

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature Review**

The rationale for this project lies in its local, grass-roots, case-specific comparative approach that takes for its focus reactions to a particular historical event, that is to say, in its *distinctiveness*. The principal resources exploited for the research are primary sources in the form of oral and written documents. Nevertheless, background reading included, naturally, the work of numerous authors who have addressed some of the central themes of the project and theoretical aspects of its methodology. For reasons of space, a selection of these works is presented here, and each work discussed as it relates to these themes and issues that include: the histories of the PCF / PCI, their ideological underpinnings, organisational nature, post-war roles, orientations and strategies at national and international levels; the parties at regional and local levels with regard to specific functions or areas of activity; post-war trends and phenomena such as the relatively smooth resurgence in France and Italy of conservative forces, and decolonisation; the place and role of oral evidence in qualitative research; memory as a cultural and political construct; myths; the role, purpose and practice of micro history; and global or transnational history. Featuring prominently on this list are articles, books or sections in books that have been published (or reedited) within the last fifteen years. That is not to say that earlier works have been discounted (indeed certain works that were written for example in and around our period for example are particularly germane, whilst others produced over subsequent decades are still regarded as key reference texts). The reason for this choice was rather to ensure that the research benefit from more recent historiography and thus be better placed to make an informed and authoritative contribution to the field of comparative communism.

#### **2.0 PCF / PCI**

The publication of works that address the PCF and PCI either in their own rights or in apposition dates predominantly, and significantly, from 1956 - the XX Congress of the CPSU in February that year having been the catalyst; followed by a surge in

publications during the 1970s coinciding with the interest in Eurocommunism; and those that contribute to the post-communist study of communism as a twentieth century phenomenon.

Amongst those to have written in length and detail on either the PCF or the PCI respectively, or their post-war leaders, or exclusively on the respective parties' responses to the events in question, are Tony Abse, Joan Barth Urban, Donald Blackmer, Francois Fejtö, Sarolta Klej'nsky, Anna Kriegel and Donald Sassoon. Several themes and issues addressed and observations made by these authors in these comprehensive and incisive analyses have emerged as grounded theory or have been challenged in context during the course of this research. Sarolta Kleja'nsky for example talks of the shock experienced by communists in the West at news of the riots in Poland <sup>1</sup> in June and in particular the uprisings in Hungary in the autumn of that year, given the perpetually glowing reports on conditions in these and indeed all Eastern bloc countries that customarily appeared in the communist press and its allied publications: 'In the West the levels of shock were equal to the levels of glorification these 'people's democracies' had been subject to on the part of the communist press and its affiliates in previous years,' (2007, p. 95). During the course of the current project this feeling of disorientation was described time and time again by informants in both locations as they recalled their experiences of this time and their reactions on learning of those events. Archival evidence, and in particular that obtained in localised searches, <sup>2</sup> also bears testament to these distinctly propagandist representations of events that naturally influenced the responses to them within our two communities (see Chapters 6, 7, 8).

Although party specific these works invariably, inevitably, make comparisons between the French and Italian Communist Parties at some point, owing to the fact that these two organisations were the two largest and most influential non-ruling

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of this study, whilst informants' reactions to the interventions in Poznan in June appear to have been of secondary importance compared with those to events in Budapest, the shock and disbelief at the reports of conditions for workers in Poland was the same (see Chapter 6).

<sup>2</sup> E.g. local communist press and Police Intelligence documents in the French study, party and party affiliated literature in French and / or Italian study.

communist parties in the post-war period and central therefore not only to national and international politics but to the international communist movement itself.<sup>3</sup> This state of affairs automatically implies and indeed calls for comparisons and contrasts to be made between the two entities, as events and conditions are interpreted in their wider contexts. One such example is that made by Joan Barth Urban in describing the ideological differences between the two parties that had come about partly because of dissimilar historical trajectories, and which were visible at the Liberation:

‘ .... the character of the PCI in the mid-1940s differed substantially from that of the French Communist Party. The PCF’s success during the Popular Front years .... led to the formation of a large body of working-class cadres drilled in democratic centralism and steeped in the 1930s’ brand of Soviet Marxist-Leninism .... In the case of the PCI, however, the pro-Sovietism of the base was initially a more emotional and spontaneous phenomenon that found only a faint reflection in the official party line ...’, (Urban, 1986, pp. 189-90).<sup>4</sup>

### **Comparative Studies**

There are of course those who have set out to make explicit comparisons between these two parties - *les frères ennemis* - and leading contributors to this body of literature include: Donald Blackmer & Sidney Tarrow, Thomas Greene, R. E. M. Irving, Anna Kriegel, George Lavau, Marc Lazar, David McLellan and Donald Sassoon. However, at the core of all comparisons made either in party specific or comparative studies, lies the contention that there were inherent ideological and

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<sup>3</sup> The other two largest non-ruling Communist Parties were the Spanish and West German parties however the post-war Spanish Communist Party was firmly contained in opposition by the Franco regime and Cold War rendered the West German Communist Party a minor player in Western communism, and was indeed banned in August 1956.

<sup>4</sup> With regard to the PCF, this evaluation is largely substantiated by the findings of this research, although this does not mean that at the local level there were not dissonances in the understandings of communist militantism (see Chapters 4, 8). With regard to the PCI, what has emerged from this research is indeed evidence of there having been an emotional and spontaneous pro-Sovietism that infused the Communist Party in Monfalcone and Venezia-Giulia as a whole in the immediate post-war period as *those communists especially who had suffered the consequences of the Fascist regime*, which included violent repression by the secret police, being sentenced by Special Tribunals to internal exile, voluntary expatriation or imprisonment. Nevertheless a pro-Soviet stance was not restricted to the base of the party, and despite this particular perspective’s not being reflected in the national party line during the late 40s and 50s, it never went away completely in the party in this region due to specific issues, conditions and influences (see Chapters 4-8).

political differences between these two parties that became increasingly marked during the post-war period i.e. that the PCF was essentially an orthodox, Leninist – Bolshevik <sup>5</sup> organisation closely attuned to Soviet interests with a natural centrist tendency and selective recruitment policies; as opposed to the PCI that was a relatively moderate, progressive, autonomous body with a flexible organisational infra-structure designed to create a mass membership. As Blackmer and Tarrow suggest:

‘The *Parti Comuniste Français* (PCF) had always appeared to most observers more dogmatic, more sectarian, more closely tied to the industrial working class, more dependent on the Soviet Union, in sum, less open than the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI) to the pressures and influences of the bourgeois society surrounding it,’ (Blackmer & Tarrow, 1977, p.6). <sup>6</sup>

The testing of this proposition in relation to the ways in which and extents to which national party positions impacted on the party federations at regional and local levels, is an integral aspect of and constant thread running through this project. Reasons for these respective conditions are examined in the literature and include:

- ideological heritage dating back as far as the French Revolution or to the Risorgimento; each countries’ route to and conception of the ‘Republic’
- the Jacobin centralist, prescriptive, highly organised, highly disciplined tradition as opposed to the fragmented Mazzini / Cavour interpretations of nationalism that ultimately resulted in a practical confederationist, liberal constitutionalism

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<sup>5</sup> Positions and interpretations inscribed in these political tendencies were the theoretical analysis of (‘Leninist’), and the practice of or movement for (‘Bolshevik’), socialist revolution (Bottomore, 1983, pp. 51-3).

<sup>6</sup> The historical contrast theory does appear to be born out in examining the national parties’ reactions to many of the key issues and events of the post-war period. For example, Thomas Greene reminds us that at the time of their joint expulsion from government, ‘In comparison with the PCF, the Italian Communist Party was much more reluctant to implement the wholesale wrecking plans proposed in 1947 by the Cominform,’ (Greene, 1968, p. 3). And on a more deep-seated level he points to the difference in the way in which the two parties responded to the post-war rise in living standards for the majority; the PCI in accordance with a ‘Gramscian’ analyses of neo-capitalism and the need to *work with* and not *against* this phenomenon by creating a working class ‘common sense’ to counter the bourgeois cultural hegemony implicit in it; and the PCF, by protest, agitation, and harsh confrontation (Greene, 1968, p. 3).

- national history and identity and the role this played in the parties' self-awareness and direction as political entities
- the ideas and influence on communist ideology of the ideas of Antonio Gramsci drawing aspects of Benedetto Croce's cultural liberalism<sup>7</sup>
- the importance and significance of the parties for both Moscow and Washington, and in the post-war decades in particular
- differing experiences of Fascism in France and in Italy and the implications of this for their respective post-war national consciousness and political orientations
- the engagement and position of intellectuals in or vis-à-vis the parties
- in the Italian study, the part that established authority played in the Party's fortunes post 1945
- and at the very disparate qualities and leadership styles of Maurice Thorez and Palmiro Togliatti.

The implications of a number of these larger issues are discussed in subsequent chapters *as they relate to the findings of this particular research project*.

The 'historical dichotomy' theory becomes less of a given in later comparative studies, some of which suggest that this paradigm is misconstrued, overstated, Marxist-oriented<sup>8</sup> and ultimately reductive. Stéphane Courtois, Cyrille Guiat, and Marc Lazar are amongst those to explore the notion that these essential political and ideological differences were simply the internal tensions present in all communist parties functioning in Western democracies, which Courtois and Lazar describe as the *teleological* and *national-societal* dimensions:

'The first is characterised by the attempt from the 'centre', Moscow, to impose homogeneity, cohesion and unity on the international communist movement; whilst the second is more marked by diversity resulting from

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<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the nearest equivalent to Gramscian thought in the context of French Marxism and as regards the question of human agency in particular, is that of Roger Garaudy's humanist critique. (Garaudy, 1970). (Croce, 1966).

<sup>8</sup> This ideological position coincides, amongst other things, with the post-modern aversion to meta-narratives (and in particular to the application of Marxist interpretations and analyses, as the meta-narrative *par excellence*). (Wellek, 1981).

the inevitable encounter a communist party has with a variety of social, cultural and political entities,' (Courtois & Lazar, 1999, pp. 17-18).

These normative and empirical dimensions and demands, they argue, coexisted to differing extents in Western European communist parties and vied for primacy at strategy and policy level at any one time according to situations and conditions. Therefore, they argue, there were overlaps between the PCF and the PCI in this regard, and consequently, the clear-cut contrast interpretation of these two parties is erroneous and as a result unhelpful. This trajectory of interpretive analyses can be explained by such factors as the focus placed on national-societal rather than on the teleological questions during the era of Eurocommunism and Polycentrism, but also by the fact that contemporary writers have applied more sophisticated readings to the problem due, in part, to newly available archival materials.<sup>9</sup>

Certainly, at national party levels, initial responses to the situation in Hungary were analogous in that both party leaderships saw the Soviet actions at that point as a necessary exercise in damage limitation:

‘As regards Hungary, the PCF leadership condemns the democratisation process responsible for the insurrection that erupted on 23<sup>rd</sup> October and the way in which the Hungarian Party responded – especially in reinstating Imre Nagy. In November, it supports compunction the Soviet intervention whilst it the Franco-British action in Suez,’ (Courtois & Lazar, 1995, p. 295).

‘Although, unlike the PCF, the Italian party abandoned its initial adherence to the Soviet hard-line interpretation of the Hungarian revolt as a counter-revolutionary putsch and cautiously referred to its popular nature and the error of the first intervention, Togliatti was soon constrained to give unconditional support to the second Soviet decision to intervene militarily,’ (Blackmer & Kriegel, 1975, p. 11).

The stances of the party leaderships converged and diverged at different moments at this time for different reasons, although what is evident is that their overriding objective was to present a united front. What is also clear is that however consistent the responses may have been regarding over-all support for Soviet actions at national party levels, things were not so straightforward at regional and local levels.

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<sup>9</sup> See Aga-Rossi & Zaslavsky, 1997.

In fact evidence from this research has revealed one instance in particular of flagrant deviation from the official party line (see Chapter 7.6).

There are also works, although markedly fewer, that include comparisons of the two parties' roles and functioning in regional and local contexts, and most notably amongst these is that of Donald Blackmer & Sidney Tarrow (1975). In the main, this compilation of essays and edited conference papers is based on empirical studies that address such things as aspects of strategic performance, party activists in public office, political legitimacy in local politics etc. in regional and local contexts. Although not recent, *this work relates to the current project in terms of its rationale*. An important justification for the work according to the editors, was that the existing historiography 'tended to treat "the party" as a monolithic structure, ignoring the significance of local and regional differences in composition and in implementation of party policies,' (Balckmer & Tarrow, 1975, p. 16). There was the need, they explain 'for a conceptually more sophisticated and empirically richer understanding' of things (Balckmer & Tarrow, 1975, p. 16). A similar and more contemporary project is that of Cyrille Guiat that looks at the cultural policies of the PCF and the PCI in two communist controlled municipalities from the 1960s to the 1980s (Guiat, 2003). Although in terms of subject matter this work does not relate directly to the current project, and although the periodisation is also is 'wrong', Guiat's focused comparative analysis relates to *Reactions ...* by way of its research design and methodological approach i.e. *it is a micro-political multiple case-study*. Guiat stresses that his structured comparative methodology centres on two carefully selected, representative municipal cases; and that common elements between the two that allow or imply comparisons are due to their being articulations of an overarching international movement functioning, in principle, according to universal precepts. Although the current project differs in that it applies a chronological / thematic approach as opposed to that of Guiat, which is topic-based, it similarly throws-up constant parallels between its two cases studies, laying bare constants and variables where they present.

Therefore existing works on French and Italian communism deal either with macro politics and political elites, or local communist party organisation, policies and strategies *per se* or in relation to a particular function / area of activity. *Reactions ...* seeks to fill a gap in the current knowledge base by placing the individual and collective reactions of ordinary communists at local and regional levels to what was a landmark event in international communism, within their wider national and international cultural and political contexts.

## **2.1 Cold War**

The cold war context is crucial to this study not only in relation to its tangible political effects at national levels as governments nailed their colours to the mast, but also in terms of the stark ideological choices and commitments it demanded of individuals at all levels of society and all levels of political engagement. This was an era of big ideas, of big ideologies, of big personalities; and an era in which nuance, complexity and equivocation were not easily accommodated and indeed in certain contexts not permitted. These conditions help to explain the reactions to the events in question. It is difficult to over-emphasise the importance of the cold war mindset in the context of this research.

Tony Judt's and Geoff Eley's panoramic and authoritative works re-examine the Cold War at the level of international politics as it unfolded against the backdrop of settlements, programmes, initiatives, which would ultimately become enmeshed with dirty wars, proxy wars and the spectre of mutual destruction. Nevertheless, many of the trends, developments and dynamics at play in 1956, which are as evident at the regional and local as they are at national levels, date from the Liberation (see Chapter 4). One such phenomenon is the relatively problem-free resurgence of conservative forces in the post-war years. For the European left, the immediate post-war period had been propitious; it had emerged from the fight against fascism self-confident, reborn, and ready to take on the world. Yet by 1956, it had become weary in the face

of the constant and formidable onslaught from the political establishment.<sup>10</sup> Certain issues and allied concepts within this general framework have been discussed by different observers. As Judt remarks: ‘The expanding web of international alliance, agencies and accords offered little guarantee on international harmony,’ (Judt, 2007, p. 242). Visions of ‘New Jerusalems’ that seemed so clear at the Liberation swiftly faded, ‘In the East and West, the Cold War closed down the radical openings of 1945,’ (Eley, 2002, p. 311). Just two years after the war had ended ‘the sharpening of international tensions began a conservative resurgence in Western Europe,’ whilst the Soviet Union adopted a stance of ‘reactionary’ intransigence,’ (Eley, 2002, p. 311).

Conservative forces at international and national levels are examined not only in regard to strategic state posturing, but to underlying economic and political trends, imperatives and conditions of the post-war era.<sup>11</sup> Martin Evans and Emmanuel Godin describe how the mood across Europe at the end of WW2 was one of national reforms and international co-operation as reconstruction took precedence over all else, and how in France the normalisation of the parliamentary system in 1946 brought ‘widespread nationalisations in the fields of energy, transport, banking and insurance, the establishment of the welfare state, and the first steps towards a planned economy,’ (Evans & Godin, 2004, p. 134). All well and good. ‘But,’ they go on, ‘although these reforms were infused with the language of socialism, in practice, they did not mark a break with capitalism,’ (Evans & Godin, 2004, p. 134). Given that Western European recovery was largely dependent from 1948-52 on United States aid, and based on national long-term economic programmes that were either

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<sup>10</sup> It might have seemed to those of a politically progressive persuasion that a page had been turned, but of course there had been no revolution, and thus no real changes to the existing power structures and relations.

<sup>11</sup> These forces, which operated notwithstanding multi-party coalitions, paved the way for the material ‘successes’ of the 1950s and sixties in France and Italy, and benefited from the largely positive associations of those successes. This development increasingly constituted real practical and ideological obstacles for the far-left in the post-war decades that saw changes in the structure of the workforce and sectors of their traditional constituencies absorbed into the social, economic and political mainstream. It may be imagined that at difficult moments such as in the autumn of 1956 when the long held beliefs and commitments of ordinary Communist Party members everywhere were being sorely tested, the apparent economic, social, and political achievements of Western democracies represented a perplexing anomaly - although in the context of this study, there is no evidence to suggest this (see Chapter 7).

approved by or did not go in counter to United States interests and political agendas, this does not surprise.<sup>12</sup>

An even more tangible political phenomenon in post-war Italy is that of its continuity with fascism by way of a fundamentally unchanged and unpurged system of institutional, administrative, legislative and judicial structures and civil-service personnel.<sup>13</sup> Paul Ginsborg, Chris Duggan and Donald Sassoon are amongst those to have made important contributions to this discussion. Some of the reasons for this post-war political phenomenon are: Italy's distinct historical trajectory that by the twentieth century had resulted in its lack of a real, coherent and cohesive national identity, a condition that weakened opposition to the sway and appeal of 'traditional' politics that included important aspects of Italian Liberalism; the United States' military and strategic interests in the country after the war that exerted no small degree of influence on Italian politics; United States economic interests in Italy during our period together with Italy's historic tendency towards liberal economic policies; and the inevitable affinity and active link between those two countries that stemmed from the transatlantic Italian diaspora. All of these factors worked to keep the Italian post-war governments firmly in the Western camp.

Ginsborg cites the immediate post-war period as a time when 'an insidious but important process was taking place' during which 'the traditional state structure and administration inherited from Fascism was quietly consolidated,' (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 91).<sup>14</sup> He continues:

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<sup>12</sup> Informants in La Seyne and Toulon describe the post-war climate, including of course the years of political and industrial unrest of 1947-8 at the nation level, that translated in the region in the late 1942 and 1950s as the on-going confrontation between the privately owned FCM shipyards in La Seyne and the local Communist Council. This situation was made all the more difficult by the rivalry between the Communists and the Socialists who had held the Town Hall for twenty years prior to WW2, and who in that time had established a comfortable working relationship with local industry.

<sup>13</sup> This also meant of course that Police files on known communists or communist sympathisers and their families remained intact and active.

<sup>14</sup> Italy had emerged from the war to all intents and purposes a defeated nation in a state of logistical and political chaos. Options were limited. As was the case in France, the immediate post-war period had not been deemed by communists a suitable moment for insurrection despite of their strong position in both countries at that point. For the Allied Powers, Italy was defeated but it was still a problem; with its north eastern frontier bordering on the Socialist Bloc and

‘As a result, in the years 1945-7 none of the apparatus of the state was called into question. No attempt was made to reform the central administration in Rome .... No serious critique was made of the many semi-independent special agencies created by Fascism for the purposes of .... intervention in the economy. Finally, no moves were taken to alter the structure or recruiting patterns of the judiciary,’ (Ginsborg, 1990, pp. 91-2).

And so the system itself remained intact, whilst attempts to purge its personnel ran aground:

‘Those who fought in the Resistance or suffered under Fascism maintained .... that the activists of the Fascist regime should not go unpunished. On the other hand, to purge the administration of active Fascists meant more or less to close it down, since membership of the Fascist Party had been obligatory for all civil servants,’ (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 92).

Who to purge and how to do it was the pressing if unanswerable question for the Italians in 1946: <sup>15</sup> ‘This failure to tackle squarely the issue of responsibility for fascism had far-reaching consequences,’ affirms Duggan; <sup>16</sup>

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popular support for the communists at that point (in the 1946 elections) the strongest in Europe. It was clear that the West, and increasingly in the form of the United States, would be doing all it could politically, economically and ideologically to prevent Soviet influence and involvement in this European country - and that would entail turning a blind eye to, or fostering, the political survival of anti-communist interests.

<sup>15</sup> It must be remembered that the public sector, created by Mussolini, was one of the largest in Europe and could not be dismantled easily. (In such instances, the purpose of a dictatorship of the proletariat becomes obvious.) Duggan gives an account of how ‘Among the most glaring and sometimes grotesque examples of continuity with fascism were those involving the judiciary .... while ‘fascists’ were regularly acquitted of terrible atrocities, ex-partisans were often prosecuted for even minor offences such as theft,’ (Duggan, 1995, p. 4). Added to which, ‘The judiciary was . instrumental in hamstringing the most progressive items of the constitution,’ which had been ‘drawn up hastily .... this left the judges with a key role in interpreting many clauses,’ which ‘provided the legal basis for the persistence into the Republic of a great deal of fascist legislation,’ (Duggan, 1995, p. 5).

<sup>16</sup> One of the ways in which this persisting power structure operated could be seen in the creation, nature and effects of Italy’s ‘economic miracle’ 1955 – 63. Sassoon describes the post-war policies that had brought this about as a mixture of liberal monetary policies and skewed state intervention together with a sustained and effective attack on the trade union power that had grown out of the Resistance and Liberation period. He argues that public spending programmes ostensibly directed towards the impoverished South, were in fact a form of state intervention that subordinated it to the interests of the ruling industrial economic groups and political elites of the North, ‘The *Cassa (per il Mezzogiorno)* i.e. Register or Fund for the South) did not develop the South. In fact it was not meant to do that. ‘What it did was to prepare in the 1950s a reserve of potential labour’ and ‘expand the market for northern industry by increasing southern incomes

‘It resulted in a curiously schizophrenic climate in Italy in the late 1940s and 1950s, in which calls for change and a renunciation of the immediate past jostled uneasily with many indications that a large part of the country’s former political baggage – both material and ideological – had simply passed unchanged into a new constitutional wrapper,’ (Duggan, 1995, p. 3).<sup>17</sup>

## 2.2 Decolonisation

The demand for independence by colonies of the European imperial powers<sup>18</sup> was a phenomenon that also took on increased momentum after World War 2, and for France in particular, the question of overseas interests and connections would play a crucial role in its politics into the 1960s - and beyond. An understanding of France’s attitudes towards and actions in relation to decolonisation is vital for an overall understanding of the period, and not least of 1956 itself.

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through a public works programme and establish a new clientele system for the leading party of government, the DC,’ (Sassoon, 1986, p. 35). The ‘economic miracle’ of the late 50s and 60s in Italy did not come without a price.

<sup>17</sup> Informants in this study describe the very real political and economic discrimination experienced by communists in Venezia-Giulia and especially in the Gorizian Province of that region that included Monfalcone, the region’s industrial hub, and the town of Gorizia itself, the provincial capital that bordered directly onto the new Yugoslavia. From the informants’ point of view, this discrimination was antithetical and distinctly ironic, given the decisive part they had played in the War of Liberation. For the political establishment however, who had nothing to gain from the left-wing inspired (and in the local context communist-led) brave new world, it was this particular history that was the problem, and discriminatory policies made perfect sense. The effects of this post-war status quo on the nature, self-awareness, orientation and levels of militancy of the Communist Party in the region during the late 40s and 50s are discussed as they relate to events in subsequent chapters.

<sup>18</sup> During the 1950s, the European colonial powers were engaged in managing / forestalling / circumventing / rethinking the decolonisation process. This often entailed the negotiating of future roles vis-à-vis or involvement in these overseas territories on ostensibly more equitable bases than before. If these new arrangements could be made, Empires could to all intents and purposes be retained. Nationalist movements and leagues meanwhile were taking what action they considered necessary to redeem the full sovereignty of their countries. For the European colonial powers decolonisation signified, as they saw it, a loss of power, influence, status and independence in the new world order. It was also seen however, as a form of modernisation, as colonies were at the same time perceived by many to be an economic political and international relations burden. More than this, it would leave the way clear for a new bi-polar colonial power structure to establish itself; one that could not only step-in and take-over their interests in the former colonies (whatever the declared agenda) but also compromise the political autonomy of Europe as an entity. For colonised nations decolonisation signified regaining territorial integrity, dignity, and self-determination in a developing new world order. The theory was that their non-aligned status gave them more freedom to manoeuvre in this shifting context and more chance of genuine autonomy once free from old colonial shackles.

Continuity in several of these European colonies had already been interrupted as a result of re-occupation by third parties during the war, which had constituted in itself a *de facto* break with a particular past, and presented the possibility of change. Other colonies had made significant contributions to the allied war effort in providing resources and most importantly - troops. The active participation in the war effort on the part of colonised peoples added to their levels of self-awareness as political actors. This, together with the changed aspirations and increased levels of self-confidence on the part of all underprivileged groups and subjugated peoples that historically result from such major conflicts, gave existing and nascent nationalist movements a further impetus to pursue their objectives. The almost universal recognition at this point on the part of the international community that the granting of independence to former colonies was timely and to all intents and purposes inevitable, was also instrumental in the dismantling or remodelling of Empires. Nevertheless, for France, and especially vis-à-vis Algeria, decolonisation would be a contested and protracted process that was to outlive any immediate post-war Gaullist plans of regaining France's former status as a world power.<sup>19</sup> In the Italian context,

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<sup>19</sup> France was the world's second largest imperial power and the actions it took at each stage in its handling of the decolonisation issue impacted not on its remaining overseas interests but on world politics. Italy was not a major player on the world stage in the same way as its European neighbour. Its Empire came late in relation to other European countries, due to its tardy and piecemeal unification process, which was still incomplete in 1945. Nevertheless, it entered the scramble for Africa along with other European nations and by 1914 it had laid claim to Eritrea, Somalia, Lybia, and then in 1922 Ethiopia. Most of its colonies were in Africa, although amongst its acquired territories must be counted those of 'Greater Italy', which comprised irredentist claimed Malta, Nice, Corsica and Dalmatia; and others around the Mediterranean basin including Albania, Montenegro and Tunisia; parts of mainland Greece and its archipelago; and Tientsin in China. All of these territories were, of course, confiscated following the fall of Mussolini in 1943. However, Italy was important politically and geopolitically in the post-war period because its fate had potentially global implications. A new colonisation was about to occur. In 1945 it was a beaten and divided country. Apart from an essentially nominal national consciousness resulting from unification in the nineteenth century, and apart from the perennial and infusive influence of the Catholic Church in Italian society as a whole, the only thing to have given it a semblance of coherence in its history had been a twenty year dictatorship. Its lack of a truly felt national identity could have meant a lack of resistance after WW2 to a Communist Party with an inspiring and authoritative Resistance record (which remained important for large sections of the population in the post-war years despite attempts by the political right to tarnish it) that promised a strong political identity, national coherence (in the form of Togliatti's *Partito Nuovo*) and a fresh start. (In truth, Western influence in Italy found little ideological or organisational resistance due to historical reasons.) . The fact that Italy had the largest Communist Party in Western Europe did nothing to alleviate these fears. (Although these fears lessened in the post-war years in relation to the rise of the US backed Christian Democrats, this was the Cold War era and it was felt that

the newly formed Yugoslavia lay on Italy's north east border and Italian politics became crucially important after 1945 (including at the time of, and during the aftermath of, the Tito-Stalin split in 1948) to the Western powers who feared that if there were to be a communist take-over in Europe Italy may well provide the opportunity.<sup>20</sup>

During the post-war period 'Empire' was seen as indispensable to regaining French status or in the words of Judt: 'France's humiliation in Europe accentuated the symbolic significance of its overseas empire,' (Judt, 2007, p. 282). Nonetheless, in tune with, or as a concession to, the wider post-war themes of reconstruction, France's post-war empire was to be, in principle, an 'evolved' entity. The French Union was established in 1946 by the Fourth Republic. However, those who were expecting any significant departure from the old model were destined to be disappointed. Despite a number of liberal dispensations concerning labour law, trade and education, it was business as usual. The Union continued to operate according to France's historic 'civilising mission', that is to say on the *assimilation* of its client populations rather than creating a *fédération* of emancipated peoples, and this was especially the case as regards Algeria, its most prized possession. Thus France's 'new deal' arrangement was ambiguous if not contradictory. In the event, instead of evolving, the Union took on a rejuvenated, reinvigorated moral imperative: 'the imperial mystique was now carried to a level rarely equalled in the history of French colonialism,' (Judt, 2007, pp. 81-94). Furthermore, this project was only to take on importance in the context of a developing bi-polar world order.<sup>21</sup>

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Italy's physical position could still pose problems.) Any changes in the Soviet system or shifts in its strategies in respect of its neighbours continued to be seen as potentially significant throughout the Cold War not only by Italy itself but by the international community.

<sup>20</sup> The Yugoslavian question was as crucial in many ways, if not as high profile, as the question of decolonisation was for France. The fact that Italy had the largest Communist Party in Western Europe did nothing to alleviate these fears. (Although these fears lessened in the post-war years in relation to the rise of the US backed Christian Democrats, this was the Cold War era and it was felt that Italy's physical position could still pose problems.) Any changes in the Soviet system or shifts in its strategies in respect of its neighbours continued to be seen as potentially significant throughout the Cold War not only by Italy itself but by the international community.

<sup>21</sup> In the early 1950s there was an intensification of resistance to colonial rule in Tunisia and Morocco (that would culminate successfully in early 1956 when both were ceded independence by France and Spain). 1954 witnessed a humiliating military defeat for France at Dien Ben Phu

By early 1956 the war in Algeria or as it was referred to by the French government the ‘public order exercise’ had escalated to such levels of violence that it dominated French politics. Both Evans and Kedward describe how as the year progressed one of the last and the most important vestiges of French imperialism became increasingly bound-up in an international drama of epic proportions. Importantly, Kedward notes the way in which the question of Algeria *blurred* the natural divisions between party politics in France; so much so in fact that the PCF deputies, anxious not to jeopardise the possibility of reforming the Popular Front (see Chapter 4), voted-in ‘special powers’ to the left-wing coalition government for the ‘pacification’ of the situation in Algeria.

Evans explains how by the autumn of that year Algeria had become ‘part of a kaleidoscope of international events which collided with frantic speed ..... The crisis in the communist world which had begun with Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin,’ ..... and ‘continued with rioting in Poland and Hungary as protestors challenged the legitimacy of their Soviet -imposed regimes .... dovetailed elsewhere with the Suez crisis,’ which ‘Mollet saw as a continuation of the Algerian policy,’ (Evans, 2006, p. 46). ‘The determination to attack Egypt was largely punitive, in response to Nasser’s support for the FLN, though also ideological in the sense that the ministers most closely identified with the Algerian war denounced him as an agent of Soviet Communism,’ (Kedward, 2006, p. 338). This research reveals the ways in which and

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and its subsequent withdrawal from Indochina after eight years of unrelenting conflict. The war in Indochina had been unpopular in France, seen by many as being a far-off, ‘military’ interest (and a decidedly ambiguous one at that), and a drain on resources at home. Public sentiment was far more complex regarding Algeria, at least in the early stages of the conflict. By the end of 1956 however, the priority for the majority of the French people was to bring about a peaceful solution to the crisis. That meant that for France, everything now depended on Algeria. However in November that year, nationalist sentiment that had emerged during the interwar period around Messali Hadj and Ferhat Abbas, and which had become etched into the Algerian consciousness by events at Setif on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1945, exploded in a veritable war for independence (although it was not to be referred to as such until long after the war had ended). This turn of events was all the more critical for France because Algeria was administratively and qualitatively *different* to all its other colonial interests in that it had been the first of the conquests of the Second Colonial Empire (and most important) in 1830; it had a sizeable and influential settler population of French nationals; *and had been since 1846 an integral part of an extended France* . When nationalists lamented the numerical superiority of Germany, imperialists pointed to the fact that the new ‘Greater Germany’ had a mere 76 million inhabitants against the 109 million of France and her empire,’ (Larkin, 1997, p.32).

the extents to which reactions of communists in La Seyne and Toulon to the Soviet interventions in Budapest were affected by such macro developments as the intensified pressure on the French military to defeat the FLN by the autumn of 1956; the reality or threat of being called to active service and in a conflict situation that had been at least in part endorsed by the PCF leadership;<sup>22</sup> what ordinary communists saw as the government's betrayal on the question of Algeria and by its colonialist exploits in Egypt - all this, epitomised and exacerbated by what they saw as the government's opportunist condemnation of the Soviet interventions.

### 2.3 Micro History

This project is not a 'local history' project in the commonly understood sense of a 'project of place', or an interest in the history of a local community *per se*, although of course a sound knowledge of the pre-war and in particular post-war histories of both case localities has been crucial in understanding the ways in which earlier events and developments had influenced the contemporary contexts of 1956. *Reactions* ..... is the study of distinct articulations of a specific and much larger community in relation to a particularly significant series of events, and as such should be understood as a micro history project. Micro history is often, quite rightly, associated with the aggregate fields of local social and cultural history as 'Phenomena previously considered to be sufficiently described and understood assume completely new meanings by altering the scale of observation,' (Levi in Burke, 1995, p. 98). However, it is equally key to transnational history in that *it reveals the intrinsic and*

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<sup>22</sup> Not all communists had welcomed the conciliatory *demarche* of reforming the Popular Front that had been Party policy since 1954, which had taken-on particular form in the run-up to the January elections that year and led to the communist MPs voting in favour of special powers for Algeria that spring. In fact rank and file communists had been sceptical from the start of the idea of any such alliance. Apart from their support for Leon Blum's Popular Front government 1936-7 there existed within the PCF membership an instinctive mistrust of Socialists inscribed in but which went beyond than the decisions taken at the Congress of Tours. It was felt that the Socialists' reformism was none other than an accommodation if not collusion with republican bourgeois values and interests that had manifested itself regularly since the split. The Socialists' insistence that whilst they rejected the Soviet model they subscribed to Marxist ideology was further proof of their inherent ambiguity if not duplicity from the communists' point of view. It was felt that the prime political motivation of the Socialists was to become the first party of the French left and that this was evident in what was widely interpreted as an inherent anti-communism on their part. What were ostensibly their nearest political allies were seen by many communists as their most pernicious adversaries (see Chapter 5).

*ineluctable link between small communities and global trends.*<sup>23</sup> It represents the fine brush strokes on a much larger tableau.

Micro history (as oral history) is an innovative approach that developed out of the wave of *Annales School*<sup>24</sup> inspired ‘new histories’ that date from 1960s and 1970s as a move towards writing more critical, more *complete* histories than the existing ‘formal’ versions that often constituted little more than national / political chronologies / narratives. These new histories gave rise to a number of sub-disciplines, methodologies and approaches concerned with the roles, conditions and experiences of those at all levels of society, and in particular those of ordinary people and of groups that in the traditional paradigm had either been systematically underrepresented or subsumed into the whole (although as a research tool micro history can be adopted in relation to the study of any nature of sub-group).<sup>25</sup> These new fields of historical enquiry are heuristic in that they seek to broaden and deepen *understandings* of human affairs, of the human condition, and of continuity and change over time by *accounting for* their discoveries; and although each has its own specific application they are also *inherently interdisciplinary*, as their labours lead them automatically across fields of academic enquiry, and towards the social sciences in particular.

The sub-discipline of micro history developed in the 1970s and as a new historical approach it gained from and indeed has been very much part of post-war trends

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<sup>23</sup> Questions of causation are also discussed by Sahlin in his work *Islands of History* in which he stresses the need for a synthesis of the cultural and the political-economic analytical approaches to local / micro history; arguing that while historical, political and social change in local communities is ‘externally induced’, it is nonetheless ‘indigenously orchestrated,’ and should therefore be understood in terms of and as product of a continuous dialectic. (Sahlin, 1985, p. viii).

<sup>24</sup> The *Annales* school was founded in 1929 Lucien Febvre and Marcel Bloch and subscribed to in the 1950s by Fernand Braudel. It opposed the 19<sup>th</sup> century Rankean school of history which was highly empirical and narrative placing emphasis on official documentation, ‘great men’ and ‘important events.’ (See Burke, 1995, p. 7).

<sup>25</sup> Other new methods of history writing include military history, constitutional history, political and diplomatic history which by their very focus marked the need for rigorous and disinterested examinations to be made of such fields; as well as the inherent distinction between these and the histories of non elite groups; economic history, local history, social and cultural histories, race history, women’s (gender) history studies; colonial history (and post colonial studies), intellectual history or the history of ideas, history of philosophy, visual history, world / global and transnational history etc.

towards a synthetic model of scholarly endeavour in which barriers between subject areas have been broken down, false dichotomies exposed, standpoints, approaches and methodologies shared in the quest for this wider knowledge and for more comprehensive understandings. As a result of these trends, an early reticence on the part of more traditional historians regarding 'new fangled interdisciplinary approaches' that undermined 'the integrity of history as a discipline,' have been challenged, and in large part replaced with the recognition of the advantages of supplementing conventional approaches with multi-disciplinary methods applied as and where appropriate (Tosh, 1997, p. 230). Micro history looks at the relations, dynamics and complexities of communities within communities, and *to do this it has borrowed some of the rigorous methodological approaches of the anthropology and sociology, as it sets out to make sense of social realities at a reduced scale of observation.* 'Following the lead of social anthropologists, sociologists paid more attention to microsocial analysis and historians to what has come to be known as 'micro history', (Burke, 1996, p. 38).

Nonetheless, the proponents of micro history are mindful to avoid what can be the reductive findings of 'the kind of social history produced under the influences of social sciences', which, Georg Iggers states, can result in 'generalisations that do not hold up when tested against small scale life they claim to explain,' (Iggers, 1997, p. 108). It is the aim of micro history to go further than this. By sharpening the focus and increasing the intensity of analysis i.e. by getting 'up close and personal', historians adopting this approach argue that they are more likely to uncover what has previously been overlooked, neglected, obscured or withheld in existing accounts, and that their end product is thus more likely to deliver a more precise and insightful retelling of a given past. They seek to confront a past reality, which was inevitably, organically, part of a larger reality, as experienced by often ordinary people in concrete conditions and in real situations (consistent with the same principle as a medical biopsy is performed, and the evidence examined intensively, in microscopic

detail, in order to arrive at a more complete, more accurate understanding of a larger, present reality).<sup>26</sup>

A key aspect of this approach and one that is central to *Reactions ....* is its theoretical dimension. Giovanni Levi explains that whilst micro history is by definition highly empirical, it is also inherently conceptual: ‘micro history cannot be defined in relation to the micro dimensions of its subject matter,’ but in fact concentrates on ‘the contradictions of normative systems and therefore on fragmentation, contradictions and plurality of viewpoints which make all systems fluid and open ..... it accentuates the most minute and localised actions to demonstrate the gaps and spaces which the complex inconsistencies of all systems,’ (Burke, 1991, p. 93, p. 107). Here Clifford Geertz, cited in Burke, explains the way in which this approach offers the opportunity to analyse the role of the subject in a given social system vis-à-vis the normative structures inevitably operating in that system: ‘Our double task is to uncover the conceptual structures that inform our subjects’ acts .... and to construct a system of analysis in whose terms what is generic to those structures .... will stand out against other determinants of human behaviour,’ (Burke, 1996, pp. 98-100). However, and importantly, here, theories ‘stay close to the ground’, *in that such a system of analysis comprises the achieving of a close fit between the empirical findings of the research, relevant concepts and theoretical positions* as opposed to one designed to test hypotheses, allow replication and facilitate extrapolation:

‘It is therefore not a question of elaborating theoretical tools capable of generating predictions but of organising a theoretical structure capable of continuing to *yield defensible interpretations as new social phenomena swim into view,*’ (my emphasis) (Geertz in Burke, 1996, pp. 98-100).

Others to have made notable contributions to debates surrounding the methodological and conceptual issues related to this approach, either from the

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<sup>26</sup> In discussing the complex nature of ‘realities’ at this level in *Local Knowledge, Local History*, Aletta Biersack in Hunt (1989) observes that recognising its ‘multidimensionality’ is crucial, as is a commitment to exploring the transcultural, pluralistic, historically constituted paradoxes that any analysis of this multidimensionality inevitably presents, (Biersack in Hunt, 1989, p. 96).

sociological or the historical perspective include: Aletta Biersack, Carlo Poni & Carlo Ginsburg, Sigurdur Gylfi Magnusson and Guido Ruggiero.

## 2.4 Oral History

Oral history is another 'new' historical approach, and issues pertaining to the value and use of oral sources have been addressed from a wide range of theoretical and empirical perspectives over the last fifty years.<sup>27</sup> As with micro history, the main focus of this body of work has been increasingly directed towards how best to ensure a 'scientific' treatment of this type of data collection and analysis, that will nevertheless accommodate and mediate the inherent inconsistencies and subjectivisms that typically define it and that are now seen as its unique strength.

Perhaps the most obvious and voiced critique of oral testimony is that it is unavoidably less reliable than documentary evidence. However, this Rankean disproportionate regard for the written word is seen by many as being as wrong as it is misleading. Tosh reminds us that 'Ironically, many of the written sources cited by today's historians were themselves oral in origin,' (Tosh, 1997, p. 207). Many 'primary sources' such as social surveys, censuses, official commissions of enquiry,

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<sup>27</sup> Oral history and feminist history have much in common and are both beneficiaries of the process of cross-fertilisation that has occurred not only between and across different disciplines. The contribution that women's history in particular has made to the development of oral history in strengthening its theoretical base has been significant. In return, oral history provides feminist historians with a unique and singularly fitting vehicle for empirical analysis grounded in a particular reality in the form of the one-to-one interview. Feminist oral historians such as Gluck & Patai (1991) and Kelly (1984), have typically adopted Marxist / feminist (post-structuralist, Gramscian, Foucaultian informed) perspectives with the purpose of cutting through culture and ideology present in communication and language to reveal material forces, 'absent' structures and dynamics in society that can influence our existence and shed light on the role of the subject in relation to them. The aim of this approach being to reach the deeper meanings and significances of the empirical evidence presented because, as Kelly points out, accessing women's history entails 'not only multiple experiences of individuals but also the systematic socio-cultural relationships that exist between the sexes, because our personal, social, and historical experiences are shaped by these relations,' (Kelly, 1984, Introduction). Of course it is not only women who may be the subjects of exclusive relations and dynamics in society but also other social groups. Nevertheless, the deconstruction processes associated with women's history that comprise careful listening techniques and sophisticated readings of evidence gathered have proven particularly productive in the field because of the particularly subtle, nuanced, implicit and culturally sensitive nature of the forms of women's exclusion. As a result, the processes themselves have become acutely honed and by extension, appropriate and effective when applied to other historical issues.

government records and documentation in relation to legal proceedings ‘are full of summarised testimonies which historians draw on, often with little regard for the selection of witnesses or the circumstances in which they were interviewed,’ (Tosh, 1997, p. 207). The mere presentation of evidence in written form is no guarantee of its credibility. No historical source is value free. Official and semi-official documents, a wide range of formal and semi-formal literature, the print media, books etc. have long been the preserve of a political, governmental, administrative, professional, intellectual, social and cultural male adult elite in terms of production and dissemination; whilst the ‘objectivity’ of evidence of a more informal nature such as notes, missives, personal correspondence etc. can hardly be taken for granted. As a medium, the written word is, by its very nature, selective, and as such, must be viewed as critically *as any other* trace of the past. It is certainly unable on its own to provide the means of writing ‘total history’. However, it is not a case of choosing between oral and documentary evidence: ‘Oral history does not seek to replace traditional historiography but must be set alongside it,’ (Evans, 1997, p.3). A research project that draws on oral testimony will automatically also exploit different types of written sources and artefacts in order not only to access maximum information but to off-set the unavoidable bias present in any one form. Following fundamental rules of academic good practice, the same critical evaluation is applied to oral testimonies as is applied to any other historical source.

A key example of the triangulation process used effectively and productively is that of Roderick Kedward and his work on French Resistance in the South of France using oral sources (Kedward, 2006, pp.15-31). At the start of the project in 1968 he explains that he had been warned by different authorities including the *Institute Maurice Thorez* in Paris, that communist resisters would only recount the party line. Undeterred by this argument, he decided to go ahead as planned with the project, and it turned out to have been the right decision:

‘... in the south I met communists who weren’t conscious of the party breathing down their necks ... through local communist tracts and papers, looking closely at nuances of meaning it was clear that the structures of the PCF had broken down in 1940, allowing different

communist voices to make their appearance ... I felt I had made a breakthrough to more relativist material,' (Kedward, 2006, pp.15-31).

Here the inter-relationship between oral and archival sources is highlighted as one supports and complements the other, pointing to entirely new lines of enquiry. This account also coincides with the findings of the current research, which support the notion that the communist movement was not a monolithic entity, that there were dissenting voices, and especially in sites far removed from traditional centres of power and thus from arguably fixed perspectives.

The 'artificial' context of the interview and hence the risk of its producing questionable results, is another quarrel traditional historians have with the oral history method. This opinion persists in some quarters despite debates in recent years about the merit of less reductive, more imaginative, experimental notions of the purpose and product of interview-based research; despite the robust, systematic and controlled methods now common practice in the field that employ effective screening and sampling methods, deliberately selected questioning methods and techniques, the careful examination and analysis of evidence, plus the same peer review processes as any other field of historical enquiry. The subjective nature of interviews in the personal bias both interviewee and interviewer can bring to the process is another criticism often levelled at this method; despite the rigorous academic approaches introduced in the 1970s that raised awareness of such issues; despite new thinking on the intrinsically interactive nature of the interview process and on 'subjectivity' *per se* as being ontologically valid and worth embracing in the ethnological tradition with the aim of arriving at 'real' understandings in these situations.

As regards the specificity of oral testimony, current thinking recognises that this type of evidence is intrinsically different from other forms of evidence, and that it must be treated, and appreciated, as such. Its special qualities are set out by Portelli, partly in response to the positivist critique that views these sources as ineluctably suspect and incontrovertibly inferior to documentary evidence. For example, he draws attention to the fact that oral history tells us less about events as such than about their *meanings*. 'They (oral sources) tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted

to do, what they believed they were doing, what they now think they did,' (Portelli, 1979, pp. 99-100). He adds 'Oral sources may not add much to what we know, for instance, about the material cost of a given strike ... but they tell us a good deal about the psychological costs,' (Portelli, 1979, pp. 99-100). His argument is that oral sources should be seen as having particular characteristics and qualities that require specific treatment, interpretation - and as ultimately conferring a *different credibility*, (Portelli, 1979, pp. 99-100).

The net effect of such opposition from the historical establishment has been to make oral historians more critically aware of their craft, more specialised in their methodologies, more responsible for the final outcome of their research and the oral history method itself intellectually defensible as a consequence. In this way it can be said to have done it a service.

## **2.5 Memory**

It is the potentially dubious nature of memory *per se* that has troubled many traditional historians who doubt whether individuals can ever give fully accurate accounts of past experiences and events. This is despite new understandings of 'accuracy' in context, and of memory as another social, cultural and political construct and of the part it plays in both the individual and the collective human consciousness. Louisa Passerini, who is especially interested in the psychological aspects of the personal interview, has turned criticisms of the dubious nature of memory 'on their head' in arguing that 'the so-called unreliability of memory was also its strength, and that the subjectivity of memory provided clues not only about the meanings of historical experience but also about the relationship between past and present, between memory and personal identity, and between individual and collective memory,' (Passerini, cited in Perks & Thompson, 2006, p.3). (see Chapter 8)

As can be imagined, concerns with the nature of memory are often directed towards the interviewing of older informants. However, Gwyn Prins points out that although 'The biochemistry of memory is still only poorly understood,' there is reason to be

optimistic in this regard as ‘tests on different types of memory tend to agree that long-term memory, especially in individuals who have entered that phase which psychologists call ‘life-review’, can be remarkably precise,’ (Prins in Burke, 1991, p. 133).<sup>28</sup> Indeed with reference to the current project, the informants’ ability to recall the events and context of 1956 was particularly striking - if at times this recall was selective. This could be related to the fact that informants were in the life-review phase mentioned above. It is also no doubt related to the fact that that year was exceptionally eventful in itself, and as such, ensured a prominent position in the informants’ memories of the period both on the personal and the collective levels.

Perhaps this apparent ability to remember contextually significant events and developments in the past is also linked to the way in which ‘everything was historical’ for this cohort, given that their daily engagement in a collective struggle was marked by discussions, debates, strategies, actions, reactions, in a way that rendered each stage of these post-war decades distinct. These people, whether rank and file militants, secretaries of cells or sections or members of Federation Committees, were leading ‘political’ lives and it seems logical to suppose that their endeavours and experiences would be automatically if subconsciously measured and evaluated along the way in relation to the long march to socialism.<sup>29</sup>

Also worth considering in the evaluation of such testimony is the notion that informants of more advancing years have little to lose - and by the same token little to gain - by sharing their memories in interviews. In relation to the current study for example, the vibrant communist communities of the post-war era in La Seyne and Toulon are long gone, whereas in Italy the PCI as such no longer exists. Therefore potential inclusion or exclusion from those earlier communities as a result of sharing

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<sup>28</sup> See also Anderson (1976) who distinguishes two types of long-term or retrospective memory: declarative (explicit) and procedural (implicit). Declarative memory function has two main features: *semantic* that deals with abstract contexts and facts; and *episodic*, that deals in context specific information. See also Middleton et al. (2005) and Olick et al. (2010).

<sup>29</sup> If this is in fact the case, it also implies the possibility of there being a schematic, relational quality to such memories that could detract from their objectivity due to their having been fashioned according to a particular ‘meta-narrative’ In the current study, this possibility has been accounted for and mediated by the researcher in the on-going process of triangulation.

individual responses to the Soviet interventions in 1956 no longer applies in the same way as it might have. Certainly, what comes across in the informants' testimonies is a strong sense that what was important for them at this point, was what they saw as 'putting the record straight'.

With regard to the ability to distinguish recollections of a particular past from retrospective analyses, Portelli also makes the case that:

'... informants are usually quite capable of reconstructing their past attitudes even when they no longer coincide with present ones,' adding that in these cases 'It is not impossible for him or her to make a distinction between present self and past self,' giving weight to the hypothesis that past experiences can indeed be accessed successfully, (Portelli, 1979, p.102).

What was interesting in this study was the way in which the vast majority of informants seemed able to re-enter the context of that year, recalling specific conditions, pressures and contemporary perspectives. Of course the interviews included elements of post-hoc observation and rationalisation, as interviewees spoke freely about their experiences (and indeed interviewees' retrospective analyses are a specific final element to this thesis). However, the informants also understood that the purpose of the research was to explore *their reactions at the time* to the events in question, and they usually had little difficulty distinguishing past experience from retrospection. When there was a lapse in this regard, the informant either corrected themselves automatically or immediately grasped the problem when it was pointed out i.e. if asked for example 'is that what you felt at the time?' or 'is that what happened at the time?'<sup>30</sup>

Questions of public and private memory have been discussed by several prominent historians over the past thirty years and central to these debates has been the notion that both phenomena are social, cultural and political constructs. The Popular

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<sup>30</sup> In fact on more than one occasion it was the researcher who made this mistake by mixing context and retrospective observation, at which point and the informant would interject with, for example: 'but at the time we did' or 'but that wasn't possible back then'. The conclusion reached in this regard to this problem was that at certain moments it was *the researcher* - in fact - who was encumbered by hindsight, and not the informant.

Memory Group are amongst those to have made major contributions in this area. Drawing on the ideas of Foucault and Gramsci in their work on the distribution of knowledge and power in society, and the ideological and cultural domination of one class by another achieved by ‘engineering consensus’ through controlling the content of cultural forms and institutions, they identify popular memory as ‘process rather than essence’, indeed as a sophisticated political process; ‘History - in particular popular memory - is a stake in the constant struggle for hegemony’, (Popular Memory Group, 1982, p.213). They look at:

- ‘public representations’ of the past as they appear in diverse, composite and sometimes contradictory forms<sup>31</sup> in the
- ‘the public theatre of history’ i.e. the many vehicles via which versions of the past are displayed and disseminated, including all types of print, broadcast and performance media, museums, exhibitions, memorials, ceremonies, public holidays, school syllabi, and at what they identify as
- ‘the historical apparatus’ i.e. the infrastructure that exists and that *constructs that theatre and ultimately controls access to it*; and they look at
- the ‘products’ of that theatre which make up ‘the field of public representation of history,’ (Popular Memory Group, 1982, pp. 205-52).

Popular memory can thus be understood as ‘the product of interaction between public discourse and private memory,’ and constitutes ‘the currently dominant sense of the past,’ (Noakes, 1998, p.12). It is for this reason that the Popular Memory Group defines the ‘popular memory’ as ‘first an object of study, but, second, as a dimension of political practice, because history matters politically’, (Popular Memory Group, 1982, pp. 205-52). Current identities are constructed on the foundations of past histories.

The field of representations is also, inevitably, a social and cultural construct, and as such is never ‘fixed’ but mutable, unresolved, a ‘site of cultural transmission’ (Popular Memory Group, 1982, pp. 205-52). Indeed within this field at any moment

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<sup>31</sup> See also the ‘inoculation’ process in myth making that operates by drawing attention to a small ‘evil’ better to conceal a larger one, (Barthes, 1993, pp. 150-1).

can be found varied and at times conflicting representations, each communicating in its own way, to its own constituency, a particular understanding of a given past. Thus people are provided with a smorgasbord of versions from which to claim their 'own'. The dominant sense of the past 'is produced in the course of these struggles and is always open to contestation', but they go on to state 'We do want to insist, however, that there are real processes of domination in the historical field. Certain representations achieve centrality and luxuriate grandly; others are marginalised or excluded or reworked,' (Popular Memory Group, 1982, pp. 205-52). In a Marxist interpretation, this occurs as a result of the class in dominance's direct access to the ideological state apparatus i.e. the base / super structure model. Whilst it is no longer considered helpful to think simply in these terms, it would appear that themes achieving any lasting centrality in the public field are not those which pose any serious challenge to establishment versions. Clearly, at the heart of this debate lies the question of structure and agency.

With regard to personal memories, Alistair Thompson suggests that these are constructed as part of a process designed to give coherence and alignment to an otherwise disjointed stream of recollections and associations: 'From the moment we experience an event we use the meanings of our culture to make sense of it,' and part of this process may be to make necessary adjustments or compromises, either conscious or unconscious, which will allow for an accommodation between the popular and private memories at any one juncture. (Thompson, 1994, p.77). Private memories which do not comply with the popular memory can result in the individual's feeling torn, and the need for a sense of composure and inclusion can lead to the ultimate acceptance on the part of that individual of mainstream versions as being those of 'reason'. The interactivity between the public discourse and private memories is similarly a 'site of constant negotiation and transaction', they 'rely on one another for validation,' (Thompson, 1994, p.77). Again, this does not mean that power is equally distributed between the two. Samuel and Thompson point out that in one way or another; 'The powerful have a breathtaking ability to stamp their own meanings on the past,' (Samuel & Thompson, 1990, p.18).

And so if both public and private memories are social, cultural, political constructs constantly being achieved by social actors in social contexts according to social realities, this obviously has implications for the practice of oral history. As Evans is at pains to point out ‘at no point must ... interviews be viewed as pure, unmediated reconstructions of the past,’ (Evans, 1997, p. 13). In the very act of *re-membering* the past, human subjects inevitably make sense of their choices, motivations, reactions: ‘through condensations, reversals, telescoping, dramatic juxtapositions, the idealisation and demonisation of characters,’ (Evans, 1997, p. 13). These features of oral testimony are all highly significant and interesting in themselves, and are part and parcel of this type of ‘thick description’ qualitative research method that aims to uncover and explore the complex, subjective experiences of particular realities. Because of this, close attention should be given to the content of personal interviews in terms of patterns of tonal range, volume range, intonation, emphasis, hesitation, lacunae a) during the interview itself in order to inform interviewer response and b) when examining sound recordings post interview in order to; make a closer and more sophisticated readings of the document; and prepare for a subsequent interview. <sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The representations of the past and recent past that were central to the contemporary interpretations and understandings of political events and developments of members of our communities in 1956 were to do, as ever, with personal and collective identity and included: their pre-war political struggles / fight against Fascism, Stalingrad, the Resistance, the rejection by the West of ‘the Soviet hand of friendship’ following WW2, Churchill’s Iron Curtain speech that ‘instigated’ the Cold War, ‘the glorious realisation of socialism’ and its advances in the Eastern Bloc countries etc. It was these issues and themes that prevailed in their personal and collective consciousness and constituted their public discourse because it was these issues and themes that were reinforced in what they read, in formal discussions and in the daily life of the Party. It was this public discourse that had a direct bearing on readings of and reactions to the events in question. What should not be lost sight of is the restricted information context in general terms that existed at this conjuncture. Television was viewed in bars, or together with friends or colleagues for a special occasion / emission in the house of a person who owned one, and cinemas of course featured news reels before the main feature and in at intervals. Non-work related travel for most people was also minimal due to long working hours, lack of disposable incomes and the customs of the time. Therefore the radio, cinema and print media had been at the time the principle fonts of information for the informants in this study. However, for our specific communities, the information context was even more restricted, and prescribed. National radio and television content was dismissed as bourgeois propaganda. Only the communist press and its affiliated publications were trusted. If the mainstream press was read at all, it was to know what the enemy was thinking, and it was never bought. The situations were slightly different in La Seyne and Monfalcone; there was a local newspaper that was communist affiliated, which was widely read by members in our community along with *l’Humanité*; whereas in Monfalcone the only local newspaper was right-wing and called ‘*il Buggiardello*’ or

## 2.6 Myths: (Identity / Representations / Associations)

This thesis argues from a constructivist standpoint that sees individual and collective identities as social, cultural and political products and as such contingent, plastic, debatable, as opposed to inherent, inescapable, things in themselves. Starting from first principles, an individual identity, as a collective identity, can only be known /

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the ‘The Lier’ by our constituency. The effect of what the Communist press did print in this polarised information context, was to reinforce the self-awareness, solidarity and convictions of our communities. Added to which, cultural activities of our particular communities were also to a large extent delineated, and always in some way ‘formative’. To slightly differing extents our two communities were at once; self-referential, with their own dynamics, social networks, political activities, information base; and component parts of a world movement of shared values, beliefs and purpose. Nevertheless, it was not only the communists who produced and consumed partisan representations of events - in many ways it defined the Cold War mode of thinking in general. The hyperbole to be found in each country’s national press functioned as an ‘inverted mirror’ of the political left and right as each camp put forward its interpretations of events as well as its own events. One reinforced the other. Sectors of the press (and especially the local press) indulged leanings more than others, but such were the times that there was effectively no hiding place from dramatic almost daily newspaper headlines and features covering the issues, conflicts, accusations, menaces, dilemmas and showdowns of the day. Thus the perspectives of the members of our communist communities in 1956 were influenced, especially at the local levels, by both Communist propaganda, and establishment versions of the ‘truth’. The analysis of the empirical evidence from oral and written documents, this information context was duly taken into account and factored into the examination of the reactions to the events in question - in the constructivist tradition. Interpretations and understandings that inform and generate reactions are no less social, cultural and political constructs than the various representations of past and present, and these interpretations and understandings require social actors to make active choices, even if that choice is simply which field of historical representations to choose from (see Chapter 8). With regard to the problem of public discourse and private memory there is perhaps another dimension to the question that the Popular memory Group do not quite address, but which should be considered in the context of the current project, and for that the focus of the discussion needs to be redirected to 1956. How was the communist individual and collective sense of the past constructed and maintained in our communities at that time, what did it comprise, and how did that influence their sense of that particular ‘present’? What needs to be considered here are:

- the fields of public representations of the past that prevailed at the time for our communities and that were effectively were one and the same as their restricted and specific information contexts
- the public theatres of history that were the Party press, Party life and activities in themselves etc.
- the historical apparatus that was the Communist Party / Communist movement, and which constructed it and allowed access to it.

In other words, if a public discourse has to do in the end with dominant ‘institutions’, then when we consider the information contexts of communist communities existing in western democracies at this time, *must we consider the notions of parallel or counter apparatuses?* If indeed we are to consider such notions, we must also ask whether these were *demystified* apparatuses making available familiar fields of representations that simply reflected and reinforced the convictions of (truly) *conscious* consumers? If capitalist interests and processes were being subverted to all intents and purposes by the Communist Party and its propaganda machine, does that mean that *our constituency was more critically aware than their bourgeois counterparts?* The answer to both these questions must be – not necessarily.

defined / formed / in relation to that of others. Much as a nation, region or sphere of influence's physical or ideological boundaries, a national, regional or political identity is characterised as much by what it is not as by what it is. All identities (personal / group) are associated in one way or another with a collective consciousness, which, as previously discussed, is directly associated to the (a) popular memory. *All* identities need a history on which to draw, on which to piece together contemporary understandings and consequently on which to base contemporary actions. Such histories are chosen or claimed and they tend to be palatable and / or meaningful. The function of a popular memory is to enshrine a collective history / identity – that also speaks to individuals. Individual and collective identities are relational, constructed, inclusive / exclusive, referential - and never negative or meaningless.<sup>33</sup>

As we have seen, images and representations of the past and the associations ascribed to them are not the straightforward traces of the past they tacitly purport to be. They are of course images and representations of real things. Indeed they are carefully chosen in the first place for use by those who have access to the historical apparatus / contemporary media and other fonts of information / mirrors of identity, and then fashioned and used by these agents to portray a particular 'reality'. They are constructs nonetheless, made knowable to the world through a process of selection, representation, distribution, interpretation and redistribution. That is to say, that images are chosen in the first instance according to particular associations sought by interested parties; they are then packaged, made 'transferable', continually moving further away from the original messy reality toward a new, neater version.<sup>34</sup> They then find their place in the public field of representations, which, as we know, is no arbitrary process. This is how myths are made. Finally, interpretation falls to the consumer, whose perspectives and conclusions in turn *contribute to* an overall process.

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<sup>33</sup> Identities, as all other human understandings, experiences, actions and even consciousness itself, are rooted in and inseparable from language.

<sup>34</sup> This is not to say however that those involved in the process of choosing and embellishing where possible images and representations that support their particular interests are fraudsters. It is after all natural to seek to present these interests in the best light.

Certainly, not all images and representations that go to make up identities / a popular memory / collective consciousness should be viewed as myth. However, *the more coherent, ubiquitous or enduring a theme in the popular memory the more likely it is to contain the mythical element.* This is because an agreed version of events must inevitably exclude the complexities and ambiguities of the integral version, and because a lasting centrality in such a thing as a collective consciousness implies both a set of fixed concepts, and a process.<sup>35</sup>

Intrinsic to the myth making process is the operation of simplification as described here by Krüger: ‘In the noisy vestibule of the temple of myths, slogans reign – and close to them, ideology. Myths reduce the complexity of reality to unambiguous, comprehensible, symbolically compressed events, conditions and truths; they also appeal ... to the beliefs of people,’ (Krüger, 1998, p.3). Moreover, this process of essentialisation acts ingeniously and deftly to close debate: ‘myth acts economically; it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics,’ (Barthes, 1993, p. 143). It entails painting things with a ‘natural varnish’ i.e. by making something, be it condition, a mechanism, an idea or other appear perfectly natural, inevitable, commonsensical, and not contrived.

In discussing French bourgeois ideological intervention in that society, Barthes talks about the use of myths, which is one of the most effective methods employed in that process. It is of course applicable in other national contexts and by other agencies. ‘A myth has the intention of giving an historical intention a natural justification and making the contingent appear eternal’ it is ‘depoliticised speech,’ (Barthes, 1993,

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<sup>35</sup> See also Angus Calder who in his work *The Myth of the Blitz* explains the way in which the very real episode of the Blitz became overnight a vehicle for the notions of national unity and resolve, when the portrayal of ‘everyone pulling together when the chips were down’ was grossly oversimplified as actual conditions and effects varied greatly. But, he stresses, the Ministry of Information version went largely unquestioned even though ‘What was seen by an individual often contradicted what was said to be happening .... you either believed the evolving Myth (which showed at each stage how Britain was invincible), or you relapsed into scepticism and fears, when you recovered from such an aberration, the Myth had already moved ahead to help you on .... every new ‘fact’ or ‘memory’ slotted into the Myth. There was nowhere else for it to go,’ (Calder, 1992, p.120)

142-5). Things are thus presented either to a specific or a catch-all audience, as required, as universal, definitive, something that is significant in itself, something that appeals and applies to all in that audience and something from which people would not wish to be excluded. Myths are always based on an original truth - but with the application of spin - constructed closely and conscientiously around an original reality whilst passing *for* reality; they are always ideologically laden never without a purpose. That purpose is to convince, to create consensus, to muster a constituency to a cause, institution or idea – without that constituency knowing it had been mustered. And once a myth has established itself within the consciousness of a particular interest group (a nation, constituency etc.), once it has attained its own ‘authority’, it is notoriously difficult to debunk.<sup>36</sup>

Central to this thesis is the phenomenon of the Stalinist myth that in 1956 had remained intact for large numbers of Western communists despite revelations and despite events. In the best simplifying debate-closing tradition, for many in this constituency the image of Stalin was synonymous with the Soviet Union itself and the associations attached to that image, which were of course fundamental communist values and ‘original truths’ such as proletarian struggle, historical and ideological authority and integrity, the fight against fascism, 20.000.000 war dead, the freeing of Europe from the Nazi threat, and of socialism in one country. Furthermore, the hostile attitude as they saw it of the Western powers vis-à-vis the Soviet Union since World War Two, only served to consolidate this image’s power to compel. At this juncture, the image of Uncle Jo out-glowed that of Uncle Sam hands down in the inverted mirror of the western communists’ perceptual world. They may have been taken off guard by the Secret Speech and the uprisings in Eastern Europe that year, but for large numbers of Party members this could be explained, rationalised.<sup>37</sup> It was certainly going to take more than that for them to start questioning the embodiment of their cause - even a deceased one (or possibly,

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<sup>36</sup> At least this has been the status of myths in the past. Whether they still have the *same* purchase, effects and tenacity in the era of information technologies is another, extremely interesting question.

<sup>37</sup> The fact that the Secret Speech was referred to in the communist press for months as ‘the report attributed to Khrushchev’ also confused the issues for this constituency, (see Chapters 5, 6).

particularly a deceased one). In the confusing Cold War climate of surreal daily headlines, machinations, one-upmanship, and real and present dangers, ‘Stalin’ and ‘de-Stalinisation’ were perplexing confounded, and this was not a time for conceptual leaps.<sup>38</sup>

And so the Stalinist myth was central to the Western communist psyche at this time. That said, there were also interesting *cultural, ideological and positional discontinuities* in the extent to which this was the case, and therefore the extent to which the myth influenced reactions to the events in question in each of the case-communities relevant to this study (see Chapter 7.6).

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<sup>38</sup> As Barthes states, myth is statistically on the right or rather it is conservative in nature, (1995, p.148-9). The ideas encapsulated in the Stalinist myth or Stalin / USSR / State Socialism were also conservative in that they conveyed essential, eternal values and were employed with the aim of maintaining a status quo. In this sense Stalin himself was effectively highly conservative, as was the Soviet system in our period, despite Khrushchev’s doomed agenda of ‘reform’.