

On Communism and the Nation –Notes from the History of the Colonial Question in the Portuguese Communist Party

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Abstract

This article analyzes the positions adopted by the Portuguese Communist Party in relation to the colonial question. Before doing so, however, the article discusses the general problem of the national question in the history of the PCP, addressing some topics that are important for a discussion of communist historiography. This discussion is part of a larger debate concerning the analytical identification between nation and culture, on the one hand, and between politics and power, on the other. In dealing with these dichotomies, some topics are presented for discussion, relating to studies on both the Portuguese Empire and the Leninist theory of imperialism.

Keywords

Nationalism, communism, internationalism, colonialism, historiography

1. Introduction

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the Portuguese king Dom Luís found himself sailing along Portugal's Atlantic coast. By chance, he and his crew encountered a small boat sailed by fishermen. The king spoke to them and asked if they were Portuguese, but they immediately answered, "No, we are from Póvoa do Varzim", which was at that time a small fishing village near Porto (Mattoso 1998: 14). I recount this brief story to illustrate one basic point: like other countries, Portugal as an imagined community is a recent construct. As we all know, the process of imagining a national community is a complex and controversial issue that divides social scientists (Anderson 1998; Smith 1995). Nonetheless, there are some points that seem to be widely accepted: states create nations and not the contrary; nations are a modern phenomenon, although we may discuss the pre-modern roots of modern nations; the main producers of the images of a

nation are men from intellectual and political circles; the image of a nation requires an image of the past.

The study of Portuguese images of the past has flourished in recent years. As post-modern theories have come to influence the national intelligentsia, the study of representations and images has become a productive field in Portuguese social sciences, resulting in the publication of important studies on Portuguese colonialist ideology (Ribeiro 2004; Alexandre 2000; Castelo 1998). Unfortunately, the study of the socio-economic structures and dynamics of the Portuguese Empire has become a less significant area for researchers. In Portugal, we can say that the study of “representations” no longer depends on the study of “realities”.

As we know, neither the first nor the second type of focus sheds any light on such a concept as “the truth”. Consequently, it is important to note that the less we care about the history of social dynamics – labor relations, for example – the more prone we are to value cultural dynamics as isolated from socio-economic forces. The risks associated with an essentialist approach to culture are exacerbated when discussing, for instance, the history of the Portuguese language. It is a risk that can perhaps best be summarized in the idea of *Lusofonia* – a concept that in a certain way develops the idea that a people owns a language, which rests upon a fetishistic approach to the language, and collides with the principle that a language belongs to the person who uses it at the moment when he or she chooses (Margarido 2000: 7).

While this article recognizes the need to study the “stone” (taken here as the figurative expression of reality), and not merely the “image of the stone” (i.e., representations), this article mostly deals with the study of an “image of the stone”, an image which is not the product of any hegemonic political power but quite the contrary: the image produced by those who were not “in charge” – i.e. Portuguese communists. Nevertheless, the general lack of consideration for what we may simply call socio-economic historical items emerges, to some extent, as an intellectual bias even when writing the history of the communist policy on the colonial question.

The Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) was founded in 1921, and underwent a profound reorganization at the end of the 1920s and again at the beginning of the 1940s. This second reorganization effort was so decisive that we may say that the contemporary PCP emerged at precisely that moment. The central question that I am studying in my Ph.D. project concerns the relationship between communism and nationalism in the party’s history. One of the central issues guiding me in this task is precisely the approach that the party adopted toward the colonial question. I have not chosen the colonial question randomly, but because of the strong link that exists between national politics and the colonial question in contemporary Portuguese thought. From the end of the nineteenth century until 1974, almost all of the country’s political projects for regeneration involved the Empire as a central component. For republicans and fascists alike, the Empire was a way to recover the nation’s “lost glory”. As such, we can hardly speak about a non-colonialist nationalism in Portugal¹.

While analyzing the PCP’s positions on the colonial question, I found myself confronted with the historical views brought to bear on these positions, and so I ended up first addressing a theoretical problem, which I discuss in the first part of my text. Only after discussing it will I be able to draw any conclusions about the PCP’s positions on the colonial question.

2. Rethinking Anti-colonialism: history versus the nation

¹ The clear exception comes from a non-nationalist political tradition – for instance, the anarchist group brought together by the newspaper *A Batalha* during the 1920s (Castro and Garcia 1995).

The PCP's historical involvement with the colonial question is usually summarized from one of two standpoints. The first describes the PCP's progressive evolution from a proto-colonialist to an anti-colonialist position. This is an idea that is present, to some extent, in the first historical analysis of the PCP and the colonial question, a chapter in an extremely original book by the historian José Freire Antunes (Antunes 1980: 81). The second perspective highlights the difficulties in finding any radical differences in the colonial positions of the PCP and those of the liberals or the republicans. This view is sustained by the two major works published on the PCP and the colonial question²: an article written by the Portuguese historian João Madeira and a Ph.D. thesis produced by the French historian Judith Manya (Madeira 2003; Manya 2004: 224).

In different ways, these views conclude that the PCP regularly renounced the anti-colonialist principles theoretically maintained by Leninist parties. It is not my purpose here to counter such assessments. Indeed, Madeira, Manya and Pereira's excellent research makes their conclusions appear to be quite solid. Nonetheless, I believe that the PCP's colonial policy cannot be completely summarized by any general claim that the party had a perpetually instrumental attitude toward anti-colonialist values. There is at least one other side to the story, which I believe is currently devalued. For us to face this hidden feature of the question, it seems to me that we need to change our perspective. Mainly, we need to re-establish the historical autonomy of anti-colonialist principles from the quest for national independence among communist political cultures.

Normally the quest for national independence has been the principal factor in explaining the existence of anti-colonialism among Portuguese communists. This analytical option implies two assumptions: first, that greater value is given to the nation-state over communist criticism of the predominant economic and social relations; second, that this criticism consequently is devalued. These assumptions structure our historical understanding, making us somehow reluctant to consider some important features of communist political cultures. Even if we take into account the profound nationalization of communist political cultures in the 20th century, it still remains clear that communist political culture tends to give less importance to the nation-state and is more committed to socio-economic criticism.

As a starting point, I will describe the PCP's overall approach to the colonial question in terms of two groups of positions. The first consists of a set of positions toward the colonial question based on a criticism of the dynamics of social and economic relations. The second consists of positions which are formed on the basis of a quest for national independence – a quest that could be satisfied either in terms of Portuguese national independence (this idea was invoked when accusing Salazar and his government of selling the colonies to the imperialist powers) or in terms of the right of African nationalist movements to independent nationhood. As times, both of these apparently contradictory nationalist demands seemed to co-exist in PCP policy.

Historians tend to ignore the first position group. They devalue an approach to the colonial question grounded in social and economic criticism. It seems that they take it for granted, as if the socio-economic perspective is something so abstractly and absolutely – almost religiously,

² There is a recent work that also deserves our attention. It is a chapter from the last volume of Pacheco Pereira's biography of Álvaro Cunhal, which has recently been published. In it, Pereira focuses mainly on the 1950s and the relationship between African militants and Portuguese communist militants, and he shows that he is not particularly concerned with searching through the history of the PCP's positions on the colonial question. Pereira's viewpoints deal with theoretical issues that are different from those I discuss in this article. While some of them are quite singular, others develop issues already debated by Manya. Pereira's emphasis on the African nationalist militants' historical revision of communist militancy is quite interesting.

I would say – present in communist political culture that it does not deserve any historical analysis. In keeping with this attitude, analyses quickly conclude by suggesting that the PCP's position on the colonial question was, above all else, one of ignorance or showed a lack of respect for the cultural life of African peoples. By linking the concept of culture to the sphere of politics and not to that of economics, these views indirectly reproduce and enhance one of the PCP's own approaches and tend to overlook or devalue another one. In other words, they end up considering the colonial question from the logic of nationalist reasoning, referring either to the established imperial nation or a potential insurgent nation. General interpretations tend to limit communist history to one of two broad analytical frames: African national independence or Portuguese colonial nationalism. Following such general interpretations, we could conclude that the nation *per se* was not a problematic issue confronting communist political cultures; to some extent, communist political cultures unproblematically managed the idea of the nation.

Underlying this whole problematic is the concept of culture. In part, what lies beneath the predominant, biased interpretation of the nation is a definition of culture that is increasingly restricted to a national community and to the state form. The political nationalization of culture produces something that might be described as the militarization of culture, or the idea that culture is a thing more than a relation, something that needs to be defended and protected as the homeland of sovereignty and nationhood (Eagleton 2003: 84). In short, national heritage – and not economic relations – is the home of culture.

By pointing to the analytical/historical lack of awareness of the cultural dimension of economic relations, I am not suggesting that the predominantly nationalist approach to culture can be explained entirely by the misleading nature of analytical interpretations. A significant number of the PCP's considerations about economic relations favored a materialist approach, one that regularly ignored the qualitative (cultural) dimension of economics. Indeed, E.P. Thompson's concept of the "moral economy" as aimed against both liberal and socialist intellectual and political paradigms should be emphasized (Thompson 1995). Nevertheless, at this point I would like to recall two general kinds of understanding of communist history: firstly, emphasis should be given to the close link between a communist tendency towards adopting an "amoral" approach to economics and the nationalization of communist politics (Szporluk 1988); secondly, it should be remembered that nationalization never became the exclusive and absolute preserve of communists, even if we consider it to be a growing tendency in communist policy (Neves 2005).

By linking these two understandings it becomes clearer what is at stake in some historical judgments of communist colonial policy: the tendency for the same perspectives and criteria to inform analytic/historical interpretations and what became dominant (and thus visible) political views. In a particular way, the transformations brought about by communist-dominated political cultures throughout the 1930s gave culture some of the organic properties commonly attributed to land: culture was defined in terms of territoriality and took on the air of heritage. Having been crystallized in this way, culture was then desocialized in order to become an identity whose essential content is nationality. More generally, the transformations that took place in political cultures across the ideological spectrum in the period after the Second World War encouraged this nationalization of culture. Since then, when dealing with questions of politics and culture, we have all tended to see culture mainly in terms of national political frameworks and we have been unable to see culture as being embodied in mobile economic relations. We prefer to look for a cultural dimension inside the nation and within the principles on which the state is based, taking all economic discourse as pure economism and promoting a commonsense division between culture and economy.

Most certainly, we can see the mark of economism in the communists' attacks on Portugal's economic exploitation of the colonies, but we can also see a conditioning "moral" pressure in the PCP's analysis. Even when we do not find any demand by the PCP for independent statehood for Portugal's overseas colonies, it is sometimes possible to detect a communist anti-colonialist feeling and position. In a socio-economic report on the 1942 famines in Cape Verde that is highly critical of the Empire, the PCP journalistic organ *Avante!* clearly calls upon colonized peoples to resist Salazarism –but not to fight for national independence. The article concludes that the famines indisputably show that only "a government freely elected by the people and interested in the solution of such problems will be able to free them from the condition of famine and slavery under which they still live". And although the report ignores any eventual struggle for national independence, *Avante!* stresses that the situation demands that the Portuguese people should adhere to a fundamentally anti-colonial principle: "a people that oppresses another people is not a free people"³.

3. Silent Bonds: the emergence of nationalism

Our first steps led us to perceive the nation as a problem, presenting a challenge to communist policies in terms of colonial policy. We were therefore encouraged to see the nation as a problem dealt with by communists and by the parties of the Third International in particular. We can now take another step toward focusing on the history of such a problematic.

If we do not wish to be astonished by facts, perhaps we should begin by emphasizing a cultural bond that unites opposite political factions, instead of simply taking into due consideration the most glaring forms of cultural rupture and political extremity. Traditionally, communism has been seen as a specific kind of alien force. In the Portuguese case, the impetus to alienate ourselves from communism comes mainly from the rhetoric of political warfare – see terms like "agents of Stalin", "delegates of Moscow", and "faces of evil". It is important for us to confront this kind of slogan in order to state that Portuguese communists were not simply or purely communists. They were communists, but communists in a specific context.

When discussing the formation of a communist, we generally claim that while he surely shared a set of common experiences with others, there was something different about him that turned him into a communist. Continuity and not only rupture must be taken into consideration. Consider this fact, for instance: some of the major Portuguese communist leaders came from families with direct political links to the republican movement that emerged at the beginning of the 20th century. The republican tradition must surely be investigated if one wants to analyze Portuguese communism and, above all, the communists' colonial policies. Indeed, some of the central concepts of the Enlightenment – such as the idea of a civilizing process – entered Portuguese communism mainly via a national liberal tradition. But we must additionally note that the Marxist matrix *per se* also contributed to the Portuguese communist worldview through its progressivism. Some of Marx and Engels's texts on colonial and national questions – in which they express a number of culturalist views – give us precise and useful examples. Let us simply follow Marx's well-known reasoning on the issue of British domination over India:

India, then, could not escape the fate of being conquered [...] Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history, is but the history

³ "As Belezas do "Império Português" – A Fome em Cabo-Verde!". In *Avante!*, 19 October 1942, p. 2.

of the successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society.⁴

As we can see from this example, we need to broaden our understanding of continuity beyond the national context to include the effects of temporal limitations. We not only need to consider continuity in chronological terms, but we must also be aware of its synchronic dimension, so that we can uncover the bond between those who are, at a certain moment, heavily engaged in a cultural war, fighting against each other for state political power and ideological hegemony. Such a bond was clearly established between Portuguese communists and the Estado Novo.

One of the major battles of such cultural wars (Lebovics 1992) regarded the symbolic value of the rural world. Indeed, the rural world has been a principal field for the imaginative representation of battles in 20th-century intellectual life, from which Portuguese communists were certainly not absent. Despite the value attributed to modern industry and to the cause of the industrial proletariat, it was mainly from the depths of inland Portugal, from the rural countryside, that communists were able to build their national imaginary. So-called popular culture was, in most cases, a result of the intellectual image of the rural world. Rural Portugal, mainly the Alentejo, the land of the rural proletariat, was seen as the land where the real Portugal fermented. The “true Portugal” suddenly and sporadically appeared in national history, participating in the great, epic revolutions of the past, most notably in 1383, 1820 and 1910, dates that are analytically synthesized as moments of class resistance and national independence (Neves 2004).

As we know, defining national identity through the definition of popular culture and defining popular culture through the definition of the rural country are widespread intellectual practices. Most nation-building processes confirm this. The myth of the soldier Chauvin is traditionally seen as reactionary, though political factions adopting national or nationalistic discourse commonly invoke the idea of the land’s regenerative capacity. In the literary universe of Portuguese communism (which we may identify with neo-realism) the land has powerfully utopian implications. It represents the principle of work, which generates wealth and life, and a last safe haven (the last refuge for those living a clandestine life and the gateway to exile). Moreover, the land serves as a guarantee of stability against the disorder of the city and the increasing spread of emigration.

It might be said that if, for the Estado Novo, rural Portugal was the homeland of a Portugal that had always existed and was re-emerging after the defeat of liberalism, for communism, rural Portugal was the home of the secret and clandestine Portugal still waiting to be released and as yet unrevealed, the place in which the future was stored. (Leal 2000). In both cases, the rural world is where “the genuine country” can be found. That is why we need to look at the collaborative dimension of intellectual conflict between the elites, even when this conflict is painted, in political terms, as being black against white, communism against fascism. As Bourdieu once skeptically claimed, the fight for symbolic power is a conflict that expresses difference only because it departs from a reality of common representation in which consensus is expressed (Bourdieu 2001:11).

All manner of bonds were used by Portuguese communists when they imagined the behavior of the multitude and when they represented the people – in other words, when they invoked the concept of “the people” to refer to the multitude and imagined certain kinds of people

⁴ Karl Marx, “Os Resultados prováveis do domínio britânico na Índia”. In Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1978), *Sobre o Colonialismo*, vol. I, Lisbon: Estampa, p. 97

when describing it. The notion that those living in Portugal were Portuguese was a cornerstone of the Portuguese communist positions on the colonial question. In conceptual terms, the communists nationalized those who lived in Portugal – termed the “people,” as in the republican narrative – and considered their national identity on numerous occasions as being more powerful than other factors of mobilization, such as those based on class. The ideas that the “masses” had a sense of their own national identity and that they viewed the colonial question in these terms were strongly held by the communist leadership when imagining the so-called “people”, those whose representation gave communist parties their *raison d'être*.

4. Power Games: Communists imagining nationalism

Nationality was not an axiom of Marx and Engels's theoretical writings. This unimportance is usually seen as a lacuna or an error, but we should also see it as an option. Even if he was an avid supporter of scientific analysis, Marx guided his own study of reality by using desires and aspirations as guiding categories. Besides this, from Marx's standpoint the nation was not a neutral and unproblematic historical entity. It was the debate between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin about the right to self-determination, particularly the defeat of Luxemburg's views that paved the way for the de-problematization of the national question in communist political thought. Hence, for the Third International, the nation became a progressively more viable field of action for communist politics.

The nation became a device through which communists were now acting upon the whole of reality, and this transformed the communists' anti-colonialist position. The colonial question began to be formulated less and less alongside the national paradigm of politics. Episodically, we should not forget the importance of the debates in the Communist International on the Chinese question toward the end of 1920. But we can now advance a little further, directing ourselves toward the core of Leninism as a central doctrine. Progressively, the central Leninist theory of imperialism took on manifest importance as the dynamo of communist political thought. In conceiving power as being territorialized and centralized at one main point – the state and the nation-state – it directly declared the occupation of state power as “the” objective. As we know, the agenda of the international communist movement was therefore constructed around the aim of assuming state power. Power was more intensely identified with state power and transforming power relations was increasingly identified with the task of seizing state power. The profound impact of this conception of power is something that deserves close attention.

Let us briefly examine the case of class struggles: the negative value or the secondary importance attributed by mainline political communism and dominant Marxist historiography to the so-called “everyday forms of resistance” (Scott 1985) cannot be disconnected from the growing analytical identification between power and politics, and between political power and state power. Such identification soon proved practical, as it avoided debates on the hierarchical nature of the state form and the authoritarianism of nationalism as problems facing communist movements (Seth 1995).

It is obviously rather simplistic to reduce the causes of such a complex web of historical features to the effects produced by a political theory, even if the political theory in question is as symbolic and compelling as Leninism. And it is true that by re-reading Lenin's theory of imperialism, we can see at least two avenues pinpointed as the routes of capitalist expansion: territorial and extensive expansion, on the one hand; and intensive and relational expansion, on the other. Lenin also considered in his fundamental text on imperialism that the power function of

the imperialist states could be diminished in the not too distant future (Lenin's own rhetoric against Kautsky's super-imperialist theory somehow skates over this point)⁵. But the principal developments of the Stalinist period clearly emphasized the territorial line of analysis and political orientation. It is not by accident that the dissident ways in which power was conceived in the Marxist tradition somehow established themselves, from then on, against the Stalinist paradigm – from the Frankfurt School to Antonio Gramsci, a hybrid case in which the concept of the national-popular was linked to the idea of counter-hegemony.

In general, and from the roots up, communist political critics invite us all to see the affective relationship between economic and political interests in social life. The Leninist theory of imperialism somehow developed this point analytically on a worldwide scale, but at the same time it stood for a strategy that promoted a distinction between the political and economic centers of power. And so the imagined center of power increasingly began to restrict politics to the national territory and institutions. In this way politics and nation-states became the home of culture, instead of concerning themselves with economics and social relations. And politics, both instead of and apart from culture, became the major field for policy and strategy.

The main consequence of this about-face was a reification of culture in national terms. This reification sustained a stepped-time frame for the concept of developed and underdeveloped countries, favoring the adoption of a progressive model of time that would gradually become applicable on a worldwide scale. Consequently, we see the adoption of a vanguardist notion of primary historical actors as responsible for submitting their countries to the various stages of progressive universal time. A country's proximity to socialism was closely linked to its degree of industrialization, and the immanent quest for a higher quality of life was linked to national productivity. Economic and social struggles were increasingly seen as being politically insufficient to bring about revolution, as Trotsky himself regretted (Mandel 1995). Class struggles were no longer seen as immediately capable of addressing new or counter-hegemonic cultural experiences. A teleological conception of history became a mainstay of communist thought and politics. In 1957, Jaime Serra, in his address to the PCP's 5th Congress, defended a change in the communist position on the colonial question, justifying his view by saying that Africa had entered into "the wheel of history"⁶.

5. Nationalism as Anti-colonialism

In 1957, the 5th Congress of the PCP approved the African people's right to national self-determination and maintained that the task of Portuguese communist militants was to contribute to the formation of movements whose first duty would be to fight for national independence. The political task was no longer to develop militant sections of the PCP in the colonies, a change that seriously weakened the idea that the independence of the colonies depended on the achievement of a democratic revolution in the metropolis. As far as the colonial question is concerned, historians of the PCP almost universally acknowledge 1957 as a watershed year, with party history consequently divided into "pre-1957" and "post-1957" periods.

⁵ "Old capitalism has finished. New capitalism is a moment of transition to something different". Vladimir Lenin (1981), "O Imperialismo, Fase Superior do Capitalismo". In V. Lenin, *Obras Escolhidas*, 1, Moscow/Lisbon: Progresso/Avante, p. 609.

⁶ Jaime Serra, "Sobre o problema das colónias – intervenção do Camarada Freitas (Jaime Serra)". In *V Congresso do PCP*, 1957. Archive: Fundação Mário Soares.

The historical significance given to 1957 is fair. Nonetheless, it leads to a tendency to describe the preceding period in terms of a timeline leading from proto-colonialist positions to anti-colonialist ones, incorporating the ambivalence of the preceding and consequent periods. As far as the preceding period is concerned, we should note that the sources presently available point to a far richer reality than could be contained in the abovementioned linear development (Neves 2001). Indeed, we can find anti-colonialist statements dating from the 1920s, just as we can find communist proposals to sell the Portuguese Empire to the British in the same decade. We can find racist declarations in the 1940s, but we also find the opposite. We can also see that the texts addressed to external audiences – electoral manifestos and other pamphlets – seem less anti-colonialist than internal documents. Finally, recalling the theoretical problem debated in the first part of this text, we can find clear attacks on capitalist social domination over Africans in the reporting of strikes and other paradigmatic aspects of proletarian life, and yet we can also find softer approaches that ignore certain aspects of Portuguese political domination over its colonies.

These ambivalences were exacerbated by the contradictory pressures emanating from the Communist International and from the moderate Portuguese antifascist opposition. But considering the affective links between the Portuguese communists' typical strategy with regard to political alliances and the Soviet strategy for leading the Third International, it is hard to see the PCP's greater attachment to anti-colonialist principles as a function of the party's degree of loyalty to the Communist International and the USSR. The major policies defended by the International in the 1930s were indirectly – but consciously – responsible for a devaluation of anti-colonialism among Western communist parties, such as the PCP and the French Communist Party. In order to facilitate antifascist alliances, communist parties softened their political positions regarding anti-colonialism.

The dominant teleological conception of history in communist political cultures is at the core of such instrumental tactics and is closely connected with a progressive vision of social development and a vanguardist conception of politics: the party guides social development so that history can be fully realized. In Portugal, to lead implied fighting for a democratic revolution, a revolution that was not yet projected as a permanent one in the socialist sense. Making antifascist alliances was the tactical move necessary for bringing about a democratic revolution, and so anti-colonialism and nationalism became tactical and instrumental devices, the first being devalued and the second given greater importance.

From the 1930s onwards, patriotism prevailed as a means of achieving internationalism. From then on, it was difficult to discern any rigorous opposition between nationalism and internationalism. In the Portuguese case – and our study tells us that the following conception may also be valid in reference to most Marxist-Leninist parties, at least in Western Europe – two opposing kinds of internationalism confronted each other within the same political culture: a nationalist internationalism and an anti-nationalist internationalism, with the first becoming increasingly dominant in communist political cultures. The influence of the communist front's strategies adopted in the 1930s, the dominant understanding of imperialism as an extensive form of expansion in opposition to the understanding of imperialism as an intensive form of expansion, the new world order of the Cold War introduced during the second postwar period, as well as a number of other trends, are factors that underlie the formation of a nationalist internationalism, which in turn gave rise to national-colonialist and national anti-colonialist positions.

But anti-nationalist internationalism nonetheless remained alive, even after the party congress in 1957.

6. Anti-colonialism as Anti-capitalism

Francisco Martins Rodrigues is now the name to bear in mind. He was an important PCP militant and a member of the Secretariat of the Central Committee in the early 1960s. He was the first person to create a leftist split in the PCP. One of the central ruptures between Rodrigues and the PCP concerned the different positions adopted with regard to the colonial question. Rodrigues' criticism of the prevailing PCP policy placed him in a situation of extreme political opposition to Álvaro Cunhal. He strongly criticized *Rumo à Vitória*, a text written by Cunhal that became the main strategic and political reference for the PCP. In opposition to Cunhal, Rodrigues defended a concept of the social struggle that was incompatible with any nationalist political project, which ran counter to one of the principal features of Cunhal's own thought. Rodrigues defended a socio-economic bias in opposition to the increasingly national focus of PCP policies. On the colonial question, Rodrigues defended the principle that the main distinction to be made was not between colonialism and fascism⁷. Rather for Rodrigues, colonialism was directly connected to capitalism, which he considered mainly as a social and economic relationship.

Politically, this change implied a rejection of any strategic or tactical move toward establishing political alliances with moderate sectors of the opposition. This had consequences at two levels. In order to combat colonialism, it was not enough to combat fascism, firstly because colonialism was one of the basic supports of Portuguese nationalism in general (not only of Portuguese fascist nationalism), and secondly because colonialism was directly connected to the dynamics of capitalism (not only with non-democratic capitalist interests). Thus, combating colonialism implied opposing republicans and democratic bourgeoisies, as well as fascists. There could therefore be no alliance with democratic colonialists:

To those who argue that attacking republican colonialism helps fascist propaganda, we will answer that concealing the Portuguese colonialist past is to conceal its very nature and that revealing it makes it possible for us to engage in a decisive combat against it.⁸

Anti-colonialism implied not only national self-determination, but also social self-determination. Rodrigues' position made him a radical critic of Cunhal's views concerning revolution in Portugal and in the colonies. The case to be made in defense of Rodrigues is that he fought against the prevailing understanding of imperialism as an extensive form of expansion, mobilizing support for an understanding of imperialism as an intensive form of expansion. His inspiration surely came from the growing influence of Maoism. But – and this is where Rodrigues' case is more interesting – such a position was only possible for Rodrigues because of the fact as a long-time PCP militant, he was already under the influence of a socio-economic bias.

Following this path, I should like to conclude by linking the debate within the PCP on the colonial question to studies of the Portuguese Empire carried out in the social sciences. The point to be provocatively emphasized is that Rodrigues' position was not only relevant in terms of the political debates that it engendered. Analytically and historically, we can find in Rodrigues' position the basis for the present-day consensus among Portuguese social scientists working on the Empire: colonialism was not a direct product of fascism, but it had its roots in the strength of a general nationalist feeling and in the general dynamics of global capitalism. So, we end up returning to our original point of departure, in which the need was stressed for studying the

⁷ *Revolução Popular – edição completa 1964-65* (1975). Lisbon: Voz do Povo.

⁸ *Idem*, p. 143.

Portuguese Empire not only in relation to the sphere of representations and ideas, but also in terms of economic and social relations.

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