

COLONIAL WAR, ANTI-COLONIALISM AND DESERTIONS DURING THE ESTADO NOVO. PORTUGAL AND ABROAD.

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“Why do we have to kill African people, peasants like us?”: The articulated scenario of desertions

Desertion has not been a phenomenon limited to the end of Estado Novo: the police registered the phenomenon during the early 1960s, as the anti-colonial propaganda did. This scenario is even more complex if we consider the variety of cases of desertion present in the numerous information recorded by the political police and in the anti-colonialist propaganda; we can find soldiers denounced as subversives because of political ideas considered as enemies of the state as we can find physical descriptions without any mention of soldiers' political opinions. For almost fifteen years from the early 1960s until the end of the dictatorship and the colonies' independence, the cases of deserters and draft dodgers were in the thousands. The scenario is multi-faceted: the soldiers' origin, the recruitment and training place, the place and moment of desertion and, of course, reasons for desertion. Soldiers of Portuguese origin deserted both in Portugal and in Africa, soldiers with African origin deserted both in Africa and Portugal, and white African sons of colonists deserted.

Furthermore, not all deserters escaped to European countries or from colonies to other African countries; there have been cases of deserters who before being shipped off to war left the army but remained hidden in Portugal. The quality of questionnaires distributed to Portuguese deserters who arrived in France and who joined one of the solidarity networks in opposition to the regime and to the war, show the variety of exit routes from the army and Portugal. Reasons for desertion have been numerous and not all the instances of insubordination to military orders had the same political reasons or

motivations. If it is true that during the last years of the war there were desertions for political reasons, we cannot forget that the fact that during the first years of the war the soldiers also had political reasons. It was the case of Joaquim Correia Agostinho denounced by the foreign minister to the PIDE Director in September 1961 with the following reason: «The soldier, his father and his sister, have subversive ideas: they read and spread clandestine and forbidden books (...) almost all his relatives are considered bad people and suspicious for their subversive ideas».¹

Testimonies on the reasons of the desertion transmitted through clandestine radios or published by the anticolonial propaganda underline a variety of aspects. «Why should we travel to another continent? Why do we have to kill African people, peasants like us», asked Fernando Ribeiro Outeirinho, who deserted from Guinea in 1966². The declarations made by deserters were also conditioned by the moment and the place of desertion. A young officer, for example, abandoned the army in 1967, just before being shipped off to Angola and remained in Portugal clandestinely; he testified he wasn't isolated thanks to an important antimilitaristic tradition in Portugal, not restricted to the colonial war³. The situation was different for those who experienced the colonial war and saw the soldiers of liberation movements fighting. In these cases, the declarations mostly concern the conviction that the Portuguese government was fighting a lost – as well as unfair - war.

The colonial war, the anti-colonialism and the desertions are fundamental to understand the end of the *Estado Novo*; they also offer a wide-ranging perspective of the 1960s and 1970s, because they had a primary importance in the formation of the left wing groups opposing the PCP and of the armed struggle organizations. Moreover, during these years, from 1961 until 1974, there was a continuous, mass movement of people, political ideas, forms of struggle, at a transnational level. The student movements, the workers' strikes, the emergence of Maoist groups and of other left wing groups, the beginning of the armed struggle, the anticolonial fight are obviously linked with what was happening in other parts of the globe at the same time.

A perspective that considers people movements in these years also forces us to contextualize and problematize concepts such as radicalism and politicization, frequently used in the literature about the “long sixties”. Portuguese movements during

¹ ANTT- PIDE/DGS Sc CI (1) 1070 UI 1209.

² Ivi.

³ Ivi.

the sixties were or were not radical? Compared to what? Compared to the past, to the kind of dictatorship they were acting in, to the contemporary movements developing in other countries, to the traditional forms of conflict? What did the colonial war and the rejection of war mean for the radicalization and politicization of young people?

The 25th of April was born in Guinea. Portugal in transnational perspective.

The decay of the Portuguese colonial empire begun in 1961: on February 4, the armed struggle in Angola started with the raid on prisons in Luanda. In December, the Indian union re-occupied Goa, Damão en Diu and the Portuguese army, much reduced compared to the enemy forces, offered almost no resistance. The loss of colonial territories in India and the beginning of the war in Angola did not prevent the government from continuing the “ultramarine” policy, adding two new war fronts, at the outbreak of war in Guinea in January 1963 and in Mozambique in September 1964.

At the end of 1964, almost 85,000 men were engaged in Africa, an extremely high and disproportionate number in comparison with the size of Portugal; the numbers of soldiers shipped to the colonies is fundamental to understanding what it meant, both for Portugal and the colonies, such as forces’ deployment during thirteen years of colonial war⁴.

Some of the soldiers engaged in this enormous war operation, would have a key role in the ending of the dictatorship. As we know, soldiers who directly experienced the colonial war carried out the 25th April *coup d’état*. The armed forces movement was plural and heterogeneous and neither the April “captains”, nor all soldiers who participated in the colonial war had the same paths to consciousness and politicization.

The direct experience of the war and mostly the awareness that the Portuguese army was losing the war against the liberation movements had a key role in the preparation of the coup. There is a circularity among African liberation movements, Portugal, colonial war and April 25th. Miguel dos Santos, Manecas, member of the PAIGC and guerrilla fighter for the independence in Guinea and Cape Verde, synthesized the weight of the colonial situation for the coup of 1974: «April 25th was born in Guinea». The declaration has a military perspective: all soldiers who had a key

⁴ L. Farinha, *A guerra estende-se à Guiné e Mozambique*, in: *Os anos de Salazar*, vol. 20. p. 15.

role in this day fought in Guinea and there they realized they were losing the war and that another way out had to be found⁵.

In addition, the leaders of the liberation movements had some of their experiences outside of colonial territories. In Portugal, there was the Casa dos Estudantes do Imperio (CEI). Between 1944 and 1965, the Casa, founded by the Minister of Colonies Vieira Machado, worked as a means of support and control of the students of colonies. With a headquarters in Lisbon and two in Coimbra, the CEI welcomed not only African but also Portuguese students. The aim was to reinforce the “emperor mentality” and the diffusion of the Portugueseness among young people, but was precisely there where feelings against the dictatorship and the colonial war were born, together with the curiosity and the valorization of the languages and cultures of colonized African people.

The movements and the relationships between Portugal and abroad concerning the colonial question are not restricted to the colonial territories. From 1963 in Algiers, there was the *Frente Patriótica de Libertação Nacional*, that had the Radio *Voz da Liberdade* and that in the last years of the Estado Novo had a fundamental role in contesting the war and supporting deserters from the Portuguese army. The Algerian FLN gave the means and the spaces to the Portuguese for their propaganda through the radio. In Algiers there were many Portuguese exiles, some of them organized in the *Junta de Acção Patriótica dos Portugueses de Argélia* (JAPPA)⁶.

Some European destinations also had a key role in Portuguese anti-colonialism, thanks to the creation of groups and deserter support committees. From France, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, the anti-colonial propaganda arrived in Portugal, with messages coming from the national liberation movements.

⁵ *O 25 de Abril nasceu na Guiné, diz Manuel dos Santos*. <http://www.dw.de/o-25-de-abril-nasceu-na-guiné-diz-manuel-dos-santos/a-17656412>.

⁶ Communists, left-wing socialists and moderates supporting the general Humberto Delgado founded FPLN at the end of 1962. The from La FPLN fu costituita alla fine del 1962 da comunisti, socialisti di sinistra e moderati, e sostenitori del generale Humberto Delgado. The executive board was the Comissão Delegada Provisória. From April 1963, the headquarters of the Front were in Algiers. The history of the Front was heavily conditioned by the clashes inside the direction for the hegemony and by internal weaknesses. Cfr: S. Martins, *Os desencontros da oposição em Argel*, in A. Simões do Paço (coord), *Os anos de Salazar*, PDA, Lisboa 2008, vol. 20, pp. 31-39. The Front however had a fundamental role in the anti-colonial propaganda, in the relationship with the liberation's movements and in helping deserters.

Rebellion and desertion in Portugal and the colonies.

Desertions occurred from the beginning of the war, but two collective desertions during the 1970s were the most famous actions. The first happened in 1970: a group of seven officers who deserted from Portugal, arrived in Sweden where they made declarations against the war, which caused a big ripple in the international media⁷. Two years later, five navy sailors deserted from Copenhagen when the Nato frigate which they had boarded stopped in the Danish port. The Committee of Portuguese Deserters in Sweden (Malmo/Lund section) welcomed the five sailors – they were between 19 and 25 years old – and from there they took part in press conferences giving a political motive for their desertion. In this case, the rejection of the army and of the war are accompanied by the conditions in the Navy (discrimination, punishment, humiliation, bullying by officers) and the awareness that war was not just unfair but also lost⁸. As mentioned above, not all deserters had Portuguese origins, or were born and brought up in Portugal. There were deserters with African origins and also deserters with Portuguese origins born in the colonies. The recruitment to the army of soldiers with African origins was part the process of the “Africanization”: from 1963/64 the Portuguese government increased the resources to finance the three war fronts. New tactics were introduced, such as the Africanization of the army through the recruitment of indigenous people, with the following objectives: to fill a deficit of soldiers; improve the capacity to penetrate the territory; give an appearance of integration of indigenous population; avoid African people joining the guerrillas⁹.

Young Mozambican, settlers’ offspring, also involved themselves in desertion. In May 1963 the weekly *Révolution Africaine*, published in Algiers, gave the news about the desertion of four young Mozambicans (two doctors and two students) from the Portuguese army: «These four Mozambicans are white colonialists’ sons; in Maghreb they would be *pieds noir*; they are part of the 150,000 “civilized”, colonialist, *mestizos*, Indians, “assimilated”, whom the colonial authority recognized the right to

⁷ See the testimony by Fernando Cardeira in: R. Varela, *Oficiais milicianos optam pela deserção*, in: A. Simões do Paço (coord.), *Os anos de Salazar*, PDA, Lisboa 2008, vol. 26, pp. 60-69.

⁸ The five navy soldiers were: Alberto José Verissimo, António Antunes Santos, Damião Pinto Monteiro, Alfredo Manuel Trindade, António Arriscado Leitão. *Cinco marinheiros portugueses desertam de uma fragata portuguesa ao serviço da Nato*, «Guerra à guerra», October 1973, n. 7. ANTT- PIDE/DGS, Sc CI (2) 15568 UI 7746.

⁹ L. Farinha, *A guerra estende-se à Guiné e Moçambique*, in: *Os anos de Salazar*, A. Simões do Paço (coord.), *Os anos de Salazar*, PDA, Lisboa 2008, vol. 20, pp. 25-26.

exist (the other Mozambicans, six million “indigenous” do not have any legal existence»¹⁰. The anti-colonial propaganda also contains information on cases of insubordination which happened in Africa. One example is the case of the internee soldiers in the Luanda psychiatric hospital. In March 1972, they organized a revolt inside the hospital and they resisted police for 36 hours. Later when they had been put on a boat back to Lisbon, they rebelled again destroying the inside of the boat. According to this article, the Luanda psychiatric hospital functioned as an alternative to imprisoning soldiers and officers who could not stand the reactionary violence of the war and rebelled in the barracks or on the battlefield: «the way to repress these actions is not imprisonment because that would cause the revolt of the entire unit (...). Instead of having prisoners, they created the mentally ill»¹¹.

“So desert, but desert revolutionarily”. Anti-colonialism inside and outside Portugal.

Portuguese deserters and draft dodgers organized political and propaganda groups against the war and the dictatorship in France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Canada. The bulletins of these groups gave logistical information about how to desert, offering news about the liberation war in the colonies. They also referred to struggles across the globe, denouncing the Portuguese army’s crimes (torture, slaughter and concentration camps).

The Committees organized political and propaganda activities supporting deserters and draft dodgers, helped by local activists. These groups expressed the rejection of war and fascism that demonstrated opposition to the regime on a grand scale, separate from the PCP’s fight against the war. For the whole of the sixties, *Avante!* spoke in favour of desertion, and in 1967 formulated a thesis, which – while exalting the phenomenon as the expression of a big protest movement coming from the Portuguese youth – invited Communist militants not to desert from the war. The Communists – the CC sustained – must work to encourage desertion, but they should not actually desert, except to aid a collective desertion or in the event of imprisonment after a revolutionary action. The formulation is clear but it contains an ambiguous base

¹⁰ ANTT- PIDE/DGS SC C (1) 1070 UI 1209.

¹¹ SC C (2) 19181 UI 7831.

concerning the rejection of the war, according to the distinction between Communists and non-Communists: «The CC considers that the many desertions of Party members – although integrated within protest and resistance against the war – did not help development and organization of the revolutionary movement. If all revolutionary elements abandon the army, it would become a docile but efficient instrument for the fascist police (...). Communist militants must courageously continue their revolutionary task in the army, in Portugal and the colonies, clarifying the ideas of their comrades organizing more decisive and more combative soldiers, stimulating and organizing desertions and other forms of action and protest against the colonial war»¹².

The deserter support Committees had to consider this position coming from the PCP, however, the positions on desertion continued to be plural and varied. In Sweden, there were three sections of deserter Committees, in Uppsala, Malmö/Lund and Stockholm. The Uppsala section, in 1972, ended the organized work; the Malmö/Lund section published the bulletin *Guerra à Guerra*, and the information organ of the Stockholm section was called *Boletim*. The editorial of issue 2 of this *Boletim*, was very polemic against the editorial of issue 4 of *Guerra à Guerra*. The Stockholm Committee (CDPE) was accused of not having taken a position on desertion. The CDPE, which supported China and Albania policies, expressed itself against both the so-called “social-fascist” position, which proposed collective desertions from the colonies, and against the so-called “adventurist” position, which contemplated armed desertion and armed actions inside the army. Instead, the CDPE proposed anti-colonial propaganda, agitation and organization within the fascist army and desertion before being shipped off to the colonies following training, and the continuation of struggle in the emigrant environment.

In France, there was the bilingual bulletin *Luta*. The first issue, dated April 1971, took an unclear position on desertion, but that contemplated that desertion would happen in the colonies and not just before boarding: “encourage collective desertion and insubordination acts both in Portugal and on the colonial front weakening the potential of the Portuguese colonial army, increasing the soldiers’ discontent”¹³. In May 1972 in France the *Comité de Apoio aos desertores e refractários portugueses* (CADRP) was also set up. The manifesto stated that the group was born from the initiative of more than 100 French and Portuguese anti-imperialists. The CADRP supported the journal A

¹² *Resolução sobre deserções*, «Avante!», september 1967, p. 4.

¹³ Pide/DGS CI (2) 19012 UI 7828.

Voz do Desertor, the journal *O Salto*, the movement of emigrant Portuguese workers (MTPE), the *Comités de Luta anti-colonial* (CLACS) that edited the bulletin *Vencerão!* The CADRP had the same position on desertion of *A Voz do Desertor*.

The *Manifesto dos Soldados Portugueses*, a little book dated January 1972 circulated in the deserter committees. These soldiers claimed affiliation with the Partido Comunista Marxista Leninista (PCML) and they started their manifesto underlining that, before entering the army, they were workers, exploited by bosses and landowners and by the State. In this case, work is their tie with the people in the colonies. The position on the war and on desertion was intransigent about fighting (in any case soldiers had to fight on the colonial front). Soldiers had to resist from inside the barracks, with guns, but carrying out a mass, revolutionary action. The fight had to be closely linked to the workers' struggle and it was necessary to have a strong and revolutionary soldier organisation. These prerequisites, as the manifesto recognized, did not exist. Soldiers who had been shipped off had to occupy the boat with guns and return to Portugal, and never reach the colonies. Desertion was proposed as a last resort and must be armed: «When you see that you cannot fight in the army any longer, when you run the danger of being arrested because your revolutionary action was discovered, when you are going to be shipped off to the colonies and you cannot collectively desert, then desert! But desert revolutionarily, with the guns and the munitions»¹⁴.

Desertion with guns was the only solution also for the Portuguese Refugee Committee in the Netherlands that published the bulletin *Deserção*. The rejection of military service was considered wrong because the army offered training and, in this way, soldiers could acquire military experience, they could conduct political agitation and confiscate army supplies to use at the moment of revolution. In the Netherlands, there was another Committee, founded in 1970 and called *Associação Resistência e Trabalho* (ART). The group published the journal *Novo Rumo*, with data on legal and illegal migration, interviews with deserters, information about exploitation in various parts of the globe, and a cultural and social section dedicated to poetry and music. The journal collaborated with the previously mentioned journal *O Salto*, which was the organ of federated associations, the *Clube dos Jovens Trabalhadores Portugueses em Paris*, the *Centro de Difusão da cultura portuguesa*, the *Clube dos Portugueses em*

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Brie, and ART¹⁵. The polemic on desertion involved all deserters and refugee committees spread across Europe. No one agreed with the PCP's position, which considered joining the colonial front. However, the discourse about how to desert - with or without guns, individually or collectively- was articulated and they discussed in detail about the permanence of soldiers inside the army, which meant participating in the war. The bulletin *Insurreição*, published by the Denmark Deserter committee, for example, held that soldiers, once mobilized for war, had to desert and steal as many weapons and munitions as they could, to be kept until the moment of insurrection. This Committee also denounced as opportunist the position of the *União Revolucionária Marxista Leninista* (URML) that held that soldiers who fought in the colonies were assassins and traitors of the working class. Despite this opinion, the URML considered that escape abroad was an individualistic and opportunistic attitude and working in the army was encouraged, such as organization of sabotage and espionage. In the case of mobilization to the colonies, the URML recommended continuing the propaganda and suggested fighting in favour of African troops, occupying territories for the liberation movements, and in this way, it did not exclude participation in the war¹⁶.

The rejection of the war and desertion were complex phenomena; the publications of the committees offer a variety of positions and show the wide-ranging spectrum of the Portuguese left during these years¹⁷. In this plural, multifaceted scenario, accusations of opportunism, revisionism, individualism and adventurism were made against each other. There were also less polemical positions, such as the campaign led by Portuguese students abroad: «alone or accompanied, with or without the guns, we have to say no¹⁸».

While deserter and refugee committees were organizing themselves, simultaneously in Portugal the anti-colonial feelings became more openly manifested. As an in-depth study showed, just at the end of 1969, important episodes against the war took place in the student environments, which would grow thanks to the birth of the

¹⁵ PIDE/DGS SC CI (2) 14730 UI 7725. Ana Cristina Clímaco Pereira has carried out a detailed study on left wing Portuguese press in France. Cfr : *La Presse de l'émigration politique portugaise en France – analyse du journal O Salto, 1970-1974*, mémoire de DEA, Paris 7, 1992.

¹⁶ Comité de Desertores Portugueses na Dinamarca ANTT, PIDE/DGS Sc CI (2) 19461 UI 7838.

¹⁷ See the studies by Miguel Cardina on Maoist and radical left wing groups in Portugal. M. Cardina, *Esquerda radical*, Angelus Novo, Coimbra 2010; Id., *Margem de certa maneira. O maoismo em Portugal 1964-1974*, Tinta da China, Lisboa 2011.

¹⁸ À *Juventude* Secretariado dos encontros dos estudantes portugueses no estrangeiro (SEEPE) Arquivo História Social, Caixa 13, fl. 1263. Me 116.

CLAC (founded by the militants of the *Esquerda Democrática Estudantil* - EDE and of the CMPL)¹⁹.

The CLAC through the publication of *Vencerão!* developed an intense anti-colonial activity in Portugal. The journal *O Salto*, in August 1972 published an interview with some members of the CLAC. The organisation, which was born from the student milieu, answered the crucial question “the national liberation fight in Angola began in 1961. Why have nine years passed before the creation of a specific organization against the colonial war”? The explanation given by the CLAC was based on the fact that in 1961 the antifascist movement in Portugal did not include any authentically popular force and was subject to the alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie. The position on desertion was to enter the army, learn how to manage guns, and desert just before boarding. Furthermore, they invited young Portuguese not to emigrate and remain in Portugal to conduct anti-colonial agitation inside the army and propaganda activities inside the country.

Despite these indications, the Clacs were not intransigent, because they did not refuse to support emigration by those who declined to do military service, because they considered it better than participation in the war²⁰. The CLAC had two different components: those who published *Vencerão!* were linked to the PCP (m-l), others to the *Movimento Reorganizativo do Partido do Proletariado* (MRPP), and they were organized in the MPAC. The Maoist group MRPP had the greatest impact in the organization of the anti-colonial fight in Portugal and their journal, *Luta Popular*, had a great anti-colonial connotation from its first issue²¹.

Left wing groups and armed struggle against the war.

The colonial war and anti-colonialism played a decisive role in the PCP, in the left wing organizations and, of course, in the relationships between them.

¹⁹ M. Cardina, *Margem de Certa Maneira. O maoismo em Portugal. 1964-1974*, cit., p. 110.

²⁰ *Nos apoiamos todos os jovens que não fizeram a guerra colonial*. «O Salto», n. 11. July-August 1972.

²¹ M. Cardina, *Margem de certa maneira*, Tinta da China, Lisboa 2011, p. 87. The author reconstructs the story, beyond that of the MRPP, though of various groups and committees with Maoist inspiration. He argues that that also students from the colonies found in the Marxist-Leninist groups the open availability to discuss the colonial war: «If the colonial war became the direct cause of the regime’s crash, the radical activism influenced by Maoism was quickly predisposed to increase this forth front, seeing the colonialism as one of the main targets to hit». (p. 261).

The first armed action by the *Accção Revolucionária Armada* (ARA), on October 26, 1970, was against the Cunene boat in the Lisbon port, due to transport army supplies to Africa. In March of the following year, ARA destroyed 30 helicopters and military planes at the Tancos air base and in June the organization blew up radio telegraphic equipment that caused a communications blackout for six hours. One year after the first action, electronic equipment from the new OTAN department in Oeiras was destroyed. The last action by ARA took place in August 1972, with damage and destruction of 20 electricity pylons; this action was conducted simultaneously in Lisbon, Porto and Coimbra. ARA actions were always approved by the PCP. The organization was born with the consensus and the support of the Party's leaders. On the one hand, the PCP, approving the formation of ARA continued the line imposed after Cunhal's escape from prison, to cancel the "peaceful orientation" led by the PCP during his prison. On the other, the new organisation could channel the pressures – inside and outside the Party – in favour of the armed actions and could act against the attacks from the left that were criticizing the Party as reformist and opportunist.

The case of two other armed struggle organizations, created in Portugal between the end of sixties and the beginning of seventies - *Liga de União e de Accção Revolucionária* (LUAR) and the *Brigadas Revolutionárias* (BR) - was different. The LUAR started the armed struggle against the Salazarist regime; the group, led by Hermínio Palma Inácio put into practice a line of direct action already theorized by the *Frente de Accção Popular* (FAP) and by the *Movimento de Accção Revolucionária* (MAR)²², that did not carry out any operations²³. The actions of the league ended in September 1973 because of the imprisonment of its militants. LUAR was the group that started the armed struggle against the regime, but it did not have an important role in the theoretical debate with the PCP, as the BR did²⁴.

The BR had the greatest anti-colonial character and Carlos Antunes and Isabel do Carmo, who founded the Brigades had, together with other militants, a key role in

²² Francisco Martin Rodrigues, expelled from PCP nel 1963, founded the Fap, influenced by Maoism, in Paris in 1964. The MAR was born in 1962 thanks to the initiative of a group of exiled. It worked supporting refugees and deserters. Both the FAP and MAR, with their journals, have been target of the ideological battle of the PCP that took organic form in the essay written by Cunhal in 1967: A. Cunhal, *Accção Revolucionária, Capitulação e Aventura*, Avante! Lisboa 2005.

²³ The first action of the League was the assault at the Portugal Bank's branch of Figueria da Foz, March 17 1967. The following operation took place September 17, 1967: the League's militants assaulted the military headquarter of Evora stealing guns. The third operation was not successful: the plan was the military occupation of the Covilhã zones, interrupting the communications and dismissing the police.

²⁴ J. Manyá, *Le PCP et la question coloniale*, p. 612.

the anti-colonial struggle in Algiers, with the leaders of the PAIGC, of the FRELIMO and of the MPLA. They transmitted military information and maps and a report on the situation of the war in Angola written by Costa Gomes, stolen from the Caetano's office to the liberation movements. The Antunes testimony offers interesting insights into the various and different levels of opposition to the war coming from the PCP, remembering the "great drama" experienced by the Party concerning the war and the need to avoid breaking the alliance with some pro-war sectors of bourgeoisie²⁵. The split between Carlos Antunes and Isabel do Carmo and the PCP happened in Algiers and had fundamental consequences. This was because the BR successfully requested to take over the radio station *Voz da Liberdade* from the Algerian government. The station was controlled by the PCP after the FPLN internal split. The removal of the PCP from Algiers, use of the radio station, the Algerian government's support, all enhanced the BR's role in Algeria from 1969. This happened at the same time as the development of the electoral movement in Portugal and of the so-called "*primavera marcelista*". A solution to the colonial question became increasingly urgent. The Brigades arose specifically to contrast with the PCP position on the colonial war: «The armed struggle made more sense at that time because of the colonial war. The issue became crucial inside the PCP, at the base of the Party. There was a great disillusionment with Marcelismo and the possibility of armed struggle arose. This led us to abandon the Party and, among many vicissitudes, to found the BR (...)»²⁶.

The first action of the Brigades took place on November 7, 1971, against the OTAN department at Fonte de Telha. The BR claimed responsibility for the action declaring the fight of liberation movements against imperialism had inspired it. The victory was dedicated to the heroic fight of the people of Vietnam, Angola, Guinea, Mozambique and Palestine²⁷. A few days later the BR destroyed a battery of guns in Barreiro. The following year, starting from March, they undertook various actions: the cutting of electricity; the theft of hundreds of kilos of explosives in the Algarve; the destruction of 15 trucks ready to be delivered to the army; the distribution of pamphlets, using petards, against the presidential election of Americo Tomás; the sabotage of Marconi electronic equipment at Palmela and Sesimbra; the theft of military maps for

²⁵ On the rift between Carlos Antunes and Isabel do Carmo and the PCP see: J. Madeira, *A história do PCP*, Tinta da China, Lisboa 2013, pp. 547- 564. The author reconstructs the passages of the dissidence concerning the role of violence fighting the dictatorship.

²⁶ Isabel do Carmo in *Carlos e Isabel. Acções explosivas, A guerra de Africa*, p. 916.

²⁷ ANTT- PIDE/DGS Sc CI (2) 18327 UI 7814.

the FRELIMO, the MPLA, the PAIGC. In March 1973, the BR attacked the army recruitment centre in Avenida de Berna and the headquarters of Rua da Fonseca and of Graça. On this occasion, two militants died. The following action, the attack on the recruitment department in Porto, was dedicated to the memory of the dead two comrades, Luis and Ernesto. On May 1, the BR blew up hundreds of petards inciting the protest of workers and in October another barracks was attacked, and almost all the archives were destroyed. In February 1974, BR organized an incursion to damage the army headquarters in Bissau. The last action, in April 1974, was the sabotage of a boat called Niassa, which was set to transport army supplies to Guinea. These armed actions were important, and were underlined by a specific anti-colonial political position: «In Portugal there were many anti-colonial actions, well done and interesting, but that were like charity action from the Portuguese poor to the colonized poor. These movements also had a paternalistic position: they supported the movements because, poor them, they were oppressed. The chance of an open discussion, on an equal level, considering them people with the same political perspective, with which we could agree or not, never appeared»²⁸.

Paths of research

The experiences of desertion, the political lines elaborated by draft dodgers and deserters in Europe, the anti-colonialism born in Portugal and the operations undertaken by the armed struggle organisations are some threads of a wide-ranging net that, as I tried to show, connect Portugal with Guinea, Angola, Mozambique and Algeria in Africa and with France, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands in Europe. We also have to consider the fact that the armed struggle militants spent months of military training in Cuba and the Soviet Union and they drew inspiration from guerrillas and from conflicts in other parts of the world, such as Vietnam and Palestine. The fights against the Brazilian dictatorship also influenced the Portuguese anti-colonialism: for example, the FPLN published the *Manual do Guerrilheiro Urbano* published in Brazil in 1969 and written by Carlos Marighella, leader of the armed struggle against the regime from 1964²⁹.

²⁸ Isabel do Carmo in *Carlos e Isabel. Acções explosivas, A guerra de Africa*, p. 912.

²⁹ ANTT PIDE/DGS Pc 1353- CI (2) dossier 14 fl. 2.

The focus on colonial war and anti-colonialism in the sixties and seventies in Portugal enable us to concentrate on a crucial moment within Portuguese contemporary history, with some elements that problematize the idea of a peaceful *coup d'état* and of a non-violent transition to democracy. It allows us, moreover, to highlight some points for possible paths of research.

The first one I suggest is the relationship between radicalism, politicisation, insubordination, movements and organisations. The plurality of the phenomenon “no to the war”, understood as the anti-colonial activism in Portugal and abroad and as resistance to the military service and desertion from the army, stimulate interesting questions about the levels of resistance to the war and the fight against the State and against the government. Not all deserters had the same motivations, the same paths of politicization and the same political ideas. The thousands of exiles and deserters were involved in insubordination, resistance and rejection acts against the fascist regime and these are not attributable to a unique political idea nor the same path of militancy. This fact brings us to question the radicalism, not considering it as an abstract category and to study the true paths and the multifaceted choices that led to thousands of people fighting in Portugal or abroad and escaping.

The question of desertion causes us to consider the choices of the youth and to contextualize the struggle bearing in mind the condition of the soldiers and the fact they were young and, as a generation, they were catapulted into the war when the world was going through crucial transformations. These young were soldiers and as soldiers expressed different ways of opposition to the army and to the war. There were varying degrees of insubordination, directed against different subjects and institutions: the officers, the government, the State. This fact is important when we consider that soldiers who took part in the colonial war were responsible for what happened on the 25th of April. Many of those soldiers would become “revolutionary heroes” during the 18 months between April 25, 1974 and November 25, 1975. We have to take into account that the role of the MFA during the PREC created a myth around the soldiers who ended the dictatorship causing the removal of violence from the regime and the army.

War and anti-colonialism are fundamental in the formation of left wing and armed struggle groups in opposition to the PCP. Both in Portugal and abroad, the PCP and left wing groups made mutual accusations of opportunism and adventurism. This element is crucial for studies on the ideological matrices, on the political forms, on the

use of violence, starting from a concrete case, and in this one, referring to a long-period event such as the war was. How the anti-colonial discourse is articulated is an important element to study; for example of the case of the Manifesto of Portuguese Soldiers mentioned above is particularly interesting. They demonstrated the opposition between the “revolutionary workers” and the bourgeoisie, but in other cases, the student milieu for instance, although not only, complaints about military discipline carried the greatest weight. For the Manifesto, work and class membership are fundamental to the construction of anti-colonial discourse. It would be possible to open a study on the articulation of anti-colonial discourse, considering who was involved, the influences and mutual relationships between violence, anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, anti-militarism and anti-racism.