Revolutionary Self-Determination? Third-Worldism, Anti-Colonialism and Ethnonationalism in Western Europe (1955-1980)

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Abstract

Cultural transfers between metropolitan cores and colonial peripheries, have been a constant feature of the history of modern nationalism. Anti-colonial movements also influenced to some extent the development and strategies of European national movements before 1939. After 1945, and with particular intensity following the Algerian War of Independence, claims for national self-determination from the colonial possessions of the European empires also influenced the development of regional and national movements within Western Europe. This was flanked by the adoption of Marxist-Leninist and New Left doctrines by the post-war generation leading Western European minority nationalisms. The article deals with the reformulation of national self-determination in Europe under the influence of anti-colonial thought, particularly since the adoption of the theories of "internal colonialism", and the new dimension given to the theory of national liberation by authors such as Frantz Fanon. It also looks at the emergence of radical ethnonationalist parties in the 1960s and their commitment to this new wave of anti-colonial self-determination. Finally, the attempts of some of these movements to articulate a transnational programme will be analysed.

As Anne-Marie Thiesse (2001:6) has stated, "rien de plus international que le nationalisme" (nothing is more international than nationalism). Nationalism is an international phenomenon, which arises and develops in an interconnected manner between various countries (Werner and Zimmermann 2003). Most approaches to nationalism usually depart from a paradox: the more nationalists in one place believe that their nation is unique, the more it resembles others. And the more a national movement admits that it imitates and gets inspired by others, the more it carries out a selective appropriation of those elements deemed relevant for its own goals. Very often, the final result of this transfer is a new one. There are so far few general reflections on the transnational nature of national thought and nationalism from its emergence as a modern identity to the present day. This gap requires us to reframe our general understanding of nationalism from a relational approach, in the sense also proposed by Wimmer and Feinstein (2010) for the diffusion of the model of the nation-state, and to see it as a result of local structures, but also of flows and transfers, and as a product of modernity, which is not just a European 'invention', but rather the result of multiple interactions on a global scale, since nationalism is a world phenomenon, and anti-colonial nationalism in Asia and Africa could not be subsumed as a mere borrowing of Western concepts of nationalism (Chaterjee 1993, 3-13). In this respect, the relevance of key historical periods on the spread and development of claims for nationhood must be analyzed in order to reconceptualize it

within the context of globalization processes (Storm 2025). This entails undertaking an assessment of the spread of national(ist) ideas by focusing on the role of cultural transfers, exiles, diasporas, and academic and literary networks (Núñez Seixas 2023).

Nationalists constantly learn from each other, in terms of cultural models as well as political practices: these cultural transfers do not always take place between the centre and the periphery, but between different peripheries, and assume particular importance at specific historical moments. This was the case, first, in the period of the 'creole pioneers' in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, as well as later on in 1848 with the 'Peoples' Spring'; in 1918-19, when the dismemberment of multinational empires and the spread of the principle of self-determination of peoples seemed to precipitate the liberation of nationalities and colonized populations; and then in 1989-91, following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Anderson 1983; Manela 2007; Wimmer 2013; Núñez Seixas 2020).

Nationalist movements have based their political appeal and their social strength primarily on internal factors. However, from the point of view of their use of strategies and political models, as well as in the perception of the world by nationalist elites, the relations between different nationalist movements also play a key role. At specific junctures, a real *demonstration effect* can occur, subject to the internal dynamics of each national movement. In addition, solidarity between peoples adds international legitimacy to the nationalists' cause (Leerssen 2006; Núñez Seixas 2019).

The dissemination of the claims of colonized peoples that has taken place since 1945 can be included in the framework of these waves of international legitimization of nationalism. More precisely, this diffusion led to the recognition of the principle of self-determination of peoples (reserved for colonized populations) within international law by the UN General Assembly resolutions of December 1960 and November 1961.[1] However, to what extent did this international environment leave its imprint on the political evolution of various European sub-state nationalisms? Did the colonial peripheries have any real influence on the centrifugal tendencies of the inner peripheries of their metropolitan centre, thereby overcoming the past role of overseas empires in achieving the integration of their European cores? (Miller and Berger 2015)? What were the terms of that influence, and what were their limits? This article will address this issue by comparing political developments in several minority nations in Western Europe, particularly (though not exclusively) in Sardinia, Corsica, Galicia, Brittany, and Occitania, focusing on their theoretical debates and political manifestos, and tracing the transnational influences and elements they reflect.

Postwar minority nationalisms: dealing with a difficult legacy

In the eyes of many Europeans, sub-state nationalism was completely delegitimized after the end of the Second World War. The atrocities committed by the Third Reich on behalf of an exclusive interpretation of ethnic nationalism, and the active collaborationism of various minority nationalist groups with the Nazi and Fascist occupier in Western and East-Central Europe, from Ukraine to Brittany, contributed to the difficult reemergence of ethnonationalist claims. The new context forced some of these groups to undertake an ideological and strategic redefinition and refounding. From Brittany to Galicia, various groups embraced long-term European federalism in search of political and intellectual re-legitimization. Nevertheless, this did not mean that sub-state nationalisms had entirely vanished from the political stage. Some of them, such as the Breton, Occitan or Corsican movements almost vanished from the public sphere and their activists limited themselves to founding cultural groupings, or promoting clubs where issues of regional economic development were discussed. Other movements, however, were able to survive. Examples include the Sardinian Action Party, the short-lived Sicilian independence movement and the South Tyrolean ethnic German parties. Flemish nationalism also re-emerged timidly over the years. Moreover, in the anti-Francoist exile, Catalan, Galician, and Basque nationalists continued to be active in France and the Americas.[2] Scottish and Welsh nationalist parties also managed to go through the late 1940s and

1950s, not without experiencing political difficulties, as they were sometimes accused of being in favour of neutrality during the world war (Philip 1975; Webb 1977).

The survival and reemergence of ethnonationalist movements in postwar Western Europe went hand in hand with the tenacious cultural claims advanced by groups that aimed at representing dozens of linguistic minorities. Some of them were demographically and politically weak, such as the Greek and Albanian-speaking communities in Southern Italy. Others had managed to reach agreements with the central authorities of the nation-states they lived in, such as the German minority in Southern Denmark, or the German-speaking communities in Belgium. Moreover, some regionalist or nationalist parties and groups were also born in places where no substantial ethnolinguistic claim existed, such as in the Canary Islands from the late 1950s onwards. Elsewhere, practically brand-new movements flourished, which tried to claim recognition for languages that were now dead, as in the case of the Isle of Man or the region of Cornwall. Some groups were also engaged in the preservation of language variants hitherto considered mere dialects: this was the case with the Veneto region, Limburg, and Savoy. Other territorial movements had already experienced a first phase of political development during the interwar period but remained faithful to a regionalist creed that only later became ideologically ethnonationalist, as in the case of Sardinia (Allardt 1981; Swenden and Maddens 2008).

General explanations of the 'ethnic reawakening' emphasized the new relevance ascribed to post-materialist values in the societies of advanced capitalism, or even stressed the individual's alleged socio-psychological need to 'rediscover' their ethnic identity. However, most of them are highly questionable, since ethnicity must be seen as a social construct in constant development (Melucci and Diani 1983). Most ethnic movements in Western Europe were not necessarily invented after 1950, but simply experienced new stages of development, while new generations of ethnonationalist activists adapted to a new global environment, also influenced by the global 1968 students' revolts, the new strategies put forward by the movement for the civil rights of Afro-Americans in the United States, and the parallel reawakening of the cultural and political demands of native Americans in the United States and Canada (Kernalegenn 2020). However, on the Western European stage, two macro-political factors can be highlighted that influenced the transnational diffusion of new principles based on the so-called 'revolt of the regions' from the 1950s onwards, and which led to a renewal of the postulates maintained by minority nationalist parties from the late 1950s. The first one was the advance of the process of European unity that began in the 1950s, to which stateless nationalist groups had to adapt their strategies (McGarry and Keating 2006; Elias 2009; Nagel 2020).

The second one is of a global nature, and will be explained in detail here: the process of decolonization started in 1945, as well as the struggles for independence engaged in by African, Asian, and American nationalist movements, which, often imbued with Marxism-Leninism and Maoism, heavily influenced a new generation of ethnic activists in Western Europe that was searching for new political models. This phenomenon was not entirely new: already in the 18th century, some interaction and transfer of ideas existed between the colonial peripheries and the regional/national movements that developed within the metropolitan core (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994). Anti-colonial movements in the Americas, Africa and Europe also influenced to some extent the development and strategies of European national movements before the Second World War. Certainly, prior to 1914 the nationalist movements led by 'white' settlers from the imperial periphery such as the Boers, but also Cuban or Indian nationalists, had exerted political influence on the Irish, Flemish, and Catalan movements (Núñez Seixas 2019, 144-87). The Basque, Catalan, and Breton nationalists, on the other hand, closely observed and sometimes followed the strategies of Egyptian or Rif nationalists, even though many Europeans did not regard those movements as equals, since some of the colonized peoples were still considered 'uncivilized' (De Pablo 2012). Moreover, in cities such as Paris, London, Leiden and Berlin, some Indonesian or Vietnamese students encountered European communists who were fighting against imperialism. However, they also crossed paths with some European minority ethnonationalists (Goebel 2015;

Stutje 2015, 2019). There had also been several examples of political hybridization between socialism, communism, and sub-state nationalism since the late 19th century (Mevius 2010). Some precursors of the idea of a European federation based on 'ethnic communities' could be found in the 1920s and 1930s, from the Breton leader Maurice Duhamel to some Baltic-German minority leaders such as Paul Schiemann and Ewald Ammende (Núñez Seixas 2019, 55-72).

However, it is only since 1945 that anti-colonialist movements have been at the forefront of (ethno)nationalist claims around the world, bestowing upon them a new democratic and even left-wing legitimacy. The novelty lay in the combination of all these elements (European 'ethnic' federalism, theories of cultural alienation, Third Worldism) with an anti-imperialist ideology that did not blindly follow the Soviet federal model (Stutje 2019). Third-Worldism proposed an alternative route, drawing eclectically on different theoretical references to define a national path towards socialism for those territories considered to be on the periphery of Europe, whose concept of European unity oscillated between the open rejection of the European Economic Community as a league of nation-states, and the alternative concept of a new Europe made up of 'authentic' nations, based on the free recognition of the principle of national self-determination, as it was proclaimed since the early 2000s by the European Free Alliance at the European Parliament (Elias 2009; Kernalegenn 2013). However, the anti-colonial wave was never as successful in Europe as it was in Africa and Asia.

Decolonization and de-alienation

In 1962, the *Comité occitan d'études et d'action* (Occitan Committee for Studies and Action, COEA), under the cultural influence of the Nîmes-born intellectual Robert Lafont, linked to the pre-war Occitanist tradition, elaborated the concept of 'internal colonialism', applying the experience of the Algerian and Vietnamese liberation movements to the peripheral and ethnically distinct regions of France, and therefore adapting the concept of colonialism to the specificities of Western Europe. The term had already been suggested in some texts by Vladimir I. Lenin, as well as by the discussions of the Congress of the Peoples of the East, held in Baku in September 1920. Moreover, it had also been later developed in the contemporary reflections of the Mexican sociologist Pablo González Casanova to describe the socio-political situation of the indigenous peoples of Latin America (González Casanova 1965, 2003; Mattu 2018). However, it was Lafont who first developed the concept for the case of the ethnic minorities and/or stateless nationalities of Western Europe. The COEA also aspired to a European federation of nations and states, which should put in the service of the workers' and peasants' interests: a 'decolonizing and regionalist' socialism on a global scale (Lafont 1971, 1974). The parallel success of the *Front de Libération Nationale* (National Liberation Front, FLN) in Algeria also seemed to demonstrate the effectiveness of its organizational models in mobilizing a colonized population. However, soon afterwards, Lafont made a difference between 'primary' ethno-linguistic nations, and 'secondary' political nations embodied by nation-states. According to him, Occitania, like many other 'primary' ethnonations, could be accommodated within existing nation-states, but only if their collective identities were first de-alienated and then recognized by the state (Lafont 1968, 55-56).

Added to this was the success of the doctrines of the Martinique-born surgeon Frantz Fanon, who was involved in both the Algerian fight for independence and the FLN, as well as engaged in the Pan-African movement. In his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (*Les damnés de la terre* 1961), whose preface was written by the prominent philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, and which was immediately translated into fifteen languages, Fanon developed an original theory of colonial alienation. He placed particular emphasis on the cultural and psychosomatic implications of colonial rule for colonised peoples and individuals, overcoming the rigid socio-economic explanatory models of classical Marxism (Fanon 1963). In the same spirit, in 1959, one of the founders of the left-wing *Parti Nationaliste Occitan* (Occitan Nationalist Party, PNO), François Fontan, had also incorporated the theories of the Austrian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich into Marxist doctrine, and

combined them with Fanon's inputs. He arrived at similar conclusions: the theory of the liberation of peoples had to entail the individual and psychological dimension of national identity, which had been denied or despised in colonized nations. The colonized population had in fact internalized the racial and cultural prejudices propagated by their colonizers, to the point of *self-hate*, through mechanisms such as forced assimilation and cultural genocide. This led to special attention being paid to the sociolinguistics of minority languages, which embraced the new concept of linguistic self-hate to interpret cultural assimilation into the linguistic majority (Fontan 1961: 23-25; Kabatek 1992).

Fanon had also focused on the subsidiary and 'parasitic' role of the local bourgeoisie in colonized countries; he emphasized the 'betrayal' of colonized intellectuals, seduced by individualism and meritocracy, as well as the necessity to use violence against the oppressor. Violent struggle was not only a legitimate form of resistance but had also to be regarded as a strategy of individual and social disalienation of colonized peoples. Therefore, violence was a crucial element of the process of national liberation: "Colonialism is not a thinking machine, it is not a body endowed with reason. It is violence in the state of nature and cannot bend except in the face of even greater violence" (Fanon 1963: 25). In this sense, Frantz Fanon reframed both some of Jean-Paul Sartre's reflections on violence, as well as the previous contributions by Sigmund Freud, insisting on the intrinsic psychological nature of collective struggle.

Similarly, the works of the Franco-Tunisian writer Alber Memmi, such as *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (2013 [*Portrait du colonisé* 1957]) had a certain impact on Western European minority nationalists, and partly drew upon earlier postulates put forward in an academic vein by the sociologist Georges Balandier in his book *The Sociology of Black Africa*, first published in French in 1955. All these authors, especially Memmi and Fanon, attached particular importance to the socio-psychological consequences of situations of colonial dependency, thus overcoming the purely economicist schemes of Marxism of traditional communist parties (Dazy 1986; Gibson 2003). As Balandier wrote, it was mandatory to grasp what he termed the "colonial situation" from a global perspective, which also entailed socio-psychological factors, ethnic stereotyping, and cultural representations, that went hand in hand with economic dependence (Balandier 1970, 21-56).

Shaping National Liberation Fronts

To the influences of the theories of internal colonialism and cultural alienation one must add the direct example of Third World national liberation movements. This was the case, first of all, with the Algerian FLN, in addition to the *Union des Peuples du Cameroun* (1948), the *Mouvement National Congolais* (1958) of Patrice Lumumba, the Kenya Independence Movement (1959) of Tom Mboya, the *Frente de Libertaçâo de Moçambique* (Mozambique Liberation Movement 1962) founded by Eduardo Mondlane and Samora Machel, the *Movimento Popular para a Libertaçâo de Angola* (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola, 1959) led by Agostinho Neto, and the Convention People's Party founded by the first Ghanaian president Kwameh Nkrumah (Okoth 2006). In general, in the south and south-east of Europe, the examples of Francophone Africa were much more influential than Anglophone Africa.

There also was a strong attraction experienced in Western European peripheries towards the new Latin American left-wing revolutionary movements. Although not strictly speaking stateless nations – they were rather seen as 'semi-colonies' that enjoyed 'formal political independence', but whose resources were exploited by foreign powers, according to Occitan nationalists (Fontan 1961, 29) – and not even embracing the cultural claims of native peoples, a peculiar mixture of anti-imperialism and inter-class populist appeal to the nation emerged from those movements, along with the new revolutionary impulse they represented. This was the case, in particular, of the 26th of July Movement (*Movimiento 26 de Julio*) in Cuba, whose aura spread to the European left; then, in the 1970s, of the Nicaraguan *Frente Sandinista* or the Salvadoran *Frente Farabundo Martí* (Martín Alvarez and Rey Tristán 2017). Starting in May 1968, this influence overlapped with the ongoing

confluences of the radical left, new themes such as ecologism and pacifism, and the ethnocultural demands of a new generation. In France alone, almost seventy nationalist groups that could be placed in this category sprang up from the late 1960s (Beer 1980). Many of these were short-lived: in the 1970s, left-wing ethnonationalists often joined the ranks of socialist or communist parties and, in some cases, permeated the discourse of the regional sections of these parties.

The ideological tradition of Marxism-Leninism since the 1920s provided both a set of discursive frames and a platform for international collaborations. Moreover, it also combined with the strategic and organizational models implemented by Third World national liberation movements. First and foremost, the necessity to shape an inter-class front for the achievement of freedom for the purportedly oppressed nation was emphasized. The instrument for this would be the formation of a constituent assembly, sometimes called a 'national-popular' or people's assembly, which would act as the representative of national sovereignty. The assembly would be composed of all social sectors, from the petty bourgeoisie to the peasantry, with the exception of the "colonized" or intermediate bourgeoisie, the "collaborationist assimilates", among whom would be found "the fiercest chauvinists of the conquering nation" (Rodríguez and López Suevos 1978). Added to this was the role of the patriotic communist party, understood as a revolutionary vanguard, often composed of 'semi-assimilated members' of the middle and lower classes of the subjugated nation, which moved from cultural demands to the embracing of multinational federalism and finally to a 'comprehensive action, at once cultural, economic and political', to be carried out by 'highly structured' organizations. The socialist revolution was thus conceived to be achieved in two stages. The first, 'popular-democratic' or national-popular, whose goal was the achievement of national sovereignty as a precondition for any social transformation; and the second, which would make way for the socialist society (Fontan 1961: 32-34). Within this framework, the Maoist variant of Marxism-Leninism – both in its Chinese and Vietnamese version – represented, in the eyes of some Western European ethnic activists, an alternative example for combining nationalism and communism: the idea of the four-class bloc (petty bourgeoisie, peasants, fishermen and workers) and the national-popular revolution were very suggestive for territories whose population was still overwhelmingly rural and poor, such as Sardinia, Brittany, and Galicia (Rubiralta 1998).

The overlapping of the centre-periphery scheme with the class scheme and the self-definition of the nations to be liberated as internal colonies seemed to offer a way of overcoming the dilemma between class and nation. There were proletarian regions, according to Robert Lafont (others simply spoke of 'proletarian nations'), whose liberation would be a first step towards the destruction of world capitalism, starting with the overthrow of the domination of the assimilated and 'intermediary' bourgeoisie (Lafont 1967, 153). Whereas nationalism and socialism had coexisted uneasily within the ethnonationalist organizations of precedent periods, they now appeared to be a legitimate and promising combination (Fontan 1972).

Added to this was the temptation of armed struggle, following the Algerian and South American models, as a complementary strategy to 'awaken' the national identity or at least the ethnic belonging of the alienated population. This was in the so-called Celtic periphery of the British Isles (Hechter 1975), but also in such distinct places as the Basque Country, Brittany, and Galicia, where the revolutionary tradition of the Irish Fenians and their post-1916 evolution also played a relevant role (Leach 2009). Undoubtedly, the most spectacular and bloody examples were those of the Basque organization ETA (*Euskadi ta askatasuna*, Basque Country and Freedom, founded in 1959), the Irish Republican Army, and, to a lesser extent, the various Corsican armed groups. Nevertheless, small terrorist groups of anti-colonial inspiration also emerged in Wales, Brittany, Galicia, Scotland, and Catalonia between the late 1960s and the late 1970s (De la Calle 2015; Perri 2023, 144-62).

With the aim of building a 'national way' to socialism, each nationalist movement adapted foreign models to its own socio-political context, emphasizing the connection to the political culture of the pre-1939 movements. At times, the ethnonationalists themselves reinterpreted local protest traditions to their own advantage, reviving the more progressive elements of their own

history. In this way came about left-wing Basque nationalism, advocating an insurrectional Irish approach that had been embraced since the early 1920s by some Basque nationalist trends, particularly the *Aberri* faction (Cullen 2024). Moreover, the new Breton nationalists resurrected great left-wing figures of the pre-1940 Breton movement, such as the socialist Émile Masson and the communist Marcel Cachin, which were read by the young activists in the late 1960s alongside Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin, and the resolutions of the Communist International of the 1930s (Chartier 2009; Monnier, Henry and Quénéhervé 2014: 65-66).

Common discourses, divergent political dynamics

Although the theory of internal colonialism first emerged in Occitania, the Occitanist movement was essentially oriented towards cultural activism and collaboration with French socialism. It was with the student revolt of May 1968 that several Maoist or Trotskyist groups took up the Occitan demands, and extreme-left Occitanist publications and groups emerged, as well as the *Comités d'action occitane*, created in 1970 with the aim of defending peasant demands and taking part in new social movements. For its part, the PNO, founded in 1959, turned towards Marxism-Leninism and a pro-independence stance, radicalizing the postulates advanced by Robert Lafont, which were also accused of being too moderate by some activists who later embraced a more radical view of Occitania as a colonized nation, and of France as an imperialist state (Martel and Despoux 2020: 63-65).

In 1971, the new *Lutte Occitane* (Occitanian Struggle) party stated its intention to fight for the decolonization of the Occitanians by organizing a working-class bloc against the French capitalist state. Three years later, Occitanian Struggle disbanded and Lafont created a new organization linked to the trade union struggles of the Occitan wine growers, *Volem viure al país* (We want to live in our country). It was, however, essentially an internal pressure group of the regional left. Despite significant cultural activism, the Occitan nationalists' electoral results through the 1970s were very modest, and very often irrelevant (Touraine *et al.* 1981).

Something similar happened in Brittany, where the younger and more left-wing sector of the *Mouvement pour l'organisation de la Bretagne* (MOB) broke away from the movement in 1963, after disputes between right-wing and left-wing sectors, and also because of the latter's sympathies towards Algerian nationalists. A year later, the *Union démocratique bretonne* (Breton Democratic Union, UDB) was founded, which was to become the main nationalist party in the region, despite the various splits and organizational instability that characterized the Breton movement as a whole. The UDB adopted the theory of internal colonialism and vainly asserted the need to form an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist liberation front in Brittany to fight against France's colonial rule (Reece 2009, 188-202; Kernalegenn and Pasquier 2014; Monnier, Henry and Quénéhervé 2014: 42-64).

In Corsica, the home-rule movement, whose origins dated back to the interwar period, was reactivated from 1960 by a small number of Corsican students residing in Paris. The weakness of the movement obliged them to co-exist with conservative regionalist groups for several years, until in 1966 the new *Front régionaliste corse* (FRC), largely composed of young left-wing activists, made the postulates of internal colonialism its own. This is how it was expressed by the Corsican authors of the collective work *Main basse sur une île* (Takeover of an Island 1971): according to them, Corsica was an internal colony of France, and the Corsicans had to overcome their inferiority complex as a colonized people with respect to both the French state and clan family structures, which had degenerated into political clientelism in the service of centralism. The thousands of French *pieds-noirs* who settled on the island after Algerian independence had further reinforced this colonial-type situation (FRC 1971). Several promoters of the manifesto later joined the French Socialist Party, but their assumptions inspired the founding of the *Unione di u Populu Corsu* (Corsican People's Union) in 1977. Interclass frontism was also adopted by some armed groups that

appeared in the second half of the 1970s, such as the *Front de libération nationale de la Corse* (Crettiez 1999; Gerdes 1985; De la Calle and Fazi 2010).

Further south, in the island of Sardinia, the long-established Sardinian Action Party (*Partito Sardo d'Azione*, PSdA), founded in 1921 largely by local veterans of the First World War and with a radically regionalist creed, ran into electoral difficulties in the 1950s. However, in the 1960s, a pro-independence current emerged within the party, which was led by Michele Columbu and the architect Antonio Simon Mossa. The latter, who was also engaged in the recovery of the Catalan language in the western-coastal town of Alghero, set out to re-define Sardinia as an internal colony of the Italian state by reappraising some of the arguments advanced by the party's left-wing leaders in the mid-1920s, but also inspired by the anti-colonial wave of the late 1950s. This trend, which for a time brought the PSdA closer to the positions held by the Italian Communist Party, advocated a Sardinian path towards a genuine socialism of a reformist and cooperative nature, which followed some examples from the African liberation movements, as well as Gamal Abdel Nasser's quest for 'Arab socialism' in Egypt (Bomboi 2014: 118-25). It also advocated a European federation of ethnic communities, using the concept of 'ethnic group' or simply 'ethnie', the essence of which was now reinterpreted from a revolutionary perspective as an appropriate repertoire of values. As Simon Mossa put it in 1969:

> We believe in the fundamental values of the ethnic group and their positive role in the process of evolution. […] The transition from a layer of age-old backwardness, the causes of which are complex, to modern and socially acceptable conditions cannot take place without re-evaluating the substantial values of the community, with the aim of arousing forces that have long been dormant in the fringes of tradition, too often considered anachronistic. All this constitutes a cultural substratum that is the most valid instrument for undertaking the struggle for redemption (Simon Mossa 2008: 80).

However, other young Sardinian activists moved decisively towards ethnonationalism and Third-Worldism. The *Città e campagna* (Town and Country) circle, founded in 1966-67 on the initiative of some Cagliari students, was critical of the industrialization model of the island promoted by the Rome government, which brought with it the destruction of the autochthonous social fabric. This model of 'colonial exploitation' carried out by Italy was denounced in 1968 by the self-taught intellectual Eliseo Spiga (Cabitza 1968). The movement did not define the island as an ethnic nation but claimed that its history was the result of colonial subjugation to the Italian state; it advocated a Sardinian socialist revolution adapted to the peculiarities of the islanders, who were in their majority peasants and shepherds. In this respect, the whole history of the island was reinterpreted as a struggle against state control (first from Turin, later from Rome): even Sardinian traditional banditry was now regarded as a primordial form of revolutionary guerrilla warfare, which anticipated many of the features of the Cuban and Algerian model (Melis 1979; Cabitza 2006; Pala 2020).

In the early 1970s, *Città e Campagna*, alongside other groups, extended their activities to the realm of politics. Because of this, a new organization emerged: *Su populu sardu-muimentu kontr'a su colonialismu* (Sardinian People-Movement against Colonialism, SPS). This was a party mostly founded in Rome and composed mainly of university students who were children of Sardinian immigrants. SPS's tenets were very close to the extreme left-wing student movement and were also influenced by contact with some Palestinian and Basque students. Some of them joined *Città e Campagna*, combining the theory of internal colonialism and Third-Worldism with the progressive tradition of the Sardinian movement and the Sardinian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's theoretical reflections on the regional question, which were conveniently reframed. The Sardinian ethnona-tionalists now added a renewed interest in the regeneration of Sardinian language and culture, an issue that had barely been addressed by interwar Sardinian autonomists. Moreover, the new party aimed at the creation of an 'anti-colonial social bloc' that, with the support of the Sardinian working

class and Sardinian migrants abroad, could form the broad basis required by a national liberation front (Ortu 1985). Eventually, SPS joined the old PSdA in 1979 and redefined its strategic line in the following years; however, other militants formed alternative groups and associations for the defence of the Sardinian language and culture, while a minority also joined pro-independence groups (Petrosino 1987; Pala 2020).

Finally, in Galicia the main actor was the *Unión do Pobo Galego* (Galician People's Union, UPG). Founded in 1963, the new organization broke with the tradition of the Galician movement, which it considered too moderate, and adopted the theoretical models of internal colonialism, Marxism-Leninism and the 'frontist' model. From the early 1970s, the UPG turned towards Maoism and the Vietnamese example, from which it took the idea of the 'bloc' of the four classes that were to form a national-popular front and unleash a revolution – at once national-popular and socialist – that would put the peasant class back at the centre. However, the party structure obeyed classical Marxist-Leninist patterns. Galicia's colonial situation emerged from its peripheral position within the Spanish state, the depredation of its natural resources, mass emigration, and the *self-loathing* typical of colonized peoples (Rodríguez and López-Suevos 1978; Núñez Seixas 1997; De Pablo-del Valle 2025, 289-337). This was also reflected in the party's main political programmes, which largely reproduced the tenets of the Third Worldist Liberation Front models. These included an interclass approach, the guiding role of the 'patriotic' nationalist party, the constitution of a People's Assembly as the first constituent body after achieving sovereignty and the aim of building a socialist state after a first stage of 'national-popular' revolution. If circumstances allowed it, the Galician nation would shape a confederation with other Iberian nationalities once the right of self-determination was acknowledged (UPG 1977; ANPG 1977). The main elements of this cognitive framework were also shared by the economist and intellectual Xosé M. Beiras, who was the leader of the tiny Galician Socialist Party, founded in 1963. Beiras, who upheld the view that Galicia was characterized by economic backwardness mainly due to its dependence from the Spanish state, was also heavily influenced by Lafont's theories, as well as by classic Marxist theory (Beiras 1972). Moreover, during the early 1970s, the UPG developed a broad network of international contacts with kindred organizations in Western and Southern Europe, especially Bretons and Occitans and, from the Carnation Revolution (April 1974), with some organizations of the Portuguese revolutionary left (Gonçales Blasco 2012).

During the Spanish transition to democracy, the UPG continued to be faithful to its postulates and applied the frontist model through the articulation of a network of different organizations intended to promote social mobilization on different levels (peasant unions, student groups, workers' unions, a 'cultural front', etc.). The main inspiration of this fabric was to be found in the Algerian FLN and other national liberation movements, and aimed at shaping a 'national people's assembly' which would take over the functions of a national parliament, following also the Maoist idea of a 'bloc of classes' against the oppressor state. This led finally to the creation of the *Bloque Nacionalista Galego* or Galician Nationalist Bloc, founded in 1982. After a first stage in which Galician 'anti-colonial' nationalism remained faithful to its radical positions, which led to it becoming mostly politically irrelevant, from the end of the 1980s onwards, the UPG and the BNG began to pragmatically adapt their political strategy and discursive frameworks to the political opportunity structure offered by the consolidation of the Spanish state of the autonomous communities. In this way, the UPG sanctioned the reformist, autonomist, and social-democratic practice of the BNG, while retaining its role as the leading party within the patriotic front to the present day. However, in the late 1990s the UPG maintained the interpretation of Galicia as a colony, victim of the centre-periphery economic scheme. Nationalism was defended as a necessary emancipatory project, since colonialism 'turns oppressed nations into proletarian nations'. This is why 'any revolutionary project in them is based on a class alliance that is embodied in the nationalist model'. Nationalist movements were considered to be the most effective instrument to fight against capitalism, "for it has in imperialism the way to reproduce itself and to obtain surplus value" (UPG 1994: 6-8; Quintana Garrido 2010; De Pablo-del Valle 2025, 383-426). The BNG represents in this

respect the only relatively successful example of political survival of the anti-colonial wave of the 1960s. Thus, this organization achieved 31.5 percent of the Galician vote at the last regional polls in February 2024, although its results are more modest in the Spanish parliamentary elections.

A transnational programme?

The common principles that characterized this new 'wave' of peripheral nationalist activism in western Europe were expressed in the *Charte de Brest* (Brest Charter), a joint declaration issued in February 1974 in Brest, Brittany, which gathered new adherents at the Mur de Bretagne meeting two years later. The Charter also established a permanent secretariat that remained active until mid-1977. Among its promoters were the Galician UPG, the Breton UDB, some Irish nationalist groups (the Irish Republican [Socialist] Movement, a joint label for several groups that combined Irish Republican tradition with Marxism-Leninism, also linked to an armed branch), as well as quite minuscule organizations from Wales (*Cymru Goch*), the Northern and Southern Basque Country, and Catalonia (*Esquerra Catalana dels Treballadors* for Northern Catalonia, and PSAN-p for Southern Catalonia). In later years, the organization was approached by Corsican nationalists, the Sardinians of SPS, and the Occitanians of *Lutte Occitane* (Salvi 1978, 164-71; Gonçales Blasco 2012, 625-772; Monnier, Henry and Quénéhervé 2014, 84-86; Cullen 2024, 158-63).

The main objectives of the Brest Charter can be summarized as follows: the defence of the right of self-determination of the peoples; the struggle against economic, social, political and cultural oppression; the end of capitalism and imperialism through the appropriation by the people of the means of production, distribution and credit (i.e. the founding of popular democracies with a planned socialist economy); the cultural emancipation of minority languages; the appeal to solidarity among all world nations in the common struggle against colonialism and imperialism, and the mid-term construction of a truly socialist Europe of the peoples. Since the signatory parties considered colonialism to be an instrument of imperialism and monopoly capitalism, which extended its influence in the economic, political and socio-cultural spheres, the Charter concluded that "the struggle for national liberation is nothing more than the particular aspect that the class struggle takes in countries oppressed and subjected to colonial exploitation", so that "the struggle for socialism takes for our peoples the form of a struggle for national liberation". Although it recognized that in some territories, such as the Basque Country and Catalonia, there were "national bourgeoisies" with "second-rank contradictions to oppressor imperialism", in the present stage of "monopolistic concentration" they could no longer play a leading role in the "struggle for liberation". Indeed, the situation specific to each nation, from Cuba to China, set the framework for the transition to socialism. In clear dispute with the traditional communist parties of Western Europe, the Charter also stated that "those who deny that the national question is relevant to the transition to socialism very often reinforce the present structure of the imperialist states"[3].

However, the political dissemination of these concepts was uneven. Ethnonationalist movements in north-west Europe were less permeable to Third-Worldism and anti-imperialist discourse, even though very small groups arose that followed these principles: among others, Red Wales (*Cymru goch*), *Plaid Werin Gymru* created in 1971, the tiny Labour Party of Scotland (1971), and the Maoist and Albanian inspired Scotland's Workers Party (m-l), founded in 1967. An example of this lack of ascendancy can be seen in the work of one of the main theorists of the new left-wing Scottish nationalism and himself a leading academic on the national question, Tom Nairn (1977). Indeed, anti-colonial discourse was hardly applicable to territories that, while peripheral geographically, were not so from the point of view of distribution of resources or levels of wealth. Nevertheless, in the 1970s, the sociologist Michael Hechter (1975) took up the assumptions of internal colonialism and tried to turn them into an interpretative scheme of the pseudo-colonial situation of the "Celtic periphery" of the British Isles, by insisting on the unequal distribution of capital and labour income, and the lower social mobility of the inhabitants of these peripheries.

Although Hechter's theories had some academic impact, they barely translated into political proposals. Among the majority nationalist parties in Wales (Plaid Cymru), Scotland (Scottish National Party, SNP) and in Flanders (the left-liberal *Volksunie* party), a quite strong line of continuity with the pre-1939 nationalist legacy was maintained, free from third-worldist influence (Philip 1975; Webb 1977; Perri 2023: 163-75). In the Isle of Man and Cornwall, the new ethnonationalist parties of the 1960s and 1970s, such as *Mec vannin* (1964) or the Cornish Nationalist Party (1969), adopted an overwhelmingly social democratic profile, and were mainly inspired by the examples provided by the SNP and Plaid Cymru (Deacon, Cole and Tregigda 2003). The same can be said of the ethnic parties representing 'classic' national minorities, whose level of social and electoral entrenchment among citizens belonging to these ethnic groups has been extremely high throughout the postwar period. This was particularly evident in the South Tyrolean People's Party and the Swedish People's Party of Finland. Generally speaking, they all gradually moved towards social democracy or progressive liberalism (De Winter and Tursan 2003).

The success of internal colonialism and Third-Worldism was a product of the *Zeitgeist*, a territorial and specific variant of the transnational spread of the postulates of the revolutionary left in the Third World, from Vietnam to Cuba, the emergence of the civil rights movement in the United States, and the explosion of the European New Left. But its impact on each of the ethnonationalist movements also depended on whether solid organizations dating from the pre-war period persisted within them. The weight of the new parties of the *anti-colonial* left was greater where these groups filled a generational vacuum, where there was no political tradition or adequate social base for a nationalist party of the liberal centre, or where the ethnic conflict generated fertile ground for the application of theories of armed struggle, as in the case of the Basque Country, Northern Ireland, and Corsica. Furthermore, in each of these cases, the strength of the previous insurrectional tradition relativized the scope of the Third-Worldist influence. In ETA's ideological evolution during the 1960s and 1970s, the legacy of radical Basque nationalism from the 1920s was more important than Algerian or South American influences, although some theorists were strongly influenced by these (Krutwig 2006; Fernández Soldevilla 2016). Similarly, the influence of Third-Worldism on left-wing radical Catalanism proved to be ultimately modest: the *Partit Socialista d'Alliberament Nacional dels Països Catalans* (National Liberation Socialist Party of the Catalan Countries, PSAN), alongside some successive splits, remained a marginal trend within the Catalan movement, where the autonomous Catalan Communist Party (PSUC) founded in 1936 clearly took the lead in the anti-Francoist struggle. Moreover, the main theoretical references of PSAN and similar groups were strongly rooted in the pre-1936 Catalan communist tradition, and made little appeal to Third-Worldism (Rubiralta 1988; Geniola 2020).

On the other hand, some tendencies that combined social democracy and peripheral nationalism also arose in Western Europe, although they disappeared from the second half of the 1980s, or merged into other nationalist parties or into regional sections of socialist parties. This was the case in Spain, Italy, and France, and also in the British Labour Party, and for much of the Walloon and Flemish left. In all cases there were precedents dating back to the inter-war period (Keating 1992).

Conclusions

The new radical ethno-nationalists of the 1960s and 1970s were mostly minority groups, the result of splits from larger organizations, or nuclei that – except in the cases of Galicia, Corsica, and Brittany – rarely succeeded in determining the political line of the nationalist movements of which they were a part. They were young activists born between the 1930s and 1940s, who mostly wished to rebel against the autonomist or regionalist generation that had preceded them. However, they also often struggled with a contradiction: to make a left turn from their cultural and political legacy without severing the umbilical cord with the ideological tradition of their predecessors. Most of them were members of the middle and lower-middle classes: in particular, the new middle classes of university students and civil servants – including many high-school teachers – who aspired to

manage areas of territorial power within a decentralized state (Beer 1977; Monnier, Henry and Quénéhervé 2014: 55). They were also very often activists of rural origin, a typical outcome of the upward social mobility of the thirty post-war glorious years: young university students who were the children of peasants or of the semi-urban lower-middle classes. In many cases, they spoke a minority language threatened by economic modernization, migration, and the threat of state-led mass culture, and experienced the sharp contrast between their social context of origin and the *alienated* urban environment, where the majority language was spoken. In several cases, such as in Corsica, Sardinia and Brittany, young immigrants in the capital cities of the *colonizing* nation-states, or the children of immigrants in the suburbs played a decisive role.

However, the political culture of the new radical-left nationalisms was eclectic, something that was also typical for the 'moral polity' of most stateless nationalists (Lluch 2015, 253-62). It was a mixture of texts, symbols and theoretical models from different origins, reinterpreted from a revolutionary outlook in light of the nation's own nationalist legacy. A former militant of the Galician left-wing nationalist movement in the late 1970s recalled his reading this way:

> In the theoretical training seminars, we read passages from *Sempre en Galiza* [written in 1944 by the Galician nationalist leader-in-exile A. R. Castelao] in a small-format edition […]; Mao Tse Tung's 'ten points of liberalism' (no less); the *Politzer*, or whatever its name was, the cause of so many misfortunes; sometimes the *Communist Manifesto* and more rarely Lenin's *What to do?* For a while the key book was Franz [sic] Fanon's *Portrait of the Colonized* (sic), hoping not to mispronounce the author's name and title (Sarille 1997, 48).

There were undoubtedly cultural transfers between Asia, Africa, and Western European 'peripheries'. However, they were often indirect, as they had been prior to the Second World War. There circulated texts by Mao Zedong, some writings by the Angolan Agostinho Neto, Kwame Nkrumah, Hô Chi Minh or the Guinean leader Amílcar Cabral (Nkrumah 1966; Cabral 1969; Hô Chi Minh 1970), as well as a variety of leaflets from Latin American authors. However, dissemination usually took place indirectly, from readings in periodicals, daily newspapers, and a few other texts. Internal colonialism was essentially a European interpretation of African, Asian, and Latin American models and political developments, which served as a mirror in which to reflect their own ethnonationalist tradition by rejuvenating it. Moreover, with the relative exception of Fanon and González Casanova, almost all the theorists of internal colonialism were European.

To a large extent, the spread of the concept of internal colonialism is an expression of the French influence on certain European intellectual minorities, who came into contact with the writings of Robert Lafont, Fontan, Sartre, Fanon and others when they were students in France, and particularly in Paris during the 1960s and 1970s. Anti-imperialism and decolonizing thought in its Occitan-French version was often much more influential for ethnic activists than the examples of national liberation movements, which were theoretically much closer, having developed in the colonial periphery of the same nation-state, or simply having been published in the same language. Thus, cultural transfers between the anti-colonial nationalist movement in Western Sahara and Galician, Basque and Catalan nationalism were virtually non-existent (Gómez Justo 2013), while Galician left-wing nationalists only discovered the writings of Mozambique's and Angola's anti-colonial Portuguese-speaking independence leaders at a late stage, after the Carnation Revolution of April 1974 in Portugal, when Northern Portugal became a friendly shelter for Galician activists during the final year of the Franco dictatorship (Gonçales Blasco 2022).

Furthermore, Third-Worldism was not always received uncritically: the emancipatory leaders of several African and Asian countries came to be sometimes regarded as new tyrants once they became rulers of the new nation-states. The authoritarian evolution of independent Algeria during the 1960s caused deep disappointment among many Galician ethnonationalists, who adhered to the socialist tenets advanced by Ahmed Ben Bella, but repudiated Houari Boumédiène (Iglesias Amorín 2018). In the medium term, the historical background of each nationalist movement, and each

nation's own history, reinterpreted from a left-wing revolutionary angle, prevailed over Third-Worldism, especially when some of these movements assumed responsibilities of (local or regional) power. But the anti-colonial narrative gave nationalist claims a new legitimization: the search for a genuine revolutionary path to socialism, which also incorporated new concerns, from ecology to feminism.

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Notes

1 Resolution 1514/XV (14 December 1960), followed by Declaration 1654 (XVI), 27 November 1961.
2 For an overview see Esman (1977); Rokkan and Urwin (1983); Tyriakian and Rogowski (1985); Watson (1990); Coakley (1992); Puhle (1995); Friend (2012), Tronconi (2011), and Perri (2023, 115-63).
3 *Charte de Brest (Déclaration sur la lutte contre l'impérialisme en Europe occidentale)/1974-1976*, http://www.udb-bzh.net/images/1970_annees/1974-1976-charte-de-brest/1974-1976-charte-de-brest.pdf.

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