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**'A Puff of a Cigarette' The relationship between the Italian
parliamentary Left and the Lebanese Left in the 1967-68 aftermath
(1967-1975)**

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Leiden University
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RESEARCH MASTER THESIS (M.A.)

‘A Puff of a Cigarette’

**The relationship between the Italian parliamentary Left and
the Lebanese Left in the 1967-68 aftermath (1967-1975)**

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ABSTRACT

The present thesis investigates the relationship between Italian and Lebanese left during the years between 1967 and 1975, uncovering the development of a special relationship between the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP). This was a transformative period for both countries' leftist groups, following the 1967 June War and the 1968 global protests. This was reflected in the Italian approach towards the Middle East and the Palestinian cause, as public opinion and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) moved from a pro-Israel position to support the Palestinian struggle.

I argue that this shift was influenced by the close relationship between the PCI and the LCP, which evolved from preferential contact to a special relationship. The LCP was the PCI's preferred interlocutor in the region, and as the 1975 Civil War approached the PCI began supporting the Lebanese comrades with first humanitarian and then financial aid. This close relationship in turn provided the PCI with information on regional politics and direct access to the Palestinian groups. By the early 1980s, the Italian position completed the shift in favour of Palestine, and both the PCI and PSI abandoned their traditional pacifism to support an Italian military intervention in Lebanon to stop the Israeli invasion in 1982.

I investigate this shift mainly through PCI and PSI archives, which show the increasing contact with Lebanese groups and the growing involvement in the country. Looking at the evolving relationship between the Italian and Lebanese Left, this thesis highlights the transnational nature of the leftist movement and connects Italian and Lebanese local politics to the global context of the Cold War and the Long-Sixties.

*To the ones lost on the way
and to zia Cecilia (1968-2023)*

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INTRODUCTION

Between 1967 and 1975 both Lebanon and Italy experienced a period of social unrest, that in the case of Lebanon resulted in a fifteen-year-long civil war (1975-1990). This social unrest was dominated by different actors, including leftist parties. In Italy, the Italian Socialist Party (Partito Socialista Italiano, PSI) and the Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano, PCI), and in Lebanon, the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), along with student, worker and agrarian social movements and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), animated the political scene through the organization of well-attended demonstrations. The years between 1967 and 1975 can be considered transformative moments in a global process initiated in the late 1950s and continued throughout the 1970s, often referred to as the Long Sixties. This process involved the creation of a global movement of solidarity that tried to link two forms of oppression: class struggle and anti-imperialism. 1968 is often considered the peak of this movement, but when we look at the Middle Eastern region this moment acquires a new meaning in the light of the 1967 Arab defeat aftermath. This peculiar conjuncture prompted important transformations in the region, of which the rise of the PLO is the most evident. This strengthening of the PLO had a major impact in Lebanon, where PLO's headquarters were located. The power of the PLO altered the Lebanese balance and eventually was one of the factors that led to the civil war. The emergence of the PLO also enhanced the global interest towards the Palestinian struggle, which in Italy led to a transformation in public opinion in favour of the Palestinian cause.

This general change of attitude towards the Palestinian cause was reflected in the relationship of the different Italian leftist actors with their Arab counterparts, especially in Lebanon. However, literature on the relationship between the Italian left and Lebanon tends to focus on the arrival point of this convergence: the 1982 Italian (and American, French, and British) intervention in Lebanon.¹ There are reasons for this. The Missione Italcon was the first Italian military operation since the end of the Second World War and thus represented a critical moment for the country. The Italian peacekeeping mission also marked the changed position of Italian politics towards the Arab-Israeli conflict, and for leftist parties in particular, which abandoned their traditional pacifism to support it. In this thesis, I argue that the interaction between Italian and Lebanese communists in the aftermath of the 1967 and 1968 events was fundamental in this overturning.

The existing literature addressed this shift from a more general point of view, focusing on the Italian left positions towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. For instance, Arturo Marzano's *Attentato alla*

¹ Enrico Calossi, Fabio Calugi, and Fabrizio Cotichia, 'Peace and War in the Political Discourse of Italian Marxist and Post-Marxist Parties', *Contemporary Italian Politics* 5, no. 3 (2013): 309–24.

Sinagoga explored the evolving positions in the Italian political scene between 1967 and 1982, and traced how Italian public opinion and politics moved from a general pro-Israel leaning to the open condemnation of Israeli actions in the 1982 invasion of Lebanon.² While Marzano's focus is mainly on the evolution of antisemitism in relation to this transformation, his analysis of Italian publications from the period – from party newspapers to books to leaflets – gave a clear picture of the different positionings towards the Palestinian question and the Arab countries. The Italian Left is analysed more in-depth by Nicola Seu in his 2016 book, *The Relationship between the Italian Leftist Parties and the Conflict in the Middle East*, which studied the evolution of the PSI and PCI's approaches to the Palestinian cause from 1948 to the present day.³ Seu underlined the different approaches and the roots behind both parties' positions, as well as their internal debates and external critiques. As already highlighted by Marzano, the PSI and the PCI's positions clashed at the outbreak of the 1967 June War, and only later did the PSI switch to support the Palestinian side. However, Seu's contribution focused only on Italian domestic politics, ignoring the role of external factors such as Lebanese actors, and in particular the LCP. In fact, according to Roberta La Fortezza, the relationship between Italy and Lebanon was fundamental in the Italian approach to the Middle Eastern crisis.⁴ Focusing on Italy-Lebanon relations, La Fortezza uncovers the bridging function that both countries served for their respective regions, and how this initiated a special relationship between the two countries, as Beirut became the Italian point of reference in the Arab world and vice versa. However, her contributions dedicated scant attention to the leftist groups' role in this relationship. The only scholar to have highlighted the contacts between the Italian and Lebanese Left is Laure Guirguis, who argued that the Lebanese New Left, in particular, Socialist Lebanon (SL) and the Organisation of Communist Action in Lebanon (OCAL), were inspired by Italian "operaismo" and its focus on workers and Maoist thought.⁵ However, according to Guirguis, there was never direct contact between the Lebanese New Left intellectuals and the Italian radical left, and Italian reflections were mainly mediated through *Les Temps Modernes* and *Les Cahiers de Mai*, as well as books published by the

² Arturo Marzano and Guri Schwarz, *Attentato Alla Sinagoga. Roma, 9 Ottobre 1982. Il Conflitto Israelo-Palestinese e l'Italia* (Roma: Viella Libreria Editrice, 2013).

³ Nicola Seu, *The Relationship between the Italian Leftist Parties and the Conflict in the Middle East: The Parliamentary Left and the Israeli - Arab Palestinian Question* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).

⁴ Roberta La Fortezza, *Cedri e ulivi nel giardino del Mediterraneo. Storia delle relazioni diplomatiche italo-libanesi tra il 1943 e il 1959*. (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2020); Roberta La Fortezza, 'Un'amicizia Italo-Araba. Italia e Libano Negli Anni Sessanta e Settanta', in *Fra Diplomazia e Petrolio. Aldo Moro e La Politica Italiana in Medio Oriente (1963-1978)*, ed. Federico Imperato, Rosario Milano, and Luciano Monzali (Bari: Cacucci Editore, 2018), 155–97.

⁵ The New Left emerged after 1967-1968 both in Europe and the Arab world as a critique and rethinking of Marxist thought, largely influenced my Maoism. While the New Left is not central to this thesis, as I will focus on traditional socialist and communist parties, the emergence of these groups contributed to the renewal of the leftist landscape and the debate internal to the traditional parties. Laure Guirguis, "Dismount the Horse to Pick Some Roses": Militant Enquiry in Lebanese New Left Experiments, 1968–73', in *The Arab Lefts Histories and Legacies, 1950s-1970s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 187–206.

French publishing house Maspéro. Nonetheless, the application of Italian radical left theories in SL and OCAI actions shows the transnational character of these movements and is an invitation to further explore the relationship between the Italian and Lebanese left.

This thesis addresses this gap and aims to understand the role Lebanon played in the evolution of Italian leftist positions towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. In particular, it focuses on how Italian positions changed after 1967-1968 peculiar conjuncture, and answers the question: *how did the relationship between Italian leftist parties (PCI and PSI) and the Lebanese Left evolve between 1967 and 1975 and how did it impact local politics in Italy?* This research question emerged from two conclusions drawn in the existing literature: first, that, as Marzano and Seu explain, Italian Left positions vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict changed after 1967 and second, that in 1982, Italian leftist parties abandoned pacifism, and supported the Italian military intervention in Lebanon, which demonstrated a clear interest in the country's fate. The timeframe was thus selected to capture this transformative moment while avoiding delving into the Lebanese Civil War. The latter complicated the relationship on both sides and undoubtedly catalysed the attention of the Italian Left in a way that is beyond the scope of this research.

The most important outcome of this research project is the analysis of the 'special relationship' between the PCI and the LCP. The Lebanese communists were the most trusted and reliable ally of the PCI, which fostered this relationship preferring the LCP to other communist or socialist actors in the Middle East. This special relationship strengthened Italian sympathies towards the Arab countries and the Palestinian cause, contributing to the aforementioned radical shift: first in Italian public opinion and then in PSI's official stance on the matter.

Research and Methodology

The research was carried out mainly through on-site and digitally accessed research at the PCI and PSI party archives. The PCI archive is located at the Fondazione Gramsci in Rome and was first systematized by the party in 1969. It holds documents from the party's different sections, including the Foreign Affairs Section, which was central to my research. I accessed the PSI archive digitally. The archive is located at the Fondazione Studi Storici Filippo Turati in Firenze and not all material has been digitalized, resulting in a possible loss of information. For the PCI, the documents I was able to access consisted mainly of its delegations' reports and notes, which sometimes included meetings' transcriptions. Internal communications concerning conferences and delegations' organization were also a consistent part of the documentation from both archives, along with correspondence between the PCI and the LCP. The sources gathered from these archives have been complemented by articles from *L'Unità* – the PCI official newspaper, also available online – and by

edited sources such as selected speeches and documents from PCI National Congresses or PSI leader Pietro Nenni's diaries.

A clear limitation of this source selection is the fact that it draws exclusively from Italian sources, except for some letters or speeches from LCP representatives hosted in the PCI archive or published on *L'Unità*, often translated into Italian. This is problematic for three reasons: first, it gives a partial image of the relations as it represents the Italian perspective only; second, it makes it harder to identify the biases in the sources themselves as there is no term of comparison; and finally, it replicates the existing power relations, failing to give space to Lebanese representation and 'subaltern' realities, which I believe should be taken into consideration by current historiography, and area studies in general. This lack of voices 'from below' is also forced by the focus on party relations, which simplifies a complex mosaic of relationships, cutting off less powerful – but not less relevant – actors such as Italian and Lebanese students, or the emerging New Left in both countries.⁶

Despite these limits imposed by the access to sources, I locate this research project in the field of Global History. I refer to global history following Sebastian Conrad's understanding, which is something different than macro-history or transnational history. In his view, any process can be approached through a global history perspective as long as "cross-border structures" have the ability "to have an impact on events, and on societies".⁷ This approach enables a focus on transnational relations, like the ones between the Italian and Lebanese left, but situates them in a broader global framework, in this case, the Cold War and the Long Sixties movement. This form of global history is sometimes referred to as 'global microhistory', as it locates micro-stories in a global context.⁸ On one side, the micro-stories are enriched from this global contextualisation, on the other they contribute to a better understanding of the global context itself.

The main reason to approach the relationship between the Italian and Lebanese Left, and the PCI and LCP in particular, through global history lenses is its participation in the global solidarity network developed in the Long Sixties. Laure Guirguis explains the global nature of this relationship beyond the simple transnationality, describing how the Cold War had produced a "matrix of war" which influenced the understanding and development of all forms of relationship.

In other words, the creation of a transnational though diversified revolutionary culture or of a global community of revolution was anchored in Cold War dynamics of antagonistic forces. Historically constructed in the interplay between global and local practices, this matrix of war constituted the framing structure to which all

⁶ The contacts between Lebanese and Italian students may be the object of further research, as I found the mention of a union of Lebanese students in Italy of progressive orientation which had tried to get in contact with the PSI, and was probably in contact with Palestinian student organizations which were quite active in the country.

⁷ Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 13.

⁸ John-Paul A. Ghobrial, 'Introduction: Seeing the World Like a Microhistorian', *Past and Present* 242, no. Supplement 14 (2019): 1–22.

protagonists referred, be they revolutionary or state representatives; it shaped all political and ideological stances; it governed the definition of a set of shared references and of a discursive logic.

From a global history perspective, this global matrix of meaning is not lost when looking at the local level, as it is considered a fundamental part of the context. Keeping ‘local’ and global’ together is central to this research project also because one of my aims is to show that Lebanon was active and connected to global discourses and movements before the civil war – which tends to overshadow the history of the country.⁹ Moreover, including local perspectives and perceptions avoids looking at Lebanese and Italian people as just objects, whose role is defined by external actors’ interpretation. This does not mean that more powerful actors are excluded from the picture, but that their influence is not seen as absolute and that their actions can be shaped by minor actors.¹⁰ Local actors are not the background of great powers’ actions but “an essential component of a genuinely international story”.¹¹

To approach the Italian-Lebanese relationship from a global perspective, I will first discuss the global and local aspects of its historical background, tracing their connections during the peculiar conjuncture of 1967-68. I will then dedicate the second chapter to analysing PCI and PSI approaches to the Middle East and situating Lebanon within this scheme. Finally, I will ‘zoom-in’ on the PCI-LCP special relationship, trying to uncover its impact on Italian and international politics through a close look at the sources. Before moving to the first chapter, however, it is necessary to address a few aspects of this dissertation that might need further discussion.

As the most important outcome of this transformation is the Italian military intervention in 1982, one might wonder why not focus on the whole period leading up to it. This thesis focuses on the years between 1967 and 1975 as it tries to uncover the role of the 1967-68 conjuncture in the evolution of Italian-Lebanese relations. The timeframe was thus selected to highlight this peculiar transformative moment, arguing that the consequences of 1967 and 1968 in both countries fostered the relationship between the PCI and the LCP, whose evolution in the early 1970s was the basis for Italian Left support to Lebanese and Palestinian people in the following years. Moreover, the years of the civil war in Lebanon heavily impacted these dynamics, and the risk would be to focus on those changes, overlooking their roots. For instance, contacts between Italy and Lebanon were on the one hand

⁹See for instance Andrew Arsan, *Lebanon A Country in Fragments* (London: Hurst & Company, 2018); Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon: A History of the Internationalization of Human Contact* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 2nd ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2012).

¹⁰ This is sometimes referred to as a ‘pericentric approach’, which aims at highlighting the autonomous role of ‘minor’ actors in the Cold War. For a better discussion of this approach see Tony Smith, ‘New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War’, *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 567–91; Paul Thomas Chamberlin, ‘Rethinking the Middle East and North Africa in the Cold War’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 2 (2011): 317–19; Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War. Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹¹ Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7.

increased during the war, as Italian multi-party parliamentary delegations would be sent to the country to communicate with the different factions at war, but on the other hand, some more personal contacts would be lost due to the many obstacles of the war, which impacted for instance the PCI-LCP relationship. It is beyond doubt that the events of the war had a role in the 1982 Italian intervention, but I argue that such an impact was possible thanks to the existing relationship that had been built before 1975 and the contemporary change in Italian feelings towards the Palestinian cause.

Another aspect that will not be treated extensively in this thesis is religious confessionalism. The first reason for this absence is the fact that religion was not central in PSI and LCP discourse. As communist parties, both the PCI and the LCP disregarded religious readings of society, and for that the LCP also advocated for a democratic non-sectarian order in Lebanon. Religion was thus never discussed, and only made its appearance during the war, as religious denomination was used to indicate the different factions. Even then, however, it was not overarching: most of the time the Maronite alliance was referred to as “Phalanges”, “right-wing”, or “fascist”, while the leftist front was referred to as “(alliance of) progressive forces”. Another occasion where religion did appear was the reading of the 1967 June War in certain parts of the Italian political landscape. As will be discussed, the PSI and other forces were particularly supportive of Israel during this war and framed the Arab actions as backwards. As such, the war was referred to as an Arab “holy war” or “crusade”. This framing was however avoided when it came to Lebanese politics, and the Italian press usually portrayed the conflict as a political one.¹² Finally, by focusing on aspects other than religion, this thesis helps create a more complex image of Middle Eastern and Lebanese realities.

¹² This is true especially at the beginning of the conflict but is of course a generalisation. However, a letter from Remo Salati to Giancarlo Pajetta (editor-in-chief for *L'Unità*) criticised the use of religious labels in the coverage of the civil war in Lebanon on one occasion, lamenting that not even the “bourgeois press” was doing that (30 March 1976, PCI, 1976, b. 362, f. 66, Fondazione Gramsci).

CHAPTER 1

Historical Background

1967-1968 as a peculiar conjuncture

The years between 1967 and 1969 witnessed a series of events that were to bring important transformations in different parts of the world. Connections between these events have been drawn by historians in the past decades, mainly under the label of “long Sixties”. However, when it comes to Middle Eastern history this global transformative moment is overshadowed by the Arab-Israeli conflict dynamics, which in 1967 took a turn with the Six-Day War. A close look at the events shows however that the Middle Eastern 1967 is not disconnected from the long Sixties moment.

On 5 June 1967, the Israeli army launched a pre-emptive attack on Egyptian forces and the Sinai Peninsula, following Egyptian president Gamal abd al-Nasser’s decision to close the Straits of Tiran to Israeli ships.¹³ In the days following the attack, Jordan and Syria joined the conflict alongside Egypt. However, within six days Israel had managed to secure the Sinai Peninsula, along with parts of Jordan and Syria territories, namely the West Bank and Golan Heights. The striking defeat crushed the spirit of those who believed in a pan-Arab dream of union.¹⁴ This sentiment had been nurtured by Arab leaders including Nasser, who claimed that through the union Arabs would have found strength. The June defeat was thus also the failure of this union, but as the pan-Arab sentiment was fading away, other means of solidarity were emerging. Among these, leftist organizations flourished with renewed enthusiasm.

This trend which moved supporters from pan-Arabism towards the Arab Left had begun years prior, with the failure of the Egyptian-Syrian Union in 1961. The new enthusiasm came along with transformations within the organizations, which led to multiple ruptures as a New Left tried to emerge. This for instance in Lebanon led to the foundation of Socialist Lebanon (SL) in 1965, a Marxist group that then merged in 1970 with the pan-Arabist Organization of Lebanese Socialists to form the Organization of Communist Action in Lebanon (OCAL). The forming Arab New Left was inspired

¹³ Guy Laron, *The Six-Day War. The Breaking of the Middle East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

¹⁴ Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century. From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 214–81; Rashid Khalidi, ‘The 1967 War and the Demise of Arab Nationalism. Chronicle of a Death Foretold’, in *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Origins and Consequences*, ed. Avi Shlaim and William Roger Louis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 264–88.

by similar trends in other parts of the globe, especially in France and Italy where new Marxist readings were opposing Stalinism and the communist parties.¹⁵

The emergence of a New Left was thus a transnational phenomenon, deeply connected to other transformations going on in the different countries. While the Arab need for transformation emerged along with pan-Arabist disillusion, in Europe it was students' and workers' discontent to fuel the debate¹⁶. The discontent exploded in May 1968 in France, and spread across the continent touching the UK, West Germany, but also beyond the 'iron curtain' Czechoslovakia and Poland. Italian leftist groups closely monitored the events in the rest of Europe and followed with their wave of protests which peaked in 1969, during the so-called "hot Autumn".

While the protests in Italy mainly focused on workers' rights, the debates that emerged both from the radical and parliamentary Left built on two key fights: antifascism and anti-imperialism.¹⁷ And as class struggle had a fundamental international dimension, its antifascist and anti-imperialist declinations also were not limited by country borders. Italy, like other countries in Europe, started to link its protests to fights from other parts of the world, starting with the Vietnamese one and including the Latin American revolutions, resistance fights in the Mediterranean such as in Spain, Greece and Portugal, and the support to the Palestinian cause.

Opening their fight to the international sphere, European (and US) movements thus came in contact with a global network of solidarity that had been developing in the Global South since 1955.¹⁸ In April 1955, 29 Asian and African countries took part in a 7-days conference in Bandung which discussed Western and Soviet influence and colonialism. The Bandung Conference encouraged cooperation at both economic and cultural levels, breaking ground for the development of a solidarity network in the following decades.¹⁹ Six years later, in September 1961, the spirit of Bandung merged with Cold War logic into the Non-Aligned movement. Led by some of the protagonists of Bandung, including Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Indonesian President Sukarno, the movement rejected the two-blocks logic and strove for peaceful co-existence and mutual non-interference. "The logic of nonalignment helped forge a global, anti-

¹⁵ Laure Guirguis, 'The Arab New Left and May '68: Transnational Entanglements at a Time of Disruption', *Critical Historical Studies* 8, no. 1 (2021): 87–113; Guirguis, 'Dismount the Horse'.

¹⁶ Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker, eds., *1968: The World Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Note that also in Arab countries it was mainly students and workers who joined and animated the protests. The fact that these protests connected with pan-Arabist disillusion does not deny the socio-economic character of the unrests.

¹⁷ Paul Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia Dal Dopoguerra Ad Oggi* (Torino: Einaudi, 2006).

¹⁸ I will here focus on Europe since US case differs mainly in the absence of strong communist groups. US organizations that are usually linked to this global network are Black Panthers movements and other civil rights groups, including the Arab-American left (see Cynthia Young, *US Third World Left*, 2006).

¹⁹ Carole Fink, *Cold War: An International History* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2014).

imperialist ‘third way’ beyond the US and the Soviet framework”²⁰, and this collaboration soon expanded from the Afro-Asian movement to include the rest of the Global South, namely Latin America. In January 1966, representatives from 82 countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America met in Havana, Cuba, to discuss the revolutions that were animating the national scene of the respective countries and “to form an alliance against military and economic imperialism”²¹. This Tricontinental conference led to the foundation of the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (in Spanish *Organización de Solidaridad de los Pueblos de Asia, África y América Latina*, OSPAAAL).

OSPAAAL had a fundamental role in disseminating Third World leftist ideas through the publication of press material which included a *Tricontinental Bulletin* (1966–1988, 1995–), published in Spanish, English, French, and Arabic, the *Tricontinental* magazine (1967–1990, 1995–), published in Spanish, English, and French, posters, books and pamphlets, but also radio programs, and the ICAIC Latin American Newsreel produced by the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC). The material produced by OSPAAAL circulated not only in the three continents from which the initiative originated but found an interested audience also in Europe. The French publisher François Maspero and the Italian Giangiacomo Feltrinelli curated the translation of the *Tricontinental* magazine in their respective countries, though in both cases the publication lasted only until 1971.²²

Publishing in multiple languages and relying on a clear symbolical visual culture, textual and visual material produced by the Tricontinental easily circulated the globe, contributing to the creation and strengthening of a solidarity network in the Global South²³. Tricontinental material was not the only for circulation: for instance, in 1967, the Afro-Asian Writers Association (AAWA, founded by the Soviet Union) started publishing a new journal in Cairo *al-Adab al-Ifriqī al-Asyawī* (*Afro-Asian Writings*), renamed *Lotus* in 1970, and a similar initiative was attempted by the US-funded Congress of Cultural Freedom.²⁴

For what concerns the Middle East, Beirut and Cairo were the two centres of diffusion, where the material was published and then distributed to the rest of the region. Along with Arabic publications and tri-continental material, US and European publications also were translated and distributed. In

²⁰ Alex Lubin, *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 143.

²¹ Anne Garland Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 3.

²² While the history of Maspero publication of the *Tricontinental* is known and described in Martine Poulain, 1998, *La censure*, in *L'édition française depuis 1945*, edited by Pascal Fouché (Paris: Edition du Cercle de la Librairie), the reason why the Italian edition stopped is still not researched, as Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli archives are being reorganised

²³ Mahler, *From the Tricontinental*.

²⁴ Elizabeth Holt, ‘Cairo and the Cultural Cold War for Afro-Asia’, in *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties*, ed. Jian Chen et al. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 480–93.

particular, the material produced by the French leftist publisher Maspero found ample diffusion in the Arabic Left audience, as well as *Le Monde* and *Les Temps Modernes*.²⁵ As Guirguis analysed, these publications allowed the diffusion of ideas from the European movements to the Arab world, as not only they gave access to French debates, but also regularly reported on the revolutionary movements in the rest of the continent, including Italian ones.

The circulation of material meant the movement of ideas and ideals, which were to unite revolutionary movements across the globe around key-concepts such as anti-imperialism, resistance to power/oppression, and internationalism. Among the theories and texts that were most discussed during the late 1960s and the 1970s was Maoism, as China tried to expand its influence. Mao Zedong's thought found fertile ground within those movements that were rejecting both US imperialism and Soviet leadership, as it was perceived by some as an "openly revolutionary, non-détentist version of communist dogma", and by some others as the "prospect of communism beyond or *without* a party".²⁶ These interpretations of Maoism spread in particular to European countries, especially in France, West Germany, and Italy, where they fuelled those new Marxist interpretations that were animating the emerging New Left. From here, in this Western guise, Maoism would then be reintroduced in Third World debates, following paths such as the one described above by Guirguis.

Built on the circulation of texts and ideas, the network however did offer concrete support to the revolutionary causes around the globe. There were two natures of this support: material, including financial and military aid, and political. While the former was based on bilateral agreements between movements and/or countries – for instance Cuban intervention in Angola in support of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) – the latter more easily highlighted the network structure of the movement. This global solidarity network was a platform that gave resonance to revolutionary initiatives around the globe.

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), amongst others, benefited from this platform. As Chamberlin brilliantly described in his 2012 work *The Global Offensive: the United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the making of the post-cold war order*, a fundamental factor for PLO international success was the globalization of its struggle.²⁷ Born in 1964 as an initiative of the Arab League, the organization brought together the different groups and movements that Palestinians had created since 1948, within and outside the diaspora.²⁸

²⁵ Guirguis, 'The Arab New Left and May '68'; Guirguis, 'Dismount the Horse'.

²⁶ Quinn Slobodian, 'The Meanings of Western Maoism in the Global 1960s', in *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties*, ed. Jian Chen et al. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 71–72.

²⁷ Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive*; Paul Thomas Chamberlin, 'The Struggle Against Oppression Everywhere: The Global Politics of Palestinian Liberation', *Middle Eastern Studies* 47, no. 1 (2011): 25–41.

²⁸ For a complete account of PLO history see Chamberlin (cit.) and T.G. Fraser *The Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Basingstoke-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)

In its early years, the organization was under the close control of the Arab League, and Egypt in particular. This is visible for instance in its first National Charter, that proposed pan-Arab values typical of Nasserist rhetoric.²⁹ However, after the June defeat, the 1968 Charter indicates Palestine liberation as the primary objective, moving the Arab union to the background.³⁰ This change was part of a series of transformations within PLO that, starting with the emergence of Fatah and its leader Yasser Arafat, brought to a gradual distancing from pan-Arabism and the assumption of an independent role as the sole representative of Palestinian people – first recognised by the Arab League in 1974, then by the international community with UN Resolutions 3236 and 3237 on the same year, and finally by Israel with 1993 Oslo Accords.³¹ This ‘palestinization’ of the conflict implied that the PLO started looking for alliances both in the regional and the international sphere, the latter being a key to its success according to Chamberlin.

This internationalisation followed two main paths: participation in the freedom fighters’ network and the assimilation of human rights discourse.³² Under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, the PLO adopted guerrilla methods replicating what other liberation movements, such as the Vietnamese and the Algerian National Liberation Front (in French *Front de libération nationale*, FLN) did, and jointly started to follow their rhetoric. Soon Fatah set itself up at the forefront of the global anti-imperialist offensive, taking up the Vietnamese legacy – as exemplified by a famous poster published by PLO that shows a Vietnamese fighter passing a flag to a Palestinian comrade.³³

As mentioned, this network provided Palestinian fighters with material support in the form of financial and military aid. First among PLO supporters was China which provided arms supply and training for Palestinian fighters. Chinese support must be read as part of a general effort to extend its influence in the Third World after the Sino-Soviet rupture, along with the previously discussed diffusion of Maoism. In addition, the global solidarity network helped the Palestinian cause resonate: support from Algeria and several recently liberated African countries was crucial, especially within the UN, as well as support from parts of Western public opinion.³⁴ As will be discussed within the Italian case, European support for Palestinian fighters increased after 1967, as the joint action of leftist groups and Palestinian activists gave more and more visibility to the cause through the publication and distribution of books and press material, as well as demonstrations.

²⁹ 1964 National Charter: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-original-palestine-national-charter-1964>

³⁰ 1968 National Charter: https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/plocov.asp

³¹ UN Resolutions 3236 e 3237 can be accessed at UNISPAL archive: <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-177305/> and <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-180059/>; for Oslo accords see: <https://peacemaker.un.org/israelopt-osloaccord93>

³² Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive*.

³³ See the poster at <https://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/al-nasr>

³⁴ A. Dirlik “The Third World” in *1968: The World Transformed* ed. Carole Fink et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

All the events here discussed articulated around two symbolical episodes: the 1967 war which catalysed a turn in the Middle Eastern regional sphere, with the symbolic demise of pan-Arabism and the consequent shifts in the regional power balance, and the 1968 protests fuelled by social discontent both in Europe and the Arab world. The global solidarity network that had developed during the 1960s was a necessary condition for these events to connect and influence each other, leading to the articulation of what I call the ‘peculiar 1967-68 conjuncture’. The focus on these two years is fundamental in understanding the complexity of Middle Eastern history, which should not be limited to the narration of its main conflicts, especially the Arab-Israeli one. While it is beyond doubt that the Arab-Israeli conflict had a certain centrality in Middle Eastern dynamics, it is also important to look at the region within a global context. This perspective allows to trace global trends and transnational connections that characterised Middle Eastern history. The 1967-68 conjuncture is a good point from which to observe the interaction between local, regional, and global spheres, as not only witnessed peak moments of the ‘long Sixties’ histories but was a transformative moment which impacted the Middle East, Europe, and their relations.

Repercussions in Italy (1967-1975)

Italian political and socio-economic landscape at the dawn of the 1967-68 conjuncture manifested several peculiarities compared to other European countries. The key one was the presence of a strong, deeply-rooted Communist party, the Italian Communist Party (in Italian *Partito Comunista Italiano*, PCI). An attractive pole for the working masses, during the 1960s and 1970s the PCI was the second largest party in Italy. Despite its large electoral base, the party was systematically excluded from the government of the country, in favour of the unwavering dominance of the Christian Democracy (in Italian *Democrazia Cristiana*, DC). The latter was a centrist party inspired by Catholic values which consistently held the relative majority within the parliament.³⁵

Throughout the 1950s and the 1960s, the PCI was excluded from any alliance due to its Communist ideology. Although the party distanced itself from USSR during the 1960s, also proposing an alternative “Italian way towards Socialism”, Italian communists were still frowned upon by moderate parties and public opinion, as Communism was considered incompatible with Western democracy.³⁶ Moreover, the DC was strongly supported by the US, who feared that openness towards Italian Left would have meant the loss of Italy as its most loyal ally in the area.³⁷ For these reasons, the governments formed in these years were based on DC alliances with minor parties. Between 1948

³⁵ Alberto Mario Banti, *L'Età Contemporanea Dalla Grande Guerra Ad Oggi* (Roma: Editori Laterza, 2009), 316–23.

³⁶ The ‘Italian way towards Socialism’, introduced by Palmiro Togliatti, proposed a series of reforms in order to establish Socialist order.

³⁷ Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia*.

and 1957, the DC formed alliances with other centre parties, such as the Republican, Liberal, and Social Democratic ones. Later, during the years between 1957 and 1960, the party formed a contested alliance with *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (lit. Italian Social Movement, MSI), an openly fascist formation. As heated debates arose and the discontent spread among the masses, the DC moved away from the MSI and looked for allies among Italian Socialists.

The second largest leftist party in Italy was the Italian Socialist Party (in Italian *Partito Socialista Italiano*, PSI). Italian socialists were of moderate orientation compared to PCI, from which they tried to take distance in favour of a more ‘democratic’ approach. While some equate this phase of Italian socialism to the contemporary West German *Sozialdemokratie*, the debate within PSI shows that Marxism and Socialism were still central to the party ideology. This moderate socialism made an alliance with the DC possible, but not without critiques from both sides. Especially within PSI, a fragmented party, debates arose on whether joining and supporting DC governments would indeed enable the party to make the necessary social reforms. As time would then prove, this alliance failed to meet socialist expectations of reform. However, DC succeeded in creating further distance between Communists and Socialists, nurturing PCI isolation. The alliance between PSI and DC was however necessary also to respond to the diffuse discontent in the working class, and its failure to do so was crucial in fuelling the protests later in the decade.

Interestingly this discontent spread while Italy was going through a period of great economic growth thanks to the country industrialization process, which also witnessed an important decrease in unemployment rates.³⁸ However, workers’ living and working conditions were mediocre, especially for migrant workers that moved from the South of the country to the industrialised North. The discontent was then enhanced by the presence of the Communist Party; the Communist ideals of equality raised people’s expectations of social change. However, these expectations were regularly deluded by the systematic exclusion of PCI from the government.

Thus, it was during this tense season that protests exploded in 1968. First among students and then, in 1969, among workers, social unrest spread destabilizing the country. Leading these protests was an alliance between the student movement and workers, of which the most important outcome was the emergence of an Italian New Left and the foundation of several revolutionary groups such as *Lotta Continua*, *Servire il Popolo*, *Avanguardia Operaia*, *Potere Operaio*, and *Il Manifesto*.

Following this heated moment, PCI and DC started working towards an alliance as the only solution to the fracture that 1968-69 had brought to the surface. The so-called ‘historical compromise’ was supported by PCI and DC leaders, namely PCI Secretary Enrico Berlinguer and DC Secretary Aldo Moro. The PCI electoral growth and its further distancing from USSR after the Czechoslovakia

³⁸ Ginsborg.

invasion in 1968 made such an alliance possible. However, the ‘historical compromise’ was welcomed by both sides with large critiques. The harshest response came from a revolutionary terrorist group, *Brigate Rosse* (lit. Red Brigades, BR). The group organised several terrorist attacks towards journalists and state functionaries with the double aim of building an armed party in preparation for the revolution, and to impede DC and PCI convergence. The peak of these operations was the kidnapping and subsequent murder of DC leader Aldo Moro in 1978. The PCI harshly condemned this and similar operations, distancing itself from the most radical elements of the Left, whose decline rapidly concluded the revolutionary long Sixties.

But which were the debates that animated this revolutionary phase in Italy? The first protests started in late 1967 when groups of students began to occupy universities in the North. During the first half of 1968, the student protests continued and spread across the country. Animated by the dissatisfaction with a poor university system, the protests soon articulated around the rejection of any authority, from university professors to politicians, to police forces, to state and family. Started as a pacific movement, in February 1968 the first clashes with the police introduced violence as a means of protest. This was somehow in line with the active approach of the movement, which did not develop strong theoretical foundations.

The debates that animated students’ assemblies centred on anti-authority sentiments and were inspired by Maoist and Marxist thought as the movement distanced itself from the major doctrines of Italian Socialism and Communism. In their simple interpretation of the events in China, the Cultural Revolution of 1966-67 was a spontaneous movement that moved the masses against authorities. This antiauthoritarian bottom-up approach merged with the Marxist focus on workers and led the students to move the protests from universities to the factories. Here, a more educated generation of workers welcomed and joined the protests, asking for better working conditions.³⁹ These included lower production rates, the end of piecework, reduction of wage differences, and safe working conditions.

The first wave of protests, started in the summer of 1968, was led by the already mentioned revolutionary groups organised by students and workers, independently and in contraposition to trade unions who were accused of being too open to compromise, as well as being controlled by political parties.⁴⁰ These groups saw the protests as a first step towards the revolution, and embraced the rhetoric and strategy proposed by liberation movements in the Third World. However, this revolutionary spirit was only shared by a minority of the protesting workers, whose interest was

³⁹ One of the few successful reforms born out of the PSI-DC alliance had been the 1962 school reform, which extended mandatory school until 14 years of age.

⁴⁰ Of the three main trade unions in Italy, CGIL (*Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*) was affiliated with PCI, CISL (*Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori*) with the DC, and UIL (*Unione Italiana del Lavoro*) with PSI.

indeed on the improvement of working conditions and not necessarily a radical change in the state structure.

During the autumn of 1969, trade unions managed to regain control of the protests, also thanks to a newly found autonomy from parties. Thanks to union coordination, protests succeeded and in the following years several steps brought better working conditions, with the promulgation of the Workers Charter in 1970 as the peak reform.

Despite not being able to start revolutionary changes in the country, the 1968 movement had an important impact on Italian society. Relations with the authority were transformed, and important reforms followed as the institution of referendum. Also gender relations were impacted, which then led to the institution of divorce, introduced in 1970 and confirmed by the 1974 referendum. Most importantly for the present discussion, Italian society experienced a new openness towards global movements.

The revolutionary experience of 1968 was not only inspired by contemporary events but was also connected to them by shared solidarity and material support. The horrors of the Vietnam War first, which nurtured discontent against the US, and the Latin American revolutions, with the idolization of Comandante Che Guevara, were determinant in starting and shaping the protests. This support and connection with Third World causes continued during the years which followed the protests, and not only involved the revolutionary groups but spread to several parts of the leftist Italian public opinion and political sphere – first and foremost Communists. A maybe trivial example was the support to the Chilean band *Inti-Illimani*, who sought refuge in Italy where they happened to be during Augusto Pinochet's coup in 1973. During their long exile, their music was constantly top-selling in the country, also contributing to spreading support for the Chilean cause.

Finally, another question that found large support in Italy after 1968 was the Palestinian one. The most resonating moment of the Middle Eastern crisis before the 1968 wave of protests was the June War of 1967. Parties' reactions to the war show the fragmentation of the political sphere regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict, a division particularly visible within the Italian Left. Most political forces supported Israel, as the attack was justified by Egypt's threats; moreover, parties were guided by the moral obligation to fight fascism and any form of antisemitism – such as Arab call for Israeli destruction – due to the still recent history of the country.⁴¹ This anti-fascist framing was shared by most nonreligious parties, especially socialist and social democratic ones, at the time merged into the PSU (*Partito Socialista Unitario*). Of official pro-Israel orientation was also the DC, which however showed a certain ambiguity maintaining in practice an intermediate position. This was due also to internal debates on whether to fully adhere to Cold War logic or to find Italy diplomatic power in its

⁴¹ Marzano and Schwarz, *Attentato Alla Sinagoga*.

bridging role in the Mediterranean and with the Arab world – a position shared by then Minister of Foreign Affairs Amintore Fanfani and Prime Minister Aldo Moro.⁴² Taking the opposite position was the PCI, which vocally supported Arab countries on the basis that the first attack was launched by the Israeli army. As it will be of further discussion, the PCI had to carefully balance its support towards Arabs to avoid accusations of antisemitism, thus the focus on Israel's attack. Indeed, most public opinion supported Israel and its right to exist, including part of the PCI base members. Many readers of *L'Unità*, the official party press, sent letters attacking the newspaper, CGIL declared its support to Israel, and also notable PCI members openly disregarded the party directions.⁴³

Things started to change, especially within public opinion, with the growing popularity of 1968 revolutionary groups. These groups, and extra-parliamentary leftist groups in general, sympathised with Third World liberation movements, including Palestinian ones. According to Arturo Marzano, the Italian radical left became more interested and involved in the Palestinian question in 1969, thanks to the emergence of the PLO in the global sphere.⁴⁴ The battle of Karameh on 21 March 1968 had shown the potential of the Palestinian *fedayeen*, as even though the battle witnessed the destruction of Karameh camp, the Palestinian fighters managed to resist. The battle of Karameh along with Fatah's emergence and the new independent role of the PLO started to form an idealized image of the Palestinian people and their cause.

Most importantly, the focus on *fedayeen* actions enabled Italian groups to make connections with the Italian Resistance, whose memory was renewed in those same years. In particular, the Resistance memory revived in its liberation fight nature, of which Third World fights were a replica, and which justified the centrality that violence had acquired after 1968. All this resonated well with the Palestinian struggle, which was then framed as a resistance fight against fascism/imperialism. This support for the Palestinian cause was voiced especially through the publication of press material, which included newspaper articles – sometimes published in newspapers dedicated to anti-imperialist fights, as well as posters, and leaflets.⁴⁵

Moral support was then followed by material support: in 1972 Italian territory began to be involved in Palestinian terrorist actions, brought on by the support of European and Italian radical groups. Moreover, during the 1970s the Italian government secretly settled a deal with PLO that granted the PLO freedom to conduct operations within Italian territory, as long as no terrorist attack was carried

⁴² On the Italian diplomatic efforts in the Middle East see La Fortezza, *Cedri e ulivi*; La Fortezza, 'Un'amicizia Italo-Araba'.

⁴³ Marzano and Schwarz, *Attentato Alla Sinagoga*; Seu, *The Italian Leftist Parties and the Conflict in the Middle East*.

⁴⁴ Arturo Marzano, 'Il "Mito" Della Palestina Nell'immaginario Della Sinistra Extraparlamentare Italiana Degli Anni Settanta', *Italia Contemporanea* 280 (2016): 15–39.

⁴⁵ Marzano.

out on Italian soil.⁴⁶ This freedom of movement enhanced the cooperation between PLO and Italian terrorist groups active at the end of the Seventies.

While terrorist actions did not enhance support towards the cause within public opinion, the narrative surrounding Palestinian resistance did. The most visible impact that the spreading support had was the significant change in PSI positions. The emerging sympathies for Palestinians could not be ignored by PSI, which after 1967 began to pay increasing attention to their cause. However, rejecting the ‘extremist’ narrations in support of the *fedayeen* fight, PSI’s focus was on the refugee question. Thus, in the years following the June War Palestinians did find space in Socialist discourse, but they were only referred to as ‘Palestinian *refugees*’, thus not considering them a political entity. As time passed, more and more voices within the party began to think about the Palestinians not only as a humanitarian problem, but also as “the irreplaceable partner with whom to build peace”.⁴⁷ The official recognition of Palestinian political rights came only in 1974 with the international recognition of PLO as Palestinian representatives.

What made this change possible was not only the reorientation of public opinion and the refugee crisis itself, but also the changed dynamics within the party. The elections of 1968 saw the failure of the PSU experiment, the alliance with the Social Democratic Party.⁴⁸ This led to internal fragmentation and the emergence of two major trends concerning the Middle Eastern crisis. One tendency was aligned with the past party positions and in support of Israel as a socialist country, while the other harshly criticized Israel for the occupation post-1967. The presence of these two opposite tendencies, along with the position of neutrality of the government – also backed by the Socialists – led the PSI to bring forth a more equidistant position. Thus in 1970 the first PSI delegation was sent to Egypt, and a first contact with Arab Socialists was established. As Israeli politics moved away from the socialist ideal, support within PSI decreased in favour of Arab socialist countries, taking a definitive turn after 1973 war and the subsequent oil crisis.

The PSI shift is representative of a large moderate majority that after 1967-68, partly due to the emergence of the refugee humanitarian crisis and partly thanks to the active propaganda of 1968 groups, moved away from Israeli support in favour of a pro-Palestinian narrative that still dominates Italian public opinion. However, a fundamental role in this change was also acted by the PCI, whose support for Palestinians and Arab people continued throughout the years following 1967, not only

⁴⁶ It is important to note that this does not mean that Italian government, once again led by the DC, supported Palestinians against Israel. In fact, it is proved that also the Israeli *Mossad* had similar accords with Italy. The strategy was thus of an equidistant position, in line with the already commented DC ambiguity. Moreover, not much is known about these deals, and sometimes information is fragmented and contrasting. For instance, while it is now given for granted that the accord with the PLO took place, its chronology is still not clear.

⁴⁷ Seu, *The Italian Leftist Parties and the Conflict in the Middle East*, 99.

⁴⁸ Seu, *The Italian Leftist Parties and the Conflict in the Middle East*.

contributing to the said propaganda but also bringing the debate within the parliament. As will be discussed in the following chapters, PCI involvement in the region found a loyal ally in its Lebanese counterpart, the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP).

Repercussions in Lebanon (1967-1975)

The Lebanese Communist Party was one of the many counterposed forces that animated the Lebanese political sphere in the 1967 aftermath. However, to understand its position within the complex Lebanese politics it is necessary to outline the political landscape more generally during the 1960s, especially given the peculiarities of the Lebanese political system. Since the country independence in 1943, the National Pact, an unwritten accord, established the distribution of power on a confessional basis.⁴⁹ This system provides for the distribution of parliamentary seats on a confessional basis: the president must be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of parliament a Shiite Muslim. Parties and alliances mainly formed along confessional lines, rather than economic or social policies. However, alliances between parties and members of different religious communities are and were not uncommon, as will be discussed later. Despite these alliances, parties do usually refer to a communal base, due to the confessional electoral system. As a consequence, another peculiarity of Lebanese politics was and still is the centrality of the political leaders and their families.

The 1960s Lebanese political landscape

A central figure in Lebanese politics during the 1960s was beyond a doubt Fuad Chehab, elected President in 1958 after intense clashes over his predecessor's mandate renewal.⁵⁰ Chehab's mandate followed two main lines: for what concerns domestic affairs, he imposed a statist approach and gave space to numerous reforms and initiatives to enhance the role of the state within the economy and in support of the population; with international policies, President Chehab tried to maintain a neutral position, but working at the same time in close collaboration with Nasser's UAR.⁵¹ The opposition coalesced against these two points, linking political and economic liberalism against statism, and strongly opposing Nasserism. This opposition was thus not built on confessional lines, even though President Chehab enjoyed the general support of Muslim communities. In fact the opposition mainly

⁴⁹ Traboulsi, *Modern Lebanon*; Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence*.

⁵⁰ I here refer to the period of tension between February and October 1958 following the attempted renewal of former President Camille Chamoun. Resisting a second mandate was the Druze and Muslim opposition, led by Kamal Joublatt, especially those parts who supported Arab unity following the recent example of the UAR. To contrast the rebellion President Chamoun looked for US support, culminated in 'Operation Blue Bat', thus US military intervention in Lebanon and the consequent occupation of Beirut port and international airport.

⁵¹ Traboulsi, *Modern Lebanon*.

consisted of the National Bloc, a social liberal, democratic and secular party of Christian majority, the National Liberal Party of liberal orientation and Christian base, and a group led by the Sunni Muslim Saeb Salam, who opposed Nasserism in favour of a stronger relationship with Saudi Arabia. Supporting President Chehab were instead two populist parties of quite different orientations: on the one hand, the Progressive Socialist Party led by the Druze Kamal Joumblatt, on the other the nationalist Maronite Christian Kataeb Party, also known as Phalanges.

When in 1964 elections led to a strong majority of Chehab supporters in the parliament, the opposition threatened a new rebellion in case of a second mandate. The subsequent debate brought to the appointment of Charles Helou, member of the Kataeb party, as a form of compromise.⁵² The Helou mandate, which lasted until 1970, was characterised by a return to anti-statism and by strong polarisation within the parliament. As the division between Chehab supporters and opposers continued, contrasts between Kataeb and PSP grew stronger.

The tensions within the parliament were mirrored by growing unrest within the population. Starting in the autumn of 1964, protests continued uninterrupted until the 1967 June War. The protests involved workers and farmers alike: while the former asked for an increase in salaries and improvement of social services, farmers' discontent emerged from a crisis in agribusiness. The origins of the crisis were identified in commercial monopolies of large agro-industries, thus protests asked for the protection of small and middle-level productions.

The Lebanese Left: PSP and LCP

Supporting these protests were Lebanese leftist movements, and in particular the PSP, the LCP and ANM (Arab Nationalist Movement), who joined demonstrations and organised campaigns in favour of both workers and farmers. The Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) was a Druze political formation which advocated for social equality and secularism. Its leader, Kamal Joumblatt, was member of a feudal family but was able to combine this traditional role with the one of a modern and secular politician. The confessional base of the PSP did not prevent the party to open to other communities, also supporting pan-Arabist ideals throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Secularism was seen as a means to obtain social equality, and PSP thus supported proposals such as the abolition of noble titles.⁵³ However, by the 1970s PSP distanced itself from certain secularist propositions such as civil marriage, probably as a consequence of the growing communal tensions.⁵⁴ What remained stable throughout

⁵² Note that Helou, despite being a member of Kataeb party, was not the member supported by the Phalanges. In fact, in order to distinguish from other groups, the Kataeb party voted for its leader Pierre Gemayel.

⁵³ Traboulsi, *Modern Lebanon*, 125.

⁵⁴ Mark Farha, *Lebanon. The Rise and Fall of a Secular State under Siege* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Carl Yonker, 'Youth Politics, Popular Organizations, and the Struggle for Secularism in Lebanon', *Bustan: The Middle East Book Review* 12, no. 1 (2021): 16–36.

the 1960s was however PSP support to workers and farmers. These positions brought the party closer to other elements of the Lebanese Left, primarily the LCP which Joumblatt legalised in 1970 as his last act as Domestic Affairs Minister.⁵⁵

Founded in 1924 as the Syrian-Lebanese Communist Party, the LCP emerged as a separate entity in 1943 with Lebanese independence.⁵⁶ However, in 1948 the party was outlawed and continued its activities in illegality until 1970. Despite its illegal status, the party managed to gain public consensus towards the end of the 1950s. Enlarging its base, the LCP gradually detached from the working class and welcomed the newly formed educated middle class. This middle class had developed an interest in social questions and international politics, something that resonated with the Communist Party, which in the past had been accused of being ‘foreign’ and detached from Arab struggles.⁵⁷ These accusations were strictly connected to the party’s relations with the USSR, an actor perceived as external and who not always aligned with Arab interests, and eventually led the LCP to take some distance from the Soviets during the 1960s. The party thus developed a reformist approach which sought the realisation of socialism through progressive reforms in the economy, but also in the state administration and the political sphere. Moreover, the June defeat in 1967 brought the LCP to a necessary moment of reflection, an experience shared by many Arab leftist formations. This opened a phase of lively intellectual debate, also animated by the emerging New Left, which spread outside the party’s traditional circles. Along with the necessity of reforms towards socialism, the party discourse attacked the union of interests between the ruling elites and Christian right-wing parties as well as (US) imperialist forces in the region.⁵⁸ As the debate flourished, in 1968 the LCP also started to take action and organised citizen forces for defence purposes against Israeli attacks in the South.

The LCP and PSP were two larger parties in a constellation of several minor leftist groups. While all parties shared common principles such as secularism and socialism, they were divided especially concerning regional affiliations. While both PSP and LCP had strong loyalty to Lebanon as a country, despite pan-Arab sympathies, other groups had a transnational approach. Main transnational affiliations included the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), which operated in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, and called for a greater Syrian state, the Arab National Movement of pan-Arab

⁵⁵ Other parties to be legalised on that same occasion were the ANM, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) and the pro-Iraqi Ba’ath.

⁵⁶ Farha, *Lebanon*.

⁵⁷ Rosa Velasco Muñoz, ‘The Lebanese Communist Party: Continuity against All Odds’, in *Communist Parties in the Middle East. 100 Years of History*, by Laura Feliu and Ferran Izquierdo-Brichs (New York: Routledge, 2019), 90–108.

⁵⁸ According to La Fortezza (2020), communist discourse in Lebanon mainly focused on the fight against imperialism, as this was the framework imposed by the Soviet on the region. However, when looking at Lebanese history of the 1960s it is clear that social struggle was also a central question in the country, a fight that was backed by LCP. On the other hand, anti-imperialism was a key fight in the region and was central in LCP communication with actors on the international sphere, as the analysis of the party’s relations with PCI that this thesis discuss will prove.

orientation, the Ba'ath party, founded in Syria but with regional branches in Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon, but also several Nasserist groups and pro-Iraqi groups. As will be discussed later, after 1967 also several Palestinian formations entered the country, complicating the leftist landscape.

The 1967-68 conjuncture in Lebanon and its consequences: protests, the PLO, and the Civil War

Part of the landscape of the left comprised several groups which emerged from worker, farmer, and student movements after 1968. Far from being disconnected from the global scenario, the protests that had started in the early 1960s found new nourishment in 1968. The social unrest that characterised the years after 1968 originated from a crisis that had built through three main stages. First, in 1966, the Intra Bank crash showed that Lebanese prosperity had come to an end and would now depend on Western networks.⁵⁹ The following industrial development was entirely based on petrodollars investment in Western capitals and according to Fouwwaz Traboulsi “as a result, the economy was further subjected to the vagaries of foreign capital, while exaggerating its monopolistic structure and strengthening the domination of the commercial/financial complex”.⁶⁰ The Arab population, which was now facing an unstable economy and a worsening of working conditions, was thus to experience a second crisis on the political level with the final collapse of pan-Arabism after the 1967 defeat. It was in this climate that news of the 1968 global uprisings reached Lebanon, resonating with the local discontent.

The protests focused on three issues: the agrarian movement, which protested against agrarian monopolies and semi-feudal exploitation; the worker movement, which asked for better working conditions; and the disillusioned student movement. After several disparate protests, the agrarian movement began to organise unions and syndicates, including the National Union of Agricultural Workers (1973). Trade unions gained popularity also among workers, in particular the General Workers' Union of Lebanon which organised general strikes throughout the early 1970s. However, while the trade unions managed to obtain wage increases, these were usually followed by a rise in prices, resulting in minimal improvement in living conditions. These *de facto* failures led to the spread of violent protests throughout the country in 1973. Finally, similarly to what was happening in Europe, students also joined the protests. Driven by both 1967 disillusionment and 1968 rising hopes, students began to protest in Beirut and other main Lebanese cities. Asking for lower fees and reform of university and the school system, the student movement began questioning Lebanese society *in toto*.

⁵⁹ The creation of a central bank in 1964 had already facilitated the integration of Western banks in Lebanese economy, but with the 1966 crash Western capital definitively substituted local financiers, see Hannes Baumann, 'The Causes, Nature, and Effect of the Current Crisis of Lebanese Capitalism', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 25, no. 1 (2019): 61–77.

⁶⁰ Traboulsi, *Modern Lebanon*, 157.

Protesting students had grown up with Nasserism and socialist ideals and had witnessed the 1958 clashes. As Laure Guirguis highlights, many of them also had the chance to study in Europe and were thus greatly influenced by the contemporary events in the continent. As a New Left started emerging in Europe, the protesting students were thus the vanguard of an Arab New Left. This flourished after the 1968 protests, as it tried to link new Marxist and Maoist readings that came from Europe with the Lebanese working class and Palestinian struggles, in opposition to Stalinism and traditional communist parties.⁶¹ However, intellectual debates soon gave space to military training in collaboration with Palestinian groups: at a theoretical level, armed struggle gained centrality, similarly to what was happening with European revolutionary groups, and “the revolutionary subject par excellence” became the *fedayeen*.⁶²

Palestinian organisations had entered Lebanon in 1967 as a consequence of the June defeat, further contributing to the escalation of violence and growing tensions between communities.⁶³ The population welcomed Palestinians, especially in the south where Palestinian organizations were seen as some political alternative to regimes that for some time had been perceived as distant and had overlooked the southern communities, many of whom were Shi’a Muslims. However, Palestinian presence attracted Israeli retaliations and preventive strikes, as southern Lebanon was now a base from which Palestinian groups would launch attacks on the country. Israel’s threats enhanced Lebanese domestic tensions, which led to open opposition to Palestinian presence both in parliament and within the army. In 1968 the major Christian leaders formed the Tripartite Alliance which, opposing Nasserism, Communism and Zionism, vocally contested Palestinian presence, launching a campaign ‘against strangers’. The same months witnessed the first clashes between the Lebanese army and PLO groups.

The crisis exploded at the end of 1968, when on 28 December an Israeli retaliation raid bombed Beirut International Airport, destroying Middle Eastern Airline planes. The government collapsed, and Palestinian-solidarity protests erupted throughout the country but were violently repressed by the army. To put a stop to the internal fighting, an accord, brokered by President Abd al-Nasser, was reached in Cairo (hereafter known as the Cairo Accord) on 8 November 1969 between Yasser Arafat and General Emile Bustani, the commander-in-chief of the Lebanese army. The Cairo Accord granted the PLO the right to move within Lebanese territory, and a sort of extra-territoriality regime that governed the Palestinian camps, which led to the *de facto* establishment of a ‘State within a State’.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Laure Guirguis, ‘The New Left in 1960s and 1970s Lebanon and 1917 as Model and Foil’, in *Communist Parties in the Middle East. 100 Years of History*, ed. Laura Feliu and Ferran Izquierdo-Brichs (New York: Routledge, 2019), 258–67; Guirguis, ‘The Arab New Left and May ’68’.

⁶² Guirguis, ‘The New Left’, 261.

⁶³ Traboulsi, *Modern Lebanon*.

⁶⁴ Traboulsi.

The Cairo Accord was not unanimously welcomed in the country. The National Bloc was the only party not to ratify the Accord in the parliament, but opposition to PLO was strong also among Phalangists. The Left supported Palestinian fighters, both in the name of Arab solidarity and due to shared political intents. However, due to the fragmentation of both the Lebanese Left and the PLO, alliances were complicated and the occasion of debate.⁶⁵ While Joublatt took on a mediator role between Arafat-led PLO and the Lebanese state, the LCP grew closer to the rival PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, headed by George Habash, a Marxist group) both on ideological and military levels, while OCAL, a group emerged from the New Left, collaborated with PDFLP (Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, headed by Nayef Hawatmeh, of Maoist tendency), but a great number of militants argued that the best choice for both OCAL and LCP would be to connect with Arafat's Fatah (and Fatah left in particular).⁶⁶ Of this idea were for instance those LCP members who held contacts with the PCI, as I will discuss in the third chapter. Despite fragmentation, these contacts eventually led to a political and military alliance between PLO forces and what was to become the Lebanese National Movement, the united front of the Lebanese Left that would be one of the opposing factions in the Civil War.

The polarisation brought by 1968 social unrest and Palestinian presence created a fertile ground for the incoming war. Clashes between the *fedayeen* and the Lebanese army were joined by Phalanges and other Christian militias and gradually embedded religious tensions. During the early 1970s confrontations between armed groups started to reproduce the same scheme:

volatile political setting provokes a confrontation which almost always is followed by contradictory accounts as to how and why the fighting started. In this case [a clash in March 1970 in Kahhalè], Palestinians claimed they were victims of a deliberate ambush while the Kata'ib argued that they had simply fired back in self-defense. Those uninvolved in the fighting attribute the episodes to mysterious or unidentified parties (agents provocateurs). If groups from among the fighters are held suspect, they are dismissed as "uncontrolled" or "unrestrained" elements. Either way, casualties on either side provoke a round of bloodier and more widespread fighting. Foreign intervention manages to arrange a cease-fire which turns out to be no more than a brief respite for combatants to brace themselves for another round of vengeful bloodletting.⁶⁷

By the fall of 1974 similar episodes occurred almost daily, and the parties had abandoned socio-economic and political logics for communal ones. The tense climate was thus ready to explode and did so on 13 April 1975, when unidentified men fired at a Christian congregation outside a church where Pierre Gemayel, leader of the Kataeb party, was also attending. In the attack, four men lost their lives, including two of Gemayel's bodyguards. A few hours later, a bus directed towards Tall al-Za'tar refugee camp drove through the area and was thus attacked by Christian militias who had

⁶⁵ Guirguis, 'The New Left'; Traboulsi, *Modern Lebanon*.

⁶⁶ Guirguis, 'The New Left'.

⁶⁷ Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence*, 223.

interpreted the gesture as a provocation. The Christian attack resulted in a massacre of all 28 passengers, and from there violence escalated into a civil war.⁶⁸

According to Samir Khalaf, the roots of the conflict are to be found in those socioeconomic and political tensions that have briefly been discussed in this chapter.⁶⁹ However, crucial to the violence outbreak were external pressures, which can be identified as 1) the radicalization of neighbouring regimes, Syria *in primis*, after the 1967 defeat, 2) the emergence of the PLO and the figure of the *fedayeen* as revolutionary fighters, and 3) Israeli pressure in the South. These external actors would eventually contribute to the conflict also as fighting forces. While Palestinian fighters were the centre of the clashes, both Syria and Israel later joined the conflict, which moved from being a civil war to a regional one. Syria was first to join the conflict in 1976, initially in support of the Lebanese Front, the Christian alliance dominated by the Kataeb party, to prevent both fronts from gaining strength and independence.⁷⁰ In 1978 also Israel joined the war, at first through the support of Christian armed militias in the South in Operation Litani, then in 1982 invading the country during Operation “Peace in Galilee”.⁷¹

Towards Italian intervention in the Civil War

While the civil war had certainly reached the international community, which called for an end to the fight, it was with these regional interventions that the war caught the global spotlight. Syria’s intervention was by some welcomed as a peace force but was also heavily criticised by others. The Italian communist press was among the ones to blame on Syrian intervention the continuation of the conflict, which according to them would have otherwise been solved with the 1976 elections.⁷² It was Israeli intervention however that would enhance international worries, given Israel’s role in the regional crisis. The 1978 Israeli intervention was ended by UN Resolution 425, which established Israel’s retreat and the creation of an international interposition force in the South of the country.⁷³ Also the global solidarity network, which had shown sympathies for Palestinian and Lebanese fighters since the outbreak of the war, began to be more involved with the conflict as Israel joined as an actor. This is for instance visible when looking at press material from those years, posters in particular, which call for actions against Israel, the imperialist enemy, both in 1978 and then after the 1981 intervention. With the 1982 Israeli invasion, global attention reached a peak, and a new coalition

⁶⁸ Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence*; Traboulsi, *Modern Lebanon*.

⁶⁹ Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence*, 214.

⁷⁰ Marcella Emiliani, *Medio Oriente. Una Storia Dal 1918 a 1991*, 6th ed. (Bari-Roma: Laterza, 2012).

⁷¹ Emiliani.

⁷² See for instance what the newspaper published in the summer 1976, such as ‘La Destra Concentra Truppe per Un Nuovo Attacco a Tall Zaatar [The Right Gather Its Troups for a New Attack to Tel al-Zaatar’, *L’Unità*, 10 August 1976.

⁷³ Emiliani, *Medio Oriente*.

of international forces was sent in 1982 to assure a peaceful evacuation of PLO forces from Beirut and Lebanon and the subsequent retreat of the Israeli army. Taking part in this mission was also the Italian army, in its first military intervention since the Second World War.

While Italian intervention was surely motivated by the escalation of violence in the country, the country affinity with Lebanon precedes the civil war. Moreover, the operation *Missione Italcon* was supported not only by DC but also by committed pacifists such as PSI and PCI. The reason behind this convergence is the object of the following chapters.

CHAPTER 2

PCI and PSI interests in the Middle East (1967-75)

PCI and PSI position on the Middle East

Ever since the 1948 Israel declaration of independence, debates concerning its recognition and the question of the Palestinian presence spread within the Italian Left. In this chapter I will give an overview of the differences between the PCI and the PSI positions on these issues. Going more in-depth, I will then try to understand the reasons behind PCI positions and how these led the party to build a special relationship with the LCP. Finally, I will once again compare the PCI approach, and its preference for LCP, to the PSI one and the virtual absence of Lebanon in its discourse.

While most recognised Israel's right to exist, the attitude towards the country varied. Socialist members were keen to describe themselves as "friends of Israel", while the PCI took a more critical position.⁷⁴ Following USSR's line the party recognised and defended Israel's right to exist, but also took distance from the Soviets by vocally criticising the Israeli government's actions towards both Palestinians and Arab neighbouring countries. What Israel supporters framed as necessary pre-emptive strikes, the PCI framed as extreme retaliatory acts in their newspaper *L'Unità*.⁷⁵ After the 1967 War and UN Council resolution 242, which called for Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories, the PCI position became even more critical and reinforced its criticism of Israeli refusal to comply with the resolution.

The application of the resolution was encouraged also by the PSI, but contrary to the PCI, they justified Israel's actions and put the blame on the Arab states. For the PSI, both Palestinian guerrilla actions and Arab support for them, as well as Arab countries belligerent attitudes, made it difficult for Israel to renounce the acquired strategic depth.⁷⁶ Thus a solution was to be found through dialogue between the different parties and an end to guerrilla acts.

The framing of Palestinian people was another divergence between the PSI and PCI discourses. Palestinians emerged in PSI discourse gradually after 1967, within two different contexts: the refugee

⁷⁴ Andrea Guiso, 'The Italian Communist Party and the "Israel Question" During the First Years of the Cold War. Towards a Historical Semantics of Communist Anti-Zionism', in *The European Left and the Jewish Question, 1848–1992. Between Zionism and Antisemitism*, ed. Alessandra Tarquini (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 229–42; Claudio Brillanti, 'The Italian Communists and Socialists' Reading of the Six-Day War and Its Consequences', in *The European Left and the Jewish Question, 1848–1992. Between Zionism and Antisemitism*, ed. Alessandra Tarquini (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 243–62; Seu, *The Italian Leftist Parties and the Conflict in the Middle East*.

⁷⁵ See for instance what *L'Unità* published after the Israeli retaliation on Beirut airport on 28 December 1968

⁷⁶ Venerio, 'Discorso Pronunciato in Occasione Della Dichiarazione Di Voto Resa per Il PSU Dal Compagno Venerio Cattani Alla Camera', 31 July 1967, 1.11.4.111, 37-43, Archivio Partito Socialista Italiano (Psi) - Direzione Nazionale; Seu, *The Italian Leftist Parties and the Conflict in the Middle East*.

question and international terrorism. Before 1967 and the subsequent ‘palestinization’ of the conflict, the PSI did not distinguish a Palestinian identity, thus referring to the Palestinian people simply as Arabs. Gradually, as the sympathy towards Palestinians spread in Italy, the term ‘Palestinian’ entered the PSI discourse but mainly referred to the figure of the refugee. Still refusing to identify a Palestinian land, the term ‘refugee(s)’ was used to indicate both Palestinians outside and within occupied territories.⁷⁷ Moreover, the refugee problem was pointed as the sole Palestinian issue, for which a solution necessarily had to come through Arab countries’ actions, as no mention of the Palestinian right of return and the related UN Resolution 194 (1948) was usually made.⁷⁸ On the contrary, the PCI vocally recognised the Palestinian right to their land, considering their fight as a national liberation one, against Israeli occupation and imperialism.

After the international recognition of Palestinian political rights in 1974, the PSI debate widened and started to be more critical of Israeli actions within occupied territories.⁷⁹ However, the PLO emergence came along with the rise of terrorist attacks as a means of political fighting. Thus, a new framing became more popular, which identified Palestinian fighters as terrorists. Especially after the attack in Munich in October 1972, carried out by the Palestinian organization Black September, in which 11 members of the Israeli Olympic Team lost their lives, any support to Palestinian fighters was reported as support to terrorism. As *fedayeen* actions started to be described as ‘barbaric’ and ‘massacres’, Palestinian supporters were invited to take distance from these events.⁸⁰ This applied both to sectors of the Italian political sphere and public opinion, as well as PLO itself in order to be considered a valid representative of its people. On the opposite side, PCI embraced the image of *fedayeen* as revolutionary fighters and often celebrated their figure. However, events such as the 1972 Munich massacre put PCI in a difficult position, trying to take distance from these actions on one side, while justifying them on the other.⁸¹

⁷⁷ See for instance the note on 14 May 1971 in Pietro Nenni’s diary, where he refers to a Palestinian village in Judaeen Desert as “Palestinian refugees’ village” [*villaggio di profughi palestinesi*] in Pietro Nenni, *I Conti Con La Storia*, ed. Giuliana Nenni and Domenico Zucàro, vol. 4, 4 vols (Milano: SugarCo, 1983).

⁷⁸ On this matter Pietro Nenni declared to Israeli ambassador Nayar that “It is necessary to find a political solution to the Palestinian refugee problem, otherwise terrorism will grow with or without Arab countries’ help”, Nenni *I conti con la Storia*; see also Seu, *The Relationship between the Italian Leftist Parties and the Conflict in the Middle East*, chap. 2.

⁷⁹ I here refer to UN General Assembly Resolution 3236 (22 November 1974) which recognised the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty in Palestine. Moreover, along with UN General Assembly Resolution 3210 (14 October 1974), it recognised the PLO as the sole representative of Palestinian people.

⁸⁰ Marzano and Schwarz, *Attentato Alla Sinagoga*.

⁸¹ See for instance *L’Unità* number on 7 September 1972 discussing the events that took place in Munich: particularly interesting is page 5, where a first article titles ‘Condolences for the victims and accusations to whoever planned the tragic ambush: deep feelings worldwide for the massacres’, commenting on the various reactions that blamed the terrorists’ actions, but where another article titles ‘The tragedy of Palestine – A people that does not want to succumb’ and gives a summary of Palestinian people persecutions since British imperialism.

This focus on the *fedayeen* figure was part of a more complex PCI representation of Middle Eastern politics. According to the PCI, the Arab political landscape was articulated around a central fight between socialism and the Arab reactionary right, which was in turn a tool of US imperialism.⁸² In this conceptualisation of the fight, *fedayeen* as revolutionary fighters were the main representatives of socialism and an active part of the communist revolution in the region. As a consequence, all those regional actors which in some ways were an obstacle to the PLO fight were considered part of a ‘reactionary left’. Thus, not only Saudi Arabia, at the time supported by the US, but also other regimes such as Egypt and Syria could be described as part of this counterrevolutionary force, depending on the specific context, despite them being socialist in form and/or ideal. Moreover, the reactionary right was responsible for Arab fragmentation, as it was often described as a set of opposition forces within the single countries. This fragmentation would weaken Arab unity, easing imperialist advance in the region.

The PSI also was quite critical of Arab regimes in the immediate 1967 aftermath. With the 1967 war, Arab countries were described by Italian socialists as ‘barbaric’, ‘medieval’, and ‘irrational’. However, as sympathies towards the Palestinian cause grew and Israel’s actions started to be criticised, the PSI radically changed its depiction of Arab regimes. Soon, Arab countries became the necessary interlocutors to achieve peace in the region. This change was already visible in 1970, as the PSI started to reach out to UAR, and was not welcomed by all base members – as this letter exchange shows.

The various and interesting articles published on *L’Avanti!* concerning the continuous and serious massacres of negro people carried out in Sudan are a public condemnation, but they should suggest us to do something more, making us promoters of parliamentary action, up to involve the U.N!

If the recent travel to Egypt carried out by our distinguished comrades, demonstrated our cordiality towards that country that considers itself the leader of that part of the Arab world (Egypt-Libya-Sudan), what better chance to conduct an intense action to convince it [Egypt] to intervene with all its prestige towards Sudan, to end such dreadful crime?

PSI branch “Giacomo Brodolini” – Naples

01 December 1970

Dear comrades,

we answer your letter, non-dated, with protocol number 780, with which you point out what is happening in Sudan and ask for a party initiative.

About that I must tell you that during the visit carried out by our delegation in the UAR following the Arab Socialist Union invite, we have addressed, among other relevant political issues, also the situation in Sudan and of

⁸² See a discussion of Middle Eastern political trends from PCI perspective on *L’Unità* in Romano Ledda, ‘Una Dinamica Progressista Investe Tutto Il Mondo Arabo’, *L’Unità*, 22 November 1969.

our fellow citizens in Libya. We did not fail to express our thoughts and the quite clear and coherent party position on the matter.

However I must underline that our visit was born out of the necessity of establishing cordial relations between the PSI and the Egyptian political forces within the frame of the mediation action for the Middle Eastern crisis we are conducting.

This way we have reaffirmed the PSI will for peace and its commitment towards collaboration so that, within the tormented international politics theatre, peace could be reached based on respect for countries' independence and peoples and ethnic groups' autonomy.

The echo of our visit to Egypt, both in Europe and Africa, highlights the importance of our initiatives that are necessary to restore PSI international initiative, quite scarce in the recent past.

Warmly

The Chief of the International Section

(Luciano De Pascalis)⁸³

As Arab states, Egypt and Syria in particular, became more and more important pieces in the crisis solution, PSI ceased to consider them as an “ugly necessity” and started to actively seek contact, prioritizing it over contacts with Israel. This was for instance the case of the 1973 peace conference in Bologna, where priority was given to the participation of Arab actors, including the PLO, while no official representatives from Israeli government parties were allowed.⁸⁴ However, thanks to PSI's insistence, participation was granted to members of Israeli communist parties, the independent party of Uri Avnery, and other leftist formations.⁸⁵

These different positions held by PCI and PSI were reflected in the type of contacts the parties succeeded in establishing in the region. As mentioned, PSI had a firm pro-Israel stance during the 1967 war, which then slid towards the inclusion of Arab countries in the debate. Looking at PSI contacts with Middle Eastern parties this change is particularly evident. For instance, in 1967 PSI leader Pietro Nenni, at the time Deputy Prime Minister, was in close contact with Israeli ambassador Jeshuad Avrim and also met with MAPAM (*Mifleget HaPoalim HaMeuhedet*, lit. 'United Workers Party', left-wing Israeli party) secretary Vitzhak Patrish at the eve of the conflict.⁸⁶ However, in 1969 the PSI made a first attempt to open a dialogue with Arab parties, attending the convention

⁸³ 1 December 1970, 1.11.1.55, 49-50, Archivio Partito Socialista Italiano (Psi) - Direzione Nazionale. All translations in this thesis are the result of my own work.

⁸⁴ The International Conference for Peace and Justice in the Middle East was held in Bologna on 11-13 May 1973. The conference aimed at creating a dialogue between all the actors involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, on the basis of the recognition of UN Resolution 242. However, Arab opposition to Israeli participation, backed by the PCI and some parts of the PSI, resulted in Israel crippled presence. Moreover, due to the outbreak of clashes in Lebanon, neither the Lebanese nor the PLO delegation could attend. The conference was considered a success by the participants, but the war in October 1973 and the failure to organize a second conference suggest otherwise.

⁸⁵ 3 April 1973, 1.11.1.33, 18, Archivio Partito socialista italiano (Psi) - Direzione nazionale.

⁸⁶ Nenni, *I Conti Con La Storia*, 3 June 1967

‘Mediterraneo anni ‘70 per l’autodeterminazione e il progresso dei popoli, contro la politica dei blocchi’ (‘1970s Mediterranean for people progress and self-determination, against bloc politics’), organised by PCI and PSIUP, to which were invited delegations from Fatah, Algerian NLF, UAR, Libya, and Syria.⁸⁷ The following year the first PSI delegation was sent to Egypt in September – after which the aforementioned letter exchange followed.⁸⁸ At this time, however, PSI was still quite close to the Israeli left, and in 1971 a delegation attended the Israeli Labor Party Congress in Tel Aviv.⁸⁹ In the following years, PSI would regularly send delegations in the region, usually including Israel, Egypt, and Syria as destinations. Meetings in Egypt and Syria would be scheduled with the respective hegemonic parties, Arab Socialist Union and Syrian Baath, while in Israel they would keep contacts with various socialist formations, like MAPAI and the Israeli Labor Party. Contact with Palestinian organizations was not common in the early 1970s, and usually happened within multiparty delegations in which PCI also took part, such as a 1974 parliamentary delegation to the Middle East, that held a long meeting with Yasser Arafat.⁹⁰ Apart from these rare meetings, Palestinians were pretty much ignored during PSI visits to the Middle East, as PSI considered the Arab countries involved in the conflict (and Israel) to be the main interlocutors for peace in the region. Palestinians were either victims or perpetrators, but not independently politically relevant in this phase. However, this changed with the civil war outbreak in Lebanon and the central role of PLO forces in the conflict, when PSI delegations started to include meetings with the Palestinian organisation.⁹¹

While PSI contacts mainly included Israel and Arab belligerent countries, PCI delegations had Lebanon as the main destination for their visits to the Middle East. Almost every delegation sent to the region would in fact include Lebanon as a starting or arrival point, where close contacts were held both with the Lebanese Communist Party and with PLO representatives. As will be further discussed in the next chapter, the aim of PCI delegations was double: on the one hand, the party aimed at collecting information on the political situation and regional issues, on the other a strong presence in the region allowed the party to gain a leadership role in the communist and anti-imperialist front. Reading Middle Eastern politics as a conflict between communist revolutionaries and right-wing reactionaries, PCI chose its interlocutors among the strongest regional communist formations. LCP was the only legalised communist party which also had some freedom of action in the region, while *fedayeen* were considered the armed vanguard of the revolution. Accordingly, Egyptian ASU and

⁸⁷ 10 December 1969, 1.11.1.118, 72-81, Archivio Partito socialista italiano (Psi) - Direzione nazionale.

⁸⁸ 30 July 1970, 1.11.1.116, 406, Partito socialista italiano (Psi) - Direzione nazionale.

⁸⁹ 1 April 1971, 1.11.1.116, 377, Partito socialista italiano (Psi) - Direzione nazionale.

⁹⁰ 3 October 1974, 1.11.4.112, 37-38, Archivio Partito socialista italiano (Psi) - Direzione nazionale.

⁹¹ Libano 1975-77, 1.11.4.92, Archivio Partito socialista italiano (Psi) - Direzione nazionale.

Syrian Baath were seen with suspicion, due to the authoritarian nature of their regimes and the feeble alliance with Communists – persecuted or controlled by both regimes.

News of PCI delegations in the region start in 1969, with a mission from the World Peace Council to Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, which included Remo Salati, a PCI member.⁹² Delegations to the region then left regularly in the following years, at least twice a year, mainly directed towards Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt, but sometimes including Iraq and Algeria. Separate delegations would be sometimes sent to Israel. It is important to note that reports from PCI delegations usually show a clear preference for LCP representatives and PLO, often approaching meetings in Egypt and Syria with a critical eye. In these countries PCI would meet with the hegemonic parties, but also sought contact with communists, even though their presence was not always legal and would undergo various forms of oppression, from open persecution (Egypt) to strict governmental control (Syria).⁹³ Among Middle Eastern communist formations, LCP was beyond doubt the preferred one, and contacts with the party were also kept through correspondence and Lebanese delegations in Rome. LCP was not only the more stable communist formation in the region but was also the key to accessing PLO, with which meetings were organized both in Beirut and Rome. Finally, PCI also had close contact with Khaled Mohieddin, an Egyptian revolutionary who took part in the Nasser-led revolution of 1952 but had a complicated relationship with the Egyptian regime.⁹⁴

Interests behind PCI positions

PCI positions on the Middle East were based on three pillars: support for different communist and anti-imperialist realities, as per the principle of “unity in diversity”; sympathy for the Palestinian struggle; and preference for moderate actors. Each pillar was the consequence of the interaction of Italian and international politics, and in particular, the complex dynamics that the Cold War created at both levels.

Unity in diversity

Fundamental to Italian communism was the principle of “unity in diversity”, initially formulated as the recognition of different “national ways to socialism”. The principle was first introduced by

⁹² PC, 1969, m.f. 055, pp. 94-98, Archivio Fondazione Gramsci

⁹³ Laura Feliu and Ferran Izquierdo-Brichs, eds., *Communist Parties in the Middle East. 100 Years of History* (New York: Routledge, 2019); Rosa Velasco Muñoz, ‘The Syrian Communist Party. Patrimonialism and Fractures’, in *Communist Parties in the Middle East. 100 Years of History*, ed. Laura Feliu and Ferran Izquierdo-Brichs (New York: Routledge, 2019), 109–28.

⁹⁴ Khaled Mohieddin held several important roles under Nasser’s regime, but was arrested and incarcerated first in 1959, and later under Sadat in 1971. The PCI apparently had a role in granting Mohieddin’s freedom after a few months in jail, but the sources do not specify how, see Remo Salati, ‘Note sul III Congresso PCL’, 21 January 1972, PC, 1972, m.f. 054, pp. 260-265, Fondazione Gramsci.

Palmiro Togliatti, leader of the PCI until he died in 1964.⁹⁵ In a text drafted in his final days, Togliatti described the “Italian way to socialism” as a democratic alternative to the communist revolution. The formulation of an “Italian way to socialism” was necessary for two reasons: first because the capitalist nature of Italy and its position in the US bloc as Washington’s loyal ally made it impossible to pursue a revolution, and second to take distance from Soviet actions in the international sphere, which embarrassed the PCI on more than one occasion.

A key moment was in this regard the USSR invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. The country, under the leadership of Alexander Dubček, was going through a period of reforms towards democratization (Prague Spring), such as press freedom or the enhancement of the National Assembly powers.⁹⁶ Frictions inside the Soviet bloc, in particular the Sino-Soviet rupture, enhanced the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) fears of disintegration of control over Eastern Europe. As a result, on the night between 20 and 21 of August 1968, four Warsaw Pact allies invaded the country. Unable to establish a counterrevolutionary government, the Soviets reached a compromise with Dubček and the other reformers which reversed part of the Prague Spring process. Like other communist formations in Western Europe, PCI had looked at Prague Spring reforms with hope and sympathy and was disappointed by USSR’s violent reaction. Vocal opposition to the invasion occupied the debate in the following months, as PCI took distance from Soviet actions, and was officially reaffirmed with the XII National Congress in February 1969.⁹⁷

Another element which reinforced PCI’s call for “unity in diversity” was the rupture between the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China (PRC), commonly known as the Sino-Soviet split. PCI, as well as other communist formations, was thus expected to pick a side in this fracture but opted for equidistance.⁹⁸ This position was in line with the recognition of a variety of national ways to Socialism, which justified the Chinese peculiarity and at the same time called for the unity of the Communist front despite these differences.

The “unity in diversity” was necessary to the strength of the international Communist movement against US imperialism. USSR’s leading role was still considered central to connecting the three components of the global anti-imperialist fight: socialist countries, worker and democratic movements, and liberation movements. However, it was the Italian approach and the theorization of the “national ways” that made it possible to connect the different realities that made up the anti-imperialist front.

⁹⁵ Daniele Pugliese and Orazio Pugliese, eds., *Da Gramsci a Berlinguer. La via Italiana al Socialismo Attraverso i Congressi Del Partito Comunista Italiano (1964-1975)*, vol. 4 (Edizioni del Calendario, 1985), 7–8.

⁹⁶ Mark Kramer, ‘The Czechoslovak Crisis and the Brezhnev Doctrine’, in *1968: The World Transformed*, ed. Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 111–71.

⁹⁷ Pugliese and Pugliese, *Da Gramsci a Berlinguer*.

⁹⁸ Sandro Bordone, ‘Il Pci e La Crisi Cinese (1969-1977)’, *Il Politico* 47, no. 3 (1982): 561–600.

Sympathy towards the Palestinian cause...

The anti-imperialist front did not include communist formations only, but also a constellation of liberation movements and leftist groups that took part in the global solidarity network that developed during the long-Sixties. The PLO was among these formations and sparked a particular interest in the PCI which led to the party's unwavering support to the Palestinian cause. This was influenced and shaped by different forms of pressure that came from three directions: first, the Directorate's ideas on the party's role within Italian and international politics; second, the base members' consensus; and third, attacks from the opposition to discredit the party.

Though the PCI was constrained within its opposition role by the Italian political system, its Directorate aimed at a hegemonic position both within the country and within Europe. The goal was to unite "all socialist, social democratic, and catholic forces towards the anti-imperialist struggle and in overcoming the declining capitalist system".⁹⁹ As I discussed above, this led the party to seek a bridging position in the anti-imperialist front and to support the different realities within the movement, including the Palestinian one. The goal of a leading position in the country also required the PCI to distinguish itself from the rest of the leftist landscape and in particular the PSI, the second largest leftist party in Italy.

The PCI's support of the Palestinian cause at the beginning of the 1970s contributed to creating distance between the PCI and the PSI. An example is the debate around the 1967 events, when the PCI and the PSI took two opposite stances, openly attacking the other's position. On 5 June 1967, with the outbreak of hostilities between Israel and Egypt, the PSI released a statement criticizing the Arab declaration of war against Israel. The PSI statement opened with dramatic tones, describing the event as the "worst crisis in Israel's troubled history and a genocide threat".¹⁰⁰ The party then proceeded to declare its support for Israel's right to exist, as well as its freedom of navigation, and called for UN and Europe intervention. On 15 June, another statement followed the ceasefire: less dramatic than the previous one, this declaration did however frame Arab action as a "holy war" and a "crusade", de facto ignoring the political dimension of the conflict and reducing it to an ethnic clash, while at the same time praising Israel courage and strength during the crisis. These statements reflected Pietro Nenni's ideas concerning the conflict: in his diary, he reported his worries concerning the war, a desperate situation in which two million Israelis were to be slaughtered by forty million

⁹⁹ Marco Galeazzi, *Il Pci e il Movimento Dei Paesi Non Allineati 1955-1975* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2011), 194.

¹⁰⁰ 5 June 1967, 1.11.4.111, 87, Archivio Partito socialista italiano (Psi) - Direzione nazionale.

Arabs.¹⁰¹ According to him, the crisis was a consequence of the UN, Europe, and superpowers' inaction, as well as Arab leaders' complicity.¹⁰²

In response to this, on 5 June 1967, the PCI Directorate proposed a reading that highlighted the reasons why Egypt had no interest in striking an attack.¹⁰³ Given that at this time it was still unclear who attacked first, this reading insinuated that Israel was responsible for the war, while the PSI's declaration blamed Arab countries. However, it was made clear that this reading was not to be officially adopted as a party position, to avoid easy attacks from the opposition.

While the debate on the 1967 war saw a clear opposition between the two parties, the following years witnessed a gradual change in PSI's position towards the Middle Eastern crisis which created chances of collaboration between them. Among these was the International Conference for Peace and Justice in the Middle East, held in Bologna in May 1973. However, despite the common effort towards the organization of the conference, the two parties clashed on the composition of the Israeli delegation. These conflicts were necessary for both parties to shape their image in opposition to the other: if the PSI was a "friend of Israel", the PCI necessarily supported the Palestinian people, and vice versa.

The second form of pressure came from the PCI electoral base and the Italian public opinion. In fact, in the years following 1967, the emergence of the PLO in the international sphere had conquered the sympathies of an active part of the Italian leftist electoral base. Thanks to the initiatives of Palestinian activists in the country, and especially their collaboration with the Italian student movement, the image of the *fedayeen* gained popularity among the masses. One of the reasons for this popularity was the equation between the Palestinian fighters and the Italian partisans who animated the Resistance to fascism.¹⁰⁴ As the memory of the Resistance was being revived in the wake of the 1968 movement, the leftist masses developed a fascination for national liberation movements, and the *fedayeen* among them. The PCI thus had a concrete interest in showing open support for the Palestinian cause and fighters.

... and preference for moderate actors

Finally, the last form of pressure came from opposition attacks and accusations. Throughout the years between 1967 and 1975, the two main accusations that the PCI tried to avoid concerned antisemitism and support of terrorism. These attacks led the party to prefer contact with moderate actors who were less likely to attract this type of accusation.

¹⁰¹ Nenni, *I Conti Con La Storia*, 5 June 1967.

¹⁰² Nenni, 3 June 1967.

¹⁰³ 'Verbale 12, 5 Giugno 1967', 5 June 1967, PC, 1967, mf 019, pp. 588-595, Fondazione Gramsci.

¹⁰⁴ Marzano, 'Il "Mito" Della Palestina'.

Accusations of antisemitism characterised the debate around the 1967 June War and communist support to Arab countries. The main allegation was that of supporting “National Socialist” countries that called for Israel’s destruction.¹⁰⁵ To avoid these claims, the PCI Directorate declared that Israel’s destruction was “an absurd and wrong objective for the Arab anti-imperialist movement”, and insisted on PCI’s historical struggle against antisemitism through the Resistance.¹⁰⁶ At the same time, the PCI tried to mirror those accusations, blaming the US on one side and PSI on the other for using Israel as a “card” in their games, respectively the “game of oil” and the electoral one.¹⁰⁷

Once the PLO emerged on the global scene through its terrorist and guerrilla actions, the socialist press started to accuse the PCI of supporting terrorism. PCI sympathies towards Palestinian resistance created indeed a delicate situation. On one hand, the PCI defended Palestinian acts equating them to the Italian partisans’ actions against the Nazis, or the Vietnamese against the Americans, within the resistance and revolutionary discourse. On the other hand, the PCI could not approve certain methods such as hijackings. This internal contradiction was the centre of the debate in a directorate meeting on 18 September 1970, where the party decided to avoid the use of the term “terrorism”, as that was commonly used to condemn all Palestinian guerrilla acts and not only the hijackings. At the same time, they would openly condemn the hijackings, but contextually reaffirm that these actions should not be used against the Palestinian resistance struggle. On both these occasions, the PCI had to carefully balance its support to Arab and Palestinian struggles with declarations of equidistance – such as recognition of Israel’s right to exist or the condemnation of hijacking – forcing the party to more moderate positions for what concerned the region.

These accusations would not only come from the opposition but also emerged in the party’s internal debate. Especially in the immediate aftermath of the 1967 June War, part of the PCI base membership sympathized with the Israeli population, a legacy of the communist role in the Resistance against fascism and antisemitism.¹⁰⁸

This internal opposition, along with the external one, and the aspiration to a leading role in the country’s anti-imperialist fight, made it necessary for the PCI to always maintain a somehow balanced position. Despite PCI support for the Palestinian fight, the party opted for contact with its moderate groups and looked with suspicion at all forms of extremism. The latter came to include Arab regimes mainly due to their undemocratic nature, as I will discuss more in-depth in the following chapter.

¹⁰⁵ Brillanti, ‘Italian Communists and Socialists’ Reading of the Six-Day War’.

¹⁰⁶ Pajetta in Brillanti, 251.

¹⁰⁷ Brillanti, 248.

¹⁰⁸ The most notable example of PCI internal dissent was Umberto Terracini open support to Israel, but other examples can be found in various letters sent to the party by its base membership and/or members of the Jewish community (PC, 1967, mf 0545, pp. 2183-2189, Fondazione Gramsci).

There is however another explanation for the PCI's gradual distancing from Arab regimes, and Syria in particular. Along with its fight against imperialism, the PCI also advocated for a peaceful coexistence against the two-blocs logic. While this might seem a contradiction, since the anti-imperialist front was openly opposed to the US, the ultimate goal for the PCI was a fair and balanced world. In the words of Luigi Longo:

Our fight for peaceful coexistence is not simply the only alternative to atomic annihilation, but also the most efficient form of the fight against imperialism and for people's freedom at present. Without active peaceful coexistence it is not possible to put an end to the arms race, we cannot overcome the unbalance between developed and developing countries, nor efficiently fight hunger.¹⁰⁹

Undemocratic and expansionist positions, such as the ones held by Syrian Baath, would have been detrimental to the peaceful coexistence, fuelling antagonism in the region and between the two blocs. Instead, the PCI sought contact with those parties that called for democracy, within and outside socialist countries. Coming from a democratic country, Italian Communists would lead the way, and help in the fight against Arab undemocratic reaction. LCP was one of the democratic forces supported by PCI in the region, and PLO, and its more moderate factions, was another. All this slightly differed from USSR politics in the region: in fact, Soviet support of Arab socialism did not necessarily include Palestinian solidarity and found its most loyal ally in Syrian Baath. The "Italian way to Socialism" found its independent role in the region in the support of LCP and the Palestinian fight.

Where is Lebanon?

Given the two different approaches the PCI and the PSI had towards the Middle Eastern region, how does this translate in the respective relationship with Lebanese groups? It does not come as a surprise that the two parties developed extremely different contacts with Lebanon. As has been already mentioned, the PCI showed a preference for their Lebanese counterpart when it came to developing contacts in the region. On the contrary, the PSI seemed to ignore the country in its analysis of the Middle Eastern crisis. Why did the two parties adopt such different approaches?

As I have illustrated in the present chapter, the PCI based its Middle Eastern policy on three main points: support for different anti-imperialist realities, as per the principle of "unity in diversity"; sympathy for the Palestinian struggle; and preference for non-extremist actors. The convergence of these interests made the LCP the natural interlocutor in the region. The party was indeed active in the fight against imperialism, and in particular against US interference in the country which had already manifested with US military intervention in 1958.¹¹⁰ Moreover, the Palestinian presence in the country and its building alliance with the party made the LCP an even more interesting partner.

¹⁰⁹ Pugliese and Pugliese, *Da Gramsci a Berlinguer*, 4:177.

¹¹⁰ La Fortezza, *Cedri e ulivi*, 165–71.

Through the LCP, the PCI managed to get access to the PLO network, establish direct contacts with its representatives, and get regular updates on the situation in the area. Of course, the narrative offered by the Lebanese contacts was biased, but in a way that was beneficial to PCI's interests. The LCP narration offered the necessary justifications for Palestinian actions and framed them within the anti-imperialist struggle. The PCI thus had to simply refer to Lebanese narration, a reliable source due to its presence in the region but perceived as a third party to the conflict – as LCP was something separate from Palestinians, and Lebanon was not part of the belligerent Arab countries. This greatly helped the PCI to moderate its approach concerning the regional crisis. Moreover, the LCP itself was of democratic and moderate orientation, especially when compared to the socialist regimes in the neighbouring countries¹¹¹

Another factor fostered the sympathies between the two communist parties. Especially in these troubled Cold War years, Italy and Lebanon shared a common bridging character, both ambiguously aligned with the US bloc in their ways.¹¹² Thus, the two communist parties shared the struggle of trying to find a national way towards socialism in a capitalist context. These contexts called for a moderate approach to the socialist fight, one that had to go through gradual reforms, and that would safeguard democracy as a key goal.

This affinity between the PCI and the LCP manifested itself primarily through the frequent contact between the parties. PCI delegations usually included Lebanon as a central destination in the Middle East, and starting from 1973 the parties began discussing the establishment of a stable presence of PCI in Beirut in the form of a reporter from *L'Unità*. Moreover, the LCP did not shy away from sharing sensitive information with their Italian counterpart, such as the state of their armed forces. With the civil war outbreak, the PCI showed once again its support to their Lebanese comrades through humanitarian and then financial aid. On the other hand, this preference manifested also through the suspicion towards other regional interlocutors, primarily Syria, as becomes clear from the delegation reports which will be discussed in the next chapter.

PCI-LCP relationship acquires more relevance when compared to the absence of Lebanon within PSI discourse: first, because it shows the peculiarity of PCI choice in seeking allies in Lebanon, the bastion of capitalism in the region, and secondly because, as PSI slowly moved its attention to the country, it is possible to hypothesize PCI influence on the socialist reorientation. In fact, looking at PSI contacts with Lebanon in the analysed period it is possible to distinguish three phases: the first phase goes from 1967 to 1972 and shows little to no interest towards Lebanon, the second phase

¹¹¹ It is however necessary to restate here the fact that the LCP started developing an armed militia in 1968, thus its moderation is relative to the conflictual context in which the party was situated.

¹¹² La Fortezza, *Cedri e ulivi*; La Fortezza, 'Un'amicizia Italo-Araba'.

occupies 1973 and 1974 and is characterized by contacts mediated by PCI, while the last phase starts with the civil war in 1975 and shows growing concern with the country and the simultaneous development of contacts with Lebanese actors.

As I already illustrated at the beginning of this chapter, in the 1967 immediate aftermath the PSI was quite critical of Arab countries' actions as they threatened the peace in the region. However, with time the party recognised the necessity to establish a dialogue with the Arab belligerent countries to build a stable peace. While this led to a growth in PSI contacts in the region, it did not affect its relationship with Lebanese actors which remained at the margin of socialist discourse. The first contact with Lebanese actors occurred alongside PCI on two main occasions: the first was the already discussed conference in Bologna in 1973, while the second was the Forum parliamentary delegation in 1974. On the first occasion, contacts with Lebanese groups were mainly held by PCI, while PSI was responsible for contacts with the Israeli delegation, but it is beyond doubt that the Socialist Party was aware of the Lebanese presence at the Conference and of its role in the crisis.¹¹³

The following year, a multi-party parliamentary delegation visited Cairo, Beirut, and Damascus, following an invite from the Arab League.¹¹⁴ The delegation was formed by members of the Italian Forum for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Mediterranean: Mario Artali (PSI, head of the delegation), Franco Calamandrei (PCI), Giuseppe Pisanu (DC), and Angelo Sanza (DC). The Forum worked towards exchanging experiences and deepening the knowledge of common issues in the European and Mediterranean regions. During the visit to Beirut, the delegation met with the Lebanese Deputy Prime Minister Fouad Nicolas Ghosn (Marada movement), Deputy Speaker Malouni, PSP leader Joumblatt, and PLO leader Yasser Arafat. While most enthusiasm concerned a long meeting with Arafat, the visit to Lebanon was probably a first step for PSI to establish contacts in the country, and PSP in particular. Moreover, the delegation was the first occurrence of official contact between a PSI member and Lebanese actors in the context of peace-building in the region.

By 1975, with the war outbreak in Lebanon, the situation evolved and the country moved from a marginalised actor to the centre of the debate along with the Palestinian people. This change manifested primarily with a PSI delegation to the country in April 1977, during which the PSI sought insights into the war and the humanitarian crisis. It is unclear which organisation was the interlocutor on this occasion, but from the notes available it seems that they were representatives of the LNM (Lebanese National Movement), the leftist front led by Kamal Joumblatt. From the same period, also some notes on a Congress of Arab People are available. These notes do not show a specific date, but the archive dates them to 1976 – which would make sense given that part of the debate seems to

¹¹³ 3 April 1973, 1.11.1.33, 18, Archivio Partito socialista italiano (Psi) - Direzione nazionale.

¹¹⁴ 3 October 1974, 1.11.4.112, 37-38, Archivio Partito socialista italiano (Psi) - Direzione nazionale.

articulate over Syrian military presence in Lebanon. These notes report on the Lebanese crisis, and especially on what LCP representatives said during the meeting. Another example of the newly found interest in Lebanese actors is a letter sent by Emo Egoli, then chief of the PSI Foreign Affairs section, in September 1976 to the PSI federations of Milano, Parma, Perugia, Bologna, Roma, Pavia, and Torino. In this letter, Egoli informed the local PSI branches of the existence of a Union of Lebanese students in Italy, of leftist leanings, that was trying to build a collaboration with the party. I could not find further mentions of this Union, nor its contacts with the PSI, but the fact that Egoli valued such collaboration is notable per se, and shows a growing interest in fostering contacts with Lebanese actors after 1975.

However, this involvement with Lebanon's fate developed the moment the war broke out. Before then, the Arab rapprochement did not include Lebanon except as a marginal presence. But why this absence from PSI discourse? Why did PSI avoid establishing contacts with socialist formations in the country, such as the PSP, before the civil war? A possible answer is that PSI's reading of the crisis excluded Lebanon as an actor. Despite its support both in the 1967 and 1973 wars, Lebanon did not actively take part in the conflicts due to the fragile border with Israel.¹¹⁵ The country provided two combat aircrafts in 1967 and in 1973 allowed Palestinian fighters to attack Israel from its territory, as per the Cairo Accords. This marginal participation made it so that Lebanon was not considered, at least in PSI discourse, as a belligerent country, and most importantly an irrelevant actor in the peace process.¹¹⁶

This was even more true as Palestinian fighters were also not considered relevant actors in the process. The fact that Lebanon was so strictly related to *fedayeen* actions might have brought a complete dismissal of the Lebanese role in the conflict. In general, the available Lebanese interlocutors for the PSI were naturally part of the Leftist block, which was building a strong alliance with Palestinian militias (see chapter 1). As I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the PSI focused its mediating efforts to enable a dialogue between Israel and Arab belligerent countries: the Arab League, and Egypt and Syria in particular, was the interlocutor for peace, not the Palestinian "terrorists" nor the "refugees". Despite the growing independence of PLO, the PSI refused the conflict 'palestinization' and opted for a dialogue with established countries instead.

There is no clear explanation for why the party refused to acknowledge Palestinian people as actors for so long, but probably several elements contributed to this narration. First of all, as I already

¹¹⁵ Sean Foley, 'It Would Surely Be the Second: Lebanon, Israel, and the Arab-Israeli War of 1967', *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 9, no. 2 (2005): 45–56.

¹¹⁶ This is however the PSI perspective: despite Lebanon not being active in the conflict, it was actually a necessary actor in the peace process as most frequent clashes with Israel happened on its borders. Also, Israeli retaliations often targeted Lebanon. I don't want thus to imply here that Lebanon did not have a role, but that since it was not 'institutionalised' through war rituals (declaration of war, army clashes, etc.) it was not considered part of the conflict by the PSI.

discussed, up until 1974 the PSI did not acknowledge the Palestinian people as a nation, thus it did not consider the PLO as a valid representative and interlocutor. Palestinians were considered Arab refugees – sometimes Palestinian refugees – and the Palestinian question a humanitarian problem. Moreover, PSI's sympathies for Israel brought the party to support the narration of Israel as a small country surrounded by enemies, a 'David and Goliath' situation. The great, strong enemies could not be the displaced Palestinian people in disarray, thus the focus on Arab belligerent countries was more functional to this narration. In addition, as PLO emerged, the PSI was quite critical of its *modus operandi*: 'terrorist' actions were detrimental to peacebuilding and were no basis for a dialogue with Israel. Finally, the image of *fedayeen* had been adopted by Italian New Left and the PCI as a resistance symbol: while on the one hand it helped the popularisation of the Palestinian fight among Italian masses, it also brought the opposition, thus the PSI, further away from it. All these factors contributed to the PSI dismissal of PLO (and Lebanon) as a valid interlocutor in the peace process.

The fact that the PCI showed a clear preference for LCP might have further contributed to PSI's initial dismissal of Lebanese actors. However, these same Communist contacts in the country constituted the basis for PSI's new interest in Lebanon once the war broke out. With the 1975 violence outbreak, and the subsequent involvement of regional actors such as Syria and Israel, Lebanon was no longer a marginal presence in the Middle Eastern crisis. In a coherent quest for peace, the PSI now focused its attention and mediating efforts on the civil war and Lebanese actors became central to the dialogue the PSI tried to carry on.

From this analysis, it is clear that a central factor in PSI's changed attitude towards Lebanon was the civil war. However, this renewed attention towards the country and the alignment with its Leftist front would not have been possible outside of the process of convergence with Arab socialists. While it is thus clear that Lebanon was excluded at the beginning of this process, which had started in 1970 with the first contacts with the UAR, this delayed convergence with the Lebanese Left is its natural continuation. This will become crucial as Israeli involvement in the Lebanese conflict grew, attracting PSI criticism in favour of Lebanese and Palestinian fighters and victims, *de facto* completing the switch from Israeli to Arab support.¹¹⁷ However, what influenced this gradual convergence in the first place? Did the PCI's continuous presence in the region have a role? The next chapter will try to answer these questions by focusing on the special relationship between PCI and LCP.

¹¹⁷ Calossi, Calugi, and Coticchia, 'Peace and War'.

CHAPTER 3

PCI-LCP Special Relationship

An overview of the PCI-LCP special relationship

During the years that preceded the 1975 civil war, the communist parties in Italy and Lebanon built a strong relationship of collaboration and solidarity. I consider it special because it was preferential and both sides acted in a mutually favourable manner.¹¹⁸ The LCP shared confidential information, while the PCI offered in exchange not only humanitarian but also financial aid.

In the immediate post-1967 war period, contacts between the PCI and the LCP were still few, probably due to the state of illegality of the Lebanese party, despite PCI's interest in the region – manifested through the high number of articles concerning Lebanon published in the years between 1967 and 1971.¹¹⁹ However, after LCP legalization in 1970, an intense exchange of delegations started: at least two delegations per year were sent by the PCI to Beirut, and were usually reciprocated by LCP with delegations to Rome. The relationship took a further step once the war broke out in Lebanon in 1975, as the political support was followed by humanitarian and then financial aid.

Preeminent figures of this relationship were, on the Italian side, PCI members Remo Salati and Dina Forti, who was also a member of IPALMO (*Istituto per le Relazioni tra l'Italia e i Paesi dell'Africa, America Latina e Medio Oriente*).¹²⁰ While Salati acted as a representative of the PCI and was usually responsible for discussing matters of political relevance in the region, Forti was in charge of establishing cultural contacts on behalf of IPALMO, an organization that researched African, Latin American, and Middle Eastern countries. As a PCI member, she also shared the information she gathered with the party and held meetings with LCP members, of which she would inform the PCI through additional reports.¹²¹ Also some members of the Directorate were involved in Lebanese

¹¹⁸ The PCF (in French: *Parti Communiste Français*), had been in contact with Lebanese Communists since the early years of the Syrian-Lebanese Communist Party. However, the PCF reluctance in supporting the Algerian Liberation Front fostered some discontent among the Lebanese communists, making the PCI a preferential interlocutor for LCP. See Velasco Muñoz, 'The Lebanese Communist Party', 2019.

¹¹⁹ Note that the lack of sources before 1969 might also be related to the loss of those same sources as an official archive of PCI was established only in 1969. However, the Foreign Affairs section is reported to have been the first to send all the previously archived material, thus such a loss of material is a speculation based on the fact that in general the amount of archival sources concerning 1967 war does not coincide with the relevance of the event. More on this has been discussed in the 'Methodology' section in the Introduction of the present dissertation.

¹²⁰ Remo Salati (1921-2001) was a PCI member and member of parliament during the 4th and 5th legislatures (1963, 1968), during which he was also member of the permanent Commission on Foreign Affairs (1966-1972); Dina Forti (1915-2015) was born in Alexandria, Egypt, in 1915 and from a young age she was interested in international politics and Communism. Member of the PCI, she entered the party Foreign Affairs section during the 1950s and remained until 1972, holding a fundamental role in the relationship with Africa and the Middle East. In 1972 Forti joined the IPALMO, where she remained until 1978.

¹²¹ Dina Forti, 'Resoconto IPALMO', 21 September 1972, PC, 1972, m.f. 054, pp. 1619-1634, Fondazione Gramsci.

affairs, often joining the delegations or welcoming the LCP representatives during their visits, in particular Umberto Cardia, Tullio Vecchietti, Nadia Spano, and Sergio Camillo Segre (then responsible for the PCI Foreign Affairs Section), all of whom were generally interested in the party foreign affairs.¹²² Finally, the PCI interests in Lebanon were also carried out by journalists from *L'Unità*, primarily Romano Ledda and Arminio Savioli, who both travelled to the country and reported on the Middle Eastern crisis from the vantage point of Beirut.¹²³ On the Lebanese side, the usual interlocutors were LCP Directorate members Karim Mroueh, Khalil al-Debs (also director of An-Nida), and Nadim Abdel Samad, and on two occasions George Haoui – once along with Yasser Arafat, and a second time as a representative of LNM after the war had started.¹²⁴ In addition, Salati had the chance to talk to Nicola Chaoui, then General Secretary of LCP, at least once during the 3rd LCP Congress.¹²⁵ While the most important communications went through these delegation visits, I could also find some letter exchanges on important occasions such as the 50th anniversary of the LCP foundation.

Generally, the PCI delegates reported a warm welcome and a brotherly atmosphere when meeting LCP representatives, as well as Palestinian ones.¹²⁶ During a meeting with Nicola Chaoui, Salati reported the Lebanese leader stated: “Between the LCP and the PCI exists a tight agreement on analysis and commitment [...] to whom who asks what is the distance between a place and another, the Lebanese peasant answers [the length of] ‘a puff of a cigarette’”.¹²⁷ On its end, the PCI showed solidarity with the Lebanese people by supporting Italian demonstrations in their favour and by sending humanitarian aid – especially once the war started.¹²⁸

In the years between 1967 and 1975, *L'Unità* published several articles on Lebanon. The framing offered by this coverage acted as a form of solidarity towards the LCP. The different types of articles

¹²² Umberto Cardia (1921-2003) was member of PCI and member of parliament in the 5th, 6th, and 7th legislature (1968, 1072, 1976), was member of the Foreign Affairs permanent Commission from 1968 until 1976; Tullio Vecchietti (1914-1999) was member of the PSI until 1964, when among other Italian Socialists he founded the PSIUP (Partito Socialista Italiano di Unità Proletaria). Following the electoral failure in 1972, the PSIUP merged with the PCI, and Vecchietti joined the party as member of the Directorate; Nadia Gallico Spano (1916-2006) was born in Tunis from a family of anti-fascist Italian immigrants. Spano joined the Resistance, and was among the women elected in the Constituent Assembly, as a member of the PCI. She was active in the Italian feminist movement; Sergio Camillo Segre (1926-) was a member of the PCI, elected in the 6th and 7th legislature (1972, 1976), during which he was member of the Foreign Affairs permanent Commission (1972-1979). Segre was also chief of the PCI Foreign Affairs Section.

¹²³ Romano Ledda (1930-1987) was a journalist and member of the PCI. He was co-editor in chief of *L'Unità*, and wrote reports from Africa and the Middle East; Arminio Savioli (1924-2012) was a journalist and a special reporter from *L'Unità*, following the most relevant events from Middle East, Vietnam, Japan, Latin America and Africa.

¹²⁴ All the LCP members mentioned here were part of the party Directorate. George Haoui would succeed Nicola Chaoui as General Secretary of LCP in 1979, while Nadim Abdel Samad became deputy General Secretary. Both Nadim Abdel Samad and Karim Mroueh were part of a more ‘orthodox’ faction within the party, which might have influenced their relationship with the PCI.

¹²⁵ Remo Salati, ‘Note sul III Congresso PCL’, 21 January 1972, PC, 1972, m.f. 054, pp. 260-265, Fondazione Gramsci.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*; PCI, 1972, b. 182, f. 316, Fondazione Gramsci

¹²⁷ Remo Salati, ‘Note sul III Congresso PCL’, cit.

¹²⁸ See for instance ‘Tradimento della lotta palestinese’ in *L'Unità*, 27 April 1969, p. 14

included a focus on Israel attacks or threats, internal clashes, demonstrations, and political crisis; more extensive reports from journalists on the ground, such as Romano Ledda or Arminio Savioli, and interviews with LCP representatives; and finally some commentaries that framed events in Lebanon within the international context and PCI rhetoric. As I will discuss later in this chapter, these articles framed Lebanon as an endangered actor which was taking part in the global fight against imperialism (Israel and the US) and fascism (the reactionary right). While the news articles contributed to the image of Lebanon as a fragile country, commentaries and interviews reported both Lebanese and Italian communist discourses, tracing lines of contact between the two parties, as well as between Palestinian-Lebanese and Italian resistance movements, offering to the Italian public the image of a sister-organization.

The special relationship built this way, however, was not immune to conflicts. The PCI members who were involved in the relationship were sometimes critical of their Lebanese counterparts. Their worries concerned the “extremist” attitude that sometimes the LCP representatives carried out, supporting violence instead of political solutions. This tension emerged at least on two occasions: the Arab People Congress of 1972, and during a PCI visit in Beirut in February 1974. Both times, Remo Salati as the representative of the Italian delegation criticised his counterparts’ “belligerent” attitude and vagueness of proposals. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the PCI’s approach to the Middle East wanted to be moderate and aimed at a political solution despite supporting the armed struggle. In this framework, the Lebanese attitude appeared “contradicting” and “confused”, “as if they wanted the war to continue”.¹²⁹ This behaviour during the Arab People Congress of 1972 upset the Italian delegation to the point that they avoided giving a speech, to not ruin their relationship with the Arab anti-imperialist forces attending.¹³⁰ However, during said Congress, the LCP representatives Karim Mroueh and Khalil Debs justified the focus on the armed struggle instead of a political solution as the only way to balance the different positions within the Congress, especially given the fact that the PLO did not accept the UN resolutions and that Arab communist and socialist forces risked isolation had they opted for a more moderate approach.¹³¹ Despite the critiques, which reappeared in 1974, Salati stated the necessity to build a stable presence of the PCI in Beirut to strengthen the party relationship with the LCP and exercise some control on other communist parties in the area, to lead the transition to socialism and strengthen the anti-imperialist front.¹³²

¹²⁹ 1974, m.f. 078, pp. 744-759, Fondazione Gramsci

¹³⁰ 5 January 1973, PC, 1969, m.f. 043, pp. 997-1006, Fondazione Gramsci

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² 1974, m.f. 078, pp. 744-759, Fondazione Gramsci

The special relationship under the microscope

The following section will be dedicated to analysing this special relationship more in-depth, looking at five specific cases. The first example will be the LCP and PCI reciprocal invitation to the respective national congresses, following the evolution of the relationship through the years; from there I will investigate why both parties were interested in one other, first by analysing the useful role that the LCP played as ‘informant’ on regional politics for the PCI, then by showing how their relationship forwarded both parties’ interests in the Palestinian cause, and presenting the different forms of aid offered by the PCI to the LCP; finally, I will discuss some of the PCI delegations reports from other countries in the region, to further demonstrate the preferential character of PCI-LCP relationship.

The special relationship through party Congresses¹³³

On the 10th of January 1968, the LCP sent out an invite to their Italian comrades to participate in the imminent party national Congress, the second organised by the Lebanese party. Unfortunately, due to its illegal status, the LCP was unable to physically host the Italian delegation, but the party had the chance to send a message to the Congress.¹³⁴ The response sent on 21 February 1968 – in Italian – was quite short and did not focus much on specific Lebanese issues. The Italian Directorate declared an interest in the country political life, with special attention towards LCP alliances with anti-imperialist forces. Adding to this, the message equated these anti-imperialist efforts to the Italian ones, within and outside the country, as to stress the similarities between the two parties.

The following year, the LCP was invited to the 12th PCI Congress (8-15 February 1969) to be held in Bologna. Representing the Lebanese delegation, Nadim Abdel Samad gave a speech that included similar themes: once again, the anti-imperialist struggle was the key point that united the communist parties, but it lacked the element of equivalence.¹³⁵ The Italian party, in the words of the Lebanese representative, supported the Lebanese struggle against “imperialism, Zionism, and the internal reaction”, but there was no mention of Italian actions in this struggle. However, the speech mentioned themes that were central to PCI rhetoric, such as the unity of the international anti-imperialist and communist front and the search for a democratic order in the country.

Remo Salati also used the similar rhetoric of “unity within diversity” and anti-imperialist fight during his speech at the 3rd LCP Congress (7-10 January 1972).¹³⁶ He expressed PCI solidarity with Lebanese, Palestinian, and all Arab people, stressing the differences between each national context

¹³³ All the speeches mentioned in this section can be found in the Appendix to this thesis.

¹³⁴ PCI, 1968, m.f. 0552, pp. 2017-2018, Fondazione Gramsci

¹³⁵ Nadim Abdel Samad, ‘Il saluto dei partiti Fratelli al XII Congresso’, in *L’Unità* 13 February 1969, p. 7

¹³⁶ PCI, 1972, b. 181, f. 293, Archivio Gramsci

and the inapplicability of a single “formula” to the realization of socialism. Compared to the Italian contribution to the previous congress in 1968, Salati’s speech was more detailed regarding Lebanese and Arab issues, but unlike the 1968 message, it did not draw a parallel between the Italian and Lebanese struggle towards socialism. This did not imply a decreased solidarity, as Salati confirmed Italian support to the LCP and explained how useful the Lebanese cause was for PCI national fight, “in which the ‘foreign’ element has a great role in the mass strife for democracy, peace, and socialism”. To conclude his discourse, the Italian delegate presented a gift from the PCI – a gold medal forged for the 50th anniversary of the party – and cheered to the Lebanese party, its fraternal unity with PCI, and the anti-imperialist fight.

The two parties were participating in the same discourse, sharing the keywords of diversity, anti-imperialism, and democracy. The support from PCI to LCP was also stressed by both parties, and Lebanese appreciation for PCI backing and interest in Italian politics was also confirmed by Salati in his report on the 3rd Congress.¹³⁷ According to the PCI representative, the delegation received a warm welcome, especially from the youth, and the continued request for meetings confirmed the prestige the party had among both Lebanese and other communist and progressive parties. Salati also dedicated a three-column article on *L’Unità* to the event, stressing the importance of the legalization of LCP, framing it as a victory for the communist front as a whole. More interestingly, he explained the exceptionality of such legalization in the Arab political landscape, as “the Arab world, in its majority, despite the openly anti-imperialist, progressive, and socialist position, does not make life easy for communists, to whom, best case scenario, it is forbidden to manifest their ideas and activities in an organized and autonomous way”.¹³⁸ This contextualisation was central, as I have previously illustrated, to the PCI narration on LCP and its preferential contacts with the Lebanese communists.

The difficulties of the LCP against the ‘internal reaction’, identified in the Lebanese Maronite front and the advancing right-wing forces in the neighbouring countries, gradually became central as domestic tensions increased. This was visible also in the speeches delivered by the Lebanese delegation during the 13th and the 14th PCI Congresses (respectively on 13-17 March 1972 and 18-23 March 1975), where the Lebanese representatives – George Haber in 1972 and Khalil Debs in 1975 – equated the Arab and Lebanese reactionary forces to the US imperialist action. Interestingly, in his speech in March 1975, Khalil Debs referred to the reactionary right in Lebanon as “fascist” – an adjective that will also be adopted to describe the Maronite front by the Italian communist press in the following years – as a way to assimilate the Lebanese political crisis to the Italian one, something that in the speech was also achieved by the frequent use of “same” when comparing Italy and

¹³⁷ Remo Salati, ‘Note sul III Congresso PCL’, cit.

¹³⁸ Remo Salati, ‘Il Congresso del P.C. libanese dopo i decenni di clandestinità’ in *L’Unità* 19 January 1972, p. 11

Lebanon.¹³⁹ The Lebanese rhetoric thus had moved from PCI support, where Lebanon was often emphatically depicted as a powerless victim of Israeli and US imperialism, to adopting its discourse of fraternity and co-participation in the fight.

Of course, the fact that the parties reciprocated invitations to their respective national congresses is nothing special nor unique. Several communist and socialist forces from all over the world, such as the Communist Party of Cuba and the Algerian FLN, also attended PCI national congresses. The same was true for the LCP congress in 1972. Nevertheless, the attention reserved for the Lebanese congresses in PCI internal communication and the public press, along with the prominent space reserved in the PCI press for the speeches of the Lebanese representatives, and the shared and reciprocated discourse the two parties employed, confirms the special relationship between the two countries.

More in general, both parties showed a growing interest in a tighter collaboration, which they discussed during several delegation meetings, as I will now proceed to illustrate.

Delegation visits: LCP as a regional informant

As previously mentioned, the relationship between the two communist parties was characterised by regular delegation exchanges. The themes discussed fall into three categories: general comments on regional politics, the situation of the Palestinian resistance vis a vis local and regional politics, and the domestic politics of Lebanon, which also sometimes included information on the LCP itself. Not surprisingly, the topic of Lebanese politics became more central after the war started in April 1975, while LCP's opinion on regional issues was particularly valued after the 1973 war and the subsequent oil crisis that greatly affected the Italian economy.

When asking the LCP's opinion on the region, the PCI focused especially on Syria and Egypt, which at the time were the strongest socialist actors in the area. The LCP interlocutors were usually quite critical of both countries: for what concerns Egypt, the main worries derived from Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat's succession to the former President Gamal abd al-Nasser in October 1970. When talking about Syria, the Lebanese interlocutors attacked President Hafez al-Assad who had taken control of the country in March 1971.¹⁴⁰ The LCP accused both leaders of having taken a political turn towards the right, especially after the war in 1973.¹⁴¹ During a meeting with Giancarlo Pajetta, Nadim Abdel Samad already had denounced the penetration of right-wing elements in Egypt,

¹³⁹ 'Kaalil Debs' in *L'Unità*, 23 March 1975, p. 10

¹⁴⁰ Romano Ledda, 'Note sui colloqui con i compagni del PCL', October 1971, PCI, miscellanea 1967-1974, 058, pp 275-280, Fondazione Gramsci; Dina Forti, 'Resoconto IPALMO', cit. pp. 1624-1634; 14 June 1973, PC, 1973, m.f. 046, pp. 429-434, Fondazione Gramsci; 1974, m.f. 078, pp. 744-759, Fondazione Gramsci.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

claiming the country was no longer useful to the Palestinian cause.¹⁴² In a meeting with Remo Salati in February 1974, Khalil Debs added to this claim, saying that while the war in October 1973 was positive for the Palestinian resistance, the shift towards the right of both al-Sadat and al-Assad had limited the war results, withdrawing their support to PLO and its Lebanese allies and thus weakening the anti-imperialist front in the region.

The critics of Hafiz al-Assad also related to his control exercised over the Syrian communists and, after the outbreak of the 1975 war in Lebanon, to Syria's intervention on behalf of the parties led by Camille Chamoun and Pierre Gemayel. These two elements greatly influenced the Italian perception of both the Syrian Baath and Communist Party. Moreover, the PCI highlighted the value of the LCP members' opinions, described "as always, smart and open observers of the events in the Arab world"¹⁴³. The reliance on Lebanese sources is also visible in the articles published by *L'Unità* during these years. The newspaper often published interviews with LCP members, reporting on their views on regional politics and the Palestinian question, as the readers were greatly invested in the Palestinian people's fate.¹⁴⁴

The interest of both the PCI and its official press in Middle Eastern politics thus led to an increase in Italian communists' contacts with their Lebanese counterparts. In fact, not only was the LCP considered the reliable informant, but Lebanon and Beirut in particular were also an optimal access point to the region thanks to the intense intellectual and editorial activity that characterized the city.¹⁴⁵ Khalil Debs began to request a more stable PCI presence on September 1972 during a meeting with Dina Forti.¹⁴⁶ He then invited the PCI to send a permanent *L'Unità* reporter to Beirut, establishing an informal PCI presence in the country. The proposal was discussed for the first time on June 14, 1973, during a meeting between Nadim Abdel Samad, Nadia Spano, Remo Salati and Umberto Cardia, and was supported by Giancarlo Pajetta who commented that a journalistic presence was preferable to a political one, probably to avoid a too open positioning.¹⁴⁷ The proposal was discussed again in July when Remo Salati travelled to Beirut and met with Debs, Mroueh, and Abdel Samad. On this occasion, Salati reported that the idea was also supported by the Syrian Ba'ath Party.¹⁴⁸ The last mention of this project appears in the report on Salati's meeting with Debs and Abdel Samad in

¹⁴² 14 June 1973, PC, 1973, m.f. 046, pp. 429-434, Fondazione Gramsci

¹⁴³ Romano Ledda, 'Note sui colloqui con i compagni del PCL' cit.

¹⁴⁴ See for instance an interview with Nicola Chaoui, LCP Secretary: 'Sul Libano la minaccia dell'asse Israele-USA' in *L'Unità* 25 July 1968, p. 3; or an interview with Karim Mroueh: 'Un programma di riforme democratiche per risolvere il dramma del Libano' in *L'Unità* 21 December 1975, p. 17; or with a member of the progressive front in Lebanon: 'Il Futuro del Libano', in *L'Unità* 02 February 1976, p. 3

¹⁴⁵ Zeina Maasri, *Cosmopolitan Radicalism. The Visual Politics of Beirut's Global Sixties* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Holt, 'Cairo and the Cultural Cold War'.

¹⁴⁶ Dina Forti, 'Resoconto IPALMO', cit.

¹⁴⁷ 14 June 1973, PC, 1973, m.f. 046, pp. 429-434, Fondazione Gramsci.

¹⁴⁸ 27 July 1973, PC, 1973, m.f. 048, pp. 501-509, Fondazione Gramsci.

February 1974, when the Lebanese comrades urged once again for a PCI “political presence” in the area, with Beirut as a centre.¹⁴⁹

From the LCP perspective, such a presence meant a more rapid intervention from the PCI, as well as increased aid and, most importantly, more attention. The opportunity of continuous reporting from Beirut meant a more frequent presence of Lebanese affairs in the Italian news, and the possibility to shape its framing by acting as sources for the PCI press. On the other hand, the Italian communists had an interest in quicker and more stable access to information on the region, to gain more control over the communist and socialist formations in the area, and to present its press as the most reliable on the Middle Eastern regional issues.

A final element that characterised the role of LCP as a regional informant was its will to share confidential information with PCI delegates. On several occasions, the LCP members disclosed information concerning the party’s (and later the Lebanese National Movement, LNM) military strength. Sharing this information helped to construct an image of the LCP as a fragile formation in need of help and support. This information was for instance linked to al-Sadat’s distancing from the Palestinian cause and the subsequent weakening of Lebanese-Palestinian forces, and, after the war started, was followed by the request for financial aid. On other occasions the party shared confidential information on regional issues, as reported by Romano Ledda concerning a meeting in Beirut in October 1971, where the Lebanese comrades shared their view on contemporary regional politics, such as the precarious position of al-Sadat in Egypt, the coup in Sudan, the weakness of Syrian communists, or the clashes between Jordan and Palestinians.¹⁵⁰

The reasons behind the adoption of this role of informant are not clear but was probably a way for LCP to attract PCI interest and attention, gaining a strong ally in Europe and within the communist network. LCP’s necessity of PCI support was linked also to USSR disinterest in the country, as the Syrian Ba’ath and, before it, Nasserist Egypt were the Soviets’ preferred regional allies. The Lebanese communists were thus overshadowed by the two strong socialist actors in the Arab scenario whose interests, often conflicting with LCP’s ones, came first and were backed by the USSR. The LCP was thus in need of a strong ally in the international communist scene such as the PCI. Moreover, the fragility of the country required the search for allies outside of the national (and regional) borders. Looking to European allies was also natural for a country that had been acting as a bridge over the Mediterranean Sea over the years, and in Europe, the strongest communist allies, also able of taking an autonomous way from the USSR, were the PCI and the PCF. On its part, the PCI gained, through

¹⁴⁹ 1974, m.f. 078, pp. 744-759, Fondazione Gramsci.

¹⁵⁰ Romano Ledda, ‘Note sui colloqui con i compagni del PCL’ cit.

the LCP, easy and reliable access to information on regional issues, and contacts with the Palestinian resistance – which was increasingly central in Italian domestic debate.

The Palestinian cause in the PCI-LCP relationship

Part of the interest of both the PCI and the LCP in fostering their privileged relationship is tightly connected with the evolution of the Palestinian cause between 1967 and 1975. The establishment of PLO headquarters in Lebanon impacted the relationship greatly. From this moment on, the LCP became the closest party to the PLO, both from a political and a geographical point of view. The party thus became a way to access the Palestinian network, both to gather information on the state of the cause and its fighters and to get direct contact with its representatives. The PCI needed both: the Palestinian cause had gained traction after the 1967-1968 conjuncture and it had aligned with the radical left idealized representation of the *fedayeen*. While extremist groups in Italy were fostering contacts with the most radicalized factions under the PLO, the PCI had to build a relationship with what they called the “sane” elements of the movement, thus the more moderate left led by Yasser Arafat.¹⁵¹

These contacts were publicized through the official press, which also published, along with the regular news from the field, a great number of interviews with PLO members, as well as reportages from journalists or PCI members who had the chance to visit PLO camps and talk with the admired *fedayeen*.¹⁵² What is unclear in the articles, however, is how these contacts were accessed. For *L'Unità*, the main interlocutor in the region was indeed the PLO, and the internal reports indicate how these meetings became possible thanks to LCP intercession. LCP members often attended meetings with Palestinian representatives (mainly Yasser Arafat) and also commented on Palestinian statements.¹⁵³ Another example of the LCP's intermediary role comes from a letter sent on 23 May 1973 by Sergio Camillo Segre, chief of the PCI Foreign Affairs Section, to his Lebanese comrades. In the letter, Segre directed George Zangalis (Australian Communist Party) to the LCP, as the man was willing to get in contact with the Palestinian resistance.¹⁵⁴ The fact that Segre went through the Lebanese party instead of directly putting Zangalis in contact with the PLO might be a sign of the fact that the LCP was perceived as a necessary intermediary. However, it might also be related to dynamics internal to the communist network, which favoured contacts between the communists

¹⁵¹ 14 June 1973, PC, 1973, m.f. 046, pp. 429-434, Fondazione Gramsci

¹⁵² See for instance the reportage from Claudio Giuliani and Margherita Paolini, two young Communists who visited al-Fatah camps: 'Tra I partigiani di al-Fath', in *L'Unità* 3 November 1969, p. 3; or Romano Ledda meeting with al-Fatah representatives in 'Un popolo che vuole diventare nazione' in *L'Unità* 3 February 1969, p. 3; as well as the documentary by Romano Ledda and Luigi Perelli 'Al-Fatah – Palestina' in Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico (AAMOD) <http://patrimonio.aamod.it/aamod-web/film/detail/IL8600001264/22/al-fatah-palestina.html>

¹⁵³ 1974, m.f. 078, pp. 744-759, Fondazione Gramsci.

¹⁵⁴ Sergio Camillo Segre, 28 May 1973, PCI, 1973, b. 221, f. 281, Fondazione Gramsci.

instead of third parties. Even in this latter case, it is however symptomatic of an LCP intermediation – whether strictly necessary or formal.

From the Lebanese viewpoint, this intermediary role was quite convenient as it created an equation between the Lebanese and the Palestinian people. Given that the Palestinian cause did attract international (and Italian) attention, contrary to the internal Lebanese struggles, it probably helped the party at an international level. As it was discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, the global attention to the Palestinian cause also concretised in material support. Thus, not only Lebanon was able to ask for humanitarian aid but also benefited from the PLO's increased resources, as the LNM alliance relied on the *fedayeen* for its armed forces.¹⁵⁵ This was true also for Italian public attention and aid, as the PCI proposed the same equating narration.

Towards financial aid

Requests for aid were uncommon between the PCI and the LCP. Despite the narrative of a fragile country threatened by imperialist and reactionary forces, what the Lebanese representatives usually asked for was PCI political support within Italian domestic politics, to guide the Italian government towards a favourable approach to Lebanon and its leftist and democratic forces. However, as tension in the region and then in Lebanon built up, the political support was no longer enough, and the party started to ask for and encourage humanitarian help. The request for humanitarian aid began with the war in 1973, and they increased once the civil war started, and was then followed by a request for financial support also.

Information on the PCI aid campaigns to Lebanon is available both in the party archives and in its official press. Sometimes the campaigns were advertised through brief articles published in *L'Unità*. This was a means to mobilise the base members and to portray the party and its local branches as defenders of human rights.¹⁵⁶ Through the internal sources it is possible to trace how this aid was requested from the LCP through PCI contacts on the ground. For instance, a note sent by Arminio Savioli, a journalist from *L'Unità*, on 15th October 1973 pressured the PCI Foreign Affairs Section to show material support during the 1973 war: “Our Lebanese comrades eagerly urge us to make, alongside the political intervention for which they give a positive judgement, some practical and highly emotional gesture, as sending medicines, an ambulance or doctors to provide first aid to the Syrian and Palestinian civilians.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ 17 December 1975, PCI, 1975, b. 308, f. 196, Fondazione Gramsci; PCI, 1976, m.f. 241, pp. 1219-1225, Fondazione Gramsci; Farid El-Khazen, *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon, 1967-1976* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000).

¹⁵⁶ See for instance Gianni Buozi, ‘Nuovo carico di aiuti per il popolo libanese in partenza da Livorno’ in *L'Unità* 15 October 1976, p. 14.

¹⁵⁷ Arminio Savioli, ‘Nota per la Sezione Esteri’, 15 October 1973, PCI, 1973, m.f. 065, p. 1240, Fondazione Gramsci

After the outbreak of the civil war, the request for humanitarian aid to support the civilian population intensified and was also directed towards the Italian government.¹⁵⁸ In addition, the LCP began to request their Italian comrades also financial aid. The first request was made by Karim Mroueh during a meeting in Rome with Salati, Pajetta and Vecchietti on 17th December 1975.

I must notice that on the PCI side the contacts with us, the visits etc. thinned out during these 9 crucial months. I believe that it is crucial to instead intensify and increase the commitment towards political and material support (blankets, clothes, food, medicines) [...] We are going through a financial shortage. We have to buy the majority of our armaments, we have to help the families of the soldiers, the population in the neighbourhoods, without food or money. We thus ask you for an immediate financial contribution, as substantial as possible.¹⁵⁹

Such a direct request was new to the LCP and PCI dynamic and was not answered until 14th May 1976, and only after a second meeting in February in Beirut, when Segre sent a note to the PCI administrative office suggesting to support the LCP with 5-6 million Italian lira (between 23.000€ and 28.000€ today).¹⁶⁰ Despite the limited amount, the fact that the party was willing to offer financial aid to a belligerent actor was indeed unusual and is per se noteworthy. The PCI, despite its public support of and admiration for revolutionary groups and freedom fighters, was deeply pacifist, as was the rest of the Italian parliamentary left.¹⁶¹ As a consequence, while it greatly encouraged humanitarian aid, sending a financial contribution that could be used in arms purchases was another matter. It is thus important to notice how Karim Mroueh tried to frame his request as a way to further contribute to the civilian population relief, but it is also crucial to keep in mind that the LCP often stressed the need for arms, especially since Syria was no longer supplying neither the Lebanese leftist groups nor the PLO – except for Saika group, controlled by the Syrian state.¹⁶² This decision might have been thus derived from the privileged relationship that had developed through the previous years and may be considered a first step towards the support of the Italian military intervention in Lebanon in 1982.

Is it preferential? PCI and the Arab left in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq

Until now I have highlighted examples that show a peculiar interest between the PCI and the LCP and uncovered the possible reasons behind it. However, I have not yet discussed when the PCI took distance from other Arab socialist or communist formations. Was there a preference for the Lebanese comrades? How did the PCI value the other leftist formations in the area?

¹⁵⁸ 17 December 1975, PCI, 1975, b. 308, f. 196, Fondazione Gramsci; PCI, 1976, m.f. 241, pp. 1219-1225, Fondazione Gramsci; PCI, 1976, b. 362, f. 66, Fondazione Gramsci.

¹⁵⁹ 17 December 1975, PCI, 1975, b. 308, f. 196, Fondazione Gramsci

¹⁶⁰ PCI, 1976, b. 362, f. 66, Fondazione Gramsci.

¹⁶¹ Calossi, Calugi, and Coticchia, 'Peace and War'.

¹⁶² 14 June 1973, PC, 1973, 046, 429-434, Fondazione Gramsci; 17 December 1975, PCI, 1975, b. 308, f. 196, Fondazione Gramsci

The focus of this brief analysis will be Egypt, Syria, and Iraq: as socialist countries, they undoubtedly attracted the attention of Italian Communists and might have been more obvious interlocutors, also given their weight on the international scenario. As it has been recognised by the historiography, Syria was indeed the favourite ally of the USSR in the region, and the Soviet Union previously entertained a close relationship with Nasserist Egypt.¹⁶³ It is thus my interest here to analyse what was the PCI's position towards possible allies in these countries.¹⁶⁴

The PCI kept in contact with socialist and communist formations in all three countries. The party was indeed interested in these relationships and often sent delegations to meetings of political parties and civil society groups in Cairo, Damascus, and Baghdad. Most importantly, the party tried, as far as possible, to keep in contact with the communist formations in the countries. When compared to the PCI relationship with LCP it is however striking how much the party approach differed in these countries. Despite the display of Syrian, Iraqi, and Egyptian hospitality – news of the PCI delegation's visit was reported on national television – the Italian delegates viewed their counterparts with suspicion.¹⁶⁵ This may have been in part due to the fragile position of communists in the three countries, or a critique of the undemocratic nature of the countries, or even partly connected to the countries' actions in the regional and international sphere, as the withdrawal of support to PLO or the attempts at territorial expansion (Syria in particular).

The former-Egyptian Communist Abdelsattar Attawila, a journalist for the Egyptian magazine *Rose-El-Youssef*, explained why the Egyptian governing party (Arab Socialist Union, ASU) could not be trusted during a meeting with Arminio Savioli in September 1971. According to him, the Egyptian ruling class was “anti-communist” but “pro-Soviet”, because while they claimed support to the USSR, they also kept persecuting the communists and oppressing the masses. This Egyptian sympathy for socialism was thus, according to Attawila, a façade to gain material support

because everyone was and is a “friend of the USSR, that helps and does not interfere”. More than that, USSR help (and support from the CP [Communist Parties] and the international worker movement) represents objectively for the Egyptian bourgeoisie, a positive alternative to mass mobilization. “As USSR gives us arms, we can do without the people”.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Efraim Karsh, *The Soviet Union and Syria: The Asad Years* (London: Routledge, 2013); Karen Dawisha, ‘The U.S.S.R. in the Middle East: Superpower in Eclipse?’, *Foreign Affairs* 61, no. 2 (1982): 438–52.

¹⁶⁴ I thus excluded from my analysis North African countries, Israel, the Arab peninsula, and Iran. While all countries did participate during 1960s and 1970s to the leftist movement in some way or another, for geographical and historical reasons they did not have a close relationship with Italian Communists. Moreover, according to PCI interpretation of the Middle Eastern crisis, the North Africa region and Iran were not involved in the debate. Finally, Israel would need a separate discussion due to the complex dynamics that characterised the relationship.

¹⁶⁵ 27 July 1973 PC, 1973, m.f. 048, pp. 501-509, Fondazione Gramsci; PCI, 1974, m.f. 078, pp. 713-765, Fondazione Gramsci.

¹⁶⁶ Arminio Savioli, ‘Conversazione con Abdelsattar Attawila’ September 1971, PCI, miscellanea 1967-1974, m.f. 058, pp. 267-274, Fondazione Gramsci.

The fact that communist parties' support is used as an alternative to mass mobilization – and thus democratization – was quite in contrast with PCI ideals and the illusion of leading the countries in their national ways towards democratic socialism. It is also interesting to note how this comment was received alongside the report on Lebanese worries over right-wing forces' penetration in Egypt. Especially after Gamal abd al-Nasser's death, the PCI's relationship with Egyptian socialists thinned. The report from Remo Salati in February 1974 testifies how the contacts between the PCI and the ASU had slowed down in the previous years, but also that there was a common wish to strengthen them – though no concrete actions followed.¹⁶⁷ The last major event in PCI's relationship with Egypt was the re-foundation, in July 1975, of the Egyptian Communist Party, probably in response to al-Sadat's turn to the right: the fact that such a political formation was once again able to operate in the country, however underground and facing state repression, undoubtedly benefited the PCI presence and opened new opportunities of collaboration with the country.¹⁶⁸

The PCI's relationship with the Syrian left was more complicated. The party had regular contact with both the Syrian Ba'ath and the Syrian Communist Party (SCP). The PCI initially did appreciate Syrian involvement in the Palestinian cause and the freedom granted to communists in the country. However, it gradually became clear that the SCP freedom was more a façade, and was in fact controlled by the government. This was also due to the fragility of the party as a consequence of its fragmentation and internal disagreement.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, as al-Assad's desire of extending his sphere of influence (in particular over Lebanon) became manifest, the PCI took distance and openly criticized Syrian actions.¹⁷⁰ This became even more evident after Syrian intervention in the Lebanese civil war in June 1976 in support of the Maronite front, in opposition to the LNM.¹⁷¹

What makes PCI's dislike of Syrian Ba'ath more relevant is the fact that the latter was supported by the USSR as its most reliable ally in the region.

[from a report on a meeting between Pajetta, Vecchietti and Salati with Karim Mroueh, 17th December 1975]

Following a question from Pajetta, who asked whether the Soviet Union was able to intercede with the Syrians to mitigate their behaviour, Karim answered that the USSR is in a gravely difficult situation in the Middle East. Only Syria continues to be of support, Egypt and Iraq keep sliding towards the right, its [in the USSR's] interest is to help Syria, for a counter-plan against the US, so it is not looking for complications.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ PCI, 1974, m.f. 078, pp. 713-765, Fondazione Gramsci

¹⁶⁸ Remo Salati, 'Note sull'incontro con Bahi Nassar' 15 July 1975, PCI, 1975, b 324, f. 81, Fondazione Gramsci.

¹⁶⁹ Velasco Muñoz, 'The Lebanese Communist Party', 2019.

¹⁷⁰ 27 July 1973, PC, 1973, m.f. 048, pp. 501-509, Fondazione Gramsci; 17 December 1975, PCI, 1975, b. 308, f. 196, Fondazione Gramsci.

¹⁷¹ An example was the statement published on 4th July 1976 after Syrian invasion of Lebanon PCI, 1976, m.f. 241, pp. 221-222, or the notes sent by Bottarelli after the FORUM delegation visit in August 1976, which describe the dramatic situation of Lebanon after the invasion PCI, 1976, m.f. 241, pp. 1219-1225.

¹⁷² 17 December 1975, PCI, 1975, b. 308, f. 196, Fondazione Gramsci.

The fact that the PCI openly criticized a USSR ally in the region is symptomatic of how the party acquired independence from the CPSU, opting for an autonomous approach to the region while at the same time acknowledging the centrality of the Soviet role.

The PCI relationship with the Iraqi left was less central to the party interests, but similarly to the Syrian case the Italian Communists kept contact with both the Iraqi Baath and the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP). Also in the Iraqi case, the PCI however did not rely on these relationships, especially due to the ICP's lack of independence. The fact that the Iraqi comrades denied the state of persecution in the country further contributed to the distancing of PCI.¹⁷³

While the PCI did keep in contact with leftist formations from all three of these countries throughout the years between the 1967 June War and the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War, the approach was much more critical than the one with the LCP. The distancing and the suspicion that characterised this approach did not make it possible for the PCI to rely on these groups for regular information. Moreover, their positioning vis a vis the Palestinian cause did not make them reliable allies. However, some form of support was maintained to oppose the Arab reactionary right, even though far from what the LCP enjoyed.

The impact of the special relationship on Italian politics

A final aspect that makes the relationship between the PCI and the LCP so 'special' is the impact that it had on the Italian political scenario between 1967 and 1975, within and outside the parliament. The main consequence of PCI activity in the Middle East was probably the growth of interest towards the Palestinian cause. As I illustrated in the first chapter, the Palestinian cause began to attract the interest of the Italian Left after the 1969 Battle of Karameh. An idealized image of the *fedayeen* as the heirs of the Italian partisans started to spread among the masses and built a connection between the domestic fight against fascism and the international struggle against imperialism.

The PCI contributed to this change through its official press, offering increased news coverage of the events in the Middle East, and Lebanon in particular. This was possible, as I have discussed in this chapter, thanks to the collaboration with the LCP and the frequent visits to the country by both PCI politicians and journalists. Moreover, the direct contact with the PLO, due to LCP intermediation, granted representation to the Palestinian fighters, through interviews or reportages from the Palestinian refugee camps. These forms of representations were fundamental in building the image of the *fedayeen* and in expanding the interest of the Palestinian cause. Italian readers had the impression of direct access to the events in the region. Finally, the connection of the Palestinian to the Lebanese cause and the LCP action provided a fortunate framing: the anti-imperialist fight. Not

¹⁷³ 9 March 1976, PCI, 1976, m.f. 228, pp. 688-689, Fondazione Gramsci.

only were the *fedayeen* fighting an imperialist coloniser, but they were also doing so in alliance with communist forces that were threatened by the same enemies and by internal reactionary forces allied with US imperialism.

However, was all this enough to build interest in the Palestinian cause, both in civil society and in parliament? According to PCI sources, the role of the party was acknowledged by their allies in the region, and it is beyond a doubt that the PCI was the only parliamentary group to openly support Arabs and Palestinians during the 1967 war. However, the government guided by the Christian Democracy had at the time opted for a position of equidistance, and was positive towards building a dialogue with Arab actors, easing its way in the region through Lebanon. Thus, according to Roberta La Fortezza, the favour showed by the Italian government towards the Palestinian cause was a natural evolution of the position expressed by Fanfani and Moro in 1967.¹⁷⁴ It is thus hard to delineate a relationship of causality between the PCI-LCP relationship and Italian government actions or political debate. However, the PCI did certainly contribute to the debate and its actions took place in a favourable climate – the 1968 aftermath – that welcomed the party propaganda, which in turn brought to maturation those sentiments of sympathy towards the Palestinian cause.

The new interest in the Palestinian cause was fundamental for a more radical change operated by the PSI which moved, as I previously discussed, from a firm pro-Israeli position to the support of the Palestinian cause and to seeking contact with Arab Socialists. This change was gradual, it had started in 1970 with a first delegation to Egypt and a simultaneous change in the discourse regarding the Palestinian cause, and was strictly connected to the pacifist approach to the region. The PSI aimed to reach an agreement between the belligerent countries for a just peace in the Middle East, and it had identified in the Arab countries the best interlocutors. However, the international recognition of the PLO in 1974 and then the war outbreak in Lebanon in 1975 further moved the party towards explicit Palestinian support and away from Israel.

Were the PCI's actions and its relationship with the LCP somehow relevant to this change? While the PCI certainly contributed to a change in public opinion and brought the debate within the parliament, it is important to note that some independent phenomena also had a role. The Israeli actions in the region, which went against international law and UN resolutions, and the changes in domestic politics within Israel were also central to the muted feelings of PSI members. Moreover, the 1973 oil crisis showed to the world, and Europe in particular, the centrality of Arab countries as actors in regional and international politics, thus making their role as interlocutors even more significant. It was thus probably the concordance of all these factors to have moved the PSI towards the pro-Palestinian front.

¹⁷⁴ La Fortezza, 'Un'amicizia Italo-Araba'.

Such a change was not only relevant at the Italian level but also within Europe. In 1973 the Socialist International (the political organisation that unites all socialist democratic formations, at the time mainly from European countries) started to reach out to Arab Socialists. During a delegation visit from the Socialist International in Egypt, Dr M. H. Ganem, First Secretary of the ASU, criticised this late approach claiming that “The Socialist International at present is not a truly international movement. You must have thought that there were no socialists outside of Europe and this is why you did not recognise our socialism”.¹⁷⁵ However, during a previous meeting, he had offered to help the Socialist International establish contacts with other Arab socialist forces (including Lebanon PSP and the Alliance of Progressive Forces in Lebanon).¹⁷⁶ While from these claims it might appear that the European Socialists had overlooked the region, I have already proved how the PSI did have contacts with Arab Socialists, and the ASU in particular, since 1970. It thus seems that the Italian Socialists had a pioneering role, leading other European formations towards a reconciliation with the Arab ones.

The newly found favour towards the Palestinian cause thus spread also outside of Italy. With the outbreak of the war in Lebanon, and as the years passed without a solution, and destruction added to destruction, these feelings cemented in the Italian population. Thanks to the strong support from their electoral base, both the PCI and the PSI became gradually able to take tougher stances on the matter, which culminated with the abandonment of their traditional pacifism to support the Italian military intervention in Lebanon in 1982.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ ‘Socialist International visit to the Near East 9th to 16th March 1974’, 1.11.3.16, 297-314, Archivio Partito Socialista Italiano (Psi) - Direzione Nazionale.

¹⁷⁶ ‘Report of visit to Arab Republic of Egypt’ (14-18 September 1973), 1.11.3.16, 360-383, Archivio Partito Socialista Italiano (Psi) - Direzione Nazionale.

¹⁷⁷ Calossi, Calugi, and Coticchia, ‘Peace and War’.

CONCLUSION

The years between 1967 and 1975 were central to the evolution of Italian sentiment towards the Palestinian cause and Lebanon. Both the two main Italian leftist parties, the PCI and the PSI, developed a relationship with their Lebanese counterparts by the time the civil war began in Lebanon. However, the evolution of these relationships differed. The PCI started from a position of favour towards Arab countries in the 1967 war and developed a special relationship with the LCP. On the other hand, the PSI harshly opposed the Arab countries in 1967, but by 1975 this position had shifted in favour of the Palestinian cause, which also developed contacts with Arab and Lebanese socialists, especially as tensions in Lebanon increased.

The PCI-LCP relationship evolved from a more general interest in the country and its role in the Middle Eastern region to a phase of close contact starting in 1971 (once the LCP was legalized) and finally to active aid in the months leading up to and in the beginning of the civil war. I defined this relationship as 'special' since both parties showed a preference for reciprocal contacts. The LCP, as the most reliable communist formation in the region, also advocated for democracy – unlike the undemocratic Arab socialist regimes – and it supported the PLO. Moreover, the two countries shared a similar position of in-betweenness when it came to Cold War logic. Finally, the LCP was useful to the PCI as it gave reliable information from the region and access to the PLO. For the LCP, the PCI was a valuable ally in Europe and within the communist network, as the party embraced and supported the national diversities within the communist front against the homogenizing attempts of the USSR. Moreover, the LCP's contacts with the PCI fostered support and attention towards the country, also thanks to Italian sympathies for the Palestinian cause.

Studying this 'special relationship' thus helps in shedding light on different aspects of Italian, Lebanese, and international politics. On the Italian side, it helps in understanding how the political debate on the Palestinian cause and the Middle Eastern crisis evolved, introducing external factors such as LCP pressure and framing. Moreover, focusing on the differences between the Lebanese Left's relationship with the PCI and the PSI underlines the different approaches the parties had towards the Middle East. While both parties ended up supporting the Italian military intervention in Lebanon in 1982, sympathizing with the Lebanese victims of the Israeli invasion, the roots of this support were quite different. On the other hand, this focus also enables to access the LCP discourse in the international sphere, helping in understanding how the party tried to attract support and aid through specific framing and by addressing a determinate European (and Italian) audience. Particularly interesting is the role of the LCP in relation to the Palestinian presence in the country: while on the one hand the PLO was a cumbersome presence, with the risk of overshadowing Lebanese

questions and actors as sometimes happens in the historiography, on the other it attracted attention to the country and with that also a flow of money and other forms of aid from which benefited also the alliance of progressive forces, LCP included, and the Lebanese population.

Finally, the analysis of PCI-LCP ‘special relationship’ enriches the historiography of the global political scenario. Firstly, this relationship shows how ‘in-between’ actors related to each other within bloc logics. Both parties, located in countries that supported the US-led bloc, but affiliated with the communist network, also enjoyed large support from their respective population. This put both countries in an ambiguous situation, where they struggled to gain trust within their countries and among the other communist parties. The in-betweenness of the PCI and the LCP thus brought the parties to follow, but also defy, Cold War logic. This also led to the construction of a transnational front that was also trans-blocs, something other than non-aligned. The PCI’s preference for engaging with the LCP uncovers its rejection of the USSR’s support of Syria. This demonstrates the PCI’s search for an autonomous role in the region and the global scenario, outside of Cold War logic. On the other hand, the Cold War matrix is omnipresent thanks to the staunch opposition to US imperialism by the PCI and the LCP. On another level, the relationships that developed between 1967 and 1975 are here analysed as an example of how the global solidarity network of the Long Sixties worked in practice: zooming-in on the PCI-LCP relationship, one traces how the information flowed and why; who participated in the network, and on what base; and how this information flow could translate into political and material support.

The PCI-LCP special relationship, and the Italian and Lebanese Left relationship in general, is just a small part of the story. These relationships impacted both countries and contributed to the period of turmoil in their domestic politics. At a macro level, they contributed to the construction of a global network of solidarity, both along and against Cold War logic. When we look at these macro-events, however, we tend to ignore their ‘micro-stories’, and along with them the people that made them real. This thesis had a peek at one of these micro-stories and its protagonists, uncovering their role in the grander scheme.

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APPENDIX

The following is a collection of the speeches at LCP and PCI congresses analysed in Chapter 3

PCI, 1968, mf o552, pp. 2017-2018, Fondazione Gramsci

Message sent to the 2nd LCP Congress on 21/02/1968 by the PCI Secretariat

Cari compagni,

desideriamo giungano a questo vostro Congresso i saluti calorosi e fraterni del Comitato Centrale del PCI.

Seguiamo con interesse gli sviluppi della situazione nel vostro Paese e la vostra politica di alleanza con tutte le forze che si battono contro l'imperialismo, in primo luogo l'imperialismo americano, per la libertà e il progresso.

Vi auguriamo buon lavoro e siamo sicuri che questo Congresso potrà dare al vostro Partito maggiore slancio e vigore per la lotta che dovete condurre.

Anche noi siamo impegnati nella mobilitazione delle masse lavoratrici del nostro paese in appoggio alla eroica lotta del popolo vietnamita, per la libertà, l'indipendenza e la pace di tutti i popoli. Siamo impegnati, alla vigilia delle elezioni politiche, a realizzare una grande affermazione del nostro Partito che apre la strada a un mutamento profondo nell'orientamento politico del nostro Paese, così da assicurare pace e progresso sociale.

Rinnovando i più sinceri auguri, vi inviamo i nostri saluti fraterni

13/02/1969, *L'Unità*, p. 07

Speech by Nadim Abdel Samad in representation of the LCP at the 12th PCI Congress, as published on *L'Unità*

NADIM ABDEL SAMAD

segretario del Partito comunista libanese

I comunisti, i progressisti e tutti i patrioti del nostro paese sono riconoscenti alla classe operaia italiana e al suo partito comunista per il sostegno e la solidarietà con il nostro popolo e gli altri popoli arabi in lotta contro l'imperialismo, il sionismo e la reazione interna, soprattutto dopo l'aggressione israeliana contro i paesi arabi nel giugno del 1907. L'aggressione contro l'aeroporto di Beirut, che mirava a intimidire il popolo libanese e a separarlo dagli altri popoli arabi, ha dimostrato d'altra parte l'incapacità assoluta del regime politico economico libanese — che è una delle forme del neo colonialismo della nostra regione — di difendere la sovranità e l'indipendenza del paese. Ciò è stato alla base dell'ultima crisi di governo nel Libano, che era anche e soprattutto una crisi di potere. Questa

crisi non termina con la formazione del nuovo governo poiché se le forze popolari hanno potuto allontanare dal governo e isolare le forze più reazionarie e più imperialiste, queste ultime non sono ancora completamente isolate e la loro pericolosità non è diminuita. Il nostro partito svolge un lavoro efficace per unificare tutte le forze progressiste patriottiche e antimperialiste su un programma minimo, per la difesa della sovranità nazionale, la coesione con i paesi arabi, per l'amicizia con i paesi socialisti, per il rafforzamento della democrazia e la difesa dei diritti dei lavoratori, per un potere nazionale democratico in grado di applicare questo programma. Ed è in questo quadro che il nostro popolo e gli altri popoli arabi considerano l'aiuto e l'appoggio dati alla nostra lotta dalla solidarietà internazionale, dai paesi socialisti e soprattutto dall'Unione Sovietica, ivi compresa la presenza della sua flotta nel Mediterraneo che è considerata dal nostro popolo come una garanzia contro l'aggressione imperialista. La complessità della situazione internazionale, l'aggressività degli imperialisti americani e dei loro agenti, pone oggi come una necessità urgente la questione di rafforzare sempre di più la coesione e l'unità del movimento progressista internazionale, di tutte le forze rivoluzionarie progressiste e antimperialiste in ogni paese. Ed è con questo spirito che il nostro partito ha appoggiato ed appoggia l'incontro dei partiti comunisti che avrà luogo a Mosca.

PCI, 1972, b. 181, f. 293, Fondazione Gramsci

Speech by Remo Salati in representation of the PCI at the 3rd LCP Congress (7-10 January 1972). Manuscript (FR)

Chers camarades,

C'est avec un plaisir très grand que je prends la parole, pour porter à vous tous et à tous les travailleurs et démocratiques libanais les salutations les plus fraternelles du Comité Central du P.C.I, et le souhait, qui est certitude, de bon travail et de succès.

Ces salutations et ce souhait ne sont pas formels. Ils jaillissent par la connaissance de votre activité, du projet des thèses, par la considération sincère vers les expériences des autres partis frères appelés par leur histoire nationale à accomplir leur tâche grande, et difficile, exaltant d'ouvrir et de bâtir leur vie au socialisme.

C'est une tâche grande et difficile, même si heureusement la Révolution d'Octobre, la construction de la première société socialiste, la victoire dans la guerre contre le nazisme et le fascisme, la politique de passe et de solidarité de l'Union soviétique et des autres pays socialistes avec les luttes d'émancipations et les mouvements de libération dans le monde entier, ont donné et donnent des modifications fondamentales, décisives pour le succès de la lutte contre l'imperialisme pour la paix, le socialisme.

Je suis ici, chers camarades, pas seulement pour exprimer encore une fois la solidarité complète et le soutien du PCI à la lutte de votre peuple, de tous les peuples arabes, du peuple palestinien, mais surtout pour apprendre et comprendre.

Les événements récents et très douloureux du monde arabe nous ont rappelé à l'approfondissement des problèmes politiques et théoriques, que la marche des Mouvements de libération a posé et pose à notre attention, et à satisfaire l'exigence de mieux connaître la différenciation entre les différentes forces politiques et sociales des pays arabes et entre les différents pays. Par exemple, toute la question du rôle des bourgeoisies nationales il faut étudier avec plus d'attention et dans chaque pays, et pour ça elle ne peut pas être affronté, en opposant une formule à une autre formule.

J'ai déjà dit que je suis ici pour apprendre et comprendre, et cette habitude n'est-elle pas rhétorique. Elle dérive de notre conception vers les problèmes de l'unité de mouvement ouvrier et communiste international, de la quelle nous confirmons l'exigence vitale et pour la quelle nous sommes toujours engagés. Il n'y a aucun doute, en fait, que la rencontre du marxisme et des idéaux socialistes avec les différentes réalités nationales et continentales est destiné à créer une très riche multiplicité d'expressions.

Mais la reconnaissance de cette 4 diversités, ne signifie pas le renoncement de l'unicité du mouvement révolutionnaire. Au contraire elle délivre cet objectif de tout formalisme mythique et dogmatique et nous sollicite à une confrontation ouverte et créative et au débat, où l'autonomie nationale, l'égalité entre les Partis, la souveraineté et l'indépendance de chaque état socialiste, la liberté du jugement historique et politique ont devenus et deviennent des exigences de l'internationalisme, qu'on ne peut pas supprimer.

C'est pour ça que votre débat et vos expériences nous sont nécessaires : c'est pour cette raison que un je suis ici, au nom du PCI, pour connaître tout ce qui, même en reconnaissant vos différences nationales, est utile à notre lutte en Italie, dans la quelle le composant « étrangère » a une si grande partie dans la lutte de masse pour la démocratie, la paix, le socialisme.

Et c'est pour ça que la classe ouvrière, les paysans, les travailleurs, les intellectuels italiens ont donné et donnent des preuves provenant de leur esprit antimperialiste et internazionaliste dans les luttes de masse et militaires, qui ont été engagées et sont engagées en soutien du active des peuples du Viet-Nam et d'Indochine, des peuples d'Angola, de Mozambique, de Guinée-Bissau, en soutien des le lutte de peuples arabes, pour le retraiter de troupes israéliennes de tous les territoires arabes occupés, pour la reconnaissance des droits nationaux des palestiniens, de la République démocratique du Viet-Nam, de le RDA (République Démocratique Allemande), de le Corée du Nord, pour le conférence sur la sécurité européenne, pour la Méditerranée, mer de paix.

Chers camarades,

Permettez-mois que je vous renouvelle les salutations fraternelles du C.C du PCI, de tous les militants communistes italiens, que j'exprime mes remerciements pour l'accueil chaleureux, sincère, simple, nous protocole et que je donne au cher camarade Nicolas Chaoui un petit cadeau; la médaille en or, forgé pour le cinquantième anniversaire de la fédération du PCI.

W le PC libanais

W l'unité fraternelle du PCL et du PCI

W l'unité anticolonialiste

17/03/1972, *L'Unità*, p. 11

Speech by George Haber in representation of the LCP at the 13th PCI Congress, as published on *L'Unità*

LIBANO

George Haber

Membro del Comitato centrale del Partito comunista

A nome di tutti i comunisti libanesi, dei progressisti e democratici del Libano, porgiamo al congresso del PCI i nostri più vivi auguri di successo. Siamo certi che il congresso rappresenterà un momento importante non solo per i comunisti, ma anche per la classe operaia, per i progressisti e i democratici italiani in lotta per rinnovare l'Italia, per rafforzare la azione antifascista, per difendere gli interessi popolari, per una politica estera italiana di pace e di indipendenza nazionale. I comunisti libanesi insieme a tutte le forze progressiste ed anti-imperialiste del Libano seguono con grande interesse le vostre lotte politiche, sociali ed ideali. Vi sono riconoscenti della forte azione di solidarietà che avete sempre condotto verso i movimenti di liberazione nazionale d'Asia, d'Africa e di America Latina e soprattutto con la lotta del nostro popolo e degli altri paesi arabi, compreso il popolo arabo della Palestina, contro l'aggressione israeliana e le manovre degli imperialisti americani che mirano a mettere i nostri popoli in ginocchio ed a liquidare le conquiste del movimento di liberazione nazionale arabo. Siamo certi, cari compagni, che vi troveremo al nostro fianco anche nella grande lotta che il nostro popolo, con le sue forze progressiste e patriottiche, conduce oggi contro la politica di aggressione e di espansione di Israele contro il Libano; sarete al nostro fianco anche nella lotta contro i reiterati tentativi della reazione araba e libanese incoraggiata dagli americani che mirano alla liquidazione delle libertà democratiche e delle conquiste realizzate nel Libano. Le forze progressiste e democratiche libanesi conducono oggi una grande battaglia per rafforzare la democrazia e per dare scacco alle manovre degli imperialisti americani e dei reazionari che mirano all'instaurazione di una dittatura nel Libano. Cari compagni, le relazioni fra i nostri due partiti si rafforzano sempre più nel quadro della lotta comune per consolidare l'unità e la compattezza del movimento comunista

Internazionale, sulla base del marxismo-leninismo; per rafforzare l'unità del movimento rivoluzionario mondiale e, nel quadro della lotta comune contro l'imperialismo, per trasformare il Mediterraneo in un mare di pace. Siamo certi che i nostri fraterni rapporti si rafforzeranno nel tempo.

23/03/1975, *L'Unità*, p. 10

Speech by Khalil Debs in representation of the LCP at the 14th PCI Congress, as published on *L'Unità*

Khalil Debs

segretario del Comitato centrale del Partito comunista del Libano

Cari compagni, permettetemi di inviare ai delegati del XIV Congresso del Partito comunista Italiano, a tutti i comunisti Italiani, il saluto fraterno e caloroso del nostro Comitato centrale, di tutti i Comunisti libanesi. Voi tenete il vostro Congresso in un periodo di profonda crisi economica, sociale e politica che scuote il mondo capitalista, ma anche in un periodo di rafforzamento delle lotte popolari e di aumento della influenza e del credito del Partito comunista. Gli imperialisti americani e le forze della reazione più reattiva cercano di imporre delle soluzioni antidemocratiche e di tipo fascista a questa crisi, tentando di farne subire le conseguenze alle masse popolari. Si assiste a simili tentativi in molti paesi europei sotto varie forme. Le lotte coerenti ed energiche che voi conducete contro questi tentativi in Italia, per l'unità di tutte le forze democratiche e popolari, per uscire dalla crisi e costruire un'Italia nuova; i grandi successi riportati in queste lotte costituiscono un contributo importante alla lotta di tutti i popoli, e non solamente in Europa, per la democrazia, la liberazione nazionale, la pace e il socialismo, lotta che si rafforza e si allarga senza sosta. Il vostro Congresso ne è una chiara dimostrazione. Lo stesso ricatto esercitato dagli Stati Uniti sui popoli europei, è anche esercitato sui popoli arabi, con le minacce di intervento militare, con il tentativo di isolare i popoli arabi dai popoli europei per scaricare la responsabilità della crisi del capitalismo sugli arabi. La politica americana nel nostro paese si svolge dunque nello stesso senso. La politica del «passo dopo passo» portata avanti da Kissinger, che vola attualmente da una capitale all'altra del Medio Oriente, non mira all'evacuazione dei territori occupati, né al riconoscimento dei diritti nazionali del popolo palestinese, né a stabilire una pace giusta e onorevole. Essa mira soltanto a dividere le file dei popoli e dei paesi arabi, come ha giustamente sottolineato il compagno Berlinguer, e specialmente i paesi i cui territori sono occupati. Essa mira a isolare il popolo palestinese e il suo unico legittimo rappresentante: l'Organizzazione per la liberazione della Palestina. Essa mira a isolare i popoli arabi in lotta dalle nazioni a loro veramente amiche: l'URSS e i paesi socialisti. In una parola, gli imperialisti americani mirano ad imporre una pace americana che possa loro permettere di riconquistare e riconfermare le loro posizioni strategiche, economiche e politiche. E bisogna dire francamente che quelli che, tra gli

arabi, avallano questa politica di Kissinger, aiutano nel fatti la realizzazione di questi fini e l'indebolimento della lotta del popoli arabi in un periodo in cui Israele ha perso molte delle sue possibilità di svolgere il ruolo di gendarme dell'imperialismo, dopo la guerra dell'ottobre 1973. Si rafforzano le lotte armate del popolo palestinese, si ha un grande sollevamento popolare delle genti del territori occupati (dove attualmente i comunisti e i patrioti arabi e ebrei sono imprigionati). C'è stato il riconoscimento internazionale dell'OLP e viene sempre più isolata la politica di aggressione e di espansione del dirigenti israeliani. E bisogna dire anche che è divenuto molto chiaro che, senza il popolo palestinese, non ci sarà una pace duratura nella regione, ma una grave situazione piena di pericolo per la pace. Cari compagni, il nostro popolo, che conduce le grandi lotte di massa, democratiche e rivendicative, sotto la direzione di forze progressiste, tra le quali il nostro Partito svolge un ruolo essenziale, è obbligato a far fronte nello stesso tempo alle incessanti aggressioni israeliane, che causano centinaia di morti e feriti tra i civili libanesi e palestinesi, procurando grandi danni materiali e costituendo una violazione permanente alla nostra sovranità. Queste aggressioni non hanno potuto realizzare i loro scopi. In primo luogo a causa della sempre più forte coesione tra il popolo libanese e il popolo palestinese per fare fronte a tanti tentativi che mirano a colpire la resistenza e il suo gruppo dirigente, per rafforzare le lotte di tutti i popoli arabi, per la liberazione del territori occupati, per il riconoscimento dei diritti del popolo palestinese a decidere da sé il proprio destino, sulla propria terra e nella propria patria, e il suo diritto a stabilire il proprio potere nazionale. In queste lotte, il vostro sostegno e la vostra solidarietà multante non ci sono mai mancati. E noi ve ne ringraziamo calorosamente. Che si rafforzi e si approfondisca l'amicizia tra i nostri due popoli e i nostri due partiti.