

In Search of Order

Portrayal of Communists in Cold War Italy

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The international position of Italy after World War II was shaped by the Cold War. Although Italy joined with the United States and Great Britain during World War II after the fall of Benito Mussolini, the country was never fully orthodox in its behavior. Italy's adherence to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was never in serious doubt, but large sectors of the population and a significant segment of the political elite disapproved of the alliance between Rome and Washington. In Italy, the battle between Communism and capitalism was not only an international matter but also a deeply divisive internal issue. The Italian Communist Party (PCI) was the largest Communist party in Western Europe; it was also a young party, having grown from roughly 6,000 members in 1943 to almost 2 million by 1946. Accompanying the swelling ranks of the PCI was a powerful cultural force—one might even call it a subculture—that extended to artists and intellectuals, to various towns and villages, and to the country's largest trade union confederation.¹ Furthermore, as a member of the anti-Fascist alliance, the PCI cooperated with other parties in several governments of national unity (1943–1947), in the establishment of the Republic of Italy (1946), and in the writing of the new constitution, which was agreed upon in 1947 and came into force on

1. Antonio Gramsci, one of the co-founders of the PCI (January 1921) and one of the most innovative Marxist political thinkers of 20th-century Europe, worked out a theory concentrating on conquering “culture” and not just the means of production—but without abandoning that seemingly supremely effective political instrument, the charismatic party. Gramsci was not just a theorist, however. He combined the roles of innovative intellectual and leader of a mass party. He died in 1937 in a Fascist prison hospital in Rome, but he posthumously exerted a significant influence through his *Prison Notebooks* (first published from 1948 to 1951) on both Communist and Italian postwar cultural and intellectual history. The literature on this subject is huge. Among recent works, see Francesca Chiarotto, *Operazione Gramsci: Alla conquista degli intellettuali nell'Italia del dopoguerra* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2011); Richard Drake, *Apostles and Agitators: Italy's Marxist Revolutionary Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), esp. pp. 206–209; and Richard Bellamy, *Modern Italian Social Theory: Ideology and Politics from Pareto to the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), pp. 115–140.

1 January 1948. Communists were a legitimate component of the country's post-1945 political space. In most of Western Europe, as well as the United States, the Cold War was a conflict often in search of enemies within. By contrast, in postwar Italy internal political rivalries that predated the Truman Doctrine were superimposed on the debate surrounding the country's foreign policy.

The history of the Cold War in Italy has, for the most part, been the preserve of diplomatic historians and scholars of international relations.² From the early 1970s, most interpretations were profoundly shaped by the U.S. revisionist school.³ Over time, however, more complex and nuanced evaluations were formulated. In today's scholarly literature, the role of Italian political parties in the Cold War and the connection between domestic politics and international affairs are taken quite seriously. Many works have emphasized the interaction between U.S. policies and U.S.-style consumerism and the subsequent reaction generated in Italian politics, economy, culture, and society.⁴ Because of the many archival sources that became available after the fall of the end of the Cold War, the relationship between Italian Communism and Soviet foreign policy has become a popular topic.⁵ Moreover, Italian historians have

2. For an overview, see Antonio Varsori, "Cold War History in Italy," *Cold War History*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (May 2008), pp. 157–187.

3. For the approaches to the study of the Cold War, see Odd Arne Westad, ed., *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory* (London, UK: Routledge, 2000). See also Odd Arne Westad, "The Cold War and the International History of the Twentieth Century," in Melvin P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. 1: *Origins* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 1–19. For key accounts of the various interpretive positions, see the bibliographical essay by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad in Leffler and Westad, eds., *Origins*, pp. 508–551. A valuable survey of much of the historiography on the Marshall Plan, rightly understood to be a centerpiece of the early Cold War, is Michael Cox and Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, "The Tragedy of the American Diplomacy? Rethinking the Marshall Plan," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Winter 2005), pp. 97–134.

4. The current literature on Americanization—usually considered the major factor in Italy's transformation after World War II—is immense. Far from being a passive recipient of U.S. proposals, however, the Italian government often solicited them and adopted only the elements that best suited the interests of Italian society. See the special issue on "Italy and the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Summer 2002); and Paolo Scrivano, "Sign of Americanization in Italian Domestic Life: Italy's Postwar Conversion to Consumerism," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (April 2005), pp. 317–340.

5. Recent studies have broken new ground in revealing the willingness of Iosif Stalin to sacrifice the interests of the PCI to Soviet foreign interests. See, in particular, Elena Aga-Rossi and Victor Zaslavsky, *Stalin and Togliatti: Italy and the Origin of the Cold War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011). On the influence of Stalinism within the Italian left, see Victor Zaslavsky, *Lo stalinismo e la sinistra italiana: Dal mito dell'Urss alla fine del comunismo, 1945–1991* (Milan: Mondadori, 2004). More sympathetic viewers see the PCI as relatively autonomous from Moscow and firmly committed to a less threatening but not always clear national road to socialism. See, for example, Donald Sassoon, *The Strategy of the Italian Communist Party: From the Resistance to the Historic Compromise*

become increasingly interested in two issues of obvious relevance to Italy's experience during the Cold War: the role played by international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the process of European integration.⁶

Without denying the critical role elites played in shaping the Cold War, this article seeks to reinforce and consolidate the Cold War "home front" as a scholarly subfield. This means examining the conflict from the bottom up rather than the top down. I am not, of course, the first to analyze the Cold War by focusing on the home front. Over the past 35 years, a plethora of monographs have concentrated on U.S. society during the early Cold War years.⁷ However, across the Atlantic most scholars—in particular, those not focusing on the German Democratic Republic—have paid little attention to the home front.⁸ This article shifts the focus of attention away from governments and diplomacy toward society and culture as agents of historical change. To that end, it explores the psychological, rhetorical, and symbolic dimensions of the Cold War.⁹ In postwar Europe, the nature of the contest between East and West and the communications revolution of the twentieth century made

(New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981). Other scholars—mainly but not exclusively post-Communist—have depicted a more uncertain strategy that was conditioned by circumstances. In this vein, Italian Communists were able to influence and, at times and within narrow boundaries, even disregard fundamental aspect of Stalin's policy. See, for example, Silvio Pons, "Stalin, Togliatti, and the Origins of the Cold War in Europe," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Spring 2001), pp. 3–27.

6. Antonio Varsori, ed., *Alle origini del presente: L'Europa occidentale nella crisi degli anni Settanta* (Milan: Mondadori, 2011); Pietro Craveri and Gaetano Quagliariello, eds., *Atlantismo ed europeismo* (Soveria Mannelli, Italy: Rubettino, 2003); and Luciano Tosi, ed., *L'Italia e le organizzazioni internazionali: Diplomazia multilaterale nel Novecento* (Padua: CEDAM, 2003).

7. See, for instance, Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 20th anniversary ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

8. Compared to the literature on prewar Stalinism, the paucity of studies of everyday life in the Cold War—era Soviet Union is noticeable. On the former, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). On the latter, the exceptions are Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), though his primary focus is on the earlier years; and Elena Yu. Zubkova, *Russia After the War: Hopes, Disillusionment and Disappointment, 1945–1957*, trans. and ed. by Hugh Ragsdale (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1998). On the German Democratic Republic (GDR), see Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, eds., *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008); and Konrad H. Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience: Toward a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999).

9. On the cultural approach to the Cold War, see Patrick Major and Rana Mitter, "East Is East and West Is West? Towards a Comparative Socio-cultural History of the Cold War," *Cold War History*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (October 2003), pp. 1–22; Patrick Major and Rana Mitter, "Culture," in Saki Dockrill and Geraint Hughes, eds., *Palgrave Advances in Cold War History* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 240–262; Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997); Giles Scott-Smith and Hans Krabbendam, eds., *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe, 1945–1960* (London: Frank Cass, 2003); and Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hect, "Culture and the Cold War in Europe," in Leffler and Westad, eds., *Origins*, pp. 398–419. A

words and images formidable weapons in the battle to win the “hearts and minds” of people. Rhetoric and symbols—in addition to the self-perception of the combatants themselves—were crucial and not incidental means through which the Cold War was waged.¹⁰

The role of the home front in shaping the popular political imagination has been addressed in the historiography, but it is a story worth reexamining.¹¹ The received narrative has elaborated on paradigms such as the coexistence of the “American dream” and “Soviet myth,” or Italy as the most “Americanized” country of Europe. An attraction to Moscow and the counteridealization of the United States have caused scholars to overstate the “craving” for “non-Italian models,” which have been portrayed as a dominant motif in Cold War Italy.¹² This article puts forth a parallel narrative. It downplays—without neglecting—Cold War international dichotomies and instead places the primary focus on the battle between Italian Communists and anti-Communists as an indigenous struggle for the redefinition of national, political, and individual identity that drew from tropes and symbols found in religious tales, ancient myths and legends, communal and family traditions, national (and sometimes regional and local) imagery and cultural forms, long-term structures of culture and mentality, and the transformative experience of World War II. The analysis is supported by a variety of historical sources but primarily by posters, cinema, and audiovisual materials. Visual images played a fundamental role in postwar Italy. The level of literacy in the country was relatively low compared to the rest of Western Europe. In addition, Italians had a strong visual tradition stemming from the Catholic Church’s centuries-long practice of using artistic forms for persuasive ends. Furthermore, almost every Italian peasant hut had its own *santino* (literally, “little saint” or “icon”), as did many an urban dwelling.¹³ Finally, the widespread use of posters in

cultural turn has recently been advocated by some practitioners of diplomatic history. See Thomas W. Zeiler, “The Diplomatic History Bandwagon: A State of the Field,” *Journal of American History*, Vol. 95, No. 4 (March 2009), pp. 1053–1073.

10. Martin J. Medhurst, ed., *Cold War Rhetoric: Strategy, Metaphor and Ideology* (Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1997).

11. Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow: The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943–1991* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Christopher Duggan and Christopher Wagstaff, eds., *Italy in the Cold War* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 1995); Pier Paolo D’Attorre, ed., *Nemici per la pelle: Sogno americano e mito sovietico nell’Italia contemporanea* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1991); and David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007).

12. Christopher Duggan, “Italy in the Cold War Years and the Legacy of Fascism,” in Duggan and Wagstaff, eds., *Italy in the Cold War*, p. 10.

13. On this, see the fascinating Marino Niola, *I santi patroni* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007).

the first postwar electoral campaigns can be related to the outdoor nature of much of recreational life in Italy: the ritual of the *passaggiata* alone justifies the parties' investment in this form of communication. However, the analysis here does not dwell exclusively on official representations; instead, it connects them with the political and social history of the period and with the conditions under which images and myths acquired power and potential at the popular level.¹⁴ Images mean nothing in themselves, taken in isolation from the historical and cultural context. They acquire meaning only when seen from the standpoint of social contextualization, or with a "period eye," to use Michael Baxandall's phrase.¹⁵ This is also important analytically, affecting the mechanism by which the reservoir of tropes and cultural influences becomes relevant. Thus, to explore the (contradictory) ways Communism was popularly imagined—or how viewers apprehended images in relation to past and current experiences—I draw here on local studies and oral history as well as newspapers and official documents, and I examine memories and biographical and autobiographical material, which can clarify what ordinary people and elites thought (or remembered) about the development of the Italian polity as the events were unfolding (or afterward).¹⁶ The aim of the article is to map the principal coordinates of the cultural system of Cold War Italy, to show how propaganda shaped the mentality of Italians (the legacy is present even today) and, in turn, how political representations were shaped by popular attitudes and assumptions.

14. For the methodological background, see Victoria E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); and Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 3–30.

15. Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1972), pt. 2. See also Clifford Geertz, "Art as a Cultural System," *MLN: Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 91, No. 6 (December 1976), pp. 1473–1499. Other studies in art history that have influenced the presentation of the material in this article are Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of Renaissance* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962); and Ernest H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

16. In the decade after World War II, the Italian Communist Party required its militants to narrate their autobiographies publicly and write them out. This practice was imported from the USSR, with roots that stretched back to the October Revolution. I have been working on more than 1,200 autobiographies written by Communists from Bologna, as well as autobiographies written by militants from Savona (Liguria), Turin, and Rome. See also Mauro Boarelli, *La fabbrica del passato: Autobiografie di militanti comunisti 1945–1956* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2007). On the practice of autobiography in the Soviet Union, see Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); and Igal Halfin, *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

Embedded in the narrative are a series of assumptions and questions that could be useful to scholars examining the intersection of culture and politics. This analysis can thus provide future scholars with a more sophisticated interpretative framework to explain the Cold War from a transnational perspective. Although it is premature to generalize from the Italian example, this article demonstrates—at least as far as Italy is concerned—that the Cold War involved the search for order. Instead of representing a struggle for material goods or economic gain, for political influence or military ascendancy, the Cold War was a symbolic contest expressing the desire to reformulate the appropriate relationship between the individual and society—a relationship that required a high level of modification insofar as the earlier understanding had been irreparably shattered by the experience of World War II.

The Communist as Enemy

The elections of 18 April 1948 marked a watershed in Italian history. The Christian Democratic Party (DC) gained a sweeping victory over the Popular Front—a coalition composed of Communists, Socialists, and other leftwing minority parties—and remained an enduring feature of Italy's national government until 1994. These elections were also a turning point in the development of the U.S. government's Cold War strategy. Although Italy ranked quite low on the list of pressing issues facing U.S. policymakers at the end of 1946, two years later the Italian experience became an important blueprint for Washington, instructive of how Communism could be defeated in Europe.¹⁷ During Italy's 1948 election campaign, three U.S. National Security Council analyses of the Italian situation encouraged an all-out campaign—involving propaganda, psychological warfare, and covert operations—to prevent the PCI from coming to power.¹⁸ The possibility of a Communist electoral

17. Morris Janowitz and Elizabeth Marwick, "U.S. Propaganda Efforts and the 1948 Italian Elections," in William E. Daugherty, ed., in collaboration with Morris Janowitz, *A Psychological Warfare Casebook* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1958), pp. 320–325. Scott Lucas and Kaeten Mistry, "Illusions of Coherence: George F. Kennan, U.S. Strategy and Political Warfare in the Early Cold War, 1946–1950," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (January 2009), pp. 39–66, demonstrate how the response to the psychological challenge posed by Italian Communism relied on an improvised and disorganized relationship between the U.S. embassy and local politicians. This lack of strategic coherence persisted in U.S. foreign policy during the early Cold War.

18. NSC 1/1, 14 November 1947, in Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri [HSTL], President's Secretary Files, Subject File, National Council Security Meeting, Box 176; NSC 1/2, 10 February 1948, in HSTL, President's Secretary Files, Subject File, National Council Security Meeting, Box 176; and NSC 1/3, 8 March 1948, in HSTL, President's Secretary Files, Subject File, National Council Security Meeting, Box 176.

victory was anything but remote. Although the DC gained the largest number of seats in the Constituent Assembly election of June 1946, the combined votes of the Communists and Socialists exceeded the DC's total. In addition, the PCI and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) ran on a joint ticket in local elections and continued to outperform the DC throughout 1946 and 1947. A continuing wave of labor unrest, coupled with the emergence of a well-organized grassroots movement inspired by the PCI, caused the U.S. authorities a great deal of consternation. George Kennan argued in a confidential memorandum written a month before the elections that it might be advisable to outlaw the PCI to prevent a Communist takeover.¹⁹ By late March, however, concern seemed to have eroded as reports from consulates throughout Italy became notably more buoyant regarding the prospect of a PCI defeat.²⁰ U.S. policymakers believed their efforts to undermine the PCI had worked well. In reality, they overstated both the likelihood of a legal Communist accession to power and the role of the United States in defeating the PCI. Scholars have convincingly demonstrated the limited impact of external forces in determining the electoral outcome in Italy. Most likely, the U.S. maneuvers would have been ineffective without the DC's skillful exploitation of the Communist issue and the vigorous efforts of the Vatican and grassroots Italian-American organizations.²¹ Although working in tandem with the U.S. administration, both the Vatican and the DC pursued an all-out effort to defeat the PCI for their own reasons—which would have existed

19. Acknowledging that this would likely provoke a civil war, Kennan suggested a militarily divided country was a better option than a Communist-dominated Italy. John D. Hicherson of the Office of European Affairs promptly rejected the proposal, transcribed in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1948, Vol. III, pp. 848–849 (hereinafter referred to as *FRUS*, with appropriate year and volume numbers). A few weeks before the elections the U.S. embassy drew up an evacuation plan in the event of an uprising, transcribed in *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. III, pp. 827–830. See also “Possible Action by the U.S. to Assist the Italian Government in the Event of Communist Seizure of North Italy and the Establishment of an Italian Communist Government in That Area,” Memorandum by the Policy Planning Staff, September 24, 1947, in *FRUS*, 1947, Vol. III, pp. 976–981.

20. “The Ambassador in Italy (James Dunn) to the Secretary of State” (April 7, 1948), in National Archives and Record Administration (NARA), Washington DC, Record Group (RG) 59 (General Records of the Department of State), 865.00/4-748. See also Dunn to Secretary of State, 6 April 1948, in NARA, RG 84, 800: Italy Elections, Box 29; and Arnaldo Cortesi, “Signs of a Communist Ebb Are Noted in Italy,” *The New York Times*, 11 April 1948, p. 8.

21. Kaeten Mistry, “The Case for Political Warfare: Strategy, Organization and U.S. Involvement in the 1948 Italian Election,” *Cold War History*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (August 2006), pp. 301–329; Mario Del Pero, “The United States and ‘Psychological Warfare’ in Italy, 1948–1955,” *Journal of American History*, Vol. 87, No. 4 (March 2001), pp. 1304–1334; Guido Formigoni, *La Democrazia Cristiana e l'alleanza occidentale* (Bologna, Italy: Il Mulino, 1996); and James E. Miller, “Taking Off the Gloves: The United States and the Italian Elections of 1948,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (January 1983), pp. 35–55.

regardless of the Cold War. Ultimately, local actors made the most powerful case against the PCI. Theirs was a privileged perspective based on familiarity with Italian society *from within*, something the U.S. efforts inherently lacked.

In the 1948 elections the DC and the Civic Committees (*Comitati civici*)—an extensive Catholic grassroots network—sought to present the contest in strictly binary terms. To vote was no longer a merely practical act but an ideologically invigorated choice between civilization and barbarism, good and evil, Christianity and atheism, dictatorship and democracy, clericalism and anti-clericalism, East and West, truth and falsehood, patriotic feeling and “alien” ideology.²² The church used its influence in society to resurrect the idea of a radical alternative: “Either with or against Christ” (*o con Cristo, o contro di Cristo*), Pope Pius XII proclaimed in St. Peter Square’s on Christmas Eve 1946. Incongruously, this declaration expressed the same mood that had been distinctive of Fascist propaganda (“either Rome, or Moscow”). Both Catholic and DC propaganda relied on and drew pictorial inspiration from the powerful imagery of the Book of Revelation, as well as other religious iconography, primarily that of the Renaissance. The propaganda conveyed the dramatic and eschatological tenor of an impending apocalyptic crisis. Political posters, often without any peculiar aesthetic qualities, depicted devils, bears, serpents, or dragons threatening women and children and the very institution of the family.²³ In the crusade against this mélange of evils, Catholic forces were represented pictorially as angels, knights, and other idiosyncratically pure beings exuding the aroma of sanctity. The ideological bonds made between Catholicism and anti-Communism were striking. The threat posed by Communism to the family was the crux of the battle, and all other aspects of the PCI program paled in comparison. To the traditionalist sensibilities of these

22. On the 1948 elections, see Robert Ventresca, *From Fascism to Democracy: Culture and Politics in the Italian Elections of 1948* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2004); David W. Ellwood, “The 1948 Elections in Italy: A Cold War Propaganda Battle,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (2003), pp. 225–236; Edoardo Novelli, *Le elezioni del Quarantotto: Storia, strategia e immagini della prima campagna elettorale repubblicana* (Rome: Donzelli, 2008); and “1948 April 1948: Italy between Continuity and Rupture,” special issue, *Modern Italy*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2011). On the “enemy within” as a crucial and consistent feature of 20th-century Italian political struggle, see Angelo Ventrone, *Il nemico interno: Immagini e simboli della lotta politica nell’Italia del Novecento* (Rome: Donzelli, 2005).

23. The serpent/hydra is a well-known symbol of evil in Christian culture, where Satan has often been represented with “dragon-like features and his limbs . . . entwined with snakes.” See James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Arts* (London: John Murray, 1974), p. 285. See also James Hall, *A History of Ideas and Images in Italian Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983). Apart from their rich religious and folkloric association, images of enemies as animals performed a crucial function of dehumanizing the enemy and presenting them in a form that confirmed their destructive nature.



Christian Vote (Civic Committee, 1948). Image Courtesy of Fondazione Vitorino Colombo, Milan – Archivio Civico Lodi.

Catholic partisans, the foremost objective of the PCI was the destruction of the family. All other targets of Communist hostility—be it bourgeois culture, the Western alliance, or even the prevalent economic system—were strikingly secondary.

The poster *Christian Vote* shows the family shielded from the serpents of divorce and free love, two of the values allegedly upheld by the Communist Party. The poster alludes to the Renaissance's artistic rendering of religious images such as the Holy Family and the Hand of God, perhaps the most recognizable trope of Michelangelo. Besides the religious connotations, however, the poster skillfully exploited the need for stability, security, reunion, and reconciliation pervading Italian society after years of warfare and civil strife. During the late stages of World War II, the national state had been left in tatters, and in the vacuum families, villages, and towns—rather than political heads or the abstract nation—became the primary sources of allegiance. The consequence was an almost spontaneous strengthening of horizontal loyalties at the expense of vertical hierarchies: people worked together within tangible networks of solidarity rather than within the more vertical structures that tended



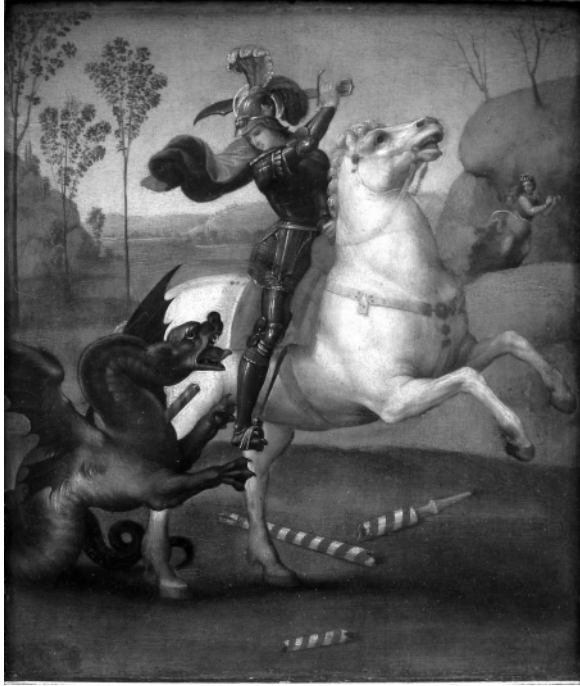
The Christian Worker (Civic Committee, 1948). Image Courtesy of Fondazione Vittorino Colombo, Milan – Archivio Civico Lodi.

to characterize modern European citizenship. The welfare of one's immediate family became the overriding preoccupation of many Italians.²⁴

The poster titled *The Christian Worker*—another production of the Civic Committees—depicts the crushing of two dragons' heads: Communism and Capitalism. The image is particularly rich in association, suggesting the potent and highly allegorical legend of St. George and the Dragon, one of the most popular Christian saints and a favorite of Renaissance art.

In Raphael's interpretation, St. George's spear has been broken in the struggle, but the proud knight is about to vanquish the dragon with the sword, thereby liberating the abducted princess, who is fleeing on the right. St. George's horse looks to the sky as if pleading for divine intervention. Knight and horse constitute a single, centaur-like creature endowed with divine

24. This was true everywhere in Europe. See Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1998), pp. 221–225; and Martin Conway, "Democracy in a Postwar Western Europe: The Triumph of a Political Model," *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (January 2002), pp. 59–84.



Raphael, *St George and the Dragon*, oil on canvas, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

favor rather than fallible and mundane physical strength.²⁵ Knight/horse and dragon, locked in the intimacy of mortal combat, appear as yet another single being, a symmetrical but divided figure bound within the same field of tension. The *Christian Worker* seeks to retell and reinterpret the same eternal struggle between good and evil, ever present and inescapable in every epoch. In contrast to Raphael's St. George, however, the *Worker* resembles an embattled giant facing unequal enemies. The artist's deliberate distortion emphasizes the power and the dominance of the worker. The poster is meant to convey a message of hope and confidence in the strength of the individual against adversities such as the brutal war experience, the disruptive effects of technology, and the fascist/totalitarian regimentation of civic life.

Such a representation is not a simple dichotomy: the *Worker* is destined to subdue two enemies. The two are not equals. Communism (the sheer force of nature and brute instinct) is portrayed as a red dragon and therefore looks

25. In the Book of Revelation, Christ rides a white horse at the head of the armies of Heaven to judge and to make war upon the earth.

much more ferocious than the frog-like depiction of Capitalism (the fatuous power of the market and money).²⁶ Although Capitalism is portrayed as a lesser peril, the two threats are nevertheless extensions of the same monster, both antithetical to the Catholic tradition. Far from flaunting material prosperity as a bulwark against Communism, Catholic forces regarded materialism as an irrefutable proof of moral degeneration. Although the United States viewed Communism as a threat to its flourishing and entrenched capitalistic system, the Vatican opposed Communism for its explicit atheism. However, the differences between the Vatican and the White House transcended their antipathetic analysis of Communism. Pope Pius XII was inclined to detect flaws in both godless Soviet Communism and a dangerously materialistic Americanism. This critique included a condemnation of a solely economic definition of the standard of life and the fetishization of technological progress and material output.

Catholic criticism of both capitalism and socialism dated back to the publication in 1891 of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum novarum*—the manifesto of what came to be known as “Catholic social thought.”²⁷ To be sure, Leo had taken the extraordinary step of embracing John Locke's theory of property as a natural right and elevating its moral status by asserting that “private ownership must be held sacred and inviolable.” After all, *Rerum novarum* sought to tackle the emerging challenge of socialism, and modernity as a whole, by presenting its own (Catholic) solution to the social question.²⁸ Yet, Locke's argument was

26. Italians accustomed to icons and religious painting knew that red was the color of Satan. The color had also been associated with revolution and disorder since 1792, when the Jacobin Club raised a red flag as a symbol of rebellion.

27. On the development of Catholic social thought in the 20th century, see Paul Misner, *Social Catholicism in Europe: From the Onset of the Industrialization to the First World War* (New York: Crossroad, 1991); Paul Misner, “Christian Democratic Social Policy: Precedents for Third Way Thinking,” in Thomas Kselman and Joseph A. Buttigieg, eds., *European Christian Democracy: Historical Legacies and Comparative Perspectives* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), pp. 68–92; David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992); Oliver F. Williams and John W. Houck, eds., *Catholic Social Thought and the New World Order: Building on One Hundred Years* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993); Sabino Frigato, *La difficile democrazia: La dottrina sociale della Chiesa da Leone XIII a Pio XII (1878–1958)* (Cantalupa, Italy: Effatà, 2007); John W. Boyer, “Catholics, Christians and the Challenges of Democracy: The Heritage of the Nineteenth Century,” in Wolfram Kaiser and Helmut Wollnout, eds., *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918–1945* (London: Routledge, 2004), esp. pp. 23–27; and Guido Formigoni, *Alla prova della democrazia: Chiesa, cattolici e modernità nel Novecento* (Trento: Il Margine, 2008).

28. Paul Furlong and David Curtis, eds., *The Church Faces the Modern World: Rerum Novarum and Its Impact* (Scunthorpe, UK: Earls Gate Press, 1994); “*Rerum Novarum*”: *Écriture, contenu et réception d'une encyclique: Actes du colloque international organisé par l'École française de Rome et le Greco no 2 du CNRS (Rome, 18–20 avril 1991)* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1997); and Robert P. Kranyak, “Pope Leo XIII and the Catholic Response to Modernity,” *Modern Age*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (2007), pp. 527–536.

qualified by the Thomist doctrine of the best use of property for the common good, including (limited) state intervention on behalf of working people and the demand for a just minimum wage.²⁹ Workers' rights and interests were the rationale for the papal condemnation of the unfettered and inhumane practices of nineteenth-century capitalism.³⁰ Capitalism, Leo asserted, was a system whose guiding ethos was the "greed of unchecked competition." The working class, having no protection from the "hardheartedness" and the brutal exploitations of capitalists, was left "surrendered, isolated, and helpless." Leo was equally harsh in his assessment of socialism, arguing that state ownership of the means of production would ultimately "rob the lawful possessor [of property], distort the function of the state, and create utter confusion in the community." Overall, the idea of social harmony—foreshadowing the ideals of twentieth-century corporatism—proved central to Leo's vision: "Capital cannot do without labor, nor labor without capital. Mutual agreement results in the beauty of good order, whereas perpetual conflict necessarily produces confusion and savage barbarity."³¹

Forty years after *Rerum novarum*, Pope Pius XI again addressed social and political questions with the encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* (1931). Although the last vestiges of the ancient order had been largely swept away in the aftermath of World War I, new forms of authoritarian or totalitarian government had begun to emerge.³² Wages and conditions of workers had indeed improved since the time of Leo XIII. Nevertheless, the world had been plunged

On the relationship between Catholicism and modernity, see Darell Jodock, ed., *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and anti-Modernism in Historical Context* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Gabriel Daly, "Catholicism and Modernity," *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (1985), pp. 773–96; Pancratius Cornelis Beentjes, ed., *The Catholic Church and Modernity in Europe* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2010); Robert P. Krainak, *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011); and James L. Heft, ed., *A Catholic Modernity? Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

29. As Ernest Fortin points out, Leo raises the status of property rights to "sacred and inviolable" in order to match the radical claims of socialism against private property while rejecting the individualistic premises of Locke's philosophy. See Ernest Fortin, "'Sacred and Inviolable': *Rerum Novarum* and Natural Rights," *Theological Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (June 1992), pp. 211–214.

30. In the words of a U.S. commentator, *Rerum novarum* and Leo's statement that "a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the masses of the poor a yoke little better than slavery itself" were "the most crushing indictment of the capitalistic system from a conservative authority." Anthony J. Beck, "Capitalism and Christian Democracy," *The Catholic World*, Vol. 110, No. 657 (December 1919), p. 360.

31. The text can be founded on the official Vatican website, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_it.html.

32. Pius had recently negotiated an agreement with Mussolini concerning the Vatican state through the Lateran Treaty (1929), but an uneasy tension still existed.

into the misery of the Great Depression, an event that again raised serious questions about the whole capitalist system. Furthermore, the fear that had so concerned Leo about socialism and its threat to the social order had also been drastically realized with the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia, and Communist ideas had continued to gain support in Europe. In this context, *Quadragesimo anno* was explicitly directed against Communism and socialism, defined as “utterly alien to Christian truth.” However, the encyclical was also critical of unbridled and greedy capitalism, the “economic dictatorship” that “has replaced a free market.”³³ In 1937, confronted with the horrors in Spain of torched churches and slaughtered religious of both sexes, two years before the world learned that only two Catholic priests had survived the travails of Iosif Stalin’s rule, and long before Winston Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” discourse, Pius’s encyclical *Divini redemptoris* branded Communism “the all too imminent danger . . . which aims at upsetting the social order and undermining the very foundations of Christian civilization.”³⁴ Nevertheless, the same document emphasized Rome’s doubts over liberalism, capitalism, and the materialist-based system of the West, seen as an error unto itself without which the menace of Stalin would never have existed.

Pius XII did not issue a social encyclical. However, the speech he gave on the feast of Pentecost (1 June 1941) to mark the 50th anniversary of *Rerum novarum*, makes clear that he wanted his own teaching to be seen as a continuation of that of Leo XIII and Pius XI. In opposition to the totalitarian systems that were gaining sway throughout Europe, Pius XII warned against any interpretation of the common good that would give to the state the power to “determine at will the manner of his physical, spiritual, religious, and moral movements in opposition to the personal duties or rights of man and to this end abolish or deprive of efficacy his natural rights to material goods.”³⁵ Pius was concerned in a special way about the threat of Stalinist Communism and its explicit denial of private property, a position Leo XIII had also condemned. But Pius XII was equally concerned about the arbitrary confiscations and comprehensive mobilization of resources undertaken by the Nazis, the Fascists, and assorted political thugs who did not reject property

33. See http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno_it.html.

34. See http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19370319_divini-redemptoris_it.html. The pontiff also cited Leo XIII’s encyclical against Communism, *Quod apostolici muneris* (1878).

35. See http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/speeches/1941/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19410601_radiomessage-pentecost_it.html.

rights as such and were instead intent on total social control and personal enrichment.³⁶

In 1948 the chief concern of Catholics focused on the bedrock of family and faith. Accordingly, Pius XII felt compelled to make common cause with Washington against the common foe, momentarily putting aside contrasting views and philosophy.³⁷ However, the anti-Communist alliance failed to erase the long history of suspicion between Rome and Washington. Even in the bleakest years of the Cold War, Italian Catholics could not regard the Soviet system as the only threat.³⁸ Within the DC, the groups that most outspokenly opposed U.S. culture and way of life, capitalism and the Atlantic Alliance, were confined to the left of the party until well into the 1950s.³⁹ Yet, in the immediate postwar years, the whole party, including the leadership and party standard-bearer Alcide De Gasperi, flirted with the idea, which some Vatican circles supported too, of creating a neutral Christian Europe (or, in a less ambitious form, a Catholic bloc of Latin European countries), that would be impervious to the corrupting influence of the different but equally unacceptable forms of modern barbarism represented by the U.S. and Soviet models. The main concern for De Gasperi and other Christian Democrats was the rescue and reconstruction of the national state.⁴⁰ By the late 1940s, international

36. The pope's language here and his use of such broad categories as "human rights" and "common good" reflects the influence of Jacques Maritain, the French philosopher whose thought became an important reference point for political Catholicism and for Christian Democratic parties newly forming in the post-World War II period. See Bernard Hubert, ed., *Jacques Maritain en Europe: La réception de sa pensée* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1996); and Jan Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), pp. 135–138.

37. Frank Coppa, "Pope Pius XII and the Cold War: The Postwar Confrontation between Catholicism and Communism," in Dianne Kirby, ed., *Religion and the Cold War* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 50–66; and Peter Kent, *The Lonely Cold War of Pope Pius XII: The Roman Catholic Church and the Division of Europe, 1943–1950* (Montreal: Mc-Gill-Queen University Press, 2002). British and American films and documentaries of the 1950s moved in an opposite direction: religious themes figured prominently in many films, encouraging audiences to view the Cold War as a conflict in which capitalism, anti-Communism, and Christianity were synonymous. Tony Shaw, "Martyrs, Miracles, and Martians: Religion and Cold War Cinematic Propaganda in the 1950s," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Spring 2002), pp. 3–22.

38. Roy Palmer Domenico, "'For the Cause of Christ Here in Italy': America's Protestant Challenge in Italy and the Cultural Ambiguity of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2005), p. 625.

39. Paolo Pombeni, *Il gruppo dossettiano e la fondazione della democrazia, 1938–1948* (Bologna, Italy: Il Mulino, 1979); Elisabetta Vezzosi, "La sinistra democristiana tra neutralismo e Patto Atlantico (1947–1949)," in Ennio Di Nolfo, Roman H. Rainero, and Brunello Vigezzi, eds., *L'Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa* (Milan, Italy: Marzorati, 1986), pp. 195–221; and Vera Capperucci, "Le correnti della Democrazia Cristiana di fronte all'America: Tra differenziazione culturale ed integrazione politica, 1944–1954," in Piero Craveri and Gaetano Quagliariello, eds., *L'anti-americanismo in Italia e in Europa nel secondo dopoguerra* (Soveria Mannelli, Italy: Rubettino, 2004), pp. 249–289.

40. Guido Formigoni, "De Gasperi e l'America tra storia e storiografia," *Studi trentini di scienze storiche*, Vol. 84, No. 2 (2005), pp. 317–334. See also Kaeten Mistry, "The Partnership between the

and domestic difficulties obliged the DC and De Gasperi to attenuate and eventually abandon their most high-sounding nationalist rhetoric. The progressive inclusion of Italy in what *New York Times* correspondent and editor-in-chief Anne McCormick labeled the “New Atlantis” led both the United States and the DC to seek an ideological convergence through the elaboration of a shared and often artificial Atlantic mythology.⁴¹ As the Italian experience demonstrates, the Cold War was a complex and nuanced phenomenon and not always an obvious duel between a clearly liberal democracy and unadulterated Marxism-Leninism.⁴²

Contributing to the vilification of Communists in postwar Italy was the ancient conflation of Russia, whose identity as Western has ever been in doubt, with Asian barbarism. Images depicting Russians as ferocious brutes, with a weakness for alcohol and a penchant for rape, sowed the seeds of fear among many Italians. Russians, after all, were not simply Communists, proponents of an alien ideology, but Mongoloid Asiatics whose kinsman Attila had imperiled Italian and Roman civilization centuries earlier. These qualities, combined with the official atheism of the Soviet Union, inspired many Italians (and other Europeans) to conflate the Red Menace with the Yellow Menace, thus stirring in the imagination lurid images of bloodthirsty Mongols and rampaging Cossacks with knives between their teeth.

Such images reinforced one of the most pervasive memories of the Soviet Union to emerge in postwar Italy: the Asiatic power that had invaded and subdued Europe. Similar posters had appeared in French anti-Bolshevik propaganda at the end of World War I, and a similar sentiment had swept the West when the Turkish colossus was perceived to be the foremost threat to *Res publica Christiana*.⁴³ The implication was that if one scrapes a Russian,

Democrazia Cristiana and the United States, 1947–1948,” *49th Parallel: An Interdisciplinary Journal of North American Studies*, No. 14 (Summer 2004), pp. 202–218.

41. Anne O’ Hare McCormick, “Cause and Effect of the Rise of the New Atlantis,” *The New York Times*, 23 March 1949, p. 15. See also Mario Del Pero, *L’alleato scomodo: Gli Stati Uniti e la Democrazia Cristiana negli anni del centrismo, 1948–1955* (Rome, Italy: Carocci, 2001); Mario Del Pero, “Containing Containment: Rethinking Italy’s Experience during the Cold War,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (October 2003), pp. 532–555; and Alessandro Brogi, *A Question of Self-Esteem: The United States and the Cold War Choices in France and in Italy, 1944–1958* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002).

42. On the need to go beyond binary dichotomies, see Martin H. Folly, “Cold War Dichotomies,” *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (December 2000), pp. 503–508. On the role of the ideological opposition between liberal-democracy and Marxism-Leninism, see Mark Kramer, “Ideology and the Cold War,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (October 1999), pp. 539–576; and David C. Engerman, “Ideology and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917–1962,” in Leffler and Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, pp. 20–43.

43. Jules Grandjouan, *Créateur de l’affiche politique illustrée en France* (Paris, France: Somogy, 2001); Patricia Spingborg, *Western Republican and the Oriental Prince* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1992),



Are You Waiting for Him? (Civic Committee, 1948). Image Courtesy of Fondazione Vittorino Colombo, Milan – Archivio Civico Lodi.

a thinly veiled Tartar emerges. During the early years of the Cold War, several leading European figures—from Churchill to Konrad Adenauer—alluded to the Soviet Union as an Oriental despotism.⁴⁴ The enduring nature of these stereotypes was evident when similar images were frequently invoked in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia after 1989. Perhaps with the demise of Communism, nationalist leaders in these countries wished to differentiate themselves from the “Eastern” identity of the Soviet Union in order to be accepted by the West and thereby gain the political advantages of membership in NATO and the European Union.⁴⁵

In 1948, memories of invasion were not far removed in the Italian mind. Indeed, in the last years of the war Italians had been exposed to a condition of

p. 20; and Robert Schwoebel, *The Shadow of the Crescent: The Renaissance Image of the Turk, 1453–1517* (Nieuwkoop, The Netherlands: B. de Graaf, 1967), p. 23.

44. Churchill quoted by Sir Ian Jacob in Michael Charlton, *The Eagle and the Small Birds: Crisis in the Soviet Empire: From Yalta to Solidarity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 43; and Konrad Adenauer, *Briefe, 1945–1947*, ed. by Hans Peter Mensing (Berlin: Siedler, 1983), p. 191.

45. Ivor B. Neumann, “Europe’s Post-Cold War Memory of Russia: *Cui Bono?*” in Jan-Werner Müller, ed., *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in Presence of the Past* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 121–136.

traumatic incivility. To take but a few examples, Cossack units fighting alongside Germans and Moroccan soldiers (Goumiers) accompanying Free French forces plunged both the Friuli (in the northeast of the country) and the Ciocciaria (south of Rome) regions into nightmares of violence and rape. Of course, Cossacks and, especially, Moroccans are quite different from ethnic Russians. However, the Italian experience with these non-European and non-white soldiers stimulated traditional prejudices in the struggle against Communists in 1948. But during the period from 1944 to 1946—the final phases of the war and the earliest stage of the postwar era—the story was markedly different. As *Time's* selection of Stalin as its Man of the Year in 1943 illustrates, World War II triggered the development and perpetuation of the myth of Stalin. Among Italians—who avoided hosting Soviet troops on their soil—the myth of Stalin was especially strong. Even Christian Democrats spoke of the Soviet Union in a reverential tone. For example, on 23 July 1944—six weeks after the liberation of Rome—De Gasperi characterized the USSR as a present-day version of the melting-pot: “I see the Russians made up of 160 different ethnics groups overcoming the differences between Asia and Europe.” He averred that “this effort toward the unification of human society is, allow me to say, a Christian effort, it is universalistic in the sense of Catholicism.”⁴⁶ From 1944 through 1946 such sentiments were widespread.⁴⁷ Only the Vatican under Pius XII and the Jesuit Order stood firm in denouncing the inhumanity of Communism, and they soon were pushed by the Allied powers—and especially the United States—to moderate their heated rhetoric.⁴⁸ But with the onset of the Cold War everything changed dramatically.

46. The speech, entitled “La democrazia cristiana e il momento politico,” was first published by the DC’s newspaper *Il Popolo* (25 July 1944) and later in *Quaderni della Democrazia Cristiana*, no. 4 (Rome: SELI, 1944); and Alcide De Gasperi, *Discorsi politici*, ed. by Tommaso Bozza (Rome: Cinque Lune, 1956), pp. 1–20.

47. Donald Sassoon, “Italian Images of Russia, 1945–56,” in Duggan and Wagstaff, eds., *Italy in the Cold War*, pp. 189–202. The prospect for Soviet-Italian diplomatic relations looked good after the end of the war. See Nina D. Smirnova, “Soviet-Italian Relations, 1945–8,” in Francesca Gori and Silvio Pons, eds., *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1943–53* (London: MacMillan, 1996), pp. 375–382. As late as 4 February 1946, the Italian ambassador in Moscow, Pietro Quaroni, lamented the “anti-Soviet stance of the majority of the Italian press,” which undermined the politics of friendship and collaboration pursued by Italian diplomats, and he urged the Soviet Union not to confuse Italian interest with “issues related to someone else’s imperialism, although outwardly depicted as battles between opposite ideologies.” See Memorandum from Pietro Quaroni, 4 February 1946, in Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Serie Affari Politici, 1946–1950, b. URSS 2, f. Rapporti con l’Unione Sovietica.

48. On 9 September 1941, Pius XII received a letter from Franklin D. Roosevelt claiming that the Soviet Union was on the brink of introducing some form of religious freedom and that the Soviet dictatorship was less dangerous than the Nazi variant. Roosevelt thus concluded that the survival of the USSR would prove less dangerous to religious life. See Myron C. Taylor, ed., *Wartime Correspondence between President Roosevelt and Pius XII* (New York: MacMillan, 1947), p. 61. On the role played by Myron Taylor in conveying to the United States the Vatican’s fears about an impending Communist



Roberto Rossellini, *Rome Open City* (1945).

The Communist as Resister

In the post-Fascist cinema, the first Italian Communist to be portrayed was the partisan Giorgio Manfredi, one of the main characters of Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (1945), who suffers terrible torture and eventually dies as a martyr without revealing the secrets of the Resistance. As he is pinned to the wall dying, Manfredi (the actor Marcello Pagliero) is photographed in a manner strongly reminiscent of Christ's death.

In 1991, Claudio Pavone argued that the period from 1943 to 1945 should be interpreted as one in which three wars were fought simultaneously: a patriotic war, a class war, and a civil war.⁴⁹ From 1943 to 1947, however, the anti-Fascist forces imposed a starker image that stressed some features while erasing others. In this narrative, the Resistance was lauded as a second *Risorgimento*, a national and patriotic war of liberation supported by a populace that rallied around soldiers and partisans to defeat Nazis and Fascists.⁵⁰ Communists supported and may even have motivated such an interpretation. The Resistance as a second *Risorgimento* constituted a key discursive strategy adopted

takeover, see Ennio Di Nolfo, *Dear Pope: Vaticano e Stati Uniti: La corrispondenza segreta di Roosevelt and Truman con Papa Pacelli* (Rome, Italy: In-Edit-A, 2003).

49. Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile: Saggio storico sulla moralità della Resistenza* (Turin, Italy: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991).

50. The *Risorgimento* (literally, "Rising Again" or "Resurgence") was the nineteenth-century movement for Italian unification that culminated in the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861.

by the PCI for several decades to establish its national-democratic credentials. Far from being an international movement inspired by foreign ideologies, this new narrative enabled Italian Communists to portray themselves as an authentic indigenous force fighting for human dignity.⁵¹

But beyond the rhetorical strategy deployed by the Communist Party as a means of political legitimation, the sacrifice in the historical struggle against Fascism, so powerfully rendered by Rossellini with the death of Manfredi, acquired a profound symbolic and existential meaning for Communists—to an extent and a degree unknown to other Italians. Yes, Catholics, other partisans, and civilian victims of the terror unleashed by the Nazis and Fascists had died alongside Communists for all of Italy so that the country might be reborn—as *Rome, Open City* powerfully portrays, reenacting in microcosmic form the greater Christian narrative of the redemption and renewal of the world. This symbolic reading is reinforced by the execution of the priest Don Pietro (Aldo Fabrizi) and by the gut-wrenching death of the *popolana* Pina (Anna Magnani)—killed by a burst of machine-gun fire and held by the priest in his lap in a reverse pietà.⁵² The renewal of Italy required the blood of reconciliation: the experience of sacrifice and martyrdom purified individuals and the community, removed violence and evil (Nazis and Fascists), providing the generative principle for social cohesion and for restoration of (a new) order.⁵³ What made the fate of Manfredi and thousands of Communist

51. Both the Italian and the French Communist Parties reinforced their patriotic credentials by embracing the rhetoric of national prestige. Alessandro Brogi, *Confronting America: The Cold War between the United States and the Communists in France and in Italy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), pp. 16–24.

52. The *Pietà*, or image of the Virgin Mary holding Jesus after the crucifixion, was a frequent subject in Renaissance and pre-Renaissance art. Several scholars have commented on the religious meaning of *Rome, Open City*. In 1946, Meyer Schapiro, a professor at Columbia University, provided one of the first critical examinations of the film that focused on its Christian motifs. Schapiro believed the film assumed “the pattern of a familiar Christian legend,” and he stated that, because the action takes place in Rome, the two male partisans, Manfredi and Pina’s fiancé, Francesco, evoke Saints Peter and Paul, who were both martyred there. Furthermore, because Don Pietro did not face the firing squad as was the usual custom, his execution recalls Saint Peter’s inverted crucifixion. See Meyer Schapiro, “A Note on ‘The Open City,’” *New Internationalist*, Vol. 12, No. 10 (December 1946), pp. 311–313. Support for a Christological reading stems from Rossellini’s identity as a Christian humanist and from the candidly Christian subject matter of many of his later films, such as *Francesco, giullare di Dio* (The Flowers of St. Francis, 1950), *Augustine of Hippo* (1972), and *The Messiah* (1975). See also Peter Brunette, *Roberto Rossellini* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 41–60; and P. Adams Sitney, *Vital Crisis in Italian Cinema: Iconography, Stylistics, Politics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), pp. 28–43.

53. Sacrifice is inseparable from the sacred: the word “sacrifice” literally means “to make sacred.” For the theoretical implications, see René Girard, *Des choses caches depuis la fondation du monde* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1978); and René Girard, *Le sacrifice* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2003). For a historical and contextual analysis, see Rosario Forlenza, “Sacrificial Memory and Political Legitimacy in Post-war Italy: Reliving and Remembering World War II,” *History & Memory*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall/Winter 2012), pp. 73–116.

partisans distinctive was their willingness to die not only for the rebirth of Italy but also for a greater cause: the coming of Communism. Communists sentenced to death would write letters just before execution as a way of reaffirming a presence in the world, and as a powerful symbol of personal experience, cramming them with references to sacrifice.⁵⁴ A young Communist partisan wrote in February 1944,

Edda, I have been condemned to death, they will kill me; but they kill my body, not the idea inside me. I die, I die without any remorse, for I am proud to sacrifice my life for a cause, for a just cause, and I hope my sacrifice will not be in vain, but instead will help the great struggle. It is this cause I have been serving faithfully and always hoping that every sacrifice will be rewarded.⁵⁵

Antonio Gramsci considered the elision of the self through sacrifice necessary in times of war and revolution. For Gramsci the individual may justify the value of his or her action and the sacrifice of his or her own and others' lives on the basis of a belief in the historical change(s) that will someday be brought about by others, even after the sacrificed individual has long since ceased to exist.⁵⁶ In this way, the dead outlive death and live beyond their sacrifice, remaining among the living. Surviving and future Communist militants would be overburdened with the duty of bringing the cause to a successful completion. This would give meaning to both individual and communal experiences and eventually to all of history.

Both Gramsci and, before him, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, thus extended one of the oldest eschatological myths of the Mediterranean world: the redemption of the elects (in this case the Communists, whose suffering is invoked to change the ontological status of the world), following an apocalyptic class conflict at the "end of history." The

54. Tzvetan Todorov points out that epic heroes tend to valorize a glorious death in combat over the pursuit of normal life, as they must die in battle to achieve immortality. See Tzvetan Todorov, *Face à l'extrême* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), p. 19. On the symbolization of experience, see Eric Voegelin, "Equivalence and Symbolization in History" (1970), in *The Collected Works*, Vol. 12, *Published Essays, 1966–1985* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 115–133; and Eric Voegelin, *The New Sciences of Politics: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 27–41.

55. Piero Malvezzi and Giovanni Pinelli, eds., *Lettere di condannati a morte della Resistenza italiana: 8 settembre 1943–25 aprile 1945* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), p. 123. See also Mario Avagliano, ed., *Generazione ribelle: Diari e lettere dal 1943 al 1945* (Turin: Einaudi 2006), pp. 179–231.

56. As Italo Calvino remarked in a 1949 article on the literature of Resistance, Gramsci's letters from prison (first, although not completely, published in 1947) are among the most astonishing of all modern testaments to revolutionary courage and self-abnegation. Calvino notes that "serenity" and "strength" are the qualities that make Gramsci representative of the revolutionary spirit of the Resistance itself. See Italo Calvino, "La letteratura italiana nella Resistenza," *Il movimento di Liberazione in Italia*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1949), p. 46.

myth of the classless society, the withering away of the state, and the disappearance of all historical tensions finds its most exact precedent in the myth of the Golden Age that, typically, lies at the beginning and at the end of history (and therefore, like all myths, outside ordinary time). With their sacrifice in the Resistance, Communists could cast a messianic role for themselves and for the party based on the self-image of heroic engagement in the historical battle against the evils of Fascism and Nazism. This was even more the case in post-war Italy. When collaboration between Communists and Catholics ended, the Communists turned to fighting the “new fascism,” by which they meant the elected Christian Democratic governments, the Vatican, and Western capitalism. The symbolic underpinning and moral foundation of the (new) Communist identity lay in the sacrifice of men like Manfredi.

Consequently, Communists—and perhaps only Communists—remembered the Resistance as an “auroral” moment signaling the beginning of extraordinary changes not only in the social and political context but in personal values, worldviews, and ways of life.⁵⁷ The Communist Resistance seemed in this sense a liminal period when the normal social structure had broken down and the individual had escaped previous lives and roles to define a new self and bring about the birth of a new human being.⁵⁸ In an autobiography written in 1951 by a Communist militant—a former partisan, who had been brought up in Catholicism—a palpable sense of transformation emerges:

As a member of a partisan band I felt I was part of a new life. . . . I realized that in the mountains, being a partisan, I was not only there to combat the German and the Fascist, but also to fight for a better world, and for a more just, human, and fraternal society; a society driven by work, free from oppression and exploitation.⁵⁹

57. See the testimonies of Catholic and Communist workers collected four decades later by anthropologist Liliana Lanzardo in Turin. Although Communists considered the Resistance a total (political and existential) transformative experience, Catholics saw it as a temporary “storm” after which “calm” and “peace” (a return to normality) would and should follow, and not the beginning of a new way to look at life, the discovery of politics, or the modification of behaviors, moral values, or deep motivations. Liliana Lanzardo, *Personalità operaia e coscienza di classe: Comunisti e cattolici nelle fabbriche torinesi del dopoguerra* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1989), pp. 87–118 (Communists), and pp. 201–258 (Catholics).

58. For the concept of liminality, see Arnold Van Gennep, *Les rites de passage* (Paris, France: Picard 1981); Victor Turner, “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*,” in *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of the Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 93–111; and Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969).

59. The text is in Gian Carlo Onnis, “La gioia di essere e il sacrificio di vivere: Autobiografie di comunisti savonesi 1945–1956,” *Ventesimo secolo*, Vol. 3, No. 7–8 (January–August 1993), p. 128. For other cases of “conversion” to Communism through participation in the Resistance, understood

Accordingly, no historical symbolism carried more weight in the postwar Communist imaginary than the Resistance. Militants who joined the PCI after the war felt crippled and deprived of a major component of their political and existential identity. This is why the main character of Guido Morselli's autobiographical novel *Il Comunista* (The Communist) perceives and defines himself as a "second-order" Communist—one who was not been forged and baptized in the epic struggle of good versus evil.⁶⁰

In the popular literature of postwar Italy, Communists took multiple forms. Sometimes they were depicted as workers, intellectuals, and revolutionaries. On other occasions, they were characterized as peasants, union organizers, or political commissioners. In a majority of cases, Communists took the form of the Resistance fighter—the hero of the partisan bands who, in the civil war from 1943 to 1945, sought to vanquish the Fascist forces.⁶¹ In almost all cases, these figures were men. A lone exception is Renata Viganò's 1949 novel *L'Agnese va a morire* (Agnes is Going to Die), a canonical text of the (Communist) Resistance in which the ethos of (self-)sacrifice projected by *Rome, Open City* and conveyed by the partisans' letters finds a comparable literary representation.⁶² However, even here the traditional hierarchy between gender holds, and in chapter after chapter the childless, semi-literate, elderly peasant washerwoman Agnes slowly yet relentlessly disappears from the foreground until the third and final part of the novel is entirely dominated by the group of (male) partisans to whom she offered material and emotional support in the struggle against the enemy.

Typically, the Resistance fighter is depicted as a proletarian (or peasant) whom the writer's alter ego (usually an intellectual or someone from a

as the beginning of a new life, see Adriano Ballone, "Una sezione, un paese: Appunti per una storia del militante comunista, 1921–1981," *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (July 1981), p. 439. According to Calvino, "the greatest example of the new man born from this Resistance is surely the serene and immensely strong Sardinian revolutionary [Gramsci]," the author of "the greatest book of the Resistance." Calvino, "La letteratura italiana nella Resistenza," p. 46.

60. Guido Morselli, *Il comunista*, in Elena Borsa and Sara d'Arienzo, eds., *Romanzi* (Milan: Adelphi, 2002), p. 941. The novel was first published in 1976 but had been written twenty years earlier.

61. Anna Baldini, *Il comunista: Una storia letteraria dalla Resistenza agli anni Settanta* (Turin: Utet, 2009).

62. The sacrifice is evoked by the title and the protagonist's baptismal name: "Agnes" derives from the Latin word for "lamb," and Christ was the Lamb of God, the *Agnus Dei*. Christ's sacrifice is suggested by the visual representation of Agnes's death (the four bullets used for her execution form the sign of the cross on her face). (This detail is overlooked by Giuliano Montaldo's cinematic adaption of the novel in 1976.) Finally, sacrifice is explicit in Agnes's pronouncement on personal sacrifice in the context of the larger cause of the Resistance. Renata Viganò, *L'Agnese va a morire* (1949; Turin: Einaudi, 1982), pp. 228–229 (for Agnes's pronouncement).

bourgeois background) meets as a comrade-in-arms during the civil war.⁶³ In this trope, the cosmopolitan learns from the proletarian. Through that experience, the intellectual comes to realize that the salvation of Italy is to be found not in libraries or universities but in the virtue of the *popolo*, in the simple wisdom of a humble people whose vigor and unsophisticated understanding has the power to save the individual from degradation and, in the process, to heal Italian society.⁶⁴

In the immediate postwar period, Communist parties were not strong in most European countries, but the Italian Communists were buoyant. In their minds, they had defeated Fascism and therefore were part of the movement of history, their actions just and their interpretations correct even if their fellow countrymen did not yet agree. This is most evident in the words of Kim, the partisan hero of Italo Calvino's novel *The Path to the Spiders' Nest*:

That age-old resentment which weighs down on Dritto's men, on all of us, including you and me, and which finds expression in shooting and killing enemies, the Fascists have that too: it forces them to kill with the same hope of purification and of release. But then there is also the question of history. The fact is that on our side nothing is lost, not a single gesture, not a shot, though each may be the same as theirs—d'you see what I mean?—they will all serve if not to free us and our children, to create a world that is serene, without resentment, a world in which no one has to be bad. The others are on the side of lost gestures, of useless resentment, which are lost and useless even if they should win, because they are not making positive history.⁶⁵

The theories of Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Stalin, and Gramsci imbued the lives of Communists with an important sense of meaning. The inescapable and scientifically proven triumph of the proletariat sustained the superiority complex that pervaded Italian Communism. Although the future classless

63. In this, *L'Agnese* is no exception. Viganò came from a middle-class family, was trained as a nurse, published her first book of poetry at eleven and her first novel at 33. Viganò had participated in the Resistance as the director of health services for the Communist guerrilla units in the area around Ravenna. She noted that the novel reflected the historical reality of the Resistance and that Agnes was a "real" person, in the sense of a composite, emblematic figure representing the actual experience of thousands of women. Renata Viganò, "La storia di Agnese non è fantasia," *l'Unità*, Milan edition, 17 November 1949; and Renata Viganò, *Matrimonio in brigata* (Milan: Vangelista, 1976), p. 143. However, even though the novel can be said to document the Resistance and women's contribution to the struggle, it also effectively participates in the mythologization of the Resistance.

64. The representation of the Communist resister would assume an anti-rhetorical and anti-heroic stance from the 1960s onward. See Luigi Meneghello, *I piccoli maestri* (Milan, Italy: Rizzoli, 1964); and Beppe Fenoglio, *Il partigiano Johnny* (Turin: Einaudi, 1968).

65. Italo Calvino, *The Path to the Spiders' Nest*, trans. by A. Colquhoun, revised by M. Mc Laughlin (London: Jonathan Cape, 1988), pp. 140–141.

society was inevitable, Communists were supposed to act directly and enthusiastically for the good of humanity. The only way to redeem society was through an act of will: by being willing to sacrifice everything at the altar of the all-absorbing grand endeavor. Through sustained sacrifice—first in war against the forces of Fascism; then in peace engulfed in a world of capitalism—Communists were inclined to see themselves as a new variety of human being. Oral history interviews collected many decades later, as well as the autobiographies written by militants, reveal that, for them, joining the party meant crossing the threshold into a superior state of brotherhood.⁶⁶ As Chiara Sereni, the daughter of Communist leader Emilio Sereni, later wrote, to be Communist meant to beat back the “gray,” to rub out the “old Adam” and become a “new man.”⁶⁷

The Communist as Friend

Although Catholic authorities and Christian Democrats had some success in portraying Communists as a dark force in political life, within the larger political culture of postwar Italy the meaning of Communism—the emotions it engendered and the hopes it ignited—was a contested matter. In the minds of many, Stalinism and Communism were benevolent forces. For example, in 1952 a young Gillo Pontecorvo—who later became famous for his direction of *La battaglia di Algeri* (The Battle of Algiers, 1966)—narrated the story of the generous assistance Moscow provided to Polesine, the area around the Po River delta, which was struck by a devastating flood in November 1951. Funded by the Italian labor unions and the PCI, Pontecorvo’s first effort presented the Soviet Union as a “great friend of the people” and a champion of anti-fascism.⁶⁸ Pontecorvo’s documentary resonated with many, as millions of Italian Communists had looked to the Soviet Union as a beacon of hope even

66. See, for example, Boarelli, *La fabbrica del passato*, pp. 89–95; and Onnis, “La gioia di essere e il sacrificio di vivere,” pp. 105, 111–116. Communist autobiographical narratives and oral testimonies are usually organized around the principle of the quasi-biological predestination of being Communist. See, for example, the memoirs of Antonio Roasio, *Figlio della classe operaia* (Milan: Vangelista, 1977), p. 5.

67. Chiara Sereni, *Il gioco dei regni* (Florence: Giunti, 2000), pp. 348–349. On the militants’ pretension to devise and build a new human being, see also Ballone, “Una sezione, un paese,” p. 449.

68. *The Timiriazev Mission*, shooting directed by Gillo Pontecorvo, 24 min., 1952, in Audiovisual Archive of the Workers’ Democratic Movement (AAMOD). A film entitled *Dopo la tempesta* (After the storm) produced by the DC portrays the “solidarity between free nations” in favor of Polesine but makes no mention of Soviet help. *Dopo la tempesta*, 10 min., 1953, in Archivio Audiovisivo della Democrazia Cristiana (AADC).

before the flood. In the revolutionary writings of the PCI, “class liberation,” the “proletarian uprising,” and the “revolutionary struggle” were understood as historical processes that did not need to arise—in fact, never could—from within Italy. Instead, the revolution would be ushered in by Stalin’s tanks.

The experience of World War II had transformed Italian attitudes toward Stalin, Communism, and the Soviet Union, giving rise to such sentiments. From the perspective of millions of Italians in 1942, the loudest critics of Mussolini were Communists living abroad. Even more important, the primary threat to the existence of Fascism came from the Red Army. With the Battle of Stalingrad (August 1942–February 1943), where the Germans and their Italian allies suffered their most decisive defeat, the cause of Italian Communism received its greatest boost.⁶⁹ In their yearning for the end of censure and persecution, in their celebration of Mussolini’s ignominious defeat, in their abandonment of tradition, and in their search for a new and more just political order was born the myth of Stalin. One would look in vain for a synthesized political philosophy or a coherent articulation of Marxist principles at the heart of this veneration, however. These new believers, after all, were frequently illiterate. Some were devout Catholics, and many had been apolitical or were even former Fascists. The catastrophic results of Stalingrad tolled the death knell for Il Duce and his lieutenants, and this was a prospect many Italians by then desperately desired. For millions who entered the Communist ranks from 1943 to 1946, Stalinism was opaque and obscure, but it represented antifascism and the future. Their political migration was due less to a turn of mind than to a change in that subtler organ, the heart.

Reinforcing the myth of Stalin, the assistance Moscow provided to the victims of the 1951 flood was abetted by the documentarian efforts of Pontecorvo, whose film celebrates the camaraderie of Italians and Soviets, forged by their mutual victimization at the hand of the Nazi oppressors. As the narrator observes toward the end of the film:

Crimean sailors and Genoan workers understand each other perfectly. They even share common stories. Eight years ago, in Western as well as in Eastern Europe, the same battle was fought to kick the German invaders out of our own Land.⁷⁰

69. For a powerful echo of the myth of the Red Army and Stalingrad among Communists, see Danilo Montaldi, *Militanti politici di base* (Turin: Einaudi, 1971), pp. 214, 276, 338; and Boarelli, *La fabbrica del passato*, pp. 60–62.

70. See also the 1964 movie *Italiani, brava gente*, directed by Communist Giuseppe De Santis. The movie—a Russo-Italian coproduction titled *Attack and Retreat* in English and *Oni sbli na Vostok* in Russian—focuses on Italian troops fighting on the Eastern Front. A solidarity war epic, the work hinges on the plot device of Italians and Soviets forming a united front against their one-time ally, the Germans.

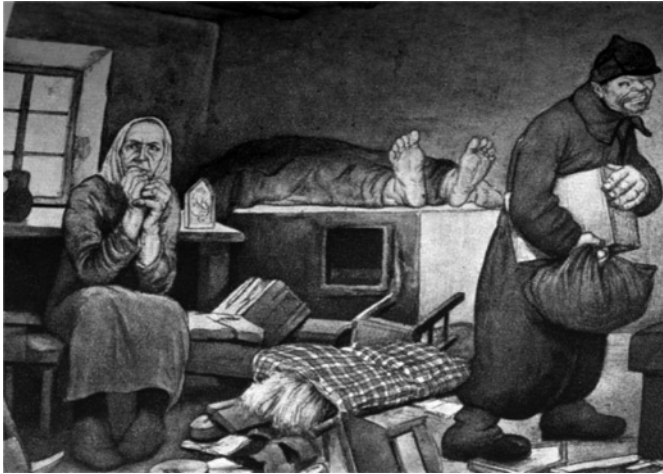
The reality was, however, very different. Beginning in July 1942, with the Germans advancing hundreds of kilometers a day, Mussolini sent Italian troops to the USSR in an attempt to ensure that Fascist Italy would share in what appeared to be the spoils of an impending victory. Less than six months later, the Soviet Red Army severed the Italian lines at Stalingrad. Defeated, the Italian Army in Russia (ARMIR) suffered enormous casualties and was forced to retreat.

That Pontecorvo's documentary inspired a large following and succeeded in garnering considerable acclaim is voluble testimony to the power of the Stalin myth. But the power of this myth should not be overstated. Alongside the sympathetic Communist portrayal existed a powerful counternarrative, one first formulated by the Fascists but later embraced, albeit in an altered form, by Christian Democrats and Catholic propaganda in 1948. This narrative painted Soviet citizens in the darkest, most sinister pigments and in the broadest of negative strokes.

Recent scholarship has provided a great deal of compelling evidence—derived from war diaries, mail censorship reports, letters from the front, and other contemporary sources—that the Soviet population was described in terms strikingly similar to those used in Nazi sources. Time and again, Soviet citizens were characterized as “repulsive,” “filthy people,” and “more like beasts than humans.” Such depictions suggest that Fascist propaganda, comfortably dismissed after 1943 as ineffectual, provided the enduring categories through which large numbers of Italian soldiers perceived anyone from the USSR—and this prehistory of Fascist visual representation of Communism returned in postwar Catholic and Christian Democratic propaganda.⁷¹ The influence of the Roman Catholic Church was also evident in the letters soldiers sent home affirming God's partisanship in the anti-Soviet crusade: “[on] one side stands Christianity, and on the other Jewry.”⁷² As Marla Stone has

71. On the Fascists' racial propaganda, see Aaron Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy* (London: Routledge, 2002). On the continuity between Fascist and 1948 Catholic propaganda, see Luciano Cheles, “Picture Battle in Piazza: The Political Poster,” in Luciano Cheles and Lucio Sponza, eds., *The Art of Persuasion: Political Communication in Italy from 1945 to the 1990s* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 131. This is hardly surprising given that not only had many of the artists who designed the posters for the Civic Committees worked for the Fascist regime, but the Christian Democrats were addressing the same masses who, only a few years earlier, had endorsed the campaign for the purity of the race. See also Mirco Dondi, “The Fascist Mentality after Fascism,” in Richard J. B. Bosworth and Patrizia Dogliani, eds., *Italian Fascism: History, Memory and Representation* (London, UK: MacMillan, 1999), pp. 144–160.

72. Thomas Schlemmer, ed., *Die Italiener und der Ostfront 1942–43: Dokumente zu Mussolinis Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005); and Alessandro Massignani, *Alpini e Tedeschi sul Don: Documenti e testimonianze sulla ritirata del Corpo d'armata alpino e del XXIV Panzerkorps germanico in Russia nel gennaio 1943* (Novale di Valdagno, Italy: Rossato, 1991).



Ezio Castellucci, *Requisition* (1942).

Source: *Prima mostra degli artisti italiani in armi: Catalogo* (Rome: Stato Maggiore del Regio Esercito, Ufficio Propaganda 1942), p. 26. © Istituto Storico e di Cultura dell'Arma del Genio.

insightfully shown, “Ezio Castellucci, painter and captain in the Italian Expeditionary Forces on the Eastern Front, gave aesthetic form to ideas about Communist/Russian degeneracy.” In a series of ink drawings, Stone continues, “Castellucci renders the soldiers of the Red Army,” as well as “Russian women and children” as “sub-human, animal-like apparitions” in “an unfor-giving landscape of deprivation and violence.” In *Requisizione* (Requisition, 1942), Stone further explains, “he depicts a Red Army soldier pillaging the hut of a terrified peasant woman.” Thus, “surrounded by the furniture he has ransacked, the soldier heads for the door.” “The peasant woman,” Stone continues in her dense and convincing analysis, “cowers next to an icon of the Virgin, which, though small, is rendered the central object in the room.” She explains: “The ghoulish, smirking soldier appears threatening to the viewer, while the peasant woman looks sadly in the other direction.” Stone then adds: “between them is a covered corpse,” perhaps “the woman’s murdered husband.” Thus, Stone concludes: “The soldier, with his pointy ears,” his “sunken” face, and his “beady eyes” is essentially a “demonic” apparition.⁷³

73. Marla Stone, “The Changing Face of the Enemy in Fascist Italy,” *Constellations*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2008), pp. 332–350.

The Communist Next Door

In the postwar period, films were important weapons in the arsenal of Italy's Communists. Although directors such as Pontecorvo used film to celebrate the benevolence of the Soviet Union, others such as Carlo Lizzani, Giuseppe De Santis, and Aldo Vergani used cinema for a different purpose. Under their careful oversight, movies emphasized the connection between Italian Communists and the larger *popolo*, as well as between the Communist Party and the Italian past. For example, Lizzani's *Modena, una città dell'Emilia Rossa* (Modena: A city of the Red Emilia, 1950) lauds the achievements of the Communist-led government in Modena. Through the voice of the narrator, contemporary Modena—under the control of its local PCI committee—is depicted as the progeny of many fathers: from imperial Rome and the city-state of the medieval era to the thriving communities of the Renaissance and the patriots who embraced the Risorgimento in the nineteenth century and the anti-Fascist Resistance in the 1940s. Although implicit, Lizzani's message was obvious: Communism in Modena, and presumably in other parts of Italy, was the offspring—indeed, the culmination—of Italian sensibilities, Italian culture, Italian ingenuity, and Italian history.⁷⁴ Despite its transalpine roots, this vast international movement of human redemption bore the unmistakable stamp of Italianization.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Modena was widely known as a city with a radical working class movement. Accordingly, anti-Communists depicted it as a city ravaged by civil strife even after liberation. According to this narrative, Communists had filled the trenches with the bodies of collaborators, priests, and landowners. This urban legend was lurid and tactical, but the Right's portrayal of Modena as a city torn by ideological division was not without merit. In 1948 and 1949, a wave of political and social protest swept across the city. In 1950 six factory workers—all of them Communists—were killed by the police. These events, however, are entirely absent from the film, as the director tried to reassure the audience that Modena was a city on the rise, well governed, civic-spirited, proud of its long tradition, and fully at ease with the modern world.⁷⁵

74. *Modena, una città dell'Emilia*, dir. by Carlo Lizzani, 26 min., 1950, in AAMOD.

75. We get an inkling of possible trouble in another Lizzani film, *I fatti di Modena*, 6 min., 1950, in AAMOD. On the ability of the Communist councils to implement policies aimed at promoting working-class interests against the wishes of the less sympathetic national government, see Rosario Forlenza, "The Italian Communist Party, Local Government and the Cold War," *Modern Italy*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (May 2010), pp. 177–196. In the anti-Communist propaganda, towns and cities led by

Surprisingly, *Modena, una città dell'Emilia Rossa* was not seriously influenced by neorealism. Instead it adopted a rhetorical style that echoes both the Fascist newsreels and the stylistic excesses of socialist-realist cinema. Individuals, therefore, are never dissociated from collective images and celebrations. Stripped of their particularity, citizens are categorized as part of a socially and culturally identifiable group—a united brotherhood that is solid, serene, settled, and disciplined. This brotherhood, of course, is the Communist Party as it sought to celebrate the advent of Socialism.⁷⁶

The Communists' efforts to depict themselves as Italians—indeed, as the best of the Italians—while striking, might not have been necessary because Italian Communists in postwar Italy truly *were* Italian. They had the same cultural background, the same popular traditions, the same customs, hopes, morality, prejudices, and behaviors, and often the same religious outlook as other Italians. Whatever might be asserted, Italian Communists and Catholics were one people. As the anthropological work of Liliana Lanzardo has confirmed, the typical citizen in the Communist stronghold of Borgo San Paolo (Turin) was monogamous, hard-working, unselfish, prudent, diligent, moderate, generous, bashful, and shy of hanging out at the traditional wine bars (*osteria*). These Italians might have been radical in their politics, but their lifestyle was perfectly bourgeois.⁷⁷

Other anthropological research and historical reconstructions—on different regions and towns, in periods from the late 1940s to the 1980s—point in the same direction.⁷⁸ True, the realm of propaganda and ideology seemed torn apart by irreconcilable antithesis and by fierce and brutal contrasts. Yet, the

Communists were depicted as a world upside down. See, for example, the propaganda film *Accadde a sopradisotto*, DC, 12 min., 1951, in AADC.

76. One can glimpse the party, while it awaits the coming of Socialism and in the meantime commits to the work it has yet to do, in *Uno sciopero a rovescio* [Reserved strike], PCI, 3 min., 1951, in AAMOD. In this rough piece of film shot in the Frusinate (a few miles south of Rome), a community of villagers defy government authority and build a desperately needed road with pickaxes and shovels during a holiday.

77. Lanzardo, *Personalità operaia e coscienza di classe*. See also Giovanni De Luna, "A Torino durante la guerra . . . Le coordinate dell'esistenza collettiva," in Anna Bravo, ed., *Donne e uomini nelle guerra mondiali* (Turin: Laterza, 2008), esp. pp. 76–77. In the same area, for the interwar years, see "Cultura operaia e vita quotidiana in Borgo San Paolo," in Giovanni Bertolo, ed., *Torino tra le due Guerre*, exh. cat. (Turin: Musei Civici, 1978), pp. 2–45, 272–279.

78. Liliano Faenza, *Cattolici e comunisti in una parrocchia di campagna* (Feltrinelli, Italy: Milano, 1959); David I. Kertzer, *Comrades and Christian: Religion and Political Struggle in Communist Italy* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Caroline White, *Patrons and Partisans: A Study of Politics in Two Southern Italian Comuni* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Luciano Li Causi, *Il partito a noi ci ha dato! Antropologia politica di una sezione comunista senese nel dopoguerra* (Siena, Italy: Laboratorio Etnoantropologico, 1993); and Sandro Bellasai, *La morale comunista: Pubblico e privato nella rappresentazione del PCI 1947–1957* (Rome: Carocci, 2000).

realities of private life, personal behavior, and individual choice suggest the existence of a “gray” area in which the intense ideological hues faded away. Catholic and traditional moral values were deeply rooted and flourished in the whole fabric of Italian society and thus also among PCI members. Communists might have been—and in fact claimed to be—anti-clerical and hostile to the Vatican’s financial and political structure, but many professed Catholicism or Christian beliefs and followed religious rituals and practices such as baptism for their children. Both within the PCI and across the entirety of Italian popular culture, the political myth of Christ as revolutionary and as “the First Socialist” was strong—a myth propagated at the end of the nineteenth century by the socialist “preacher” Camillo Prampolini (1859–1930), founder of “evangelical socialism.”⁷⁹

With few exceptions—exceptions confined to a narrow circle of leaders and “progressive” and revolutionary intellectuals—Communists’ attitudes toward family, sexuality, marriage, and the role of the individual in society were hardly distinguishable from the attitudes of their Catholic counterparts.⁸⁰ Both Catholics and Communists feared the most disturbing and unsettling effects of modernity and social, economic, and cultural modernization. In a letter sent to the PCI weekly publication *Vie nuove*, a militant anxiously wrote, “We have heard that in the country of Socialism [i.e., the Soviet Union] women do traditional and typical male jobs such as ship captains, miners, etc. Don’t you think this is pushing too far the project of equality between woman and man?”⁸¹ The presumed superiority of men over women was barely discussed by Italian Communists. Women could be considered “mere objects” or “sheer instruments of pleasure,” as one Italian Communist wrote in his 1951 autobiography.⁸² Another militant naively confessed that he did not believe

79. One of Prampolini’s best-known speeches is the so-called Christmas speech. Camillo Prampolini, “La predica di Natale,” *La Giustizia*, 24–25 December 1897. See also Stefano Pivato, *Clericalismo e laicismo nella cultura popolare italiana* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1990), pp. 66–119; Arnaldo Nesti, “Gesù socialista”: *Una tradizione popolare italiana* (Turin: Ed. Claudiana, 1974); and Boarelli, *La fabbrica del passato*, pp. 54–60.

80. Maria Casalini, *Famiglie comuniste. Ideologia e vita quotidiana nell’Italia degli anni Cinquanta* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2010); and Bellasai, *La morale comunista*, pp. 115–200.

81. “Donne socialiste e lavori pesanti,” *Vie nuove risponde* (Rome: Editoriale Vie Nuove, 1953), p. 212. On Communists and gender identity and the relationship between genders in Cold War Italy, see Bellasai, *La morale comunista*, pp. 201–319.

82. Autobiography no. 155, in Fondazione Istituto Gramsci Emilia Romagna, *Autobiografie dei militanti del Partito Comunista Italiano di Bologna e provincia, 1945–1958*. The Communist press denounced the bleak and backward condition of women not only in the south but also in the “advanced” and “Red” countryside of Emilia. See Domenico Rea, “La donna salva,” *Noi donne*, No. 46 (19 November 1950), p. 5; Felice Chilanti, “Il primo amore delle fanciulle del Sud,” *Noi donne*, No. 27 (4 July 1954), p. 7; and Giuliana Dal Pozzo, “Le donne che non siedono a tavola,” *Noi donne*,

in what he himself proclaimed in his role as a party propagandist and activist when affirming that men and women must have equal rights.⁸³

The undeniable reality of the Italian-ness of Communist Party members, and the need to demonize former allies in the battle against Fascism, prompted Christian Democrats, Catholics, and other anti-Communist forces to manufacture new imagery. The stereotype of the unknown barbarian descending from Eastern wastelands no longer sufficed. The new challenge was how one could go about presenting Communism as an alien threat to Italy when PCI members were so well integrated into the Italian way of life.

The propaganda film *La strategia della menzogna* (The Strategy of the Lie)—produced by the Civic Committees in the run-up to the 1948 elections—broke new ground in the burgeoning anti-Communist campaign.⁸⁴ Instead of relying on stereotypes that portrayed Communists as barbarous outsiders, the new strategy presented Communist leaders as fast-talking demagogues bent on manipulating the “credulous” masses. These leaders, as shown in the film, engage in manipulation by contrasting the misery of the people with the opulence of capitalists. A predictable sequence of events ensues. First the worker obeys the Communists and goes out on strike; then the local economy becomes paralyzed; and finally turmoil and civil strife descend on the city. At the end of the film, the narrator observes how the crowds at Communist meetings are “eternally deceived,” and he draws a not-so-subtle comparison between the Fascist supporters of Mussolini and the followers of the PCI’s Palmiro Togliatti.

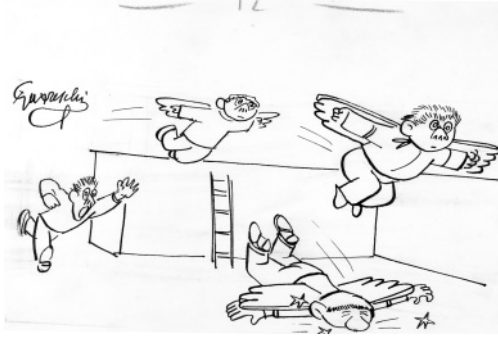
The comparison between Communism and Fascism, and the portrayal of Communists as easily manipulated dupes gained popularity in postwar Italy.⁸⁵ Contributing to this set-up was the writer Giovanni Guareschi, who produced

No. 4 (23 January 1955), p. 6. In letters sent to Communist journals and publications, women often complained about their “Red” husbands, who allegedly were “extremely jealous” and “possessive,” “selfish” like a capitalist, and petty-minded. Communist men were also accused of treating their wives as “scapegoats” for their problems and of thinking that the ideal wife was one to be kept in a constant state of subjugation, both physical and intellectual. See Giuliana Dal Pozzo, “Mio marito sarebbe l’ideale se . . .” *Noi donne*, No. 46 (21 November 1954), pp. 16–17; Antonietta, “Signora Maria, ha cinque minuti di tempo? Al marito della signora Maria . . .,” *Noi donne*, No. 10 (7 March 1954), p. 3; and “Confidatevi con Paola, incomprensione maschile,” *Vie nuove*, No. 33 (23 August 1953), p. 24.

83. See Boarelli, *La fabbrica del passato*, pp. 168–169.

84. *La strategia della menzogna*, Comitato Civico Nazionale, 9.5 min., 1948, in Fondazione Ugo Spirito, Archivio Storico, Fondo Comitati Civici, No. 4.

85. The overlap between Nazism (and Fascism) and Communism and the link between them under the usefully elastic term “totalitarianism” or the label of “Red Fascism” was common to anti-Communist propaganda everywhere. See Les K. Adler and Thomas G. Paterson, “Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the America Image of Totalitarianism, 1930s–1950s,” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 75, No. 4 (April 1970), pp. 1046–1064.



Giovanni Guareschi, *Blind, Willing, and Absolute Obedience* (1948). The caption reads: “Countermand that, men! The sentence published in *l’Unità*: ‘The comrades who do not fly are traitors,’ should be really read: ‘The comrades who do not *vote* are traitors.’” [N.B.: *Fly* – *Vote* in Italian are *Volano* – *Votano*]. From: *Candido*, 7 March 1948. Image Courtesy of Archivio Giovannino Guareschi, Roncole Verdi (PR). © Eredi di Giovannino Guareschi.

a steady stream of anti-Communist cartoons for the weekly periodical *Candido*.⁸⁶ Guareschi’s cartoons range in artistic style from mere doodles to more detailed drawings, but consistently his humor is sharp and direct. On some occasions, PCI members are portrayed as three-breasted women. More typical is his depiction of the Communist as a goofy-looking fellow with three nostrils.⁸⁷ The third nostril, as Guareschi explained, was the indispensable prerequisite for Communist militancy, for it allowed gray matter to ooze out of the brain, and simultaneously it provided party rhetoric with a gate of entrance.⁸⁸

In a similar vein, the young Federico Fellini—not yet the director of film masterpieces such as *Otto e mezzo* (8½, 1963) and *La dolce vita* (1960)—produced many satirical cartoons in the immediate aftermath of the war. In his popular series *I due compagni* (The Two Comrades), Fellini’s

86. From 1946 to 1960 Guareschi wrote hundreds of short stories set in a small, remote town where Catholics and Communists and their leaders—the Catholic priest *don Camillo* and the Communist mayor *Peppone* (which roughly translates as “Big Joe”)—are constantly at odds. The stories were turned into popular films. See Giovanni Guareschi, *Mondo Piccolo: Don Camillo* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1948); Giovanni Guareschi, *Mondo Piccolo: Don Camillo e il suo gregge* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1953); and Giovanni Guareschi, *Mondo Piccolo: Il compagno Don Camillo* (Milan: Rizzoli 1963). The first movie was *Don Camillo* (1952), directed by Julien Duvivier and included Gino Cervi (Peppone) and Fernandel (*don Camillo*).

87. The word *trinari-ciuti* (three-nostriled), Guareschi’s neologism, is widely used in current Italian language.

88. Giovanni Guareschi, *Mondo Candido 1946–1948* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1991), pp. 219–220.

I due Compagni



- Compagno, ma quella è mia moglie!
 - Compagno, sull'«Unità» non c'è scritto!
 - Compagno, hai ragione: tante scuse e Viva Togliatti!
- (Federico)

Federico Fellini, *The Two Comrades* (1946). The caption reads:

- Comrade, she is my wife!
- Comrade, *l'Unità* does not report it!
- Comrade, you are right: I am very sorry and hurrah to Togliatti!

Source: Angelo Olivieri, *Fellini Satyricon Politikon. Le vignette tra guerra e partiti* (Rome: Un mondo a parte, 2005), p. 66.

characters are little more than caricatures, a duo of moronic but likable buffoons who are completely dependent on the party press. They are incapable of judgment even when the truth is obvious.

This kind of representation persisted even after the start of the “Khrushchev Thaw” and the de-Stalinization campaign launched at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956. A film produced by the Christian Democrats in 1958 portrayed Communists as gullible and daft. The title of the film, *The Comrade Gnocco-Allocco*, plays with language.⁸⁹ Literally translated, *Gnocco-Allocco* means “Pasta-Bird,” but nearly every Italian would understand that this conveys qualities of naïveté, stupidity, or just plain folly. Thus, to the typical viewer, “Comrade Gnocco-Allocco” would mean something akin to “Comrade Silly-Gullible-Foolish.” Not surprisingly, the

89. *Il compagno Gnocco-Allocco*, DC, 12 min., 1958, in AADC.

protagonist, Signore Gnocco-Allocco, is a staunch Communist who, despite his sincerity, is wholly lacking in wisdom, understanding, and common sense. He is the electoral backbone of the PCI, the Italian equivalent of the “useful idiot.”⁹⁰

In the works of Fellini and Guareschi, and in the *Gnocco-Allocco* documentary produced by the DC, the use of humor and ridicule was a deliberate strategy that enabled the anti-Communists to portray their archenemy in harsh terms, but without seeming cruel. In contrast to the United States, where domestic Communism could be cast as wholly alien and un-American, the Italian situation was very different.⁹¹ In a country in which as many as one-third of the electorate—more than 8 million Italians in 1948—had cast their votes with the Popular Front, a thorough demonization was untenable. Just as untenable were the plans elaborated by the U.S. Psychological Strategy Board (established in 1951), which called for the Italian government (and the French) to undertake a series of measures aimed at “reducing the strength and the appeal” of Communists with the “ultimate objective of outlawing them.”⁹² Also untenable was the heated anti-Communist rhetoric offered by U.S. Ambassador Clare Boothe Luce in her attempt to remake the Italian political landscape.⁹³ By contrast, ridicule and humor enabled anti-Communists, Catholics, and Christian Democrats to dismiss Communists politically, while still recognizing their humanity.⁹⁴ To do otherwise would almost certainly have created an insurmountable discord within households, neighborhoods, and communes throughout Italy. Ridicule thus served as a social balm that mitigated the friction between clashing but constituent parts of Italy’s body politic.

90. The idea that Communism, like every ideological system, deprives people of individuality and robs them of their self-respect is conveyed in films of the early Cold War such as *Man on a Tightrope*, directed in 1953 by Elia Kazan.

91. Ellen Schrecker, “McCarthyism: Political Repression and the Fear of Communism,” *Social Research*, Vol. 71, No. 4 (Winter 2004), pp. 1041–1086; and Richard M. Fried, *The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming! Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold-War America* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press). On the Western—mainly U.S.—construction of enemy stereotypes, based on a mixture of popular psychology, advertising technique, and academic research, see Ron Robin, *The Making of the Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Industrial Complex* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

92. “French and Italian Elections,” 6 July 1951, in HSTL, Staff Member and Office File, Psychological Strategy Board File, Box 11, Folder 091.4; and “Remarks by the Department of State Member of the Psychological Strategy Board on the Psychological Strategy Plan for Reduction of Communist Power in Italy,” 2 February 1952, in NARA, RG 59, 62D333, Box 1, File PSB D-15.

93. Mario Del Pero, “American Pressures and Their Containment in Italy during the Ambassadorship of Clare Boothe Luce, 1953–1956,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (June 2004), pp. 407–439.

94. The strategy of humor and ridicule as a weapon in dealing with the enemy can be traced back to the tradition of the *commedia dell’arte*.

Conclusion

The Communist in Cold War Italy assumed many faces. At times he was the enemy or the courageous resistance fighter. On other occasions he was the three-nostril caricature. Sometimes he even represented the “best” among Italians. For all their differences, these competing representations sought to answer the same question haunting postwar Italy: How were Italians to make sense of their recent past and define themselves as a culture and a people in the present?

The search for order and the construction of a new identity, both for individuals and for the nation as a whole, took place in almost all West European countries after World War II but attained a special urgency in Italy.⁹⁵ Italy was the only country west of the Balkans in which World War II became a civil war. Italy was the only West European country in which sovereignty was contested internally—with competing governments, supported by their own armies, claiming legitimacy. On 25 July 1943, the Fascist regime had collapsed as a result of heavy casualties, economic crisis, food shortages, and the setbacks of the war. Forty-five days later, on 8 September, Marshal Pietro Badoglio announced over the radio that an armistice with the Allies had been signed five days earlier. Accordingly, he ordered the Italian armed forces to cease fighting the Allies, but he offered no other precise instructions. The announcement was followed by the precipitate flight from Rome of King Victor Emmanuel III, his family, and the military high command.

In the wake of the king’s ignominious exit, a void emerged in the leadership of Italy, as soldiers and civilians were left without clear military and political direction. Within days an army of more than a million men disintegrated, and hundreds of thousands of troops were rounded up by Germans and interned in concentration camps.⁹⁶ As the Anglo-American armies advanced from southern Italy into the German-occupied north, civil war broke out between the forces of Resistance and the forces of Fascism. From this condition emerged a situation of unprecedented uncertainty. The propagation of warfare into society pitted neighbor against neighbor and uprooted customary life through violence, material devastation, massacres, retaliation,

95. On the theme of Italian national identity in the immediate aftermath of World War II, see Emilio Gentile, *La Grande Italia: The Myth of the Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), pp. 211–335; Ernesto Galli della Loggia, *La morte della patria: La crisi dell’idea di nazione tra antifascismo, Resistenza e Repubblica* (Rome-Bari, Italy: Laterza, 2003); and Gian Enrico Rusconi, *Resistenza e postfascismo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1995).

96. Elena Aga-Rossi, *A Nation Collapses: The Italian Surrender of September 1943*, trans. by Harvey Ferguson II (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

and bombing. Torn by these pressures, the legal framework of the nation evaporated. Civilian life became a frontline experience, destroying patterns of trust and social consensus and undermining faith in elites and political authority. For almost everyone in Italy, the war produced great confusion and disorientation.⁹⁷

The construction of an ideological framework of authority through the images of Communism helped assuage deep uncertainty about the political and economic situation and the potentially disruptive consequences of the civil war. From the perspective of the average Italian citizen, the paramount threat to the nation was neither a violent Communist takeover nor a Fascist return to power. More than anything, Italians yearned for stability.⁹⁸ For Communists and anti-Communists alike, images of Communism armed an anxious population with the symbols and markers of certainty. For the supporters of the PCI, the image of the self-sacrificing Communist militant provided Italians with the assurance that, despite obstacles, they could ultimately prevail. By contrast, for anti-Communists, Catholics, Christian Democrats, and other conservative forces, the image of the Communist barbarian who threatened the very existence of freedom, religion, and superior civilization offered patriotic Italians a sense of clarity by providing a coherent vision of the battles to be fought and the enemies to be overcome.

During the civil war, Communists, Catholics, and some conservative forces fought arm- in-arm against Fascism. Identity was taken for granted. One was either Fascist or anti-Fascist, and as a consequence it did not matter much whether a person identified as a “Communist” or a “Catholic” or a “Christian Democrat.” Because the battle lines were clear (at least in retrospect), neither Communists nor Conservatives nor Catholic partisans needed to think hard about the nature of their cause. With the eventual demise of Fascism and the end of the war, however, Communists and anti-Communists confronted a very different situation. They needed to offer a plan

97. For testimonies, memories, and historical reconstructions, see Enrico Emanuelli, *Teatro personale* (Milan: Muggiani, 1945), pp. 55–56; Gabriella Gribaudo, *Guerra totale: Tra bombe alleate e violente naziste: Napoli e fronte meridionale 1940–1944* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2005), 311–328; Giulio Guderzo, *L'altra guerra: Neofascisti, tedeschi, partigiani, popolo in una provincia padana: Pavia, 1943–1945* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), pp. 1–80; and Rosario Forlenza, “Bewilderment and Re-composition: September 8, 1943 and the Liminal Origins of Italian Democracy,” *International Political Anthropology*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2011), pp. 133–157.

98. The Italian desire for stability after years of turmoil, and yet also for renewal, and the ability of Christian Democrats to meet and cherish the hopes and fears of Italians are powerfully assessed in Ennio Di Nolfo, *Le paure e le speranze degli italiani, 1943–1953* (Milan: Mondadori, 1986). See also Rosario Forlenza, “A Party for the Mezzogiorno: The Christian Democratic Party, Agrarian Reform, and the Government of Italy,” *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2010), pp. 331–349.

for stability that was simultaneously compatible with their earlier ideological commitments. Thus, two opposite stereotypes came to occupy the symbolic worldview of Italians: that of Communists as a menace to Italian values; and, conversely, that of Communists as selfless promulgators of a new, stable order rooted in social justice. For both images the opponent was indispensable to achieving full identity—an identity whose coalescence had been stalled when the anti-Fascist alliance against the common enemy had broken apart. Each party needed the other to serve as a straw man—or as an oppositional marker of certainty around which its own identity could be constructed.

In the late 1940s and the 1950s, depictions of Communists reflected a Manichaean conflict between good and evil.⁹⁹ From the political left, Communists portrayed their enemies as champions of the oppressive hydra of capitalism, Fascism, and clericalism. From the standpoint of the Christian Democrats and Catholics, as well as other anti-Communists, the enemy wanted an all-out assault on religion, private property, and the family. In this propaganda war, both the enemies of the Communists and the Communists themselves employed a visual grammar deeply rooted in Italians' cultural memory and expressed through centuries in folk and religious art. At a time when the old markers of certainty had dissolved and the durability of the Italian polity seemed tenuous, images of Communism—a synthesis of old and new—provided reassurance. By invoking tacit knowledge and using familiar symbols, these new images helped to craft a new narrative that made sense of the turbulent world Italians were confronting and, more importantly, provided a road map that would enable them to escape their tragic history and enter a new world.

The representations and case studies analyzed in this article are meant to highlight the unique and compelling character of the political, cultural, and symbolic battle over Communism that was waged in postwar Italy. The discussion here helps to explain why the Cold War in Italy was so peculiarly intense and why the basic split engendered by Stalinism had such a remarkable persistence. Communists and anti-Communists alike forged an image of Communism as a political entity. This representation, however, incorporated stark images, the pre-political repertoire of recurrent archetypal symbols, the lexicon of civil war language, and the legacy of Fascist mentality and propaganda. Symbolic, mythical, and cultural elements from various sources were fused

99. For the “spiritual” dimension of the Cold War, see Abbot Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 72–88; Stephen Rossbach, *Gnostic Wars: The Cold War in the Context of a History of Western Spirituality* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

with contemporary political ideology to create a special visual language and appealing rhetoric to facilitate the seizure of power, the seizure of meaning, the transformation of popular attitudes and beliefs toward elite and political authority, the reconstruction of patterns of trust and social consensus, the redefinition of social values, and the creation of a new mystique. In a formative and transformative moment for the political imagination of Italians—when the civil war had challenged old ways of comprehending the world and aroused profound uncertainty over the meaning of the past, present, and future—symbols, languages, rituals, and visual imagery introduced by Communists and anti-Communists infused the political community with new meanings, cast new meaning on the experience undergone by individuals and groups, affected people's worldviews, and fostered the formation of bloc identities.

Thus, even when traditional Cold War culture and international conflicts were losing their grasp and agency, a political imagination centered on the opposition between Communism and anti-Communism exerted a visible influence and was preserved in Italian political culture long after that opposition had become obsolete. The depiction of Communism in postwar Italy was not an adjunct to diplomacy or political and military affairs but a critical determinant of the Cold War, a paramount factor in shaping the meaning of the conflict and the deep character of Italian politics and culture until the opening of the Berlin Wall and well beyond.