure in Rome.⁷

The chapter focuses on three Italian authors who were intensely invested in the idea of revolution emanating from the Third World. Their films and texts about African decolonization had a considerable impact both within and outside Italy. In particular, the work of Pontecorvo and Pirelli helps us understand the role the Algerian war played in redefining some key elements of the Italian cultural and political landscape, a further sign of the war’s deep impact on societies beyond France and Algeria. Their work aims to widen the concept of “Resistance” in the postwar

period, which moves from the national, to the transnational and, ultimately, to the anti-colonial.

Cultural manifestations in support of the war were profoundly linked to Italy's strong sympathy towards Algeria. This sympathy can be linked to Italy's "rediscovery" of its Mediterranean vocation in the postwar period, as part of a politics of power and sphere of influence in the region. Italy is situated precisely in this liminal and liquid space of the Mediterranean, which is adjacent to, and yet not completely identifiable with, Europe, and whose waters touch African colonial and postcolonial territories. According to Giulio Valabrega, from 1958 onwards, the Italian left began to take a real interest in the Algerian liberation struggle, and towards the end of the 1950s the war began to be seen as a Mediterranean, and not just a European, issue. This interest coincided with the strengthened importance given to the public memory of anti-fascist struggle, which opposed reactionary tendencies and called for an international anti-colonial solidarity.⁸ Italy's support for Algeria markedly distinguished it from France, where the ex-colony played an ambivalent, often negative, role in the collective memory. Moreover, French and Algerian narrativizations of the war led to the development of two distinct historiographical traditions that were not in dialogue with one other. As Branche notes, "The Algerian war thus slowly entered the French past, but the Mediterranean became a border again: these two shores turned their backs upon each other."⁹

Echoing their nations' attitudes towards the war, the PCI gave a lot of support to the FLN, unlike the French Communist Party, which displayed an ambivalent and at times hostile attitude towards the FLN's aims and objectives. The PCI was praised by the FLN at the conference of Algiers in 1963 (after independence) for having given it the strongest support among European left parties and the biggest contribution to helping it define the "Algerian path to socialism".¹⁰ The Algerians admired the PCI for proposing its own unique path to socialism that refused to be subsumed entirely by Moscow and for its support for their national independence from the French.¹¹ The Italian left represented by the PCI did indeed support Algerian independence on quite an exceptional level.¹²

We should also remember here the support given to the FLN by Enrico Mattei, head of the Italian oil conglomerate ENI, who for both idealistic and commercial reasons supported its independence struggle against the French colonizers. Mattei directly financed the FLN.¹³ In the progressive press of the time, Algeria took on the role of a "pre-Vietnam" moment, with headlines in a November 1961 issue of the Communist paper *L'Unità*

announcing a demonstration through the centre of Rome of students and activists supporting the Algerian cause.¹⁴

A SUBALTERNIST PERSPECTIVE

The narrative of the oppressed and the colonized, their subject-positions and their experiences, are at the centre of the stories told by Pirelli, Pontecorvo and Orsini. Privileging such a perspective facilitates the creation of a subalternist narrative; the authors' metropolitan anti-colonialism, as we have seen with Pankhurst and Steer, moves them towards an "anti-orientalism", a rejection of imperial binaries that reveals their capacity for "self-othering", to borrow Leela Gandhi's term.¹⁵ In planning his *Letters of the Algerian Revolution*, Pirelli wanted it to become a chapter of Algerian history, rather than merely part of a French account, sympathetic and self-critical though it might be. In a 1960 letter to his editor Giulio Einaudi, Pirelli explained that "you cannot lump together French protest, refusal and testimonies with the Algerian revolution; the legal appeal or the conscientious objection with the suffering and struggle of an oppressed people; more or less paternalistic concessions and militant, painful [national] claims."¹⁶ The war of liberation had to be narrated by the Algerians themselves, and hence could not include French testimony.

Pontecorvo, with his use of non-actors and his extensive filming on location in the Casbah of Algiers, also offers an Algerian perspective on the events; successive filmmakers, like the African American director Spike Lee and the Indian director Mira Nair, remarked that the film had been a model for them because it had non-white protagonists in lead roles, a rare occurrence in Western filmmaking.¹⁷ Pontecorvo and his co-screenwriter Franco Solinas had originally prepared a very different film treatment of the Algerian war. They had initially conceived a screenplay (still extant, though it was never made into a film) called *Parà*, which follows the perspective of Paul, a young ex-member of the Paras (the élite French parachutist corps) turned photojournalist. Paul wishes to travel to war-torn Algeria to get a scoop, aiming to photograph a particularly bloody act of violence against Algerians on the part of colonialist forces.¹⁸ He meets up with his friend Jean, a *pied noir* and member of the right-wing terrorist OAS, to ask for help with his objective. Paul is depicted as an elegant, sophisticated and jaded young man who wants to obtain the ultimate journalistic prize, photographing a murder in real time. Through subsequent flashbacks, we get to know that Paul is a torturer, as he has been in the

Parà in Algeria. At one point, while he is in Algiers, he encounters by chance the Algerian man he tortured years before.¹⁹

The screenplay characterizes him as cold, calculating and without any remorse or ethical feelings; he wishes to witness and photograph the killing of an Algerian simply because it will make for great journalism and he will become famous. He finally gets his chance: his friend Jean shoots point-blank a young Algerian girl who is walking down the street in European dress, which she is wearing in lieu of her customary Algerian clothing, in the hope of passing the checkpoint into the European part of the city so she can visit a relative in hospital. The screenplay provides her backstory and describes her preparations for going out, thus encouraging the audience to become attached to her character. And then, quite brutally and suddenly, she is shot by Jean and dies in agony. Paul cynically takes her picture while she is being killed, the clicks of the camera in synchrony with the shots of the pistol.²⁰

The original screenplay Pontecorvo and Solinas had written places the European gaze at the centre of the filmic narrative; more broadly, as Gianni Tetti has analyzed, it is concerned with the corruption, inhumanity and cruelty of Europeans complicit in the horrors of colonialism and the atrocities committed by the French during the war—almost a horrific, cinematic prehistory of Mathieu's implacable colonial logic in *The Battle of Algiers*, as discussed in Chap. 6. If the film had been made, it would have created a discourse entirely *internal* to the European debate on colonialism, and would have analyzed the war from the perspective of a liberal but completely Western subjectivity. The radical innovation of *The Battle of Algiers* is that the perspective belongs to the Algerians themselves. Rather than having a single narrative focalization in a European protagonist like Paul, who is depicted in *Parà* as a Kurtz-like, or indeed Marlow-like, figure attempting to capture on camera war atrocities in the colony, the colonized themselves, the non-actors of the Casbah, are the main characters.

In *The Battle of Algiers*, there is an inversion of the scene in *Parà* where the young Algerian girl is killed while walking down the street in European clothing, a safeguard that doesn't protect her from the murderous gaze of the OAS operative, who sees through her disguise. By contrast, *The Battle of Algiers* presents the famous episode of the three FLN women who discard their Algerian attire in order to don European outfits so they can pass the checkpoint and plant bombs in the French part of Algiers. They dress in an atmosphere that is reminiscent of a preparation for battle, complete

with a drumming soundtrack, as if to mark the solemnity of the occasion. The perspective and the point of view are completely reversed compared to *Parà*, having shifted from the European to the Algerian. Instead of witnessing multiple acts of violence committed by Europeans against Algerians, which in *Parà*'s screenplay are very graphically depicted, and which would have presented the Algerians as merely hapless victims of European colonialism, we witness acts of retaliation and resistance of the Algerians against the French. These are framed in such a way that they become integral moments in a cycle of "counter-violence" of the colonized that can never be equated in ethical terms to colonial violence because they are presented as an act of legitimate territorial and psychological reclamation. For the colonized, "this violence represents the absolute praxis. [...] The colonized man liberates himself in and through violence. The praxis enlightens the militant because it shows him the means and the end."²¹ *The Battle of Algiers* represents possibly the most vivid narrativization of Fanon's impassioned essay "On Violence", but it develops Fanon's theory even further, allowing for the possibility of identification between the European audience and the Algerian protagonists. Such "self-othering" was hinted at, but never fully articulated, in *The Wretched of the Earth*.

A FORGOTTEN FILM: *I DANNATI DELLA TERRA*

BY VALENTINO ORSINI

Pontecorvo's work can be likened to several other influential Italian films of the 1960s and 1970s that were centrally concerned with the theme of political violence, contributing to a debate in terms of both an ethics of representation and an ethics of struggle.²² This aesthetic of violence was linked to contemporary debates in Third Cinema, as exemplified by the Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha's 1965 essay, translated into Italian as "*L'estetica della violenza*" ("The Aesthetic of Violence") for a prominent film journal, *Cinema 60*.²³ A shared focus on the role of armed struggle in Third-World revolution places *The Battle of Algiers* alongside a now forgotten film, Valentino Orsini's *I dannati della terra* (*The Wretched of the Earth*), made in 1969, the title further testifying to the influence of Fanon's last work on a whole generation of young Italian revolutionaries and intellectuals. Not only did it resonate with their anti-fascist beliefs, but Fanon's theory of anti-colonial revolution seemed readily applicable to the

problematic of class struggle in Europe; it was rumoured that his book provided radical leftist groups with a solid theoretical justification for armed struggle against the Italian state.²⁴

Orsini's film deserves a much more important place in the cinematic canon than it currently holds; Orsini, himself "a neglected figure" who had worked closely with renowned filmmakers Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, was widely praised by avant-garde directors and critics of his generation for his advancement of the genre.²⁵ *I dannati della terra's* experimental form, influenced by French *nouvelle vague* cinema, and by director Alain Resnais in particular, proposes film as a way to make a theoretical and ideological statement, and is effectively a unique exploration of the political lessons to be learned from decolonization, one that finds few parallels, if any, in the genre.²⁶ In its emphasis on metafictionality, it is also an essay on film itself as an art form, and on what might be the political role of cinema in revolution. "With *I dannati della terra*, Orsini intended to extend the postcolonial discourse to the industrialized world so that the rebellion against colonialism and impatience with capitalism could find a point of contact."²⁷ At the heart of the film's enquiry is the attempt to forge a revolutionary language that rejects European bourgeois art, born out of, and sustained by, capitalism. Orsini emerges as a partisan director, as critical in his own way of European colonialism and capitalism as Pontecorvo, though he projects his "didactic" message about Third-World revolution and its relationship to European radicalism via very different filmic techniques from those of Pontecorvo. His resistance aesthetics is diametrically opposed to the legacy of neorealism so profoundly reworked by Pontecorvo. Indeed, it seems to self-consciously reject Pontecorvo's documentary style, opening up a dialogue around the most effective artistic solution for communicating a Third-Worldist political position.²⁸ *The Battle of Algiers* had been panned by Marxist film critics such as Guido Aristarco and Goffredo Fofi, who criticized it for not analyzing the political, economic and social causes, as well as the development, of the Algerian revolution; according to Fofi, since it was lacking in internal coherence and insufficiently dialectical, it did not offer any real interpretation of history.²⁹

I dannati della terra is intensely and unabashedly ideological (Pontecorvo's film is as well), but it rejects a linear and continuous narrative structure and the possibility of unself-conscious identification with the characters on the part of the viewer. The many interruptions, ellipses and gaps in the diegetic development of the film are resolved within an overall

artistic unity because they are “anchored to an ideological structure that is always recognizable”, according to the critic Guido Aristarco.³⁰ This ideological structure is based on a continuous reiteration of the importance of armed struggle in a successful revolution. At the centre of the film’s reflection is a debate on the failure of Marxist revolutions across the world, which it imputes largely to the lack of connections established between anti-colonial liberation struggles and revolutionary movements in Europe.

The plot revolves around an Italian director, Fausto Morelli, whose friend Abramo Malonga, an “African” director (as he calls himself), has recently died of leukaemia (just like Fanon), entrusting his unfinished film about Third-World decolonization struggles to Fausto, with the request that he complete it. The film stages the intense ideological, cultural and artistic problems Fausto faces as he attempts to execute the will of his African friend and stay faithful to his legacy. Just like Orsini himself, Fausto is a faculty member of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia (Experimental Centre for Cinematography) in Rome (the Centre is also mentioned in the opening credits as the film’s main supporting institution, in a direct extra-textual reference that serves to break down the fourth wall). As Colleoni comments of Orsini’s film, “These *auteur* works were made by directors whose personalities represent a cinematographic ‘function’, given that they were left-wing intellectuals themselves capable of generating in the public an inescapable horizon of expectations.”³¹ A passage Fausto dictates to his assistant Luciana, while trying to move forward with Abramo’s project, captures what he believes to be a crucial ideological message that Abramo wished to communicate with his film:

Conclusion: the failure of African independence struggles and the crises of the various revolutionary processes today bear witness to our inability to establish an effective political connection between the struggles of the Third World and the struggles in neo-capitalist societies. We find ourselves in a situation that invests revolutionary forces with a new set of questions. These forces are today faced with a strategic void of political knowledge and activity (remember Abramo’s explicit reference to the responsibilities of the Marxist left both in Western and Eastern European countries). Then add [Fausto tells his assistant]: ‘And this concerns all of us’.³²

The film presents several examples of this failure to connect the struggles, and Fausto’s own difficulties in completing Abramo’s film without betraying its message appear symbolic of Europe’s inability to communicate with Third-World struggles against capitalism and colonialism.

The film begins with images of decolonization in Africa: footage of villagers being asked where they are from, to which they respond mentioning their tribe. This then cuts to a message in large letters on the screen from Patrice Lumumba, the Congolese nationalist leader and Third-World hero: "Stay united. It is the enemy who wants to divide us. Make the voice of the tribe be silent so that the voice of the Congo can speak." As these images appear, we hear the sounds of a film reel in the background and a voiceover reading out a script. The film has actually begun with a film *screening*: footage from Abramo's unfinished film is being projected in a darkened room of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia. Fausto and his assistants are watching the footage, one of them reading out Abramo's script for the film and trying to connect it with the images. As the audience is immediately confronted with a work in progress, we are not allowed to unselfconsciously immerse ourselves in the diegesis. "Try to speak more in sync", urges an assistant to the person reading out the script. Throughout the film we are constantly made aware of the filmmaking process, which becomes a thematic element of the narrative. Fausto and his student assistants realize they have reached the end of Abramo's footage when a film technician from outside the screening room calls out to Fausto in a thick Roman dialect: "*A dottò, il materiale è finito.*" (Sir, that's the end of the material.") The occasional appearances of uneducated workmen, waiters, technicians in the film ironically underline the bourgeois identity of the main characters, who are all intellectuals and filmmakers debating the future of the revolution and the role of art in political praxis.

Abramo's posthumous footage includes a critical tribute to Lumumba, showing images of his imprisonment and execution by Belgian colonial forces and corrupt Congolese officials (carried out, as we know, at the behest of the Central Intelligence Agency [CIA]). Abramo avoids idealizing Lumumba's "sacrifice", saying he wishes to express both his love for him and his disagreement with him in his film. Against the backdrop of images of African revolutionary soldiers, we hear the voiceover reading out part of Abramo's script:

The comrades of Guinea-Bissau have told me that honesty and integrity lie in the practice of revolutionary violence. They are right. And they have also told me: to those who do not know us, reply that we are the wretched of the earth. Our reality is what westerners call under-development: domination, misery, fear, hunger, oppression, ignorance, tribalism, terror, death, violence. To those who do not yet know where the enemy is housed, reply that

under-development is imperialism, and that this is the great house of capital. To those who have not yet understood what we believe in, reply that our armed struggle is neither a dogma nor an objective, but simply a method. Finally, to those who wish to know everything about our future, reply sharply that our revolution does not depend on us, but rather we depend on the outcome of the revolution.

In the “film within a film”, we witness Abramo pondering this message handed over to him by the African revolutionaries he has captured on camera fighting in the bush against Western capitalism. “And these truths they have entrusted me with, how shall I translate them into clear images?” Abramo reflects here on his own duty and responsibility to portray the African revolution artistically to his audiences, especially Western audiences, without obfuscating its cause and its message. The question of address and destination of the revolutionary message coming from the Third World is a matter of central importance in *I dannati della terra*. This issue is further amplified by the legacy the dying Abramo leaves to the *European* filmmaker, Fausto, who attempts to make sense of the African director’s posthumous material: to edit it, to recreate it faithfully somehow. The racial mediation of Abramo’s text through the vision of a white filmmaker is a problem of which Fausto is constantly aware. Fausto’s worry about translating Abramo’s film into a European film, which within it contains Abramo’s worry about translating effectively the African revolutionaries’ message for European audiences, gestures to the difficult and complex reception of Third-Worldist ideas in Europe. Was *The Wretched of the Earth*, along with other anti-colonial writings by Amílcar Cabral and Che Guevara—all extremely popular texts among the 1968 generation—sufficiently understood by its Western readers? Were its calls for a renewal of the European left effectively heeded by the political activists and would-be revolutionaries of that era? “My film is yours”, says Abramo to Fausto in his last letter to him. But will Fausto be able to complete it?

The film is complex and confusing to watch, with its fragmented montage, its frequent breaks in the narrative and its jerky, disconnected sequences of images. As mentioned earlier, it prevents an immersive identification with the characters, thus making viewers radically question their unexamined assumptions about their own class and racial identity. Fausto becomes close to Abramo’s widow, a young white woman named Adriana, who is distraught after the death of her husband; this interracial marriage introduces further complications into the plot (as well as echoing Fanon’s

own marriage to a white French woman) because later on Adriana and Fausto have a relationship, suggesting another possibility of betrayal on Fausto's part of Abramo's memory.

In the early part of the movie, Adriana and Fausto go to the airport to meet briefly with Abramo's brother, a high-ranking politician in an unnamed African state. Adriana tells Fausto that he "cares very much about the film". The scene is filmed from behind, with the three characters walking towards the airplane gate as Abramo's brother changes planes in Rome. Unlike the representation of Abramo in the film, who is always shown bare-chested and with very little clothing on, his brother is dressed in smart European clothes and delivers a politically realist speech to Fausto and Abramo's widow. Speaking in French to the two Europeans, he says that "in Africa the film would not be accepted" because it is so critical of Lumumba and of the failure of Africa's liberation struggles. His brother finds that the film is simply negative and that Abramo lacked political realism; the usefulness of negative critique is another core question of the film. "In truth, the film also contains a yes: armed struggle, in all its forms," replies Fausto rather sharply to the brother. The brother makes it clear that he and his fellow Africans need the film to be made, as it can serve real political purposes. "The film must be useful to us, now, concretely, in every sense", he tells Fausto. His last words to Fausto and Adriana as he goes to board his plane are: "If you want to help us, try to understand our point of view!" The sliding glass door separating him from them closes at that moment, nearly cutting his words off. The camera then turns to the two Europeans behind the glass, who look pensive and preoccupied, possibly doubtful as to whether they will be able to carry out their African comrade's wishes. *Realpolitik* is not missing from *I dannati della terra*; the urgency and speed of the airport scene suggest that there is no time to be lost for recent nations attempting to construct a new political reality in Africa after decolonization.

Idealism is as heavily critiqued as failed revolutions in Africa and in Europe. In fact, one might say that the film is constantly critiquing itself and the ideological issues it lays before the audience: "In the 1960s and 70s, Italian art-house cinema addressed the internal conflicts in the Left and the political and ideological differences distancing the reformist stance of the Italian Communist Party from that of the revolutionary extra-parliamentary groups."³³ By 1969, disillusionment with the outcome of Third-World liberation movements and with the European left had set in. The narrative of the film ferociously targets orthodox party politics as

represented by the Italian Communist Party. It implies that the failure of Africa to successfully achieve revolution is largely the fault of European revolutionaries, who failed to connect with their struggles.

The film offers an extended reflection on the question of art in contemporary times. Aristarco calls *I dannati della terra* a “revolutionary film”, not so much in the sense that it references revolution (which, of course, it does), but more in the sense that it attempts to forge a revolutionary poetics. Abramo, as we find out through Fausto’s flashbacks, tells him that his cultural formation is mainly political, because he is convinced that, for “us” Africans, “the first form of culture is the revolution.” He first contacts Fausto by asking to work with him, the famous European director, at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, a prestigious and avant-garde film centre. But he specifies that his only aim is to learn cinematographic techniques: “I don’t want to Europeanize myself, nor to use European culture as a launching pad to affirm my own existence.” Abramo’s words directly reference Fanon’s essay “On National Culture” in *The Wretched of the Earth*, which precisely delineates the need for the colonized intellectual to reject Europeanization in order to forge a truly revolutionary and, by implication, anti-colonial and national culture. This flashback comes just before a scene with Fausto in the present day, reflecting on Abramo’s film and remarking that in the end it was “neither African nor European, but simply revolutionary”. Abramo had confessed his worry that he was producing an excessively schematic, ideological film. And indeed at the first viewing of the posthumous material, one of Fausto’s student assistants says that the film is a bit schematic, but good, to which Fausto replies sharply and ironically: “Not bad for a Negro, in other words.” Fausto is devoted to the memory of his friend, despite the fact that Abramo had expressed misgivings towards their friendship. “It’s not a question of skin”, he tells his friend. “It’s a question of history.” We are often presented with images of Abramo dancing or running almost naked on the beach. The objectification of his beautiful black body is made deliberately visible, inviting us to confront our mental stereotypes, unsettling the voyeurism of the audience:

I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: “Sho’ good eatin’.”³⁴

Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* is an almost over-determined intertextual reference in the film; at one point Fausto picks up a copy of the book and flips through it, as if looking for inspiration for the reworking of Abramo's film or perhaps gesturing to the influence Fanon's book has had on the making of Orsini's film. African culture is also problematized; after Abramo performs an African dance for the other filmmakers and actors in the Centro Sperimentale, Fausto says to him that his colleagues have applauded him as if they were white tourists. "But is it revolutionary, as you say, to reprise African culture as if it were a new culture?" Both exoticism and nativism, as in Fanon, are condemned; Negritude cannot be a way forward.

This radical questioning of every assumption makes for a deliberately fragmented film, which is, however, held together by its ideological certainties. Fausto is completely convinced that the only way forward for radical transformation in his own society is through armed struggle, here and now. In the Italy of the 1960s and 1970s, radical left groups such as the Red Brigades and *Lotta Continua* had detached themselves from the parliamentary left and advocated political violence against the class enemy and the establishment.

Third-World struggles were an important inspiration for them. As Abramo says to Fausto: "Internationalism is to make revolution here! To help our own revolutions!" Fausto writes in his diary: "To conclude Abramo's film is to show the conditions in which we all live." (The frequent scenes of Fausto writing in his diary, composing and then erasing sentences, typing the screenplay of the film, or dictating his notes to his assistant Luciana, serve to suggest that the text is a work in progress, an "open work". It can also be considered an open work in the sense that the viewer is invited to complete it, to give it an ending or a meaning).

Fausto opts for a Brechtian conclusion to the film, one that is distinctly allegorical and metafictional. He turns the film set into a white labyrinth, presumably to indicate the ideological maze of the present. The camera follows various naked actors of different nationalities into the paths of the labyrinth. Abramo is also present as one of the characters here (which is confusing as he is already dead). But the characters are presented to the viewer *as characters*; their identity is staged meta-cinematically, thus disallowing any form of empathy or unconscious identification. Fausto "interviews" a number of the characters via ferocious monologues, not allowing them to speak. Among these is an Argentinian woman, Margherita, a friend of his, whom he interrogates

on her personal responsibility, as a member of the Europeanized elite, for the failure of Che Guevara's revolution in Latin America. He also interviews an African American actress, describing her fate as a black artist in front of a white audience; though in Italy she is not persecuted as she would be in America, "we have consigned you to nightclubs and to second-rate parts, forced to mimic the stars of your race." Finally, we hear a voiceover deliver an extra-diegetic speech:

Abramo, Fausto have reached a revolutionary certainty, but as actors, and as you know, this is not enough. As it is not enough, as we know, to confront the violence represented in films so as to delude ourselves into thinking that we have eliminated the historical violence of capital. Hence, in order not to mislead anyone, the film is suspended, because it is now our turn, outside of here, to confront their violence.

Thus the film ends, after showing Abramo reciting a scene from Fausto's film. Fausto, and by implication Orsini, is concerned that art is not in itself enough of a revolutionary act. He does away with the suspension of disbelief, bringing us back to the fictionality of what we are watching; this is merely art, while real and effective political action lies outside the film production house and outside the cinema.

Italian films about African decolonization were part of a wide-ranging cultural production that includes the work of Giovanni Pirelli, a key representative of this Italian anti-colonial engagement that I have analyzed in the works of Orsini and Pontecorvo. His edited collections of letters from Algerians involved in the war of liberation, however, produce a different kind of resistance aesthetics as it is mediated through testimonial narratives rather than through cinema.

GIOVANNI PIRELLI: FROM ANTI-FASCISM TO ANTI-COLONIALISM

Pirelli, the son of the noted industrialist Alberto Pirelli, was a committed socialist and fought as a *partigiano* in the Italian Resistance. He had always had literary ambitions, however. By the end of the 1950s, he was very well known in Italy for his collections of letters of Italian and European resistance fighters condemned to death, which he had edited with Piero Malvezzi. The first was entitled *Lettere di condannati a morte della Resistenza italiana* (*Letters of Italian Resistance Fighters Sentenced to*

Death), which was to become a classic of Italian resistance literature and memorial writing. The second was entitled *Lettere dei condannati a morte della Resistenza europea* (*Letters of European Resistance Fighters Sentenced to Death*), a book similar to the previous one, which, however, enlarged the focus of the Italian testimonies to anti-fascist protagonists of the *European* resistance, emphasizing how the Resistance had been an international European movement and should not merely be considered part of national histories.³⁵

This post-Resistance idea of literature informed Pirelli's third collection of letters, *Lettere della rivoluzione algerina* (*Letters of the Algerian Revolution*) (1963), edited with Patrick Kessel. The volume consisted mainly of testimonies about the repression and torture of Algerians during the war (it was also published in French with Maspéro under the title *Le peuple algérien et la guerre: lettres et témoignages 1954–1961*).³⁶ Pirelli's unique contribution, both cultural and political, to the Algerian movement for independence included his close friendship and collaboration with Fanon.³⁷ He also produced another extraordinary and forgotten book, *Racconti di bambini d'Algeria* (*Stories of Algerian Children*), in which he collected the testimony of refugee children and their drawings about their traumatic experience of war. According to Pirelli's close friend Jacques Charby, he collaborated on this project with Fanon, who suggested the methodology for interviewing the children.³⁸

Pirelli's three books of *Letters* exemplify a political and cultural trajectory that moves from an anti-fascist to an anti-colonial commitment without particular contradictions; indeed anti-colonialism is seen as an ideal *continuation*, in the postwar period, of anti-fascist struggle. As Pirelli remarked:

Remember that the Resistance did not at all end with the defeat of fascism. It continued and continues against everything that survives of that mentality, of those methods, against any system that gives to the few the power to decide for many. It continues in the struggle of peoples subject to colonialism, imperialism, for their real independence. It continues in the struggle against racism.³⁹

The above comment by Pirelli can be found in the 1969 edition of Pirelli's *Letters of European Resistance Fighters Sentenced to Death*. The book was republished after the Algerian war, and so Pirelli's understanding of the meaning of the Resistance (and its literature) was in the context of his subsequent involvement with the Algerian cause.

In Pirelli's research and in his collections of testimonies, the concept of Resistance gradually expands from Italy, to Europe and ultimately to Algeria's liberation struggle from French colonial rule. The Resistance loses its initial "national" scope and is universalized so as to include the condition of man in any situation of oppression, thus echoing Pontecorvo's claim that he was drawn to represent the Algerian struggle in *The Battle of Algiers* following on from his representation of anti-fascist resistance in *Kapò*.⁴⁰ And crucially, Pontecorvo's and Pirelli's understanding of the necessity for violence in anti-colonial struggle was profoundly indebted to Fanon.

Pirelli's three collections of letters, all written in the first person, constitute an example of a new conception of literature and history, which privileges testimony and the first-hand experiences of those directly involved in the conflicts. All three of his books are not yet memoirs, but rather document a very recent past. His first book of *Letters* by the Italian *partigiani* condemned to death is involved in constructing an idea of the Resistance for the Italian public, barely seven years after the end of the war, when the meanings of this event were not yet stable and fixed, and indeed were still contested. This concept of writing flows into Pirelli's aesthetic and historical project of the *Lettere della rivoluzione algerina*, again published just after the end of the Algerian war, in 1963. His aim here was to hear from the Algerians themselves. What emerges is a history of the war where the Algerians are protagonists.⁴¹ Pirelli considered this attention to Third-World political struggle part of a growing interest of Italian historiography in the Resistance and the workers' movement. For Pirelli, this type of scholarship, far from being a "subaltern history" (namely subordinated to more mainstream narratives—thus recalling Gramsci's prevalent use of this term in the *Notebooks*), was "now being considered as a component of general historical problems", as Pirelli wrote to his father in 1956.⁴² Pirelli's approach to testimony as a form of literature and history is at once very Gramscian and very Fanonian, and is founded on his own experience of struggle. His privileging of Algerian voices recalls Pontecorvo's "subalternist cinema". Pirelli shares the same cultural and political trajectory as Pontecorvo: as in Pontecorvo's cinema, a strong vein of documentary realism structures his literary aesthetic.

Pirelli provided a material contribution to the Algerian cause through economic means, and he was heavily involved in the Jeanson network, a well-known group of French supporters of the FLN also known as the "*porteurs de valises*" (suitcase carriers, as they often carried money or documents

for the Algerian cause). He also assisted two members of the network, Micheline Pouteau and Janine Cahen, who had been in charge of transferring funds for the FLN out of France. Pouteau and Cahen were put on trial and sentenced together with six Algerians and eighteen French citizens during the famous Jeanson Trial in September 1960. After the two women left prison, Pirelli helped them find a job with the Italian publishing house *Il Saggiatore*.⁴³ Cahen and Pouteau would then go on to write, in Italian, *Una resistenza incompiuta: la guerra d'Algeria e gli anticolonialisti francesi* (*An Incomplete Resistance: The Algerian War and the French Anti-colonialists*), a unique history of the war through documents, testimonies and photographs. The substantial two-volume work was never published in French, possibly for reasons to do with censorship.⁴⁴ Branche notes that their book is one of the few direct testimonies of the “porteurs de valises”, pointing to a dearth of publicly available information on the history of the FLN in France and their French supporters.⁴⁵

Among other documents, the book collected many testimonies of French conscripts, who were appalled by the atrocities they were made to commit in Algeria: “That we are torturing a poor devil out of sadism, on the part of young twenty-year-olds who represent the whole of French youth, revolts and nauseates me. Nice youthful mentality!”⁴⁶ Cahen and Pouteau wished to narrate the metropolitan resistance to the war in France, a history that had been suppressed from official accounts but which could serve to paint a very different picture of French attitudes to the war. The French left is found to be profoundly guilty in betraying such a resistance. In 1956 there had been a movement of protest against conscription, but the movement had not been supported in any way by the French left. The book documents the attempts at legal redress against the atrocities and repressions of the French in Algeria, and then the clandestine activism after opposition in France was outlawed, which Cahen and Pouteau call the “radicalization of the struggle”. However, unlike the French resistance, metropolitan opposition to the war remained “incomplete” (*incompiuta*) because it was not supported by a “great left party”.⁴⁷ The responsibility for this is clearly, though not explicitly, laid at the feet of the French Communist Party.

As with previous works we have seen, there is a recurrence of the words “resistance” and “*partigiano*” in these publications relating to the war, terms whose meaning was by no means fixed in the postwar years and indeed was being contested and debated in the public sphere. A small 1961 booklet entitled *Gli algerini in guerra* (*The Algerians at War*),

illustrating with plenty of photos the fight of the FLN, contains a revealing passage: “Photographs of battles, stories of ambushes, scenes of partisan life that we have already lived through ... did we really have to start again with all of this less than ten years after the end of the war? Was it for this that we fought?”⁴⁸ “We”, the subject of these questions, refers to the European anti-fascist left, which sees its previous struggle mirrored in the struggle of the Algerians against European colonialism. The Algerian war thus emerged as a real test for anti-fascists, further proof that fascism was still alive and well both in its colonial manifestations and also within the metropole. But intellectuals like Pontecorvo and Pirelli were in a privileged position to understand and adopt these causes as their own because they saw them through the prism of a very recent historical memory, that of the Resistance.

As in the case of Pirelli’s *Letters* from the Italian and European Resistance, his subalternist history of *Letters of Algerians* strove to establish a counter-discourse around the meanings pertaining to the Algerian war, which were highly contested in the French public sphere, though Cahen and Pouteau’s work shows how widespread the popular opposition was to the war. In Pirelli’s *Letters of the Algerian Revolution*, we read accounts of torture, suppression, violence and murder in varying locations, testifying to the international and transnational dimensions of the war. Algeria (both rural and urban) and France are the two main locations, but letters coming from the Algerian internment camps play a very prominent role.⁴⁹ For European readers, this was an obvious reminder of the concentrationary universe of the Nazi *Lagers*, and indeed the FLN and French anti-colonialists used this analogy for propaganda purposes. As Rothberg notes of texts that aimed to expose the violence of the colonial state in Algeria, “controversies about torture, censorship, and the use of concentration camps in the fight against the Algerian independence movement lead to the importance of testimony as a mode articulating the suppressed truth of colonialism.”⁵⁰ There is thus a clear link at the level of form as well as content between the Holocaust and the Algerian war in terms of narrative modes, centered around testimony.

In their introduction to the *Algerian Letters*, the editors Patrick Kessel and Giovanni Pirelli note that almost all the documentation relative to the war was from French sources, and here they provide an alternative account through Algerian testimonies and letters:

The discourse [around the Algerian war] belongs to the world of the whites, of the Europeans, as the Arabs say. Against the fascism of the ruling class in France we have a liberalism made up of paternalism. It all draws on a traditional terminology that doesn't even take into account the experience of the European resistance. Algeria is the victim, and not the protagonist, of a war of liberation.⁵¹

Emphasizing the agency of Algerians in the self-representation of their struggle was essential in order to avoid the usual liberal position on the conflict, expressed through an Orientalist pity, that saw them as passive victims of French violence. Pirelli sought to implement a form of subalternist historiography that would allow Algerians to present the war according to their own words and documents. A key element of Pirelli's intellectual outlook was the idea of research as a form of political struggle.⁵² Pirelli believed that publishing these documents would contribute to a more international support for the Algerian cause.

The letters in the book act as both testimony and documentation.⁵³ Clearly influenced by Fanon, the editors explain that revolutionary violence, for members of the FLN, becomes a necessary instrument with which to oppose colonialist violence, given that "colonialism is violence *per se*"; but revolutionary violence is also simultaneously a refusal of romantic and anarchic violence.⁵⁴ Pirelli and Kessel selected the material (70% of which had not been published previously) on the basis of its "personal" character, and deliberately excluded journalistic, literary or any other type of text that had an "official" aspect. They were searching for a form that was as "unmediated" as possible. Each section is prefaced by a brief introduction of the events and circumstances of the letters and testimonies, and an explicit narrative position is adopted that rejects the French colonialist or liberal mediation of events.⁵⁵

The profound intertextuality between Pirelli's Algerian *Letters* and his European *Letters* constructs a common frame of reference for the reader, which widens the scope of the term "resistance" from the European to the Algerian context.⁵⁶ The letters are often brief, poignant, heartbreaking in their terseness and hope: the individuality of the writers emerges here, part of Pirelli's constant attention to the singularity of human beings as both part of and yet beyond class or race, a focus he shared with Fanon. The intertextual link with Pirelli's Italian and European letters also emerges in this interest to recuperate the human diversity of the Resistance: young,

old, educated, uneducated, male, female. Members of the Algerian Resistance came from all strata of society, much like the European Resistance against fascism—the Resistance was the expression of a *people*, and yet it was composed of distinct individuals each with their own story. Pirelli's books aim to highlight the common basis of the anti-fascist and anti-colonial project, and his intention to recover an untold and non-élite archive of subaltern voices and subjects involved in this Resistance.⁵⁷

Pirelli's other book about the Algerian war was a collection of children's testimonies and drawings about the conflict, *Racconti di bambini d'Algeria (Stories of Algerian Children)*. These were child refugees whom Pirelli and Charby interviewed. The children only spoke if they wanted to, and they could express their response in any form: verbally or through drawings. Only the interviews that were a "*testimonianza*" were then collected in the book. The dust jacket blurb mentions that the book was coming out at a time when the Algerian people were finally able to return to their freed homeland, adding: "If the most decisive denunciation of nazism came from a young city girl, Anne Frank, these country children [...] express the same definitive denunciation of colonialism. With them, begins the Nuremberg of Algeria."⁵⁸

The editorial packaging of this book clearly aimed at highlighting analogies between the experiences of the Algerian people and those of the Jews, with the explicit parallel between these testimonies of Algerian children and Anne Frank's *Diary*. The book was published in 1962, in the very months in which Algeria was forming an independent government after the Evian accords. The repeated evocation of the Nazi persecution against Jews was used by the Einaudi editors (and especially Pirelli) to frame the Algerian experience for their Italian readers, through instantly recognizable analogies with the experience of the Holocaust. It was published in the Einaudi *Saggi* collection, a series that privileged historical and political testimony. The book also contains the children's drawings of refugee camps, killings, French soldiers and Algerian patriots, among other images.

The testimony of Abdelhamid Bouklatem (eleven years old, from Souk-Akhras) is interesting for the way the child sees the betrayal of Algeria by the French, after Algerians had fought to liberate them from the Germans during the Second World War.⁵⁹ The children always talk about "France" as the entity that comes to kill and to torture.

CONCLUSION

Pirelli's work shows how the Algerian war in particular, and decolonization movements in the Third World more generally, profoundly influenced the direction European left culture was to take in the 1960s. This chapter has aimed to explore the ways in which Third-Worldism operated a cultural and political renewal in Europe, and more specifically Italy, that arguably culminated with the 1968 movement. Gramsci's thinking around Italian cosmopolitanism and the "work" of Italy's civilizing mission, as he calls it, starts from the solidarity Italian anti-fascists perceived with anti-colonial struggles. At the same time, the work of Pirelli, Pontecorvo, Orsini and others outlines the remarkable trajectory of the *Italian* left vis-à-vis anti-colonial struggles of this period: a left which was self-critical and conscious that Marxism needed to be rethought outside of its historically Eurocentric mode. Third-World Marxism—if indeed it could still be called such—represented by the intellectual contributions of Fanon, Cabral and Agostinho Neto, provided a genuine alternative to Cold-War polarities—an alternative that unfortunately would not be sustained, and indeed was actively suppressed, in subsequent years. At this historical juncture, when theoretical paradigms of the West are failing to make sense of violent political realities, this forgotten strand of "Italian theory", in its profoundly Third-Worldist dimensions, can serve to provide us with new heuristic and interventionist tools.

NOTES

1. Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 173.
2. See for example Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel, and Sandrine Lemaire, *La fracture coloniale: la société française au prisme de l'héritage colonial* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006). Michael Haneke's film *Caché* also highlights the ambivalence and traumatic residue of the Algerian war in France's collective memory.
3. James McDougall, *A History of Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 216–217. See also Raphaëlle Branche, *La torture et l'armée dans la guerre d'Algérie, 1954–1962* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001).
4. Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Les Crimes de l'armée française* (Paris: Maspero, 1975), 11; quoted in Raphaëlle Branche, *La Guerre d'Algérie: une histoire apaisée?* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 23.

5. Sergio Romano, "Osservazioni in margine a un libro", *Italia e Algeria: Aspetti storici di un'amicizia mediterranea*, ed. Romain Rainero (Milan: Marzorati, 1982), 17 (9–22).
6. Mourlane, Stéphane. 2010. Radio Interview. "La Fabrique de l'Histoire: Histoire de la guerre d'Algérie 4". Transcript available at: <http://www.fabriquedesens.net/La-Fabrique-de-l-Histoire-Histoire,414>.
7. David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Life* (New York: Picador, 2000), 371.
8. Giulio Valabrega, "La questione algerina a Milano", *Italia e Algeria: Aspetti storici di un'amicizia mediterranea*, ed. Romain Rainero (Milan: Marzorati, 1982), 314–315 (313–329).
9. Branche, *Une histoire apaisée?*, 24.
10. Paolo Borruso, *Il PCI e l'Africa indipendente. Apogeo e crisi di un'utopia socialista (1956–1989)* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2009), 81.
11. Borruso, *Il PCI e l'Africa indipendente*, 70. PCI party leaders Romano Ledda, Giuliano Pajetta and Palmiro Togliatti all proclaimed their support and sympathy for Algerian nationalism. Unlike the French Communist Party, the PCI supported the FLN's demands and their adherence to a specifically Muslim-Arab identity. After independence, the PCI became involved in helping to establish a socialist state in Algeria. They sent a doctor, an active member of the PCI, to try to set up a national health service after the departure of French medical personnel (see Borruso, *Il PCI e l'Africa indipendente*, 74). More crucially, the PCI offered a historical model to the Algerian Communist Party for forging ahead with socialism: the "compromesso storico" adopted after 1945 in Italy, where Communist and Christian Democrat parties had joined forces and agreed to meet half-way in order to preserve a united front after the victory against fascism. Given the centrifugal tendencies displayed by the various Algerian political parties after independence, it was imperative to recall national unity. The memory of the Italian resistance against fascism served PCI party leaders well in advising the nascent Algerian state cadres in strengthening the unitary forces unleashed by the popular liberation struggle (Borruso, 75).
12. See Giulio Valabrega for an account of the many cultural and political initiatives that arose throughout Italy, but especially in Milan, in support of the Algerian cause. Among these, he mentions the work of Giovanni Pirelli and the informal network of support that he and many other prominent left intellectuals created for the people of Algeria (Valabrega, 321).
13. See Mourlane.
14. "Corteo di giovani manifesta per la libertà dell'Algeria", *L'Unità* (November 4, 1961), 2. The celebrated Italian painter, Renato Guttuso, dedicated a number of drawings and etchings to Algeria, including one entitled "Algeria 1961", which was part of an exhibition entitled "La violenza, ancora" that took place in Rome in 1961, and which saw the partici-

- pation of many Italian artists and included 45 works of art dedicated to this theme. The caption accompanying Guttuso's drawing said: "We dedicate this drawing to the Algerian people and to all the peoples who are fighting for their freedom and independence."
15. Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 20. Gandhi, drawing on Agamben's theory of community, speaks of "a qualifying ethico-existential capacity for the radical expropriation of identity in the face of the other—a capacity, that is, for self-othering".
 16. Giovanni Pirelli, Letter to Giulio Einaudi, January 5, 1960, Foglio 391, Fascicolo 2429/1—Pirelli Giovanni, 23/3/1960-31/1/1960, Giulio Einaudi Archive (Turin).
 17. See *Five Directors*, a short feature with five directors speaking about the influence of Pontecorvo's film on their own work (contained in the Criterion Collection edition of *The Battle of Algiers*). Pontecorvo struggled to find funding for *The Battle of Algiers* from Italian producers because he was told that "no one is interested in Arabs" (Bignardi, *Memorie estorte a uno smemorato*, 121).
 18. See Gianni Tetti, *Franco Solinas, l'officina dello sceneggiatore tra cinema e letteratura. Parà, testo genetico di un'intera filmografia*, PhD Thesis, University of Sassari, Academic Year 2009–2010., especially pp. 256–353 for a thorough analysis of Solinas's screenplay of *Parà*.
 19. This scene was most likely inspired by a real-life episode described in the last chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*, "Colonial War and Mental Disorders", which includes case histories of Algerian and European patients whom Fanon treated while he worked in Algeria. The case histories are used by Fanon to illustrate the psychopathologies deriving from colonial violence, and in particular the traumatic effects of torture on both victim and perpetrator. One of Fanon's European patients, a policeman, while being treated for mental psychosis after torturing Algerians, by chance meets one of his victims in Fanon's clinic (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 194–196). Fanon's text was a crucial intertext for Solinas and Pontecorvo's cinematic work on the Algerian war.
 20. Tetti, *Franco Solinas*, 352–353.
 21. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 44.
 22. Other films that can be included in this canon are Pontecorvo's *Burn!* and *Operation Ogro* (about the Basque resistance movement *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* [ETA] during and after Franco's dictatorship); Gianfranco De Bosio's *The Terrorist* (1963); and Valentino Orsini's *Uomini e no* (1980), among others.
 23. See Federica Colleoni, "Fanon, Violence and Rebellion in Italian Cinema: The Case of Valentino Orsini", *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 17:3 (2015), 332.

24. See Neelam Srivastava, "Frantz Fanon in Italy: Or, Historicizing Fanon", *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 17:3 (2015), 319.
25. Colleoni, "Fanon, Violence and Rebellion", 332.
26. *I dannati della terra* is very difficult to find, as it is not commercially available and very few libraries have it. It is possible to obtain a copy of the film from the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome. I would like to thank the very kind archivists at the Centro Sperimentale for their help in giving me access to the film.
27. Colleoni, "Fanon, Violence and Rebellion", 338.
28. Federica Colleoni mentions that Orsini had begun filming in Guinea-Bissau in the midst of the guerrillas, "an experience which led him to question the film language used to date and explore the possibility of overcoming traditional forms of bourgeois cinema". See Colleoni, 334.
29. Goffredo Fofi, "Gillo Pontecorvo, *La battaglia d'Algeri*", *Quaderni Piacentini* 29 (January 1967), 98. See Morando Morandini, "Significato politico ed importanza filmica della *Battaglia di Algeri*", *Italia e Algeria: Aspetti storici di un'amicizia mediterranea*, ed. Romain Rainero (Milan: Marzorati, 1982), 421–435, for an examination of the film's reception at the time of its release.
30. Guido Aristarco, "'Il Dio affogato nel nostro sangue'", *Sotto il segno dello scorpione. Il cinema dei fratelli Taviani* (Messina: D'Anna, 1977), 248.
31. Colleoni, 330.
32. Valentino Orsini, *I dannati della terra* (1969).
33. Colleoni, 330.
34. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 112.
35. Piero Malvezzi and Giovanni Pirelli, ed., *Lettere di condannati a morte della Resistenza italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1954) and Piero Malvezzi and Giovanni Pirelli, ed., *Lettere di condannati a morte della Resistenza europea* (Turin: Einaudi, 1954).
36. Patrick Kessel and Giovanni Pirelli, ed., *Lettere della Rivoluzione algerina* (Turin: Einaudi, 1963).
37. Pirelli was instrumental in getting Fanon's works translated and known in Italy. He worked closely with the editor Giulio Einaudi, over a period of more than ten years, to ensure that Fanon's writing was published by Einaudi. When Pirelli and Fanon first met, they had initially conceived the idea to produce an anthology of Fanon's writing in Italian (this was before the publication of *The Wretched of the Earth* in 1961). But this project fell through due to Fanon's illness and death in 1961; Pirelli subsequently edited the Italian translation of *L'An V de la révolution algérienne* (which came out with Einaudi in 1963 with the title *Sociologia della rivoluzione algerina*) and an anthology of Fanon's essays in *Opere scelte* [*Selected Works*] (Einaudi, 1971), which featured a substantial introduction by Pirelli. Pirelli

- is also the author of an essay on Fanon, collected in Alessandro Aruffo's *Fanon o l'eversione coloniale* (Rome: Erre Emme, 1994), 121–167. See Neelam Srivastava, “Le Fanon italien: révélation d’une histoire éditoriale enfouie”, in Frantz Fanon, *Écrits sur l'aliénation et la liberté, Oeuvres II*, ed. Jean Khalfa and Robert Young (Paris: La Découverte, 2015), pp. 565–583.
38. Neelam Srivastava, “Le Fanon italien: révélation d’une histoire éditoriale enfouie”, 567.
 39. Giovanni Pirelli, Preface, *Lettere di condannati a morte della Resistenza europea*, ed. Piero Malvezzi and Giovanni Pirelli, second edition (Turin: Einaudi, 1969), 8.
 40. In Pirelli's work, we witness the universalization of the Resistance through testimony, understood as a form of writing that is meant to be representative of all those who did not manage to be commemorated in any way whatsoever, the “submerged”, as Primo Levi defined the victims of the Holocaust (Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, Turin: Einaudi, 1986).
 41. This was already evident in the planning stages of the collection. In January 1960, he wrote to his editor, Giulio Einaudi, explaining his idea behind the project, and how it differed from the many publications on Algeria already in circulation. He felt it was more “advanced, conscious and original”, because its perspective came from within the Algerian struggle, and that he intended to proceed “like a scholar of the FLN would, if he had my opportunities”. The fundamental consequence of this idea was that he would only work with “Algerian testimonies”, specifying what he meant by Algerian: “the Arabs of Algeria and the Europeans of Algeria, or the Europeans who actively side with the FLN”. See Letter to Giulio Einaudi, January 5, 1960, Foglio 391, Fascicolo 2429/1—Pirelli Giovanni, 23/3/1960-31/1/1960, Giulio Einaudi Archive (Turin).
 42. Alberto Pirelli, Giovanni Pirelli, and Elena Brambilla, *Legami e conflitti. Lettere 1931–1965* (Milan: Archinto, 2002), 188.
 43. See Cesare Bermiani, *Giovanni Pirelli, un autentico rivoluzionario* (Pistoia: Centro di Documentazione, 2011), 28–29; and Tullio Ottolini, “Giovanni Pirelli e la guerra d’indipendenza algerina: tra attivismo intellettuale e *soutien* concreto”, *Giovanni Pirelli intellettuale del Novecento*, ed. Mariamargherita Scotti (Milan: Mimesis, 2016), 97–98 (85–110).
 44. Janine Cahen and Micheline Pouteau, *Una resistenza incompiuta. La guerra d’Algeria e gli anticolonialisti francesi 1954–1962*, 2 volumes (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1964).
 45. Branche, *Une histoire apaisée?*, 282. An important contribution to the history of the FLN in France is Jim House and Neil MacMaster's *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
 46. Cahen and Pouteau, 197.

47. Cahen and Pouteau, 4.
48. Dominique Darbois and Philippe Vigneau, *Gli algerini in guerra* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1961), n. p.
49. There is a section entitled “*Mondo concentrazionario* in Algeria, 1957” (“Concentrationary world in Algeria, 1957”), which includes collected letters from the interned people in these camps.
50. Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 25.
51. Patrick Kessel and Giovanni Pirelli, “Prefazione”, *Lettere della rivoluzione algerina*, ed. Patrick Kessel and Giovanni Pirelli (Turin: Einaudi, 1963), xxv.
52. “Research itself has been a form of struggle, carried out during a period of extreme psychological and moral tension. The ‘militant’ character of our research explains in turn why we have taken on the responsibility of making public a group of documents of a personal nature” (Pirelli and Kessel, Prefazione, *Lettere degli algerini*, xxvi).
53. The editors, Kessel and Pirelli, identify a typical “scheme” in the authors of these documents denouncing torture, massacres, arrests and violence against the civilian population in Algeria. Firstly, the letters report the authors’ past, their condition and their experience as colonized, and later their entry into the struggle and their actions until arrest or capture. Secondly, the Algerian is shown to be opposed to the military, police or judicial French apparatus. The third aspect shows the Algerian, theoretically *hors de combat*, planning new forms of struggle within captivity. “The fact that these letters cover the entire arc of time from the beginning of the Revolution to the end of the armed struggle allows us to follow its evolution” (Kessel and Pirelli, xxvii).
54. Kessel and Pirelli, “Prefazione”, xxvii.
55. Fanon’s influence is very present. In the section entitled “Il 20 agosto 1955 a Aïn Abid”, the account of a massacre in an Algerian village, the editors explain how Algerian counter-violence emerges in reaction to the enormous repression by the French against the civilian population. Here, in a footnote, the editors quote Fanon’s comment about the massacre of July 20: “In the armed struggle there is what we could call the point of no return. It is almost always attributable to the sweeping repression which encompasses every sector of the colonized population” (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 47). Another account by Yacef Saadi of a very violent, graphic torture of sympathizers and militants in the Casbah expresses the memory of a horrific experience and provokes “vicarious trauma” in the reader (100–104, in the section “Ad Algeri dopo il passaggio all’esercito dei poteri di polizia”, *Lettere della rivoluzione algerina*).
56. Moussa Lachtar, an imprisoned Algerian patriot, compares one of the young prisoners to the students of the lycée Buffon, who formed a resistance group against the Nazis during the French occupation. Letters by

these students are contained in Pirelli's *Lettere dei condannati a morte della Resistenza europea* (*Letters of European Resistance Fighters Sentenced to Death*).

57. Of himself as a writer, Pirelli says that he prefers writing about the personal, the intimate problems of the individual rather than of society, "in clear contrast with my political interests!" (Pirelli, *Legami e conflitti*, p. 189). This comment may explain his preference for doing work in the field of testimony, a genre that straddles collective and individual experience. Pirelli would have also liked to work in cinema, perhaps along the line of the films that Pontecorvo created, on the birth and formation of the Italian nation (*Legami e conflitti*, 189).
58. *Racconti di bambini d'Algeria*, ed. Giovanni Pirelli (Turin: Einaudi, 1962), dust jacket cover.
59. Abdelhamid perceives the German occupation of France as analogous to the French occupation of Algeria, and thus sees the French as traitors. He also mentions that the French eat pork (implying they are infidels) and that they are afraid of the *Front de Libération Nationale*. Proud reassertion of Muslim identity goes hand in hand with Algerian patriotism. The testimony ends with a wish, "*Salvezza a tutti i nostri combattenti algerini perché combattano per noi. E noi saremo veramente la giovinezza algerina imparando a leggere, a scrivere, e a essere bene educati*" (*Bambini d'Algeria*, 47).

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