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Argentine Left Parties and the 1967 Six-Day War through the Prism of Global Networks and South-South Connections

Maximiliano Jozami

Abstract. - The June 1967 war between Israel and the armies of Egypt, Syria and Jordan had an important impact on the Argentine left, which sided with the Arab countries. The Communist Party of Argentina (PCA), which had a significant influence on the Jewish community, defended the policy of the Soviet Union, while *Política Obrera* (PO) and the Revolutionary Workers' Party (PRT), two Trotskyist currents, were critical of the Soviet policy and saw in the political process of the Middle East an ongoing national revolution that could develop into a socialist revolution. Even though the three parties openly repudiated anti-Semitism and denounced the calls to expel the Jewish population from Israel/Palestine, they were not exempt of the use of anti-Semitic (and Orientalist) tropes. They described Israel as a mere 'pawn of US Imperialism' devoid of agency and, with the exception of the PCA, ignored the existence of the Palestinians as a distinct national group. The debate of the Israel/Palestine question at the Tricontinental Conference held in Havana in 1966 influenced the left as a whole, and seems to have informed the positions of PO, organization that became the first Marxist party in the world to have called for the political destruction of the State of Israel, which was to have been carried out by the revolutionary alliance of the Arab and Jewish masses of the Middle East. Both the PCA and PRT defended Israel's right to exist instead.

Keywords: Israel, Palestine, Tricontinental, Communism, Trotskyism, Anti-Zionism.

Resumen. - La guerra de junio de 1967 entre Israel y los ejércitos de Egipto, Siria y Jordania tuvo un importante impacto sobre la izquierda argentina, que se alineó con los países árabes. El Partido Comunista de Argentina (PCA), que tenía una influencia significativa dentro de la comunidad judía, defendió la política de la Unión Soviética, mientras que *Política Obrera* (PO) y el Partido Revolucionario de

los Trabajadores (PRT), dos corrientes trotskistas, fueron críticos de la política soviética y vieron en el proceso político del Medio Oriente una revolución nacional en curso que se podía convertir en una revolución socialista. Aunque los tres partidos repudiaban abiertamente al antisemitismo y denunciaban los llamados a expulsar a la población judía de Israel/Palestina, no estuvieron exentos del uso de tropos antisemitas (y orientalistas). Describían a Israel como un mero ‘peón del imperialismo estadounidense’, carente de agencia y, con la excepción del PCA, ignoraron la existencia de los Palestinos como un grupo nacional en sí mismo. El debate sobre la cuestión de Israel/Palestina en la Conferencia Tricontinental celebrada en La Habana en 1966 influyó a la izquierda en su conjunto, y parece haber servido de insumo a las posiciones de PO, organización que se convirtió en el primer partido marxista del mundo en plantear la destrucción política del Estado de Israel, la cual se suponía sería llevada a cabo por la alianza revolucionaria de las masas árabes y judías del Medio Oriente. Por el contrario, tanto el PCA como el PRT defendían el derecho de Israel a su existencia.

Palabras clave: Israel, Palestina, Tricontinental, comunismo, trotskismo, antisemitismo.

Introduction

The quasi-permanent presence of the Israel/Palestine question in the Argentine political scenario has been highlighted by different authors,¹ and the history of the Argentine left has been deemed essential “for the construction of both a global outlook as well as a particular vision on any of the long processes or situations lived in Argentina during the last one-hundred or one-hundred-and-twenty years”, since that political current permeated decisively the social,

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¹ See the volume edited by Emmanuel N. Kahan (ed.), *Israel-Palestina. Una pasión Argentina. Estudios sobre la recepción del conflicto Árabe-Israelí en la Argentina*, Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2016.

intellectual and cultural fabric of the country.² This is particularly valid for the political turmoil of the decades of 1960 and 1970, and for the treatment of the Israel/Palestine question during that period.³

The present article focuses on how the Partido Comunista de Argentina (PCA, Argentine Communist Party), the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT, Revolutionary Workers' Party) and the organization Política Obrera (PO, Workers' Politics) reacted and related to the 1967 Six-Day War between Israel, Egypt, Syria and Jordan.

The Argentine Left by the End of the Global 1960s

The Argentine left was no stranger to the processes that took place within the international left during the global 1960s. This resulted in a plethora of organizations strongly influenced by the Cuban and Chinese Revolution, the anticolonial struggle, and the different events in Eastern Europe, usually referred to as “the New Left”.⁴ Adding to the complexity, a “Peronist left” arose in Argentina, with an eclectic theoretical repertoire. The present article will focus solely on the Marxist left, particularly on the three organizations mentioned in the introduction.

With around 50,000 members by 1963, the Communist Party was the most numerous organization of the Marxist left in the country. However, the organization had lost almost half of its membership in around one decade.⁵ The 1960s were years of crisis for the PCA: according to Casola, this is related to an international rupture between the left and the Soviet Union. Both the Chinese and the Cuban revolution had had an enormous – and negative – impact on the Communist Parties. As a result, many splinter groups of different

² See Hernán Camarero, “La izquierda como objeto historiográfico”: *Nuevo Topo*, 1 (2005), pp. 77-99.

³ Stites Mor proposes that the modalities of identification of the Argentine Left with the Palestinian cause might be a unique case in the global left. See Jessica Stites Mor, “The Question of Palestine in the Argentine Political Imaginary. Anti-Imperialist Thought from Cold War to Neoliberal Order”: *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research*, 20: 2 (2014), pp. 183-197.

⁴ The term is however problematic. For a further discussion, see Martín Mangiantini, “La ‘Nueva Izquierda’ en la Argentina. Claves y discusiones alrededor del concepto”: *Astrolabio*, 21 (2018), pp. 27-52. In any case, the concept covers a heterogeneous range of organizations of different origins – many of them splinter groups from the Socialist and Communist Parties, and a varied ideological palette, which included Maoism, Guevarism, Castroism, Trotskyism and even Hoxhism. This enumeration is, of course, far from being exhaustive.

⁵ Ronaldo Munck, *Revolutionary Trends in Latin America*, Montreal: Centre for Developing-Area Studies, McGill University, 1984.

significance emerged and created an international scenario of growing complexity.⁶

While the Communist International had been officially dissolved by Stalin in 1943, the PCA continued to be closely under the orbit of the USSR and particularly of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. At the same time, the revolutions in the aftermath of World War II had created a dual situation: while they expanded the political and economic scenario for Russian influence, the newly triumphant leaderships were also a challenge for the growingly conservative Soviet bureaucracy.

By 1967, these tensions were evident in the case of the PCA. The unconditional defense of the Soviet Union and its international strategy of peaceful coexistence had to be combined with the defense of the Cuban Revolution – a process that had not been initially supported by Moscow and had even been opposed by their allies of the Cuban PSP – as well as their stance towards the People’s Republic of China in the midst of the Sino-Soviet split. The result was a contradictory set of positions.

Particularly in Israel/Palestine, one of the aforementioned splinter groups was the Israeli Socialist Organization, best known by the name of its journal, *Matzpen* (Compass). It had been founded in 1962 by militants who had been expelled from the Israeli Communist Party due to their defense of the right to the national self-determination of both the Jewish and Palestinian Arab peoples, as well as the right of return for the Palestinian refugees. The organization developed a further criticism of Zionism and started to call for the “de-Zionization of Israel”, by which they meant transforming Israel into a state that represented all its inhabitants regardless of their religion or ethnic origin, and abolishing the “Law of Return”.⁷ *Matzpen* did not belong to any international organization; however, some of their members did belong individually to Trotskyist currents, among them one of their main leaders, Jabra Nicola.⁸

⁶Natalia Casola, *El PC Argentino y la Dictadura Militar. Militancia, estrategia política y represión estatal*, Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2015, p. 7.

⁷The Law of Return, passed on 1950, is an Israeli law that grants Jews from all over the world the right to settle in Israel and gain Israeli citizenship. *Matzpen* contrasted this to the ill treatment received by Arab Palestinians born and raised in the region and deprived of many political rights.

⁸*Matzpen*’s stance against Zionism was harshly contested by the Israeli establishment. Many of their militants ended up abandoning the country and the organization ceased to exist around 1980. However, and despite being a numerically reduced group whose size went from a few dozens to some 100 militants mainly from Jerusalem, their political positions had a deep influence and are still present in the Israeli political imaginary. For further details, see Ran Greenstein, “Class, Nation, and Political Organization. The Anti-

In the field of Argentine Trotskyism, the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT, Revolutionary Workers' Party) was much smaller than the PCA, but it would achieve political importance in the years to come.⁹ It was the result of the fusion, in 1965, of two different currents: the Trotskyist Palabra Obrera (Workers' Word, led by Nahuel Moreno - pseudonym of Hugo Miguel Bressano Capacete) and the more populist Frente Revolucionario Indoamericano Popular (FRIP, People's Indian-American Revolutionary Front, led by Mario Roberto Santucho). Between the end of 1967 and the beginning of 1968, the organization would split into the PRT-La Verdad (The Truth) and the PRT-El Combatiente (The Combatant). The PRT-LV would continue in line with the Trotskyist tradition and would later become the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (Socialist Workers' Party), considered by some the largest Trotskyist party in the world during the decade of 1970.¹⁰ The PRT-El Combatiente would then decide to embrace armed struggle (this being the reason for the schism) and would gain great significance in the 1970s with the creation of the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (People's Revolutionary Army), which tried to combine urban guerrilla warfare with a rural 'foco' in the northern province of Tucumán.

Finally, Política Obrera (PO) was even smaller than the PRT. Nevertheless, it would experience a relatively important growth in the following years, not exempt of drawbacks, and it would eventually become the most important current of the Argentine left at the beginning of the 21st century.¹¹ PO was

Zionist Left in Israel/Palestine": *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 75 (2009), pp. 85-108.

⁹ The PRT had around 600-700 members in 1967. See Martín Mangiantini, *Itinerarios militantes. Del Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores al Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (1965-1976)*, Buenos Aires: Ediciones Imago Mundi, 2018, p. XIX.

¹⁰ Munk, *Revolutionary Trends*, p. 99. Others consider that this assertion may be exaggerated, and that perhaps some French Trotskyist currents were then more important (Norberto Malaj, Interview with the Author, November 2018.) In any case, the PST acquired international relevance within the Trotskyist movement.

¹¹ Their insertion in the trade-union movement would lead them to outgrow the much more traditional and experienced Morenoist current in the early 1970s. However, PO's erratic orientation in the face of the 1973 elections allowed the Morenoist to recover their numerical superiority and a wider political influence that lasted for decades. This was acknowledged internally by the Morenoists in a debate within their Brazilian organization: "Em 1972, contra toda a vanguarda, tendo os lambertistas à esquerda e o PC à direita, o PST se legalizou, a través da unificação com um setor do PS, e foi às eleições agitando um programa democrático e socialista, enfrentando Cãmpora-Peron. A Política Obrera (lambertista) era do mesmo tamanho ou até um pouco maior que o nosso partido. Passados cinco anos vamos encontrar o Pst com mais de 4 mil militantes e sendo o maior partido de esquerda hoje dentro da classe operária, e PO com algumas centenas de militantes, provavelmente menos de que em 1972." (Internal Discussion Bulletin of *Convergencia Socialista*, "Contribuição à Discussão Sobre PS," 1978, p. 7).

formed in 1964 by a group of young militants led by a 22-year-old intellectual, Jorge Altamira (pseudonym of José Saúl Wermus). PO would define itself as Trotskyist only a couple of months after its foundation, and although their permanent attempts to differentiate themselves from the other Trotskyist currents active in the country would become characteristic,¹² by 1967 they still had no clear position towards the international Trotskyist movement. They would later consider this to be one of the explanations for what they would describe as “the limited scope” of their initial theorizations.¹³

On the contrary, the current led by Moreno had taken active part in the international Trotskyist movement at least since 1948. After several splits, International Trotskyism had managed to reunite in a world congress held in 1963, giving birth to the Unified Secretariat of the IV International (USFI), whose main theoretician and political leader was the Belgian Ernst Mandel (others like the Italian Livio Maitan played an important role). Some minor groups, however, rejected the reunification: Pierre Lambert and Gerry Healy, leaders of the French OCI and the British SLL respectively, would stay apart in the International Committee for the IV International; the Argentine J. Posadas would found his own “Posadist IV International”.¹⁴ The Greek Michel Pablo, who had been the most renowned leader of the IV International after Leon Trotsky’s death, was also out of the USFI, since he was considered responsible for what the other organizations saw as ‘revisionist’ positions. By 1967, Pablo’s organization, based in France, was named International Revolutionary Marxist Tendency. It did not hold numerical importance, but Pablo continued to exert a certain political influence through his writings

¹² Alexander describes this as a typical trait of Trotskyism. Robert J. Alexander, *International Trotskyism, 1929-1985. A Documented Analysis of the Movement*, Duke University Press, 1991, pp. 24-27.

¹³ See Osvaldo Coggiola, *Historia del Trotskismo en Argentina y América Latina*, Buenos Aires: Ediciones ryr, 2006 (, 2a. ed.), pp. 207-209. *Política Obrera*’s homonymous organ would often publish articles from antagonistic international Trotskyist currents, sometimes even defending contradictory positions. Roberto Gramar, who was in charge of receiving international and local mail in 1967, reaffirms that they had no formal relation to any international current and that they would “receive whatever international material was available”, something that was not always simple due to the repressive conditions under Onganía’s dictatorship (Roberto Gramar, *Interview with the Author*, 2016).

¹⁴ Even though they still kept some influence in some countries, by then the Posadists had already started to follow a very idiosyncratic path that would approximate them more to a cult than to a political party - even for Trotskyist standards. Their peculiar political positions included references to flying saucers, astronomy and theoretical physics (see, for instance, J. Posadas, *Les soucoupes volantes. Le processus de la matière et de l’énergie, la science, la lutte de classes et révolutionnaire et le future socialiste de l’humanité*, Paris: Éditions Réed, 1968).

among the left and the anticolonial movement – he would even become an advisor to Ben Bella’s government in Algeria.

The PRT was not a formal member of the USFI, even though they openly recognized their sympathies and historical ties.¹⁵ The sector led by Santucho had no previous formal international membership, although some of their cadres had visited Cuba and developed a strong sympathy towards the Cuban revolution. Also, some members of the Morenoist current had received military training in Cuba in previous years. These links with Cuba would play a role in the relation between the PRT and the USFI, since by then this international Trotskyist organization had started a process of ‘reassessment’ of the Cuban experience that would lead them to promote the creation of - mostly failed - guerrilla movements in different countries.¹⁶

The Argentine Jewish Community and the Left in 1967

In the wake of the 1967 war, the Argentine Jewish Community was one of the most numerous in the Diaspora, with almost 300,000 members. After decades of intense political struggle, with a strong political and cultural dominance of the Ashkenazi sector, it had become “a highly centralized community [...] that wholeheartedly espoused Zionism”. The Spanish language Jewish press was very active: the weekly *El Mundo Israelita* was linked to the Zionist Labor alignment (Mapai and Ahdut HaAvoda, whose front was the basis of Levi Eshkol’s government in Israel); the bi-weekly *La Luz* to the Zionist Sephardim Movement and *Nueva Sión* was the voice of Mapam-Hashomer Hatzair.¹⁷

¹⁵ “Declaración General de La Conferencia Tricontinental”: *La Verdad*, 27, February 14, 1966.

¹⁶ Nahuel Moreno himself and Livio Maitan, an Italian Trotskyist leader, were perhaps the two most outspoken advocates of what they themselves would later call ‘Foco deviation’. See Coggiola, *Historia del Trotskismo*, pp. 215-221 and Daniel Gaido / Maximiliano Jozami, “Introducción a la primera edición en español de ‘La tendencia terrorista en Rusia’, de Vera Zasulich”: *Revista de Historia Social y de las Mentalidades*, 21: 2 (2017), pp. 145-187.

¹⁷ Haim Avni, “The Impact of the Six-Day War on a Zionist Community. The Case of Argentina”: Eli Lederhendler (ed.), *The Six-Day War and World Jewry*, Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2000, pp. 137-165. There is abounding bibliography on the historical process of political struggles that lead to the ‘conquest’ of the Jewish organizations by the Zionist movement. For instance: Lawrence Bell, “Bitter Conquest. Zionists against Progressive Jews and the Making of Post-War Jewish Politics in Argentina”: *Jewish History*, 17: 3 (2003), pp. 285-308; Emmanuel N. Kahan, “‘Sionistas’ vs. ‘Progresistas’. Una discusión registrada en las páginas de Nueva Sión en torno a la cuestión Israelí y la experiencia fascista durante el Affaire Eichmann (1960-1962)”: *Cuestiones de Sociología*, 3 (2006), pp. 298-314; Silvia Schenkolewski-Kroll, “Ideology and Propaganda in the Collective Memory’s Construction. Zionism and Communism in

The PCA held a very important influence over sectors with a Jewish identity, particularly through its leading positions in the ICUF (Idisher Cultur Farband, Federation of Jewish Cultural Entities), which included schools, theaters and other cultural hubs.¹⁸ The PCA had a specific “Israelite Commission” that guided their intervention in the ICUF. In the early 1950s, the ICUF was expelled from the Jewish community central, the DAIA, after refusing to denounce the rise of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union. As a result, a group decided to leave the ICUF and created Klorkait (Clarity).¹⁹ In this process, many intellectuals who were either members or sympathizers of the PCA decided to part ways or distance themselves from the organization. A strong rivalry developed with the publishers of Nueva Sión, the Mapam-Hashomer Hatzair, a party that had a positive appraisal of the Soviet Union until the drift in the early 1950s. In any case, the influence of the PCA over the Jewish collective was still significant in 1967.²⁰

The PRT and PO had no significant influence in the organized Jewish community in the wake of the Six-Day war. In 1966, the PRT had attempted an approach to a group of ten members of the MAPAM’s youth from the city of La Plata, apparently without further results despite a promising initial

Argentina”: August Grabski (ed.), *Rebels against Zion. Studies on the Jewish Left Anti-Zionism*, Warsaw: Jewish Historical Institute, 2010, pp. 125-138.

¹⁸ For a history of the ICUF in Argentina, see Nerina Visacovsky, *Argentinos, Judíos y camaradas. Tras la utopía socialista*, Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2015.

¹⁹ Ariel Svarch, “¿Comunistas Judíos o Judíos comunistas? La Rama Judía del PC en un contexto de crisis identitaria (1920-1950)”: 10th Jornadas Interescuelas/Departamentos de Historia, (2005), online: <http://cdsa.aacademica.org/000-006/713.pdf> [22-11-2019].

²⁰ We follow Rein and Lesser when they assert that the studies of the Jewish diaspora in Latin America should also include individuals non-affiliated to community organizations. See Raanan Rein / Jeffrey Lesser, “Nuevas aproximaciones a los conceptos de etnicidad y diáspora en América Latina. La perspectiva Judía”: *Estudios Sociales*, 32: 1 (2007), pp. 11-30. We use the term “collective” in order to differentiate it from “community” or the Spanish “colectividad”, which is often used in reference to the “official” Jewish organizations centralized in the DAIA, from which the ICUF had been expelled. Norberto Malaj (pseudonym of Norberto Flexer), who left Baderej, a Sephardi branch of Hashomer Hatzair in 1967 and joined Política Obrera in 1970 after a brief participation in a short-lived organization named “Madis” (Amos Movement of the Zionist Left), considers that the influence of the PCA in the cultural and political Jewish scene in Buenos Aires was significant. He also depicts a very progressive Jewish community, strongly radicalized, including currents that identified themselves as Zionist (Norberto Malaj, November 2018). [This view of the Argentine Jewish community was described as “idealized” by former Argentine exiles to Israel in a commentary to this work during a workshop at the University of Tel Aviv.] See also Daniel Kersfeld, *Rusos y rojos. Judíos comunistas en los tiempos de la Comintern*, Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2012, pos. 3152-3161 (e-Book).

forecast.²¹ One of the founders of PO, Roberto Gramar (pseudonym of Marcelo Nowersztern), describes that many of the first members of PO came from a Jewish background, particularly the leaders, among them the already mentioned Jorge Altamira, as well as his brother Julio Magri (pseudonym of Natalio Ismael Wermus) and Gramar himself.²² However, PO rejected organizing a Jewish fraction as such, and they embraced what seems to have been an assimilationist position.²³

This background of many of PO's founding members seems to have been used in a derogatory way as part of the identity ascribed to them: at least within the Morenoist current, it was informally said that PO was a pro Zionist group, without providing any evidence to substantiate that supposed position.²⁴ Even during an electoral debate in 2000, Herman Schiller (a renowned journalist, himself of Jewish origin and then candidate of Izquierda Unida, a Left front that included the Morenoist current) would 'accuse' the main leader of PO, Jorge Altamira, of allegedly "hiding his past in Hashomer Hatzair (left-wing

²¹ See Executive Committee of the PRT, Memo "Para los miembros del CC - Minutas y resoluciones de las resoluciones del CE", August 18, 1966. AA3166. Fundación Pluma and also Nora Ciapponi, Communication with the Author, January 2019.

²² Gramar highlights that "it was not a mere question of origin, we had a Jewish education, went to Jewish schools and some belonged to the Zionist left". This was also the case of other activists who would join PO in the late 1960s and early 1970s and would become important leaders within the organization, such as the already mentioned Norberto Malaj and Rafael Santos (pseudonym of Gustavo Eibuszyc) (Gramar, Interview with the Author, October 2016.). Efraim Davidi, who left the Zionist juvenile organization Hejalutz Lamerjav for a small Argentine Maoist party (PCM) during the 1970s, recalls a joke that circulated back then, according to which "the only reason why the Central Committee of Política Obrera doesn't hold their meetings in Yiddish is because they have a Sephardi member" (Efraim Davidi, Interview with the author, June 2019). Claudio Waisbord, former leader of Política Obrera in Córdoba, also remembers that they used to make ironic calls for the "Christianization of PO", since the majority of their members had a Jewish background – just like himself, who had been a member of Hashomer Hatzair before joining PO (Claudio Waisbord, Communication with the Author, June 2019).

²³ "We never had a Jewish fraction. Since we embraced the socialist cause, we couldn't accept a particular status as Jewish. From then on, one makes their own path and abandons all position of ethnic/cultural type. PO can be accused of taking care of the questions that affect the Jewish people, but because this is still one of the most important epicenters in the class struggle. Due to many circumstances, I occupied myself with the question of Israel and the Jewish people, but not because I am a Jew, but because the Palestinian drama and the whole situation in the Middle East are one of the most important open wounds in the contemporary world". (Malaj, November 2018).

²⁴ This was independently reported by two former members of the Morenoist current, Nora Ciapponi (one of the most important public figures of the current in the 1970s and 1980s) and Sergio Zeta. In both cases, they considered that the 'accusation' was baseless and part of the 'folklore' of the Left. See Nora Ciapponi, Interview with the author, April 2018 and Sergio Zeta, Interview with the Author, April 2018.

Zionism) and his participation as a resident in an Israeli kibbutz some decades ago”,²⁵ to which Altamira replied: “unlike the Pope, I have not had the pleasure of visiting Israel”.²⁶

Aside from parties, the Zionist movement and the Israeli Embassy considered the role of the intellectuals, and particularly those in the Left, to be very important due to their influence on the public opinion in Argentina and other Latin American countries. This is why they edited and circulated many booklets, pamphlets and books, which were usually reproductions of writings of European left-wing intellectuals translated for Latin America by Israel. “Only occasionally [were] specific articles written by Jewish or non-Jewish Latin Americans, adapted to national problems and mentality, also circulated with the assistance of the embassies”.²⁷

The June 1967 war had a huge impact in Argentine Jewry. In the face of the growing tensions of the previous weeks, the different organizations of the community had been unfolding a public campaign in solidarity with Israel, mainly highlighting the inflammatory anti-Semitic rhetoric of the Arab leaders that were calling for an ethnic cleansing. They were even organizing a mass rally which, with the outbreak of the war, was suspended by the military government, due to fears of clashes with the Arab community. In exchange, Jews from all over the country were urged to gather in local synagogues and institutions. According to the organizers, around 70,000 Jews from all over Argentina were involved in these activities. Outstanding public figures such as the writer Jorge Luis Borges took part in activities of solidarity with Israel and the mass media reports showed sympathy for Israel. Apparently, the public mobilization of the Argentine Arab collective (mainly Syrian and Lebanese) was not of equivalent importance.²⁸

²⁵ Herman Schiller, “Altamira, yo y Los Varenikes”: Página 12, March 29, 2000, p. 9.

²⁶ He also asserted that he had never been part of Hashomer Hatzair. See Jorge Altamira, “Todo por un plato de lentejas”: Página 12, March 30, 2000, p. 6.

²⁷ Edy Kaufman, “Israel’s Foreign Policy Implementation in Latin America”: Michael Curtis / Susan Aurelia Gitelson (eds.), *Israel in the Third World*, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1976, pp. 127, 138, 139.

²⁸ Avni, “The Impact”.

The Tricontinental Conference: Anti-Israeli Positions through South-South Connections

The unilateral handling of the October 1962 missile crisis by the Soviet regime led to a relative cooling-off period for Soviet-Cuban relations and convinced the Cuban leadership of the need for broader political alliances. The Cubans attempted to overcome their isolation by different means, among them pursuing an independent international revolutionary strategy. This included the organization of the “Tricontinental Conference” (January 1966), in which delegates from national liberation movements and leftist organizations from 82 countries were represented. The conference had a lasting influence, having for some become “the driving force of international political radicalism and the primary engine of radical cultural production throughout the world”.²⁹

The PCA took direct part in the Tricontinental: the party press enthusiastically announced that a joint meeting presided by a Peronist senator had decided that three communist militants would integrate the Argentine delegation, along with three members of the Peronist movement.³⁰ Most likely, the announcement had the purpose of highlighting a supposed ‘turn to the left’ of Peronism, described by the PCA since 1962.³¹ After this agreement, however, Cuba invited directly two other Argentine delegates who belonged to new organizations: Abel Alexis Latendorf (PVP, People’s Vanguard Party) and José Gabriel Vazeilles (MLN, National Liberation Movement).³²

The Tricontinental is mentioned in practically all the issues of the official newspaper of the PCA, “Nuestra Palabra”, between January and March. Even when the Conference was not yet over, the PCA reported on their development, the contents of the debates and the different commissions, highlighting the creation of the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL).³³ The PCA would assess the Conference in a very positive manner:

“[...] the Conference has met its fundamental objective in a highly satisfactory way. Its purpose was to bring different social forces closer along a common anti-imperialist platform

²⁹ Anne Garland Mahler, “The Global South in the Belly of the Beast. Viewing African American Civil Rights through a Tricontinental Lens”: *Latin American Research Review*, 50: 1 (2015), pp. 95-116.

³⁰ “Deliberan Asia, África y América Latina”: *Nuestra Palabra* 810, January 5, 1966.

³¹ Victorio Codovilla, *El significado del giro a la izquierda del Peronismo*, Buenos Aires: Anteo, 1962.

³² Efraim Davidi, “La Revolución Cubana y el Movimiento Nacional Palestino (1959-1967)”: Tel Aviv, 2016 (Unpublished Draft).

³³ “La Tricontinental”: *Nuestra Palabra* 811, January 12, 1966.

and, by these means, to broaden the organic and political basis of the world progressive and revolutionary front".³⁴

The General Declaration of the Tricontinental was published by the PCA in February, along with a summary of Fidel Castro's speech, with special highlights on his open attack on Trotskyism.³⁵ This attack shocked the PRT, who dealt obsessively with the subject during most of 1966 in their weekly publication and criticized the Conference as just another pro-Moscow event that "tried to mix everything in the same pot: revolutionary mass movements with governments and leaders of the so-called 'national progressive bourgeoisies'".³⁶ But after a few weeks they started to portray the Conference in a positive manner, and published its General Declaration stating that they subscribed to it, something that the PCA had also done.³⁷ Already in July, they would openly state that the conclusions of the Conference should be used in order to "fully develop actions of a defensive-offensive character in common with all the opportunistic parties, including Stalinism. Only this path will accelerate their crisis."³⁸

This position towards 'Stalinism' was not by mere chance: by this time, the crisis of the PCA was a well-known fact within the left and the leadership of the PRT had received many reports in relation to the different internal factions in the PCA, so the PRT's Executive Committee decided to make a systematical attempt to influence and attract a sector of the PCA.³⁹ This included a dual approach: on one side, they would voice a left criticism to the policy of the PCA, the Soviet Union and the international communist parties;⁴⁰ at the same time, they would call for unified actions with the PCA rank and file.

³⁴ "El Congreso de Cuba": Nuestra Palabra 812, January 19, 1966.

³⁵ Conferencia Tricontinental, "Declaración General de La Tricontinental": Nuestra Palabra 815, February 9, 1966 and Fidel Castro, "Fidel. El imperialismo será inevitablemente derrotado": Nuestra Palabra 815, February 9, 1966.

³⁶ "Conferencia Tricontinental. ¿Frente revolucionario o frente popular?": La Verdad 25, January 31, 1966.

³⁷ Conferencia Tricontinental, "Declaración General de La Conferencia Tricontinental": La Verdad 27, February 14, 1966. See also Estrategia 5, April 1966, pp. 4-6, for a more balanced analysis of the Tricontinental Conference by the PRT. In this text, they highlight the importance of the creation of "a Latin American Solidarity Organization" (the future OLAS).

³⁸ "Derrotemos el Plan Johnson para nuestro continente": La Verdad 48, July 11, 1966.

³⁹ PRT, "Para los miembros del CC".

⁴⁰ There are numerous articles with this orientation between 1966 and 1967, with a special series of twelve articles entitled "Theory and Practice of an Opportunistic Leadership" that began in Nuestra Palabra 86 (April 17, 1967) and finished in Nuestra Palabra 99 (July 31, 1967). The calls for unified actions seem to have been overly general and even abstract. We have not found records of any major unified action between the PRT and the PCA in the period.

Interestingly, the aforementioned memo also refers to *Política Obrera* and describes it as a group in crisis. The PRT saw some signs of a possible approximation in the positions of PO, even though they highlighted the existence of a sectarian tendency or at least a sectarian leader. Their decision was to “hit on them in order to carry out a united front action” but at grassroots level – the coverage of PO in the pages of *La Verdad*, the PRT’s newspaper, is practically non-existent in this period. PO, on its turn, carried out a permanent criticism of the rest of the Argentine left, including the PCA and, most particularly, the PRT, which was subject to repeated attacks.⁴¹ Curiously, PO wrote nothing in relation to the Tricontinental Conference, neither on Castro’s attacks on Trotskyism.

Even though it was not the subject of a particular commission of the Tricontinental, some Arab delegations proposed a draft resolution on the question of Israel/Palestine to the Conference. Among other points, the resolution defined Israel (“the Zionist State of immigrants”) as “an imperialist base, a useful and obedient tool of Imperialism for aggression and penetration”, described Zionism as “an Imperialist movement by nature”, with a “racist and fascist” structure and condemned “the Zionist movement and the existence of Israel in the occupied territory of Palestine”⁴².

The proposal took some of the delegations by surprise: apparently, a Uruguayan delegate initiated a debate that would lead to the abstention of the Uruguayan and Argentine delegation – and, perhaps, also of the Soviet delegation.⁴³ Nevertheless, the resolution was approved with the vote of all the other delegates.

Even though the declaration did not directly call for the destruction of Israel, the concept, until then never raised by Marxist organizations, was clearly implied. The resolution also failed to mention the destiny of the Jewish population in case of achieving the proposed destruction of Israel, which is

⁴¹ The periodicity of these attacks was such that the leadership of the PRT reacted surprised when one issue of *Política Obrera*’s publication didn’t mention the PRT. See PRT, “Para los miembros del CC” PO rejected the proposals made by the PRT for a united front. See Dirección Nacional de *Política Obrera*, “Declaración adjunta a la Carta de la Dirección de PO a la Dirección del PRT del 26/2/67”, March 22, 1967. Cedinci.

⁴² It must be taken into consideration that the mention to “occupied territory” before June 1967 had a different connotation than in present times, so the resolution clearly condemned the existence of Israel as such. All quotes from this paragraph are taken from the reproduction of the resolution in *Conferencia Tricontinental*, “Proyecto sobre el conflicto Árabe-Israelí”: *Nueva Sión* 423, February 10, 1966.

⁴³ According to the report of *Nueva Sión*, only two delegations abstained, the Uruguayan and the Argentine; see “Entretelones de un absurdo”: *Nueva Sión* 423, February 10, 1966. According to the PCA, also the Soviet delegation was among those abstaining; see *Nuestra Palabra* 821, March 23, 1966.

important, since the question had already been raised in clearly anti-Semitic terms by different Arab leaders, most notoriously by the first leader of the PLO, Ahmad al-Shuqayri.⁴⁴

The passing of this anti-Israeli resolution caused an immediate outcry from Zionist organizations; the MAPAM/Hashomer Hatzair denounced the influence of the Arab regimes and the inconsistency of the Communist Parties, since the support of the ‘Socialist Bloc’ had been decisive for the creation of the State of Israel and its victory in the 1948 war.⁴⁵ Many important Jewish and non-Jewish intellectuals followed, among them Ernesto Sábato, León Rozitchner, José Bleger, José Itzigsohn and Bernardo Verbitsky, with statements on the press and public talks. In 1968, the MAPAM/Hashomer Hatzair selected some of these texts and, along with some introductions, articles by European and Israeli authors, as well as documents, published “Israel: un tema para la izquierda”. The book would have a wide circulation, with many reprints and re-editions, including a Uruguayan edition.⁴⁶

The PCA felt forced to state their position on this debate, and they published an article in which they charged “the political reaction” with “speculating” in relation to the resolution on Palestine voted by the Tricontinental. The PCA reported the abstention of the Argentine, Uruguayan and Soviet delegations and quoted several paragraphs of the statements made to the Israeli communist newspaper Kol Haam by a Soviet delegate to the conference, Dmitri Dulidza. The delegate stated that the resolution was “contrary to the Soviet policy” and clarified:

“the poisonous hatred of one people against the other is a weapon in the hands of Imperialism [...] It is clear that the Soviet Union fully supports the legitimate rights of the Palestinian Arabs, but this position is under no circumstance directed against the Israeli people and their State, and these legitimate rights do not contradict neither deny the rights of the Israeli people [...] That is why the anti-Israeli resolution of the Conference was not accepted by us”.⁴⁷

Also, the Cuban Communist Party sought to distance itself from the resolution almost immediately, first of all by not including the anti-Israeli resolution in the booklets and leaflets published with the materials of the Tricontinental

⁴⁴ The call to “throw the Jews into the Sea” was apparently not made by Shuqayri, but it was attributed to him and repeated ad nauseam by the international press. In any case, Shuqayri’s statements had been clearly anti-Semitic – he advocated for what today would be defined as an ethnic cleansing. See Moshe Shemesh, “Did Shuqayri Call for ‘Throwing the Jews into the Sea’?”: *Israel Studies*, 8: 2 (2003), pp. 70-81.

⁴⁵ “Entretelones”, *Nueva Sión*, February 10, 1966.

⁴⁶ See B. Verbitsky et. al (eds.), *Israel. Un tema para la izquierda*, Buenos Aires: Nueva Sión, 1968 and *Israel, Un tema para la izquierda*, Buenos Aires-Montevideo: Palestra, 1969.

⁴⁷ “La URSS, Israel y La Intercontinental”: *Nuestra Palabra*, March 16, 1966.

Conference. A year later, in the aftermath of the Six-Day war, Fidel Castro would state that “true revolutionaries never threaten with the extermination of a whole country [...] That kind of propaganda helps the Israeli leaders to mobilize their people’s patriotism.”⁴⁸

Within the Argentine Trotskyist groups, none of them would make public mention to the debate, but the PRT would internally refer to this resolution as having created “confusion” among members of the MAPAM’s youth.⁴⁹

The Outbreak of the War

Despite the activity of the Argentine left being restricted by the military dictatorship, they still managed to publish their official organs, sometimes under precarious conditions. *Nuestra Palabra* (PCA) and *La Verdad* (PRT) were weekly publications, while *Política Obrera* was a monthly journal. The Communist Party had a five-decade-old publishing tradition in a broad field of subjects, as well as an impressive influence among intellectuals – which had nevertheless started to decline since the 1950s.⁵⁰ This was evident in the appearance and contents of the different journals: *Nuestra Palabra* enjoyed a much more professional design and covered the most diverse aspects of the international situation. Both *La Verdad* and *Política Obrera* were much less ambitious, with a minor coverage of international issues, particularly PO, which sometimes covered almost exclusively issues related to the trade-union movement.⁵¹

For the three organizations, the relative space given to the conflict was sometimes central. Only in 1967, the PCA published in *Nuestra Palabra* 20 articles related to the situation in the Levant; once the war erupted, they also published a booklet entitled “The Truth about the Conflict in the Near East”⁵², authored by Ruben Sinay, the main leader of their Israelite Commission. The PRT published 13 articles during the same year in *La Verdad*, while *Política Obrera* published 5 articles in their monthly homonymous publication.

⁴⁸ Arturo López-Levy, “Las relaciones Cuba-Israel. A la espera de una nueva etapa”: Cuba in Transition. Papers and Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual Meeting, Vol. 20, 2010, online: <https://www.ascecuba.org/publications/annual-proceedings/cuba-in-transition-volume-20/> [22-11-2019].

⁴⁹ PRT, “Para los miembros del CC”.

⁵⁰ See Adriana Petra, *Intelectuales y cultura comunista. Itinerarios, problemas y debates en la Argentina de posguerra*, Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2017.

⁵¹ This was the subject of a self-criticism by the PRT during their third Congress. See “Tercer Congreso del PRT”: *La Verdad* 95, July 3, 1967.

⁵² Rubén Sinay, *La verdad sobre el conflicto en el Cercano Oriente*, Buenos Aires: Documentos, 1967.

In the three cases, most of the articles had foreign authors: the PCA published articles signed by Communists from other countries or based on cables issued by press agencies from the 'Socialist Bloc', while the PRT reproduced articles of its international current, the USFI. The PO combined articles of different international currents, sometimes contradictory. However, the three currents also included important articles of analysis written by Argentine leaders: in the case of the PCA and the PRT, they held no signature (with the exception of Rubén Sinay's booklet); in the case of PO, Jorge Altamira authored the central article on the subject.⁵³

The texts written in the eve of the war show that the three currents made Imperialism responsible for the confrontation and that they supported the Arab side. The PCA, however, was confident that the policy of Egypt, the Soviet Union and their allies would avoid the war.⁵⁴ The PRT was also overconfident, but from another point of view: their forecast included an imminent revolutionary uprising. In the case of war, they argued, the inevitable mobilization of the Arab masses would defeat not only "the reactionary State of Israel", but also "all the feudal and bourgeois Arab governments. A process of permanent revolution, impossible to stop, would take place".⁵⁵

When referring to "Imperialism", the three currents pointed mainly to the USA, but the PCA included also a denunciation of British policies and, interestingly, of Western Germany. This was obviously related to the geopolitical interests of the Soviet Union and the 'Socialist Bloc'. Not unrelatedly, the PCA ascribed a key role in the crisis to oil companies, namely the Standard Oil and British Petroleum.⁵⁶ The PRT, with a broader scope of

⁵³ The case of PO was peculiar: they first published in the same issue an article originally written by Michel Pablo's current and another article written by Matzpen and taken from a USFI publication (see W. Soutima, "La cuestión Palestina y el conflicto Árabe-Israelí": *Política Obrera* 16, June 7, 1967; and ISO-Matzpen, "Declaración del C.C. de la Organización Socialista Israelí": *Política Obrera* 16, June 7, 1967), but in their following issue, they published an article written by Jorge Altamira that clearly rejected some of the positions defended by Pablo and by Matzpen (see Jorge Altamira, "Aprender de la derrota sufrida por la Revolución Árabe": *Política Obrera* 17, June 28, 1967). Adding to the confusion, in that very same issue, they published another article by Matzpen, which included some particular positions contradictory with those defended by Altamira (ISO-Matzpen, "El social imperialismo de la izquierda Israelí": *Política Obrera* 17, June 28, 1967). Altamira, who was in charge of the journal, claims that he could not supervise issue 16 because he was imprisoned for a brief period, and that the first political task that he undertook after recovering his freedom was writing Altamira, "Aprender de la derrota" (Jorge Altamira, Interview with the Author, 2016).

⁵⁴ "La crisis en el Cercano Oriente. Confabulación imperialista": *Nuestra Palabra* 882, May 30, 1967.

⁵⁵ "El conflicto Árabe-Israelí": *La Verdad*, 91, May 29, 1967.

⁵⁶ "Sin VI Flota ni S. Oil habría paz en Medio Oriente": *Nuestra Palabra* 883, June 6, 1967; "La diplomacia petrolera apoya el 'espacio vital' para Israel": *Nuestra Palabra* 885,

analysis in this aspect, referred to the “colossal economic development” of Israel, and explained it as the result of the “massive affluence of imperialist capital”, something that PO would also subscribe.⁵⁷

As expected, there were differences when it came to the analysis of the Soviet policy. The PCA gave wholeheartedly support to the policy of the USSR in the Middle East since before the creation of the State of Israel. In line with the concept of peaceful coexistence, they talked about “the firm policy of peace of the USSR”,⁵⁸ and in a statement issued by their Central Committee when the war erupted – which served also as the cover for their weekly journal, they made a call “For peace and peaceful coexistence, noble objective longed for all the peoples of the world, and consistently defended by the Soviet Union and the socialist countries!”⁵⁹

The Trotskyist currents, instead, were highly critical of the Soviet involvement in the crisis, but with important nuances. One of the two first articles published by PO was much more careful in its criticism and even described positive aspects of the Soviet policy in the Middle East: “the efforts undertaken by the USSR in order to achieve a rapprochement between Syria and the UAR” and “their will to assist the radical regimes against imperialism”. The criticism avoided any mention to the geopolitical interests held by Moscow and was limited to a supposedly “narrow conception of the dynamics of the Arab revolution”, which would generate “confusion” among the communist parties. This was related with Michel Pablo’s positions, which were much more lenient with the Soviet leadership than traditional Trotskyism, at least since the beginning of the 1950s.⁶⁰

However, PO’s own elaborations were unequivocally critical of the Soviet leadership, to which they refer as “the Stalinist bureaucracy”. The same was valid for the PRT, and both organizations criticized the fact that, despite having announced its support for the Arab countries in the case of war, the Soviet Union maintained its military neutrality during the confrontation. They related this to the policy of peaceful coexistence, which they repudiated. They would also express a strong rejection of the acceptance of the unconditional cease of fire by the Soviet Union in the UN Security Council, because it did not demand

June 20, 1967; “Hidrocarburos y diplomacia (Editorial)”: *Nuestra Palabra* 887, July 4, 1967.

⁵⁷ “Guerra: Apoyemos al pueblo Árabe”, *La Verdad* 93, June 12, 1967.

⁵⁸ “La crisis en el cercano Oriente. Confabulación imperialista”: *Nuestra Palabra* 882, May 30, 1967.

⁵⁹ Comité Central del Partido Comunista, “¿Qué hay detrás del conflicto Árabe-Israelí? Declaración del Comité Central del Partido Comunista”, June 7, 1967. Archive of the Communist Party of Argentina.

⁶⁰ Coggiola, *Historia del Trotskismo*, pp. 140-141.

the Israeli withdrawal from the newly occupied territories (the West Bank, the Golan Heights, Gaza and the Sinai). This was particularly stressed by the PRT, not only in articles of their own, but also by reproducing the positions of the Communist Party of the Dominican Republic and the Communist Party of Cuba, both of which criticized the UN resolution.⁶¹ They also reproduced an article with the position of one of the two Israeli Communist Parties, which was supportive of Israel.⁶² This was evidently part of the PRT's attempt to exert an influence on the crisis of the PCA.

Israel as Depicted by the Left

The depiction of Israel by these three Argentine organizations shares a common pattern: they portray Israel as a State completely lacking of agency or autonomous decision. The war is considered the result of (mainly US) imperialist planning, and the role of Israel would be the one of a mere 'accomplice' (PCA), 'appendix' (PO) or 'servant' (PRT) of US/World Imperialism.⁶³

Recent historiography shows that the initiative in the 1967 war was on the Israeli side, not on the US, and that the Americans even attempted to stop or delay the Israeli offensive more than once. However, it would be a methodological mistake to expect the Argentine Left organizations to have been familiar with this specific knowledge, which, back in 1967, was classified information held perhaps only by the US and Israeli intelligence. Nevertheless, the Argentine left was already familiar with the possibility of the detailed planning for a military expansion by the Israeli Defense Forces years before the outbreak of the war, by means of Spanish translations of Soviet booklets.⁶⁴ The PCA deemed those reports truthful. However, they never ascribed them to

⁶¹ "Cuba denuncia un golpe contra la causa Árabe": *La Verdad* 95, July 3, 1967; "El PC Dominicano denuncia la política exterior del Kremlin": *La Verdad* 98, July 24, 1967.

⁶² It was actually the fraction led by Moshe Sneh and Shmuel Mikunis, who by then had already severed relations with Moscow. The PCA replied without mentioning the PRT, with an article reporting that "The Communist Party of Israel Condemns the Zionist Adventure", in reference to the other fraction. They also reported that they condemned "the Sneh-Mikunis group", described as "a minority fraction" that had decided to part ways with the purpose of supporting "the war of aggression" and "the Eshkol-Dayan-Begin government". See "El Partido Comunista de Israel condena la aventura Sionista", *Nuestra Palabra* 893, August 15, 1967.

⁶³ See "¿Qué hay detrás del conflicto Árabe-Israelí?": *Nuestra Palabra* 884, June 14, 1967; Altamira, "Aprender de la derrota"; "Guerra. Apoyemos al pueblo Árabe": *La Verdad* 93.

⁶⁴ Sinay, *La verdad*, pp. 18-22.

decisions dictated by the objectives of the Zionist movement – they considered Israel as a simple executioner of orders dictated by Washington:

“Of course, the Israeli expansion is not an end in itself. It serves the neocolonial objectives of mining the progressive regimes of Syria, Egypt and Iraq, and it brings back also ancient colonial desires, such as the ‘internationalization’ of the Suez Canal”.⁶⁵

This consideration about Israel is partially reminiscent of Orientalism as described by Edward Said: the ‘Orient’ appears as a land of people that cannot represent themselves, deprived of agency.⁶⁶ There was, however, an exception, since even though the leadership of the state of Israel appears as a mere agent of US Imperialism, one organization of the Israeli left did have a voice in the Trotskyist journals: both PO and the PRT published an article by Matzpen that, at the same time that called for the “de-zionization” of Israel and equal rights for Arabs and Jews, explained that a Hebrew nation had been created as a result of the Zionist conquest.⁶⁷ Matzpen defended therefore the right of that nation to have their own state. The PRT shared that position; PO, however, rejected it in Altamira’s article and simply denied the existence of a Hebrew nation:

“we don’t believe that the Zionist colonization has given birth to a Hebrew nation in the historical sense of the word. Their cultural attributes are questioned by the racial discrimination between ‘Ashkenazi’ and ‘Sephardim’, and their separate economic life is not a national but an imperialist product”.⁶⁸

The denial of the existence of a Hebrew nation still in 1967 is noteworthy: already then, the Hebrew language had been clearly established as a national language, there was a territorial claim (regardless of its justice or lawfulness) and there was a domestic market much more dynamic than most of the other economies in the region. However, with the exception of a very loose mention to the differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardim, the article by Política Obrera did not provide information about the concrete reality in Israel/Palestine that could serve to sustain such statements. The denial of the

⁶⁵ “La diplomacia petrolera apoya el ‘espacio vital’ para Israel”: Nuestra Palabra 885, June 20, 1967.

⁶⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, London: Penguin Books, 2003, pp. 1-28.

⁶⁷ ISO-Matzpen, “Declaración del C.C. de la Organización Socialista Israelí”: Política Obrera 16, June 7, 1967; ISO-Matzpen, “Llamado de los Socialistas Israelitas”: La Verdad, 93, June 12, 1967. Both organizations published also another article by Matzpen, which included a detailed description of the Israeli left and an interesting conceptualization of the role of the Histadrut. The document also provided a depiction of class relations in the kibbutzim, denying that these organizations were “socialist”, and describing them as an institution that supported colonization and the ideological cohesion of the Zionist project. See ISO-Matzpen, “El social imperialismo de la izquierda Israelí”: Política Obrera, 17, June 28, 1967; ISO-Matzpen, “La verdad sobre Israel”: La Verdad, 96, July 10, 1967.

⁶⁸ Altamira, “Aprender de la derrota”.

existence of a Hebrew nation seems to be a repetition of the different Marxist elaborations that, during the first decades of the 20th century, mistakenly foresaw the dissolution of Zionism.⁶⁹ But even through the prism of a supposed Trotskyist ‘orthodoxy’, it must be pointed out that Trotsky, by the end of his life, had abandoned the ‘assimilationist’ position for the Jewish question, describing the existence of a Jewish nation that would persist for a prolonged period.⁷⁰

Nonetheless, PO’s most controversial position was another one: in contrast with the previous article signed by Soutima, which repudiated the calls for the destruction of Israel by the Arab leaders, Altamira’s article openly called for the destruction of Israel in what they considered revolutionary terms:

“The first alternative was to break with the myth of the Pan-Arab unity against Israel, declaring that the objective was to overthrow all the monarchic and pro-imperialist regimes, and to destroy the State of Israel as an imperialist base, but the practical order of these two tasks will tactically depend on the interests of the revolution. This alternative required to organize independently the revolutionary nationalist forces from all the Arab world with the purpose of a revolutionary civil war, and it required to incorporate the most exploited masses of the Jewish people to this struggle, pointing out that the objective is not the reactionary utopia of their extermination but the liquidation of Israel’s imperialist State form –State form that is the direct agent of the exploitation of the Jewish masses and the racial and social discrimination existing in that country.⁷¹”

It is important for the analysis to highlight that the destruction of the State of Israel is, in the article, clearly distinct from the racist objective of exterminating the Jewish population. This seems an attempt to differentiate anti-Zionism from anti-Semitism. At the same time, Israel is described as a “direct appendix of imperialism, determined by their international economic link with the world Jewish bourgeoisie, who is direct part of [imperialism]”.⁷² The expression “world Jewish bourgeoisie” is used again afterwards: “In its current form, the State of Israel is not even the expression of its population, but of the world Jewish bourgeoisie, economically assimilated to imperialism”.⁷³ The concept itself is confusing from a socio-economic point of view: the author does not explain what the supposed “economic assimilation” means. At the same, it is compatible with classic anti-Semitic elaborations: it is hard not to point out the similarities between the idea of a “Jewish bourgeoisie, economically

⁶⁹ Arlene Clemesha, “Trotsky y la cuestión Judía”: En Defensa Del Marxismo, 27 (2000), pp. 51-78.

⁷⁰ Leon Trotsky, “On the Jewish Problem”, Fourth International, 6: 12 (1945), pp. 377-379.

⁷¹ Altamira, “Aprender de la derrota”.

⁷² Ibidem.

⁷³ Ibidem.

assimilated to imperialism” and the concepts of “international synarchy” or “Jewish world government” usually spread by anti-Semitic libels. It would be inaccurate, however, to describe this as part of an anti-Semitic agenda of PO, which clearly did not exist. It is more likely that these unconsciously anti-Semitic assertions were the result of an improvised position informed by indirect pressures from Arab nationalism – via the Tricontinental – on a subject that had not been thoroughly studied by PO.

According to Altamira, this was the first time that a Left party from any country called for the destruction of Israel.⁷⁴ This can be held true if we consider that the Tricontinental Conference was not the expression of a single party and that none of the Marxist parties that had taken part in the conference defended afterwards the resolution that called for the destruction of Israel. According to Gramar, this elaboration had further influence on the Argentine Left (the Morenoist current would start to raise this slogan after the Yom Kippur war in 1973) and on international Trotskyism when PO joined the international organization lead by the French Pierre Lambert.⁷⁵

It is noteworthy that despite this radical criticism of Israel, PO failed to mention the accusations of war crimes reported in the international press against the Israeli Defense Forces. The same was valid for the PRT, but not for the PCA, which denounced the use of napalm and the “inhuman treatment of the civilian population in the territories occupied during the current military campaign”, which they considered had been learned by the Israelis commanders from their visits to the US troops in Vietnam.⁷⁶ The PCA also related this to the Kafr Qasim massacre and to the systematic segregation of the Arab and non-Jew population, as well as to the absence of civil marriage and the influence of religion in public life. Similar observations in relation to racial segregation were pointed out by the PRT in the reproduction of an article written by Peter Buch, member of the US Socialist Workers’ Party (affiliated to the USFI) and by PO.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Altamira, Interview with the Author, 2016.

⁷⁵ Gramar, Interview with the Author, 2016. The PCA would never endorse the call for the destruction of Israel and would even criticize Nasser’s statements in this regard as “preposterous”. See Sinay, *La verdad*, p. 35.

⁷⁶ Sinay, *La verdad*, pp. 36-37.

⁷⁷ Peter Buch, “El mito del ‘progreso’ en Israel”: *La Verdad*, 97, July 24, 1967; Altamira, “Aprender de la derrota”.

‘The Arabs’

The PCA was the first party in the left to openly address the question of the Palestinians as a national group. As Saborido points out, the PCA called for the return of the Palestinian refugees and the creation of a Palestinian state in Sinay’s booklet published in June 1967. Sinay states that, although the Palestinians are indeed Arabs, reducing their identity to that aspect is equivalent to reducing the identity of Argentines or Peruvians to “Latin Americans”, ignoring their national specificities.⁷⁸ Sinay also develops an analysis of Al Fatah and their terror methods, which they repudiate, and they consider the organization lead by Arafat as suspiciously functional to the interests of imperialism. This would be in line with the position adopted by the PCA some months later in relation to the OLAS Conference in which the Cubans would call for the development of guerrilla movements in all Latin America, and in general, with the position of the PCA towards guerrilla movements in Argentina during the 1960s-1970s.⁷⁹

Instead, the treatment of Palestinians as a specific conceptual entity was almost absent in the narrative of the Argentine Trotskyist groups. The first article by Matzpen reproduced by both the PRT and PO defended the right of return for the Palestinian refugees – this was also the case of an international declaration of the Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International reproduced by the PRT, which also mentioned Al Fatah as “freedom fighters”, without a further analysis. Nevertheless, the elaborations of the Argentine Trotskyists continued to ignore the Palestinians as a national group, and referred to them generically as ‘the Arabs’, ‘the Arab people’ or ‘the Arab nation’. They saw the entire political process in the Middle East through the prism of Pan-Arabism, to the point that, for instance, for the PRT “there is no such thing as an Egyptian revolution, but an Arab revolution, whose culminating point was Algeria”⁸⁰ and PO would consider that “the national question in the Middle East is the Arab question, not the Hebrew, which must be politically assimilated to the former”.⁸¹

This Trotskyist approach to Pan-Arabism included the idea of parallels between Nasserism and Peronism, a trait present in many other Argentine

⁷⁸ Mercedes Saborido, “El Partido Comunista Argentino y la Guerra de los Seis Días”: *Izquierdas*, 12 (2012), pp. 52-70.

⁷⁹ The PCA would provide initial support to the Argentine dictatorship of 1976-1983 and would condemn guerrilla organizations as providing the justification needed by the right-wing in order to carry out political repression.

⁸⁰ “La Revolución Permanente. Mito o una guía para la acción”: *La Verdad*, 96, July 10, 1967.

⁸¹ Altamira, “Aprender de la derrota”.

political actors.⁸² In the case of the PRT, the parallel was explicit, since they considered that both Perón and Nasser embodied a ‘sui generis’ form of Bonapartism, in analogy to what Trotsky had described for the government of Cárdenas in Mexico: “those special governments that rely on the workers' movement, looking for a broader base in order to resist the excessive demands of imperialism”.⁸³ In a development of this point of view, the Arab-Israeli conflict was an indirect conflict in which the true contestants were not the Arab governments and Israel, but the Arab masses and Imperialism. In a teleological approach, the solution of this confrontation was necessarily the socialist revolution, in a process or ‘permanent’ or ‘uninterrupted’ revolution that would follow the paths already described by Trotsky before the 1905 Russian Revolution and universally valid for all the countries that had not yet fully completed what were supposed to be their ‘bourgeois tasks’, as it was the case of both Egypt and Argentina.⁸⁴

PO never referred to “sui generis Bonapartism”⁸⁵ but shared the view of an on-going revolution: “Nasserism and the Syrian left have carried out great advances in the democratic and anti-imperialist revolution in their countries. They have not crowned this process, though”. At the same time, PO criticized the ‘inconsistency’ of the Syrian and Egyptian governments, and attributed those characteristics to the “[...] duality and ambiguity of the petty bourgeoisie, as radical as it may be, in the face of the concentrated pressure of imperialism and the independent mobilization of the masses”.⁸⁶ This seemingly more sound position, however, does not provide any information on the class character of the Egypt state, something considered key for a consistent Marxist analysis. The problems shown by PO in order to carry out a proper analysis of nationalism would be object of a severe self-criticism some year later, during their first congress in 1975.⁸⁷

The PRT showed a similar lack of depth in the analysis of Egypt, but they simply attributed it to ‘lack of space’ in their journal.⁸⁸ However, in an exchange with leaders of the USFI, they acknowledged that they had “countless and serious theoretical problems that must be elucidated” in relation

⁸² See Lily P. Balloffet, “Argentine and Egyptian History Entangled. From Perón to Nasser”: *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 50: 3 (2018), pp. 549-77.

⁸³ “Onganía. ¿Perón, Franco, Nasser o De Gaulle?”: *La Verdad*, 51, August 1, 1966.

⁸⁴ “El conflicto Árabe-Israelí”: *La Verdad*, 91 (1967).

⁸⁵ Intriguingly, this is also a concept developed in Trotsky’s last writings. Similarly to Trotsky’s latest positions on the Jewish question, PO seems to have not been aware of them.

⁸⁶ Altamira, “Aprender de la derrota”.

⁸⁷ Coggiola, *Historia del Trotskismo*, p. 226.

⁸⁸ “Los gobiernos burgueses Árabes únicos culpables de la derrota”: *La Verdad* 94, (1967).

to Egypt and what they called “revolutionary-Bonapartist governments and parties between the bureaucracy and the masses”.⁸⁹

Finally, the PCA did not refer to the same process as a revolution, but as a national liberation movement that spread all over the Arab countries “with vacillations, contradictions, inconsequence”. They stressed the role of the Soviet policy as the most important progressive factor in the process, particularly via their participation in the Bandung conference and also by means of their arms trade with the Arab countries. They signaled the 1952 overthrow of Farouk as a turning point, at the same level of the ascent to power of the Ba’ath Party, which they saw as a heterogeneous, although clearly leftist force.⁹⁰

The Aftermath: Results and Perspectives

Although both the PRT and the PCA had provided predictions that were utterly inaccurate, neither of them admitted it. In their analyses of the results of the war they kept the previous optimism: the PCA virtually avoided any deep reflection on the negative results of the war for the Arab field and posited that these would be solved by means of international diplomacy, particularly in the UN. This was actually the Soviet foreign policy, which also included a reinforcement of their military presence in the area.⁹¹ The PRT, after having forecast a continental revolution in the case of war, acknowledged now “a severe defeat for the masses”. However, they still showed enthusiasm: they considered that only the Arab leadership had been defeated, not the Arab masses, and that the defeat, since it was “external”, would only accelerate the crisis, due to which “all the contradictions of the Arab revolution will become deeper, forcing this revolution to advance much further”. They placed a strong emphasis on the political and personal responsibility of Nasser: the cover of *La Verdad* was a picture of the Egyptian leader, under the title “Arab Bourgeois Governments, the Only Responsible for the Defeat”.⁹²

The main article written by PO is clearly a tacit reply to the PRT. Altamira rejected blaming an individual (Nasser) and developed an analysis of the

⁸⁹ “Carta a Livio Maitan”: *La Verdad*, 76, January 23, 1967, (Unsigned, probably written by Nahuel Moreno).

⁹⁰ Sinay, *La verdad*, p. 12, 24-25.

⁹¹ E.g., “La votación en la ONU. Israel no puede cantar victoria”: *Nuestra Palabra* 888, July 11, 1967 and “Enérgica advertencia soviética a los agresores israelíes”: *Nuestra Palabra* 891, August 1, 1967.

⁹² “Los gobiernos burgueses Árabes únicos culpables de la derrota”: *La Verdad* 94, (1967).

international situation, which, according to his interpretation, had been favorable to US imperialism since 1964, with a relative retreat of the revolutionary forces. They considered the military results of the war as having produced a defeat of the Arab revolution, not only of their leadership, and this was to be very important, among other things, because they saw no new revolutionary leadership appearing as an alternative to Nasserism and the Ba'ath.⁹³ They were ignoring the role that Al Fatah had already begun to play. PO's position towards Nasserism was ambiguous: first, they saw the movement as having made huge advances in the democratic and anti-imperialist revolution, but later in the same article they ironically rejected the possibility of Nasserism leading a social revolution.

The PCA combined the denial of the consequences that the military defeat had for the Arab regimes supported by the USSR with an increased verbal attack to Israel that included comparisons to the Nazi regime. These comparisons were in general artificially forced and even preposterous – for instance, they started referring to the war as a 'Blitzkrieg' and used this as a supposed evidence of a similarity between the Nazis and the Israeli regime. They also made use of anti-Semitic tropes, as when they wrote that "the influence of the Jews in the world of business is well known" or that "the Zionist oligarchy embedded in the highest levels of the world oil monopolies attacked the Arab peoples in defense of oil controlled by Imperialists" and referred to the Israeli Prime Minister, Levi Eshkol, as "Rothschild's puppet ['el hombrecillo de Rothschild']".⁹⁴

This position would give place to an important crisis in the ICUF. An internal report of the PCA for the preparations of the 1968 Congress of the ICUF describes a drift between two 'wrong approaches': 'hard-liners' who expected the ICUF to act as a simple repeater of the PCA's policies and members of the PCA who, according to the vision of the leadership, were dissolving in the ICUF - to the detriment of the Party. The leadership acknowledged that they had not been prepared to face what they called "the chauvinistic explosion that shocked the [Jewish] community" during and immediately after the war and they set other priorities to be discussed in the ICUF, leaving the conflict in the Middle East in fifth place.⁹⁵ As a result, the loss of influence of the PCA among the Jewish collective would deepen – many individuals took distance from both the ICUF and the Party, and a group originally organized around the Max Nordau Center in the city of La Plata

⁹³ Altamira, "Aprender de la derrota".

⁹⁴ "La 'Blitzkrieg' de la oligarquía sionista": Nuestra Palabra 886, June 27, 1967.

⁹⁵ PCA's Israelite Commission, "Informe de la Comisión Israelita", (September 9, 1968), Fondo Partido Comunista Argentino, Years 1940-1968. Cedinci.

parted ways and created a new journal, Fraie Schtime, whose center of activities would be located in the city of Buenos Aires.⁹⁶ The PCA would try to instill new energy to the ICUF by creating a new publication, Tiempo, whose first issue would appear in 1968.⁹⁷

Conclusions

The Argentine left faced the 1967 war through the lens of an oversimplified theory of Imperialism. This approach, which showed several inconsistencies when dealing with a complex reality, was influenced by the international networks in which the Argentine Left took part. PO seems to have been the first Marxist party in the world to openly call for the political destruction of the State of Israel, a position resulting from a South-South dialogue, since it was informed by the influence of nationalist Arab governments in the Tricontinental Conference of Havana.

Even though the three parties denounced the calls by some Arab leaders for the extermination of the Jewish people living in Israel/Palestine, this did not hinder them from making use of anti-Semitic tropes or engaging in anti-Semitic attitudes. The fact that many of the activists who wrote these texts were themselves Jewish and sincerely repudiated anti-Semitism cannot be used to deny the spread of certain anti-Semitic rhetorical figures. On the contrary, this illustrates the complexities involved in the analysis of racist speech. Even though the PCA's denial of the rise of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union was perhaps the most notorious position of this type, some other attitudes deserve attention, such as the false accusations against PO of being pro-Zionist, unofficially held by the PRT and based solely on the Jewish origin of many founders of PO, or the use of anti-Semitic tropes such as the concept of "world Jewish bourgeoisie" and similar by PO and the PCA.

The question of the destruction of the State of Israel, even though it was raised by PO along with a clear repudiation of the calls to expel the Jewish population of Israel/Palestine, is still very problematic. Even though the

⁹⁶ Leonardo Senkman, "Repercussions of the Six-Day War in the Leftist Jewish Argentine Camp. The Rise of Fraie Schtime, 1967-1969": Eli Lederhendler (ed.), *The Six-Day War and World Jewry*, Bethesda: University Press of Maryland (2000), pp. 167-186.

⁹⁷ Emmanuel Nicolás Kahan, "Los 'Judíos Progresistas' en Argentina. Posicionamientos, debates y tensiones frente a La Guerra de Los Seis Días (1967)": Emmanuel Nicolás Kahan/Santiago Cueto Rúa/Laura Graciela Rodríguez (eds.), *Memoria y violencia en el siglo XX*, La Plata: Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 2018, pp. 39-61.

destruction of the bourgeois state has always been part of the Marxist-Leninist program, it was never raised as a slogan or concrete proposal for a certain state, but more as a general description of the revolutionary process. As a matter of fact, PO did not apply the slogan to any other state at that time, making it clear that its use had to do with the specificities of the Israel/Palestine question. Even if explicitly distinguished from the ideas of expelling the Jewish population, the concept of a 'revolutionary destruction' of Israel was confusing and was not developed or explained – in contrast, for instance, with the proposals for the 'de-Zionization' of Israel by Matzpen.

In general, the theoretical elaborations of the Argentine left in relation to the Middle East were still superficial and showed major problems, as the question of nationalism and national groups, or the class character of the different states in the Middle East, which lead some of these organizations to talk about feudal revolutionary leaderships in the 20th century – something at odds with Marxism and any other political theory.

The theoretical framework of the three parties led to their denial of agency for both Israel and the Palestinian people. An important exception would be the treatment of the Palestinians as a distinct national group by the PCA after June 1967. Despite having fluid contacts with the reality of Israel/Palestine, neither party made use of their relations with members of the Jewish collective who had emigrated in order to have a voice from the region, preferring the analysis of the international organizations to which they belonged or other leftist groups from countries that were not in the Levant, with the partial exception of the reproduction of articles by Matzpen that had been previously published on the French or US left press.

The reception of the 1967 war acted as catalyst for the ongoing process due to which the PCA was irrevocably losing its influence within the Argentine Jewry. Contrary to the PCA, PO and the PRT were not related to specifically Jewish organizations, but the discussion on the 1967 war would set the basis for their position towards Israel/Palestine in the future.