

Italian Colonialism and Resistances to Empire, 1930–1970, by NEELAM SRIVASTAVA,
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Blurring the lines between consolidated historiographical traditions which study anti-colonialism, antifascism, and imperialism as distinct and unrelated objects, *Italian Colonialism and Resistances to Empire* aims at challenging existing compartmentalised historiographies by encompassing all these different dimensions. The author adopts an unusually extended chronology in order to connect nation-building and internal migrations with antifascism and the opposition to Italian colonialism on a transnational scale. Building on Antonio Gramsci's notion of 'cosmopolitanism', Srivastava retraces the intertwined history of antifascism and anti-colonialism, from the anti-colonialist internationalism of the 1930s, through the antifascist *Resistenza*, to the anti-imperialist and decolonial struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. What appears is a 'hidden history' of an Italian 'radical intellectual tradition' (pp. 196–7) running as a red thread from the Ethiopian war to Third-Worldism. A red thread that the author does not hesitate to connect with contemporary 'Italian Theory' and particularly with the outcome of the productive contamination between *operaismo* (workerism) and postcolonial theories, best exemplified by the work of Sandro Mezzadra.

In my view Srivastava's book has two main objectives, which are highly influenced by Robert J.C. Young's thinking. In framing the first objective, the author argues that Italian colonialism, because it was so belated, had a key impact on the articulation of a global anti-colonial discourse. Srivastava convincingly proposes two theoretical shifts. Firstly, building on Leela Gandhi's idea of 'self-othering', the book aims at breaking down 'the imperial binarism of colonial versus colonised sensibilities/subjectivities' (p. 149) by focusing on a disparate group of militants and intellectuals born in the West but deeply committed to and inspired by decolonial struggles. Perfectly attuned to recent historiography, Srivastava stresses the

importance of casting back the focus to the metropole *via* the colonies and *via* anti-colonialism in order to draw a more accurate genealogy of 'Europe's own political and discursive formations' (p. 6). Secondly, the book critically engages with Schmitt's *Theory of the Partisan*. Unlike Schmitt, the author proposes a deterritorialised understanding of partisanship. Srivastava here has in mind the work by Claudio Pavone on the Italian Civil War. In this perspective, she understands the commitment of the anti-colonial militants not as an instinctive defence of their own homeland, but as an ethical choice made in the unprecedented setting of a global civil war.

The second objective of the book is to underline the role of the 'resistances to Empire' in reshaping the canon of Western Marxism framed by Perry Anderson in 1976. Here Srivastava responds to the harsh criticism addressed to postcolonial studies – among others by Vivek Chibber (*Postcolonial Theory and the Spectre of Capital*, 2013) – 'of having ignored Marxism and capitalism as structuring movements in the history of anti-colonialism's history' (p. 88). Challenging Chibber's 'conventional story', Srivastava argues that anti-colonial thinkers made a significant contribution 'to provincializ[ing] European Marxism' (p. 206).

Srivastava organises her argument around two main focuses. The first section (chapters 1–5) starts with the Ethiopian war (1935), which is considered as a 'critical event'. Adapting François Furet's reading of the French Revolution to the Ethiopian war, Srivastava argues that 'the revolutionary event, *from the very outset*, totally transformed the existing situation and created a new mode of historical action that was not intrinsically part of that situation' (p. 16). In this framework, the first section of the book is dedicated to the study of international reactions to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, and in particular to anti-colonial thinkers and writers of the metropole and of the black diaspora. Shortly before the Spanish Civil War, Ethiopia provoked a vibrant wave of support spanning from the Italian communist party (chapter 2) to the pan-Africanist thinker George Padmore (chapter 3), from the novelist Claude

McKay – one of the key figures of the Harlem Renaissance (chapter 4) – to Sylvia Pankhurst, feminist, socialist, and ‘print activist’ (p. 147), founder and editor of *New Times and Ethiopia News* (chapter 5)..

Moving from the 1930s to the 1950s and 1960s, the second section (chapters 6–7) identifies in the Algerian war of independence against the French (1954–1962) a new ‘critical event’ and focuses on its impact on the post-World War II Italian anti-colonialism. The Algerian war was indeed a shifting point in the genealogy of the New Left, when young radicals broke with the ‘old Left’ precisely on the issue of decolonisation. In this perspective, Srivastava rightly stresses that these new militants embraced Third-Worldism as a reactivation of the antifascist front ‘beyond the confines of Europe’ (p. 236). Through case studies such as those of Gillo Pontecorvo (director of the *Battle of Algiers*) and Giovanni Pirelli (extraordinary historian and writer) – both former partisans in the *Resistenza* – the last two chapters focus on what the author calls the ‘aesthetics of resistance’ and together show how ‘Third-Worldism led to a renewal of Italian radical culture, especially in the realms of literature and film’ (p. 195).

As with any innovative and thought-provoking work, this book’s originality raises important new research questions. In conclusion, I would like to focus on two points. Firstly, the reference to the Schmittian *Theory of the Partisan* is of great importance, particularly the focus on the ethical divide understood as the catalyst for the transformation of the ‘European Civil War’ of 1914–1945 into a global civil war, where imperialism was conceived as the new fascism. However, the relatively few examples of militant intellectuals discussed in the book, while convincingly validating the thesis of a shared ethos, conversely risks overlooking the complexity of a multifaceted phenomenon. For example, for many of the militants who inscribe decolonial struggles in the continuity of the *Resistenza*, the myth of the ‘unfinished’ or ‘betrayed Resistance’ (because severed of its class dimension) became a key issue in the 1970s debates among the revolutionary Left concerning the legitimacy of political violence.

Secondly, the role of Third-Worldist thinkers in reshaping Western Marxism, as described by Srivastava, should be more closely gauged. If there is no doubt that decolonisation had a vast impact on the New Left tactics and repertoires, I would rather agree with Enzo Traverso that between Western and Black Marxism there was a ‘missed encounter’ (*Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory*, 2016, p. 176). In other words, if the wave of social and political protests of the global 1960s would be inconceivable without decolonisation (from the Ethiopian war, through Algeria and Cuba, to Vietnam), it seems that anti-colonial struggles never fully entered Marxist theory workshops – which instead long remained white and Eurocentric, determining the foreclosure of colonial and racial issues.

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