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# A World without Empire?

Encounters and connections  
between African, European,  
and Soviet Communists,  
1920s to 1970s



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edited by  
Silvio Pons



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DELLA  
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*In memory of Andreas Hilger*



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# Antifascism, Anticolonialism and Internationalism in the Portuguese Communist Party<sup>1</sup>

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During the 1930s, the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) adopted a very unusual position compared to the international communist movement's traditional anti-colonialism. In the aftermath of the Italian aggression against Ethiopia, both the Comintern and the main European communist parties emphasized the close link between Fascism (encompassing all authoritarian states and nationalist movements) and imperialism.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the PCP embarked on a tortuous and problematic path of reappropriating colonialism in a paradoxically nationalistic and anti-Fascist sense. After a fifteen-year period of uncertainty and ideological adjustment, by the mid-1930s the Portuguese communists had adopted a stance José Neves has termed «progressive colonialism».<sup>3</sup>

This essay traces these different phases up to the threshold marked by the 1957 turning point, when the PCP repudiated then colonialism. It focuses mainly on the political culture of the PCP, leaving aside the details of mobilization by colonial subjects, political relations with the colonies, and interactions with Moscow and other European parties.

## Origins

The Portuguese Communist Party was founded in March 1921 by activists coming mainly from revolutionary syndicalism and the

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<sup>1</sup> I'm grateful to Anna Shapovalova, whose researches in Moscow allowed me to use the archives of the Comintern. The following acronyms are used in the text: FMSMB: *Fundação Mário Soares e Maria Barroso*; RGASPI: *Rossijskij gosudarstvennyj archiv social'no-političeskoj istorii* (The Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History).

<sup>2</sup> G. Procacci, *Il socialismo internazionale e la guerra d'Etiopia*, Roma 1978; N. Srivastava, *Italian Colonialism and Resistances to Empire, 1930-1970*, London 2018.

<sup>3</sup> J. Neves, *Comunismo e nacionalismo em Portugal*, Lisboa 2008, p. 186.

anarchist movement.<sup>4</sup> It was thus difficult to establish a political culture marked by Third-Internationalist Marxism in the initial years. Despite exchanges and meetings with exponents of other national parties (starting with the Spanish party), periods spent in Moscow by its leaders (Caetano de Sousa and Pires Barreira in 1922, Carlos Rates in 1924), and regular visits by Comintern delegates, especially between 1923 and 1925, relations with Moscow developed slowly. On several occasions, the Comintern criticized the PCP for its lack of a Marxist background.<sup>5</sup>

This directly affected the development of the PCP's position on the colonial question, particularly in building relations with African colonies. The political culture of the ruling group was characterized by a mechanical application of Leninist theory on imperialism and a stadial conception of historical development. The former led to a general critique of colonialism that did not address the specificities of the Portuguese Republic and its overseas possessions, nor did it conceive of the fight against imperialism as existing independently of the destruction of capitalism. This stadial vision shared many similarities with the conception of the "civilization" process of "backward" populations proposed by liberals and republicans. It interpreted the socio-economic condition of the colonies through a clearly hierarchical lens of more or less "civilized" societal models. There was only one path to development in this view, the one modelled on European capitalism, and "backward" populations were posited as being at various stages along this path. No alternative trajectory was considered possible; only catching up to and chasing the European forerunners. As Chakrabarty has observed, «it was through recourse to some version of a stagist theory of history – ranging from simple evolutionary schemas to sophisticated understandings of "uneven development" – that European political and social thought made room for the political modernity of the subaltern classes».<sup>6</sup> However, this theory also led the party to fail to recognize the subjectivity of colonized peoples, their "otherness", and autonomy.

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<sup>4</sup> A. Cunha, *The anarchist origins of the Partido Comunista Português (PCP)*, «Investigaciones Históricas, época moderna y contemporánea», 42, 2022, pp. 981-1018.

<sup>5</sup> J. Madeira, *História do PCP. Das origens ao 25 de Abril (1921-1974)*, Lisboa 2013, pp. 17-27.

<sup>6</sup> D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, New Edition, Princeton 2008, p. 9.

Consistent with this view, on a political level the PCP took a stand on the side of the struggles of the “colonial proletariat” exploited by the Portuguese bourgeoisie, but said nothing about Africans as Africans within their society and historicity. It expressed support for the economic demands of colonial peoples but saw them as incapable of achieving true independence and self-determination until the communist transformation to come, thus making self-determination conditional on future socialism in Portugal (see, for example, the draft statutes for the Socialist Republic of the Soviets of Portugal, 1925).

Relations with the colonial territories were essentially absent, even though significant instances of mobilization had been taking place in the Portuguese colonies for some time. Newspapers and associations had sprung up in Angola and Mozambique; notable among these was the workers’ association in Lourenço Marques (now Maputo) and its newspaper *O Emancipador*. In Mozambique, organized activities linked to the traditions and cultures of the workers’ movement in the early 1920s were undergoing significant development.<sup>7</sup> All these instances of agitation were deeply influenced by syndicalism, however, with a preponderance of anarcho-syndicalist ideas and strong sympathy for the revolutionary trade union *Confederação Geral do Trabalho* and newspaper *A Batalha*, much more than for the PCP and the theses expressed by the Comintern. In Mozambique, only one trade union leader declared himself a communist in this period: Faustino da Silva. However, his political and ideological links were not with the Portuguese Party, but with the Communist Party of South Africa where he had gone into exile in 1925 to evade police pursuit for participating in a railway workers’ strike.<sup>8</sup>

### *Under the dictatorship*

On 28 May 1926, a military coup overthrew the First Republic and established a military dictatorship. This was the start of an authoritar-

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<sup>7</sup> N. Khouri, J. Pereira Leite, *Les Indiens dans la presse coloniale portugaise du Mozambique 1930-1975*, «Lusotopie», 15, 2008, <http://journals.openedition.org/lusotopie/581> (accessed 28 August 2024).

<sup>8</sup> See J. Many, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais et la Question Coloniale 1921-1974*, Thèse pour le doctorat en Science politique, Université Montesquieu-Bordeaux IV, Bordeaux 2004, p. 133.

ian turn that involved António Oliveira de Salazar rising to the head of the government two years later and culminated in the establishment of the *Estado Novo* in 1933. Democratic guarantees and spaces for participation were progressively eliminated, and within a few years a political regime based on systematic violence, police repression, and mass regimentation had taken shape.

The authoritarian shift extended to the colonial territories as well. In 1930, before the proclamation of the *Estado Novo*, the Colonial Act declared the colonial possessions an integral part of the state and established the «regime of the *indigenato*» that imposed a strict distinction between Portuguese («civilized»), assimilated, and «indigenous» people. The Salazar dictatorship eliminated the freedoms that African elites in Angola and Mozambique had enjoyed before 1926.<sup>9</sup> This reduction of the already limited system of rights and guarantees led to a drastic worsening of conditions for the colonial population, as they were subjected to harsh treatment and fierce exploitation in the labour sphere.<sup>10</sup> In parallel, colonial propaganda became incessant, consolidating an imagery that portrayed the empire as the heart of national identity and the vehicle of a civilizing mission abroad.<sup>11</sup>

With all spaces for freedom closed, the PCP like all other democratic parties was forced into clandestinity.<sup>12</sup> The first years of the Salazar government coincided, in the international communist movement, with the start of what is called the “Bolshevization” process of the national parties.<sup>13</sup> This turning point profoundly affected Portuguese communists: the PCP adopted the ideological and political stances demanded by Moscow, embracing the “class against class” political line that led to a break with bourgeois and social-democratic forces. However, the conditions imposed by the coup d’état complicated rela-

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<sup>9</sup> J. Derrick, *Africa’s ‘Agitators’. Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918-1939*, New York 2008, p. 435

<sup>10</sup> Id., *Africa’s ‘Agitators’*, p. 373.

<sup>11</sup> E.W. Sapega, *Consensus and Debate in Salazar’s Portugal. Visual and Literary Negotiations of the National Text, 1933-1948*, University Park 2021.

<sup>12</sup> J. Pacheco Pereira, *Problemas da história do PCP*, in *O fascismo em Portugal. Actes du colloque de la Faculté de Lettres de mars 1980*, Lisbonne 1982, pp. 280-281. An initial assessment of the repression appears in RGASPI, Comintern, 495-179-23. *Relatório do comité central do Partido comunista português*, december 1927.

<sup>13</sup> S. Wolikow, *L’Internazionale comunista. Il sogno infranto del partito mondiale della rivoluzione (1919-43)*, Roma 2016, pp. 95-126.

tions between the leaders remaining in Portugal and the delegation in Moscow, also hindering relations with the Russian leadership.<sup>14</sup>

This set of changes – the establishment of dictatorship, colonial authoritarianism, clandestinity, and Bolshevization – profoundly impacted the way Portuguese communists related to overseas possessions. Overcoming the uncertainties of the first five-year period, the PCP adopted a resolutely anti-colonialist position from the second half of the 1920s onwards, distinguishing itself from the pro-colonial positions of republican and socialist politicians and intellectuals. This new stance was systematically defined in the early 1930s, once the party had reorganized itself after the coup d'état and was equipped with a new press organ, *Avante!*. The turnaround was fully articulated in a June 1931 text titled *A Ditadura do Proletariado e a Expropriação dos Expropriadores* [*The Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Expropriation of the Expropriators*]. This new line was reiterated in 1934 with *Pontos Fundamentais do Programa do Governo Operário e Camponês* [*Fundamental Points of the Programme of the Workers' and Peasants' Government*]. The Portuguese communists thus took a stand against Salazar colonial policy, contesting the expansionist orientations of the Colonial Act especially in terms of the economic exploitation of territories and populations. They thus called for «the immediate and complete liberation of the colonies, the self-determination of the archipelagos of Madeira and the Azores, including the recognition of the right to secede from Portugal».<sup>15</sup>

Unlike in previous years, they now supported the liberation of the colonies even before undergoing their socialist transformation. This new line was fully consistent with the “class against class” tactics promoted by the USSR and Comintern at the time. The PCP adopted a distinctly anti-Fascist profile, positioning itself as a force radically opposed to the Portuguese power system, including its imperial dimension. It differentiated itself from other political forces: from the republicans, who fully embraced the legacy of the Republic, defended the colonial administration that had existed before the coup d'état,

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<sup>14</sup> RGASPI, Comintern, 495-179-24. *Rapport du Comité central du parti portugais à l'Exécutif de l'Internationale communiste*, Lisbonne, 1 march 1928; RGASPI, Comintern, 495-179-23. *Confédération générale du travail unitaire. Secrétariat Internationale a Secrétariat de l'Internationale Communiste*, 27 april 1927.

<sup>15</sup> *Pontos fundamentais do programa do governo operário e camponês*, «Avante!», série II, 2, octobre 1934, p. 6.

and upheld the principle of colonization itself; and from the anarcho-syndicalists, who were relentlessly declining, increasingly marginalized, and focused on other issues and battles. This alignment was directly urged and promoted by Moscow, and indeed it intervened on several occasions.<sup>16</sup> Despite this, however, the Comintern leadership continued to express doubts about the PCP and did not fully trust it due to its ideological weakness, anarchist origins, and the political fragility of its cadres.<sup>17</sup>

The anti-colonial battle itself highlighted the PCP's difficulties in fully converging with the Comintern's positions. A radically critical stance towards the imperial system was not matched by effective efforts to forge meaningful links with militants in the colonies, whether African or white, as demanded by Moscow.

Conditions were certainly difficult. Colonial liberation movements were in their infancy (the *Liga Nacional Africana*, founded in 1929, and some associations had appeared abroad). Moreover, clandestinity made communication between the metropolis and the colonies difficult for Portuguese communists. However, peasant uprisings in the African colonies were reported in the Comintern press, indicating the beginnings of a much wider struggle against imperialist domination in Africa.<sup>18</sup> Dramatic and well-documented denunciations of the conditions of the populations (especially workers) in the colonies also circulated.<sup>19</sup>

For the PCP, however, anti-colonialism remained a secondary issue, developed mainly in a theoretical or agitational manner without translating into concrete engagement. This was due in part to the strong influence of nationalism on the party. In a 1931 letter to the Political Secretariat of the Latin Office of the Comintern, a party leader noted that within the PCP there persisted «a chauvinism that is unconscious, but which nevertheless remains a chauvinism».<sup>20</sup> This weakness would facilitate a change of discourse in the following years.

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<sup>16</sup> A. Marty, *Indications sur «texte définitif de la lettre directive au PCP adoptée par le Secrétariat politique du 19 octobre 1932»*, pour le Secrétariat roman, p. 18, quoted in J. Manyà, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais*, pp. 210-211.

<sup>17</sup> J. Pacheco Pereira, *Álvaro Cunhal, uma biografia política*, vol. II, 'Duarte', o dirigente clandestino, Lisbonne 2001, p. 149.

<sup>18</sup> E.T. Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa before World War II*, New York 1974, p. 180.

<sup>19</sup> G. Padmore, *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*, London 1931, pp. 39-45.

<sup>20</sup> *Lettre de Tulio pour le Secrétariat de la Commission centrale exécutive du PCP au*

### *The turning point*

In the mid-1930s, Fascist regimes began expanding their influence, starting with Italy's invasion of Ethiopia. This event catalysed discussions among communist and anti-colonial groups, who argued that Fascist imperialism revealed the true, oppressive nature of European colonialism of "non-white" populations. In early 1936, amid Italy's war against Ethiopia, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois published an article in *Foreign Affairs* asserting that Fascism exposed the reality of Europe's exploitative relationship with the rest of the world:

The probabilities are that Italy, by sheer weight of armament and with the complaisance of Europe, will subdue Ethiopia. If this happens it will be a costly victory, both for Italy and the white world. There will be not only the cost in debt and death, but the whole colored world [...] all that vast mass of men who have felt the oppression and insults, the slavery and exploitation of white folk, will say: «I told you so! They do not believe in Christianity and they will never voluntarily recognize the essential equality of human beings or surrender the idea of dominating the majority of men for their own selfish ends» [...] Economic exploitation based on the excuse of race prejudice is the program of the white world. Italy states it openly and plainly. [...] The world, or any part of it, seems unable to do anything to prevent the impending blow, the only excuse for which is that other nations have done exactly what Italy is doing<sup>21</sup>.

These reflections were not mirrored in the thinking of Portuguese communists. They viewed the Ethiopian war as further evidence, akin to Germany's remilitarization, of the Fascist regimes' trajectory toward a new world conflict.<sup>22</sup> The global impact of the event on anti-colonialism was not fully understood.<sup>23</sup> At that time, the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) was more influenced by the Spanish Civil

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*Secrétariat politique du Bureau latin de l'IC*, Lisbonne, 21 août 1931, p. 5, quoted in J. Manya, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais*, p. 210.

<sup>21</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *Inter-Racial Implications of the Ethiopian Crisis*, «Foreign Affairs» 14, 1935, pp. 86, 92.

<sup>22</sup> RGASPI, Comintern, 495-179-11. Partido comunista portugues, *Circular. Directivas para a preparação da jornada do primeiro de maio*, 11 abril 1936, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Regarding the reaction of the anti-colonialist movements to the aggression against Ethiopia, see G. Procacci, *Dalla parte dell'Etiopia. L'aggressione italiana vista dai movimenti anticolonialisti d'Asia, d'Africa, d'America*, Milano 1984.

War, perceived as a direct threat to Portugal, and the strategic changes in the international communist movement initiated by the 7th Congress of the Comintern. This congress drew the participation of a Portuguese delegation including Secretary Bento Gonçalves, Manuel Roque Júnior, Gilberto de Oliveira, Álvaro Cunhal, and Francisco de Paula Oliveira “Pavel”, the permanent representative of the Comintern’s Latin section.<sup>24</sup>

With the advent of the Popular Front, to which the PCP leadership quickly and enthusiastically adhered,<sup>25</sup> the PCP’s focus shifted from differentiating themselves from other anti-Salazarist forces to collaborating with such forces, starting with the *reviralthistas* (the liberal republican movement aimed at overthrowing the authoritarian regime). Simultaneously, the process of nationalizing communist parties intensified, and the PCP was no exception. The party’s leadership became increasingly determined to challenge Salazar regime’s monopoly on national sentiment.

Building a closer relationship with national culture and history could take various forms: the French Communist Party drew on France’s revolutionary tradition to reconcile the working class with patriotic symbolism; the Italian party, under Togliatti, linked nationalization with the development of socialist politics in the West, culminating in the proposal of “progressive democracy”.<sup>26</sup> The PCP, isolated from society and with limited intellectual resources, adopted a more traditional patriotic discourse, including an affirmation of the country’s imperial role. They aimed to be seen as the true interpreters of the nation’s interests and identity, in contrast to the regime.

This new direction was clearly articulated by Secretary Bento Gonçalves. After returning to Portugal from Moscow where he attended the 7th Congress, he was arrested again by the political police and subsequently transferred to a prison in the Azores. During his 1936 trial before a military tribunal, alongside two other leaders, José de Sousa and Júlio Fogaça, Gonçalves prepared a defence statement. In this document, he not only countered the accusations against him but also outlined the Party’s strategy and vision. Specifically, abandoning classist rhetoric, he accused the *Estado Novo* of pursuing policies

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<sup>24</sup> J. Neves, *Comunismo e nacionalismo*, p. 127.

<sup>25</sup> *Acaba de se constituir a Frente Popular Anti-Fascista*, «Avante!», series II, no. 16, February 1936, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> S. Wolikow, *L’Internazionale comunista*, pp. 139-143.

that did not serve the country's interests. Furthermore, Gonçalves positioned the PCP as the only «authentic defender of the nation».<sup>27</sup>

The defence of Portuguese national interests was asserted without distinguishing between national and colonial issues. The Portugal championed by the communists was progressively framed as coinciding with the Portuguese empire, considering the colonies an integral part of the country. In a short span of time, anti-colonialist slogans and calls for the right of dominated populations to separate from the Portugal disappeared from the PCP's arguments. The new line instead developed around three objectives that were closely linked to the evolving international framework.

The first objective was to defend Portugal's independence from external threats. Starting in 1936, faced with German expansionism and the Spanish Civil War perceived as potential direct threats to the country, the communists advocated for a comprehensive defence of Portugal's independence and territorial integrity. To bolster national unity, traditional patriotic rhetoric began to appear in documents published by *Avante!*: «We [communists] love Portugal, we love our beautiful land, which has natural wonders like Sintra, the Algarve with its almond trees, and the verdant and flourishing Minho. We love our people, to whom we proudly belong». However, the Portuguese did not see themselves as an exception in the international movement: everywhere, they claimed, communists «are the best defenders of national independence, in concrete and not in fiction», as «is shown to us by the Spanish and Chinese communists who occupy the front lines in the fight against the invaders of their countries».<sup>28</sup> The Salazar regime was accused of a «betrayal of the nation», being subordinate to foreign powers with hostile interests (the United Kingdom and then, more threateningly, Germany). For example, an article in *Avante!* from June 1937 stated: «Portugal is a country that has long felt the shameful weight of foreign domination. [...] Fascism, which hypocritically calls itself “nationalist”, has buried Portugal's independence more and more every day».<sup>29</sup> In the same year, a propaganda pamphlet «invites

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<sup>27</sup> See J. Manyà, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais*; J. Neves, *Comunismo e nacionalismo*, pp. 127, 433.

<sup>28</sup> *Os comunistas e a Nação*, «Avante!», series II, no. 59, 3<sup>o</sup> semana de Novembro 1937, p. 3

<sup>29</sup> *Os internacionalistas são os mais fervosos partidários da independência de cada povo*, «Avante!», série II, n<sup>o</sup> 37, 1<sup>ère</sup> semaine juin 1937, p. 3.

all Portuguese to unite to free Portugal from foreign oppression and its traitorous agents».<sup>30</sup> The anti-colonial discourse was thus reversed, identifying Portugal not as a colonizing power but as a country in danger of being colonized, first by the British<sup>31</sup> and then by the Germans: «Portugal does not want to be a German colony!» is a slogan used on several occasions.<sup>32</sup> This reversal was justified by the theoretical thinking of the international communist movement. In his text *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), Lenin had considered Portugal a «dependent» country due to its close ties with England. In the second half of the 1930s, the Comintern's analyses qualified Portugal as a «semi-colony», emphasizing its dependent relationship with the United Kingdom. This interpretation, proposed mainly by Evgenij Varga, gained wide acceptance among Portuguese communist leaders.

The second objective was to defend the colonies from German expansionism. The fragility displayed by Portugal and threats to its independence primarily affected the survival of the empire. The alarm was raised by Hitler's desire, especially after Italy's conquest of Ethiopia, to redraw the borders of Germany's African holdings in the future. The PCP's press and internal documents granted ample attention to this issue, making use of the idea that the Salazar regime had perpetrated a «betrayal» of its country and was a «lackey» of Hitler.<sup>33</sup> The PCP managed to extend its network of internal alliances around this campaign, involving exponents of conservative and monarchical circles. One of these was Paiva Couceiro, former governor-general of Angola (1907-1909), opponent of the Republican troops in 1910, and beginning in the early 1930s also opposed to the *Estado Novo* (which had initially tried to integrate him).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *A caminho da guerra e da dominação estrangeira. A política de traição nacional do governo fascista de Salazar*, novembro 1937, p. 15, quoted in Manyá, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais*, p. 220.

<sup>31</sup> RGASPI, Comintern, 495-179-11 CPP, *Directivas para a preparacao da jornada do Primeiro de Maio*, 11 abril 1936, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> *Portugal já é uma colónia alemã*, «Avante!», no. 49, setembro 1937, p. 3; *Portugal não quiere ser uma colónia de Hitler!*, «Avante!», no. 73, março 1938, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> *Angola já é Alemão?*, «Avante!», série II, n° 58, 2a semana de novembro 1937, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Está em perigo a integridade nacional*, communiqué du Secrétariat du PCP, fin 1937. RGASPI, Comintern, 495-179-17, *Carta de Paiva Couceiro em defesa de Angola*, 31 outubro 1937.

Finally, the third objective of the PCP's new strategy was to propose a new relationship with the colonies. This relationship was once again subordinated to an anti-regime stance, and its condemnations of the harsh conditions imposed on African populations was framed within this context. The Salazar regime was accused of failing to promote the development of the colonies and administering them archaically, thus creating the risk of foreign domination.<sup>35</sup> Above all, the *Estado Novo* «today enslaves not only the natives but also its own children who go to the colonies to seek the work that the metropolis refuses them».<sup>36</sup> In criticizing Salazar, the PCP also re-evaluated the situation of the previous years, especially the First Republic (1910-1926) now cast as employing a «mild and humanitarian system of colonization».<sup>37</sup> In opposition to the existing empire, the PCP proposed its idea of «progressive colonization», focusing on breaking with the *Estado Novo* administrative system and governance practices and eliminating all forms of exploitation of the subjugated populations. The basic idea was that, while rejecting the «policies of colonial imperialism», colonialism would be morally acceptable because it could help «other, less civilized peoples, so that they can gradually integrate into the international system until they have achieved the conditions for their complete autonomy». This idea was stated in the 1936 program of the *Frente Popular*, the alliance of communists, socialists, and republicans.<sup>38</sup>

Formulated in this way, the communists' proposal fully converged with that of the republicans and liberals. Echoed in these speeches was the suggestion of "Lusotropicalism", the theory developed by Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre to describe the distinctive features of Portuguese imperialism, framing the Portuguese as better colonizers than other Europeans. Lusotropicalists argue that, due to their warmer climate, geographical proximity to Africa, having been visited by Romans, Visigoths, Moors and many other cultures in pre-modern times, and being poorer than other colonizing nations, the Portuguese

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<sup>35</sup> *A escravatura ainda existe no 'império colonial'*, «Avante!», série II, n° 48, 4ème semaine de agosto 1937, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> *O paraíso fascista em Angola*, «Avante!», série II, n° 71, 3a semana de fevereiro 1938, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> *O paraíso fascista em Angola*, «Avante!», série II, n° 71, 3a semana de fevereiro 1938, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> *O Programa da Frente Popular Anti-Fascista, 1936*, in *A Frente Popular Antifascista em Portugal*, ed by L.H. Afonso Manta, Lisbon 1976, p. 64.

were more humane, friendly, and adaptable to other climates and cultures. Lusotropicalism was opposed by Salazarism in the 1930s – although it partly adopted themes and suggestions from the regime’s colonial propaganda – mainly because Freyre claimed that the Portuguese were more inclined than other European nations to mixing (in the 1950s, however, there were explicit and significant openings).<sup>39</sup>

In the analytical and rhetorical scheme proposed by the Portuguese communists, a critique of the racist basis underlying the social hierarchies operating in the colonial territories was completely absent. On the contrary, the discourse they proposed implied the permanence of a clear racial hierarchy. It is true that the PCP in this period, unlike the previous decade, tried to raise awareness – through its press – about the harsh living conditions of the «poor blacks»;<sup>40</sup> it is also true that this commitment was supported by the increased attention of international public opinion. However, the Portuguese communists did not call for the African masses to be organized politically or through trade unions. The aim was instead to push the white colonists to lead the native populations and work side by side with them in a common effort against the Salazar regime. An example of this can be seen in an appeal to the «white» colonists of Angola: «Whites of Angola! [...] there is more affinity of interests between you and the Blacks than between you and your white exploiters. Join the Blacks, enlighten them, and fight together for the defence of your interests!».<sup>41</sup> The communist propaganda continued to be addressed to the Portuguese colonists and not the African populations. As part of this perspective, PCP rhetoric also alluded to the advantages of a race-based division of labour. The document just quoted above denounced as a highly negative situation the fact the diminishing of white people, forced to perform the kind of highly menial tasks rightfully reserved to the native populations: «Due to the permanent emigration of the native labour force, whites

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<sup>39</sup> In relation to Luostropicalismo, see C. Castelo, “*O Modo Português de estar no Mundo*”. *O luso-tropicalismo e a ideologia colonial portuguesa (1933-1961)*, Porto 1999; Gilberto Freyre: *Social Theory in the Tropics*, ed by P. Burke-M.L.G.Pallares-Burke, Oxford 2008.

<sup>40</sup> *A escravatura ainda existe no ‘império colonial’*, «Avante!», série II, n° 48, 4ème semaine d’ agosto 1937, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> *Império colonial, império da fome*, «Avante!», série II, n° 49, 1ère semaine de setembro 1937, p. 2. Italics mine

find themselves little by little doing the hardest work, the government gives them the same living conditions as it gives blacks».<sup>42</sup>

The absence of relations with the native populations and lack of an organized network of active communist militants in the colonies certainly contributed to the development of this strategy. However, the main factors fuelling this line were internal political concerns: it derived from the PCP's commitment to creating a united anti-Fascist front within Portugal. Abandoning the goal of full independence for the colonial territories meant removing an element of division with other opposition forces, as republicans and democrats did not favour independence for the colonies. Internationally, the conditions of the Portuguese colonies also attracted less attention in the 1930s. Compared to the aggressive colonial expansion of Fascist Italy and threats from Hitler's Germany, Portugal – which did not join the Axis – was considered much less of a threat.<sup>43</sup>

This policy of internal alliances brought with it growing isolation from the rest of the international communist movement. The Comintern quickly intervened to rein in a PCP that was excessively “nationalist” and completely misaligned with official positions on colonialism. The loss of contact with the Comintern led leaders and activists to cling even more closely to a new value: the nation.<sup>44</sup>

### *The «reorganisation»*

From 1940 to 1942, the PCP underwent what is known as its “reorganisation” phase. The arrest of its key leaders necessitated a significant overhaul of the party's organizational structure. During this period, the PCP transformed from the agitation and propaganda group it had been in the 1930s into a politically entity of national significance, even if still obliged to operate clandestinely.<sup>45</sup>

The years of “reorganisation” were profoundly influenced by the ongoing war. On one hand, Salazar's government intensified its

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<sup>42</sup> *Império colonial, império da fome*, «Avante!», série II, n° 49, 1ère semaine de setembro 1937, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> J. Derrick, *Africa's “agitators”*, p. 373.

<sup>44</sup> J. Many, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais*, p. 195.

<sup>45</sup> F. Rosas, *Os três caminhos de Álvaro Cunhal. Notas breves sobre a historia do PCP*, in *Álvaro Cunhal. Política, história e estética*, ed by J. Neves, Lisboa 2013, p. 47.

exploitation of colonial economies and tightened control over local populations to meet the global demands of the war economy. On the other hand, fears stemming from German expansion in Europe and Africa heightened concerns that Portuguese colonies might fall under the control of the Third Reich, thereby jeopardizing Portugal's national independence.<sup>46</sup>

However, the threats to Portuguese territories were not limited to Germany alone. Since the onset of the conflict, major powers had been showing interest in Portuguese territories, particularly the Atlantic archipelagos (Azores, Madeira, and Cape Verde) and Pacific colony of East Timor. Initially, the PCP staunchly supported Portugal's "territorial integrity". The German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 precipitated a significant shift, however. With the formation of a broad anti-Fascist coalition and the Soviet Union aligning with democratic powers, the PCP changed its stance. It publicly endorsed the United Kingdom's occupation of the Azores (eventually carried out in 1943), aimed at establishing a naval base in the Atlantic to counter potential German advancements. This strategic shift prioritized the anti-Fascist struggle over strict adherence to territorial integrity and revived accusations against Salazar for allegedly aligning Portugal with Germany under a guise of neutrality. These accusations were further bolstered in 1942 when Japan occupied the entire island of Timor, leading to renewed condemnation of Salazar as a traitor and «the foremost enemy of the Portuguese people».<sup>47</sup> This stance implied that the occupation of any Portuguese overseas territory equated to an attack on Portugal itself.<sup>48</sup> As noted by Judith Manyá, the PCP's approach to Timor criticized Salazarism and its alliances rather than focusing on broader internationalist anti-colonial principles.<sup>49</sup>

During the war years, Portuguese communists went beyond mere repetition of nationalistic slogans. The "reorganisation" phase also marked a crucial period of theoretical refinement. Two texts were particularly instrumental in this regard. The first was the document titled

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<sup>46</sup> M. Newitt, *The Portuguese African Colonies during the Second World War*, in *Africa and World War II*, ed by J.A. Byfield-C.A. Brown-T. Parsons-A.A. Sikainga, New York 2015, pp. 220-237.

<sup>47</sup> *Política de traição nacional. Em Timor entregue ao Japão*, «Avante!», VI série, n° 27, 2a quinzeina de fevereiro 1943, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> J. Manyá, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais*, p. 268

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266.

*A nova divisão administrativa de Portugal*, deliberately misnamed to facilitate underground circulation. This text explored the concepts of nationhood and internationalism, building upon analyses from the latter half of the 1930s but placing them within a more comprehensive theoretical framework. In keeping with Stalin's conception of the nation as articulated in *Marxism and the National Question* (1913), the document defined a nation not merely as a sentimental bond among individuals, as theorized by Ernest Renan and others, but as a complex unity encompassing stability among people, shared language, territory, economic life, and psychological unity. Consequently, it rejected racial interpretations of nationhood, particularly in the case of Portugal: «The Portuguese nation does not derive from the convergence of individuals belonging to a single race; rather, the Portuguese population has its origins in diverse racial backgrounds, including Iberians, Celts, Lusitanians, Romans, Goths, Arabs, and others».<sup>50</sup>

The development of nation-states, according to the document, introduced imbalances where some nations dominate others. In response to such oppression, it advocated for a «national movement» transcending class boundaries and representing the entire national community.<sup>51</sup> For Portuguese communists, this national struggle was viewed as a transitional phase toward the eventual realization of socialist internationalism, acknowledging its often necessary but temporary nature.

Regarding the specifically Portuguese context, the document characterized Portugal as a semi-colonial nation akin to South American or Balkan countries. Despite maintaining formal political sovereignty, it was economically, financially, and diplomatically dependent on external powers. Notably, Portugal both exercised imperialism through its colonies and experienced subordination to other imperialist powers. Until a few years prior, «British capitalism almost exclusively exploited the Portuguese nation and some of its colonies. However, after

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<sup>50</sup> FMSMB, *Arquivo Mário Soares, Antes de 25 de Abril de 1974, Oposição clandestina, Organizações PCP*, Pasta 02597.001. *A nova divisão administrativa de Portugal*, Editorial Avante, s.d., p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> FMSMB, *Arquivo Mário Soares, Antes de 25 de Abril de 1974, Oposição clandestina, Organizações PCP*, Pasta 02597.001. *A nova divisão administrativa de Portugal*, Editorial Avante, s.d., p. 9.

the establishment of the Salazar dictatorship, significant concessions were made to German and Italian imperialism».<sup>52</sup>

Given this situation, the document emphasized the communists' role in advocating for national independence while steadfastly adhering to internationalist principles. This dual commitment underscored their strategy for navigating the complexities of colonialism, imperialism, and national liberation within the broader framework of socialist goals:

We are internationalists because the ultimate victory of socialism, our ideal, is only possible on an international scale, requiring the collaboration of workers from all countries [...]. However, our internationalism does not mean we are detached from our nation. We love our country, one of the most beautiful in the world, and we are proud of its past, its history, and its significant contributions to civilization and human progress [...]. We take pride in the traditional Portuguese love for freedom and independence [...]. Yet, we do not dwell solely on the golden moments of the Portuguese nation. We demand the defence and guarantee of our independence and territorial integrity, which are threatened by foreign aggressors and a government guilty of national betrayal. We insist that Portugal return to its role as a promoter of civilization and progress.<sup>53</sup>

Applying the criteria derived from Stalin's text – nation as a stable community defined by language, territory, economy, and psychic life – the document implicitly concluded that the overseas colonies could not be considered nations. Each of them lacked one or more of these fundamental characteristics. Therefore, if the driving force of change must be the nation – closely cooperating with the workers' movements – the fact that there was no nation among these possessions meant that any notion of independence had to be considered premature.

These analyses were developed by Álvaro Cunhal in 1943, at the party's first clandestine congress. Cunhal, who emerged as the party's undisputed leader (though he formally became secretary in 1961), proposed what he called «the first contribution to the exact communist

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<sup>52</sup> FMSMB, *Arquivo Mário Soares, Antes de 25 de Abril de 1974, Oposição clandestina, Organizações PCP*, Pasta 02597.001. *A nova divisão administrativa de Portugal*, Editorial Avante, s.d., p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> FMSMB, *Arquivo Mário Soares, Antes de 25 de Abril de 1974, Oposição clandestina, Organizações PCP*, Pasta 02597.001. *A nova divisão administrativa de Portugal*, Editorial Avante, s.d., pp. 15-16.

definition of the national-colonial problem in our country».<sup>54</sup> His intervention is thus of particular significance. After recognizing the peoples of the colonies as «natural allies of the proletariat», he pointed out the party's almost total disinterest in the fate of the Portuguese colonial peoples. He stated that the «Party has never even defined its position on the problem of the Portuguese colonies». Portugal is the fourth colonial power in the world, however, and «this shows the great importance of the colonial problem for the workers' movement in our country».

The conclusions drawn were clear and unequivocal: recognition of the equality of rights of nations and the equality of the colonial peoples with the Portuguese people; rejection of any form of differentiation between the rights of «blacks» and «whites» or between the «backward» peoples of the Portuguese colonies and the enslaved masses of the metropolises; and active support of the Portuguese proletariat in waging national and resistance movements against the exploitation and violence of the colonizers and the Portuguese imperialist bourgeoisie. This entailed a commitment to building an alliance between the Portuguese workers and the workers of the colonies, recognizing the right of colonial peoples to constitute themselves as independent states.

At the same time, Cunhal pointed out that the colonies were not yet ready for independence due to their economic and political backwardness: «No Portuguese colony constitutes a nation. The vast majority of the indigenous population is not yet grouped into nations. In each colony, there are many tribes and proto-national groupings». The national movements in the colonies had not yet acquired an organized form, partly due to the hatred and terror that pitted “blacks” against “whites”.

Recognition of the right of colonial peoples to establish themselves as independent states was tempered by the belief that these peoples, «not developed in all respects, are not capable by themselves, in the present circumstances, of guaranteeing their independence». The solution could not be a “concession” from the Lisbon government; indeed, these territories, insufficiently developed politically and economically, would risk falling under the domination of another imperial power once liberated. According to Cunhal, what was needed was a radical change in the Portuguese political system: «The abolition of the yoke of Portuguese and foreign imperialism in the Portuguese col-

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<sup>54</sup> Á. Cunhal, *A aliança com os povos coloniais*, apresentado ao I Congresso Ilegal do Partido Comunista Português, 1943. The document is reproduced in full in J. Manyá, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais*, pp. 692-697.

onies, although totally impossible under a capitalist regime, can still be partially solved within the framework of capitalism, under a broadly democratic regime».

Cunhal's statement strongly rejected any legitimization of colonialism based on the idea of a «civilizing mission» – an idea still echoed in the previous document, *A nova divisão administrativa de Portugal* – and expressed a clear rejection of racism in all its forms. At the same time, however, the struggle for the independence of the colonies and liberation of the subjugated populations was postponed to an indefinite future, because of both those territories' «backwardness» and the generally adverse «circumstances». Anti-colonialism continued to be subordinated to anti-Fascism.

### *During the Cold War*

The political strategy developed in the latter half of the 1930s was not abandoned after World War II. At the second clandestine congress in 1946, the colonial issue was secondary. Cunhal admitted that «in none of the Portuguese colonies has the work of the party been able to develop in a sufficiently organized manner», attributing this to both the political isolation of the colonies and numerous misunderstandings and mistakes in the party's dealings with those territories.<sup>55</sup> The congress's resolution reiterated that the regime was operating counter to national interests. Salazar, previously accused of enslaving Portugal to the United Kingdom and Nazi Germany, was now accused of subservience to the United States.<sup>56</sup> He was labelled as being «against the nation» and accused of «facilitating the infiltration of Anglo-American imperialism into the Portuguese colonies». The Communist Party thus aimed to form a new democratic government as the sole defender of national interests.<sup>57</sup> This discourse persisted

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<sup>55</sup> FMSMB, *Arquivo Mário Soares, Antes de 25 de Abril de 1974, Oposição clandestina, Organizações PCP*, Pasta 02597.003, *Organização informe do Comité Central ao 2º Congresso Ilegal do Partido Comunista Português*, elaborado pelo «Camarada Duarte» (Álvaro Cunhal), 1946, pp. 46-47.

<sup>56</sup> FMSMB, *Arquivo Mário Soares, Antes de 25 de Abril de 1974, Oposição clandestina, Organizações PCP*, Pasta 02597.001, PCP, *O Governo está levando Portugal à bancarrota*, agosto 1947.

<sup>57</sup> FMSMB, *Arquivo Mário Soares, Antes de 25 de Abril de 1974, Oposição legale e*

throughout the 1950s, linked to broader anti-Americanism, criticizing both the United States' international role and the spread of its mass culture.<sup>58</sup> The immediate liberation of the colonies was sacrificed to maintain alliances with other anti-Fascist forces. This frontist stance was bolstered by the 1943 formation of the *Movimento de Unidade Nacional Antifascista* [Movement of National Antifascist Unity] (MUNAF), the clandestine front of the oppositions, and *Movimento de Unidade Democrática* [Movement of Democratic Unity] (MUD) in 1945, a semi-legal platform in which the PCP was very active.

However, significant developments emerged in the general context. First, a reflection on the link between colonialism and Fascism grew among anti-imperialists, highlighting Europe's historical responsibilities. Du Bois's 1936 analysis underwent new and significant developments, particularly in his 1947 work, *The World and Africa*, where he wrote: «There was no Nazi atrocity – concentration camps, wholesale maiming and murder, defilement of women or ghastly blasphemy of childhood – which the Christian civilization of Europe had not long been practicing against colored folk in all parts of the world in the name of and for the defense of a Superior Race born to rule the world».<sup>59</sup> Similar views were expressed in Aimé Césaires' *Discourse on Colonialism*, published in 1950:

Yes, it would be worthwhile – Césaires' wrote – to study clinically, in detail, the steps taken by Hitler and Hitlerism and to reveal to the very distinguished, very humanistic, very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century that without his being aware of it, he has a Hitler inside him, that Hitler *inhabits* him, that Hitler is his *demon*, that if he rails against him, he is being inconsistent and that, at bottom, what he cannot forgive Hitler for is not *the crime* in itself, *the crime against man*, it is not *the humiliation of man as such*, it is the crime against the

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*semilegal*, Documentos 50º MUD Juvenil, Pasta 02597.003.019, II Congresso Ilegal Do Partido Comunista Português. Resoluções, 1946, pp. 1-2. See also *Só o governo è responsável pela desastrosa situação que o país atravessa*, «Avante!», VI série, no. 124, 1st quinzina de outubro 1948, p. 1; *A penetração imperialista nas colónias e a política antinacional do colonialismo*, «Avante!», VI série, no. 125, 2nd quinzina de outubro 1948, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> *Os governos fascistas de Salazar e Franco ao serviço dos imperialistas americanos*, «Avante!», VI série, n. 177, maio 1953, p. 5; *As colónias portuguesas campo de manobra do imperialismo estrangeiro*, «Avante!», VI série, n. 198, abril 1955, p. 2; J. Neves, *Comunismo e nacionalismo*, pp. 148-151.

<sup>59</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa*, New York 2007, p. 15.

white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the “coolies” of India, and the “niggers” of Africa.<sup>60</sup>

Hannah Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, also identified the imperialism and racism of colonial conquests as the precursors of Nazism.<sup>61</sup> In light of these positions, the PCP’s stance appeared increasingly anachronistic and dogmatic.

Beginning in the late 1940s, the national and international political landscape changed profoundly. The Cold War redefined Portugal’s international role. After an initial phase of isolation, from 1948 onwards the regime aligned itself within the bipolar opposition, joining the Atlantic alliance system. Portugal participated in the second phase of the Marshall Plan and joined NATO. The *Estado Novo* thus positioned itself alongside the great Western democracies. Propaganda shifted away from explicit references to Fascism to instead emphasize anti-communism and highlight a dual threat: externally, the expansion of the Red Army to the Pyrenees, and internally, the “communist danger”. This led the government to outlaw the MUD at the beginning of 1948, amid internal fractures caused by the Cold War, and implement an even more repressive clampdown on the PCP.<sup>62</sup>

The colonies and colonial policy of the *Estado Novo* underwent significant changes in the post-war period. First, there was substantial migration to the two main colonial holdings, Angola and Mozambique, with the presence of Europeans there increasing approximately sixfold between 1940 and the final years of the empire.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, the Portuguese government modernized the imperial system, introducing changes in legislation, administrative structures, development policies, and social policies. The declared aim was to economically and politically integrate the motherland and the possessions into a kind of “pluricontinental nation”. References to the colonies gradually disappeared; with the constitutional revision of 1951 that revoked the

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<sup>60</sup> A. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, New York 2000, p. 36.

<sup>61</sup> H. Arendt, *The origins of Totalitarianism*, New York 1951.

<sup>62</sup> N.S. Teixeira, *The Portuguese at War. From the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day*, Brighton-Chicago-Toronto, 2019, pp. 109-117.

<sup>63</sup> C. Castelo, *Colonial Migration to Angola and Mozambique: Constraints and Illusions*, in *Imperial Migrations. Colonial Communities and Diaspora in the Portuguese World*, ed by E. Mourier-Genoud-M. Cahen, New York-London 2013, p. 115.

Colonial Act of 1930, the term “colonies” was replaced by “overseas provinces”. These reforms and semantic revisions aimed to incorporate the empire into a post-imperial world and facilitate Portugal’s entry into the United Nations. This policy in the colonies resulted in a system of government based on developmentalist projects that exerted strong pressure on the labour force, alongside repression and separation between different ethnic groups.<sup>64</sup>

The PCP, however, essentially repeated its arguments of previous years. It denounced the state of backwardness in the colonial territories and intense exploitation of the workers, blaming the regime for these conditions. In other words, it continued to focus on a problem defined not so much as colonialism itself, but as the reactionary and “Fascist” variant of colonialism implemented by the *Estado Novo*, characterized by ruthless repression and «bloody and brutal exploitation».<sup>65</sup>

The most significant new element of the post-war period – and the one that should have most seriously challenged this line of “progressive colonialism” – was the emergence of the first anti-colonial movements in African possessions. According to Nuno Severiano Teixeira, «in line with the modern definition of the concept, resistance against colonisation and the formation of anticolonial movements at the Portuguese colonies began with the shaping of African elites in the second half of the forties and the emergence of independence movements in the fifties and sixties»<sup>66</sup>. Numerous leaders were able to secure an intellectual and political education after World War II, with many of them attending Portuguese universities in the metropolises and participating in the MUD Juvenil, the MUD’s youth movement. In the second half of the 1940s and the 1950s, several leaders of future liberation movements were students in Lisbon and other universities, taking advantage of the services offered by the state to African students from the colonies. This cadre included, among others, Amílcar Cabral and Vasco Cabral from Cape Verde, Agostinho Neto, Lúcio

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<sup>64</sup> M.B. Jerónimo, *Ordering Resistance. The Late Colonial State in the Portuguese Empire (1940-1975)*, «Political Power and Social Theory», 33, 2017, pp. 109-128; M.B. Jerónimo-J.P. Monteiro, *Empire and Decolonization in Portuguese Africa*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Portuguese Politics*, ed by J.M. Fernandes-P.C. Magalhães-A.C. Pinto, Oxford 2023, pp. 70-87.

<sup>65</sup> *O povos coloniais são poderosos aliados na nossa luta pela paz e pela independência*, «Avante!», VI série, no. 182, novembro 1953, p. 6.

<sup>66</sup> N.S. Teixeira, *The Portuguese at War*, p. 146.

Lara, and Mário Pinto de Andrade from Angola, and Marcelino dos Santos from Mozambique.

In many cases, militants from the colonies joined the PCP. However, the relationship was not straightforward. After taking part in organizations opposing the dictatorship in Portugal, from the mid-1950s these students began to set up their own autonomous organizations. Simultaneously, they started participating in international meetings as representatives of their territories. At the Student Congress for Peace held in Bucharest in 1953, Agostinho Neto represented Angola, Marcelino dos Santos represented Mozambique, and Vasco Cabral represented Guinea and Cape Verde. Thus began the movements for the independence of the Portuguese colonies.<sup>67</sup>

Communists opposed the self-organization of young people in the colonies and the formation of political groups on a national basis. They supported political initiatives, but believed these should be carried out within existing Portuguese organizations, starting with the PCP itself. They did not understand the motives driving young activists from the colonies, neither their desire to create autonomous political organizations nor the importance they placed on national identity. Throughout the 1950s, therefore, the party progressively lost the influence it had once exerted over these young people.<sup>68</sup> It later attempted to regain some ground by proposing the creation of autonomous communist parties, a project that only succeeded in Angola.

In general, the depth of the divide between militants from the metropolis and those from the colonies eluded the communist leadership. As Judith Manyá has asked, should this position be seen as the result of an awareness, by default, of African otherness, or the expression of a certain paternalism?<sup>69</sup> These elements are not mutually exclusive, and indeed both were intertwined in the theoretical formulations of the party in previous years. The Portuguese communists thus struggled to grasp the emerging novelty of the first post-war decade: the formation of anti-colonial militants and groups aiming for independence.

Throughout the first half of the 1950s, the PCP leadership was incapable of understanding the specific features of the anti-colonial movements and the impossibility of fitting them into the interpretative grids

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<sup>67</sup> D.C. Mateus, *A luta pela independência: A formação das elites fundadoras da FRELIMO, MPLA e PAIGC*, Mems Martin 1999, p. 86.

<sup>68</sup> J. Manyá, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais*, pp. 454-460.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 480.

of 1930s orthodox communism. The party press followed the conflicts in Asian and African territories – Korea, Burma, Indonesia, India, Egypt, Kenya, Tunisia, and especially revolutionary and post-revolutionary China – with increasing interest.<sup>70</sup> In general, support for self-determination and independence for the colonies intensified. In 1953, *Avante!* highlighted with enthusiasm that «in the dark continent the answer to the imperialists begins to resound: “We demand freedom! Africa for the Africans!”». Attempts to delegitimize and prevent the struggle of dependent peoples will not save the regime of colonial slavery that history has condemned.<sup>71</sup> However, these were mostly rhetorical speeches without real political effects. Indeed, in terms of the Portuguese empire, the PCP continued to subordinate anti-colonial struggles to the goal of overthrowing the dictatorship and bringing about political change in the metropolis. The defeat of the regime was considered the «only way to realize the common aspirations of the Portuguese people and the colonial peoples subjugated by Salazarism».<sup>72</sup>

The PCP's position began to change after the first post-war decade, mainly due to two decisive developments. The first was the eruption of intense conflicts for the independence of Goa, Daman, and Diu, so-called “Portuguese India”. The PCP expressed support for these peoples fighting for freedom, no longer seeing these struggles as conflicting with the integrity of Portugal.<sup>73</sup> Instead, it directed its attacks at the military intervention ordered by the Lisbon government and the repression carried out by Portuguese troops. This marked its first step towards accepting the immediate surrender of part of the country's possessions.<sup>74</sup>

The second event was the Bandung Conference, considered a «vigorous overthrow of the colonial system of imperialism and the plans for world domination» pursued by the Americans. The conference was also seen as a valuable contribution to peace and collaboration

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<sup>70</sup> Exemplifying this is *O povos chines marcha firmemente para o socialismo*, «Avante!», VI série, no. 182, novembro 1953, p. 6.

<sup>71</sup> *Os povos coloniais pronunciam-se pela sua liberdade e independência*, «Avante!», VI série, no. 177, maio 1953, p. 6.

<sup>72</sup> *A paz vencerá a Guerra. Os povos coloniais são poderosos aliados na nossa luta pela paz e pela independência*, «Avante!», VI série, no. 182, novembro 1953, p. 6.

<sup>73</sup> *Queremos a solução pacífica do caso de Goa, Damão e Diu!*, «Avante!», VI série, no. 191, setembro 1954, p. 1.

<sup>74</sup> *A VI reunião ampliada do comité central pela paz e pela negociação em Goa! Resumo da intervenção do camarada João*, «Avante!», VI série, no. 204, setembro 1955, p. 4.

between peoples, particularly economic and cultural cooperation between Asia and Africa. Bandung involved Portugal directly: the Portuguese government's policy towards the rebellions in the Indian colonies of Goa, Daman, and Diu was condemned.<sup>75</sup> From that moment on, the idea that the Bandung Conference marked a significant shift became widespread among communists. It was expected that international attention towards the colonies would increase along with awareness on the part of the colonized populations, making it unlikely for the Salazar regime to resort to the ruthlessness employed in the past to suppress revolts.<sup>76</sup>

The definitive and official shift away from any wait-and-see attitude towards the independence of the colonies took place in 1957. In the context of full alignment with Khrushchev's platform and in the wake of the events in Goa, the 5th Congress revolutionized party policy. The report on the colonial question by Jamie Serra ("Freitas") constituted the main political contribution of the Congress. It not only put the issue back at the centre, but also made a genuine break with the discourses of the previous twenty years. There were two thematic axes. The first was the condemnation of Portuguese colonialism in general, in its essence and not just in terms of specific manifestations. In previous years, the PCP had criticized Portuguese colonialism in its Salazarist version, vaguely suggesting there could be a different, progressive colonialism. At this point progressive colonialism was no longer considered a realistic or desirable option. The second axis was a recognition of the strength gained by the anti-colonial movements and the growing link between decolonization and the advance of the socialist camp.<sup>77</sup> This marked the beginning of a completely new phase, which was followed in 1961 by the onset of armed movements in the Portuguese colonies.<sup>78</sup> The PCP abandoned the exceptionalism that had characterized its position in relation to the international

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<sup>75</sup> *Os povos da Ásia e da África manifestam-se contra o colonialismo e pela paz*, «Avante!», VI série, no. 199, maio 1955, p. 6.

<sup>76</sup> J. Neves, *Comunismo e nacionalismo*, p. 141.

<sup>77</sup> FMSMB, *Documentos Souto Teixeira*, Pasta: 04435.791, Freitas, *Sobre o problema das colónias*, in *Ve Congrès du PCP*, edições «Avante!» 1957, pp. 112-121. See also J. Many, *Le Parti Communiste Portugais*, pp. 426-429.

<sup>78</sup> G. Strippoli, *Anticolonialismo e antifascismo nelle guerre coloniali portoghesi (1961-1974)*, «Passato e presente», 38, 2020, n. 110, pp. 65-80.

communist movement, and the anti-imperialist struggle became central to its ideology and strategy.

*The cultural roots of «progressive colonialism»*

The PCP's "progressive colonialism" stance was driven by political reasons. As we have seen, the party aimed to assume a fully national profile and participate in the united front opposing the Salazar regime, in line with the strategy dictated by the 7th Comintern Congress. The party's distance from the populations of the overseas possessions and delay in forging relations with the first forms of anti-colonial mobilization were also consequences of its clandestine condition and resultant organizational delays.<sup>79</sup>

Political and tactical factors were undoubtedly decisive. Nevertheless, the strategy of "progressive colonialism" also reflected the cultural fragility that the PCP exhibited from its origins, as we have seen. The repression by the Salazar regime and isolation of militants and leaders in the country exacerbated this situation: as late as September 1928, the party's central committee wrote to Comintern secretary Jules Humbert-Droz stressing the difficulty they had in accessing not only the Comintern's discussion materials but also fundamental theoretical texts.<sup>80</sup>

This strategy was thus tied to the specificities of the political culture and analytical framework of Portuguese communists.

The first of these specificities was its stadial conception of historical development. In this evolutionary theory, history is conceptualized as a succession of transformations through universal, hierarchically defined stages, each corresponding to a specific level of productive forces. It implies a Eurocentric view, identifying the most advanced levels of development with the industrialized West as the goal towards which the rest of the world should aspire. The idea that history

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<sup>79</sup> The harshness of the repression and its intended effects on political activity are illustrated in a lengthy document from the party leadership intended for internal circulation: RGASPI, Comintern, 495-179-11. PCP-Le Secretariat, *Circulaire confidentielle. A toute l'organisation. Il faut porter une plus grande attention au travail conspiratif*, 28 março 1936.

<sup>80</sup> RGASPI, Comintern, 495-179-24. Partido comunista portuguese - C.C., *au camarade Humbert Droz, du B.E. de l'I.C.*, Lisbon, 10 septembre 1928.

proceeds in successive stages along a linear path was well-rooted in socialist and communist thought. It originated from Marx's positivist and "vulgar" interpretation, legitimized by some of his writings (e.g., the "orientalist" articles on India) and Engels' theory of "peoples without history". This concept was developed by Kautsky, Plekhanov, and Bukharin, among others, and influenced Lenin's theory of imperialism, particularly in the formulation of it offered by Evgeni Varga in the interwar years.<sup>81</sup> The linear, progressive, Eurocentric vision also derived culturally from liberalism and the Enlightenment. As Neves notes, some of Portugal's communist leaders were educated within networks of relationships directly linked to the republican movement that emerged in the early 20th century.<sup>82</sup> Through the national liberal tradition, some central concepts of the Enlightenment – such as the idea of civilization – entered into the cultural baggage of Portuguese communism to constitute, in some ways, one of the underlying assumptions of that political culture. Significant traces of this culture are found in the Portuguese communists' references to colonialism's supposedly progressive function: in the period under examination, this progressiveness was seen as a factor that could accelerate the development of the colonies. The overthrow of the dictatorship and construction of a democracy in Portugal were held up as preconditions for effective political independence.

Closely linked to this conception was the idea that profound, structural differences exist between Africa and Asia in terms of historical development and anthropological assumptions. This idea was already present in the PCP in the 1920s, but it remained at the margins of the party's intellectual framework until the 1950s. A journal such as *Sol nascente* [*Rising Sun*], an anti-Fascist publication allied with the communists, reveals an attitude prevalent in intellectual circles close to the PCP: it included both tributes to China, its history, and culture, and stances in favour of Indian independence. The argument was clear: Indians «are by no means a savage people who need imperialism to be civilized... They have their own culture, their own civilization,

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<sup>81</sup> Regarding the PCP's reception of Marxism, see A.P. Pita, *O Marxismo na Constituição Ideológica e Política do Partido Comunista Português*, «Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais», 40, 1994, pp. 89-108.

<sup>82</sup> J. Neves, *On Communism and the Nation. Notes from the History of the Colonial Question in the Portuguese Communist Party*, «e-Journal of Portuguese History», 4, 2006, n.1, p. 5.

whose children are Tagore and Nehru. They already know what they want and where they will march». <sup>83</sup> India and China were considered heirs of great civilizations. Africa, in contrast, was still seen as lying outside the path of history, dominated by backward and rigid social and cultural structures. For these reasons colonialism in Asia was not justified, while in Africa it was seen as potentially playing a historical role in supporting development. In the 1950s, this view became explicit. With the rise of the movement for the liberation of Goa and independence of India, PCP analyses reiterated the maturity of Asia in contrast to the immobility of Africa. <sup>84</sup> It was only after Bandung, as Jaime Serra declared at the 1957 congress, that this opposition came into crisis and was replaced instead by support for an alliance between the two continents. <sup>85</sup>

Another factor influencing the PCP's ideology was its conception of rurality and peasants. To strengthen the national discourse during the party's reorganization, its leaders incorporated the notion of "love of the land" into their rhetoric (a sentiment also expressed by Cunhal, as noted earlier). They portrayed the countryside and rural populations as the repositories of the nation's soul. <sup>86</sup> However, beneath this rhetoric lay a belief in the superiority of industry and the industrial proletariat – seen as the emblem of economic development – over the agrarian economy and the peasantry.

The party frequently declared the necessity of an alliance between the working class and the peasantry. The document approved at the 1946 congress explicitly states that «a broad and strong national unity movement must be based on the unity of the working class». <sup>87</sup> This was not an alliance of equals, however. At the 1943 congress, Cunhal stated that «the most powerful ally of the proletariat is the peasantry». He clarified that the term «peasant» encompassed all social strata (agricultural wage earners who only own their labour power, rural workers with small plots of land but who are still impoverished, ten-

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<sup>83</sup> *India*, «Sol nascente», 3, 1939, n. 41, p. 17.

<sup>84</sup> J. Manyá, *La «question d'Orient» dans l'imaginaire colonial du Parti communiste portugais*, «Lusotopie», 7, 2000, pp. 161-173.

<sup>85</sup> J. Neves, *Comunismo e nacionalismo*, p. 142.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>87</sup> FMSMB, *Arquivo Mário Soares, Antes de 25 de Abril de 1974, Oposição legal e semilegal, Documentos 50º MUD Juvenil*, Pasta 02597.003.019, II Congresso Ilegal Do Partido Comunista Português. Resoluções, 1946, p. 2.

ant farmers, and small landowners) «whose interests oppose those of the big agrarian lords» and who are «interested in abolishing feudal domination in the countryside and the agricultural monopoly brought about by Salazar's corporatism». <sup>88</sup> However, he emphasized that «this is not an alliance of equals; the peasants are necessary but subordinate to the proletariat and specifically the working class». <sup>89</sup>

This worker/peasant dichotomy was paralleled by the modernity/aristocracy dichotomy. The term “peasant” encompasses a variety of social figures, but more generally we can apply Dipesh Chakrabarty's observations about India to the Portuguese context:

I should clarify that in my usage the word “peasant” refers to more than the sociologist's figure of the peasant. I intend that particular meaning, but I load the word with an extended meaning as well. The “peasant” acts here as a shorthand for all the seemingly nonmodern, rural, nonsecular relationships and life practices that constantly leave their imprint on the lives of even the elites in India and on their institutions of government. The peasant stands for all that is not bourgeois (in a European sense) in Indian capitalism and modernity. <sup>90</sup>

This hierarchy influenced the conception and representation of the relationship between metropolis and countryside. In Portugal – which was also portrayed as a semi-colony and a nation expressing “love for the land” – the industrial proletariat was firmly established, whereas the colonies were characterized as exclusively rural societies. The hierarchies within the empire thus reflected different levels of development and evolution. In light of these considerations, the Portuguese communists' idea of “progressive colonialism” appears not as a mere oddity but as a paradoxical and unsettling consequence of a schematic yet coherent cultural framework.

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<sup>88</sup> FMSMB, *Fundo Isabel do Carmo/Carlos Antunes Duarte*, Pasta: 09700.013, Duarte [A. Cunhal], *Informe político do Secretariado do Comité Central ao I Congresso Ilegal do PCP*, in *Unidade da Nação Portuguesa na Luta Pelo Pão, Pela Liberdade e Pela Independência*, 1943.

<sup>89</sup> J. Neves, *Comunismo e nacionalismo*, p. 54.

<sup>90</sup> D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p. 11.