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## “PORTUGAL WAS LIBERATED BY THE AFRICANS”: AN INTERVIEW WITH HISTORIAN MICHEL CAHEN FIFTY YEARS AFTER THE CARNATION REVOLUTION

AN INTERVIEW WITH HISTORIAN MICHEL CAHEN FOR THE ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG SOUTHERN AFRICA

FREDSON GUILENGUE

Fascism in Portugal ended fifty years ago and resulted in the establishment of democracy in the country. It was also the start of negotiations with the African liberation movements to end colonialism. Five decades later, the trajectories of Portugal’s former colonies are quite distinct, with relations between the Lusophone countries markedly different from those between other former colonizers and the colonized.

To understand the political, socioeconomic, and military context leading up to the revolution in Portugal, as well as its relationship with Portugal’s former colonies in Africa, **Fredson Guilengue**, Senior Regional Programme Manager of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung’s Southern Africa Office (**RLS**) spoke with **Michel Cahen (MC)**. The interview was conducted on 12 February 2024. Cahen is a historian of Portuguese colonialism in Africa and an analyst whose focus is on Portuguese-speaking African countries (PALOP).

**RLS:** THE LUSOPHONE AFRICAN COLONIES ARE OFTEN SEEN AS AN EXAMPLE OF AFRICAN SOCIALISM OR, MORE SPECIFICALLY, AFRO-MARXISM. HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS TODAY’S HISTORICAL RESEARCH AROUND CATEGORIES SUCH AS AFRO-MARXISM?

**MC:** For me, Afro-Marxism never really existed. What happened is that in a specific colonial context, Portuguese colonialism never allowed for the emergence of an African elite, except very briefly during the final stage of colonialism between 1960 and 1974. The African elite was a micro-elite. There was no petite bourgeoisie. There were no farmers and not even a working class, as forced labour prevented one from forming. The micro-elite was composed of the assimilated and mixed-race *mestiços*, who worked in the third sector doing bureaucratic work.

In reality, this micro-elite was placed within the colonial administration or at the immediate

margins of the colonial administrative machine. This elite knew Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea-Bissau, however, only through the lens of the colonial state. This same elite would later try to create independent states socially inspired by the Portuguese state model. Looking from the perspective of cultural sociology, what was in the minds of the new leaders was to build their own Portugal. That is a homogeneous nation with no space for ethnicity, led by a single party, a state with a very strong presence in the economy, and a single language. This is exactly what Portugal used to be. However, in the context of a fascist Portugal, there was the need for an armed struggle. As a result, there was a certain politico-military proximity to the Soviet Union, Cuba, and China. Therefore, so-called “Marxism-Leninism” emerged as a more effective politico-cultural tool.

When we speak about Marxism-Leninism in such situations, we need to ask ourselves who was Marxist inside these movements. In Angola, I can only think of Viriato da Cruz and maybe Mário de Andrade. In Mozambique, we cannot find any real Marxists. We cannot find people who have read Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, or Rosa Luxemburg. There is absolutely nobody. Therefore, Marxism-Leninism does not exist and simply never existed in these contexts.

Taking Angola as an example, when the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA) officially adopted Marxism-Leninism at its 1977 Congress, the very same year that the *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (FRELIMO) did in Mozambique, independent Marxist publications were banned in Angola. The followers of Nito Alves, who were advocates of Marxism, were murdered. People who tried to publish texts by Marx, Engels, Lenin, or even Rosa Luxemburg were not authorized to do so by the government.

In this context, Marxism-Leninism just appeared as a political discourse of authoritarian modernization but it was not well regarded by

international capitalism, even if it was not socialist. You cannot build socialism in a single-party regime, because society, including the African society, is highly heterogeneous, with different political trajectories. In a single-party state, power is not vested in the people.

In Mozambique, many Portuguese people left the country between 1974 and 1976, and small business people abandoned the factories. Therefore, there was a situation of self-management whereby Mozambican workers took control of the businesses. FRELIMO decided to dissolve workers’ management committees and appoint administrative committees comprising party members. As we can see, party power was merely symbolic of people power. This is a classic phenomenon.

Therefore, I would consider the expression “Afro-Marxism” an impressionist expression. I am not saying there were no Marxists in Africa but there were very few. There were some in South Africa, for example, not necessarily members of the South African Communist Party (SACP). In Mozambique, I cannot find anyone among its leaders who had a solid knowledge of Marxism, nor who knew how to apply it in the absence of a working class.

**RLS:** HOW WOULD YOU CHARACTERIZE THE POLITICAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT IN PORTUGAL AND ITS AFRICAN COLONIES LEADING UP TO THE REVOLUTION?

**MC:** Between 1971 and 1973, 44% of the state budget in Portugal was allocated to military expenses. Nevertheless, the colonial state was hard to defeat militarily in the colonies, except in Guinea-Bissau. However, although undefeated, the Portuguese state was asphyxiated by the military costs of the war. The Portuguese bourgeoisie had already decided to join the European Community as far back as the 1960s. But they were scared, and rightfully so, that the fall of the regime would lead to a popular revolt.

Marcelo Caetano, who took over after Salazar's long reign (1932-1968), made some slight changes in terms of liberalizing the political regime, a period known as the "Marcelist Spring". It meant that a person could buy a Marxist publication in a bookshop in downtown Lisbon, which was no longer viewed as dangerous. There were also some independent members of parliament, not really from the Left, but independent, who could be elected. However, it was still a single-party corporatist regime and the colonial war went on.

Without the armed struggle of the African liberation movements, I believe that the regime would ultimately have fallen. It would have perhaps limped along for a few more years but then collapsed. Therefore, the Carnation Revolution in 1974 in Portugal was sparked by the liberation struggle of the African people. It took ten to thirteen years of colonial warfare for the Portuguese military institution to dissociate itself from the "New State" (name of the Salazar and Caetano regime) it had been supporting since 1926. The military officers who carried out the coup had never imagined that it would provoke a popular revolution. They just wanted to bring down the regime, end the colonial war and go home.

When the coup d'état began in Lisbon on the night of 24–25 April with the occupation of a radio station, the first thing that the army officers told the people was to stay indoors, they would take care of everything. But the Portuguese people immediately took to the streets. May Day in Lisbon was a major event - the coup had already produced a revolution. Interestingly, this revolution had a huge effect on the officers themselves, some of whom became more or less revolutionaries, or close to the Portuguese Communist Party.

A population that had endured 40 years of fascism intervened to demand greater democracy and more social measures. As a result, the democratic revolution in 1974

transformed into a social revolution in 1975. It was not necessarily a socialist revolution, but a social one. The challenges created by one stage of the revolution caused the need for another. This process may be called "permanent revolution".

As I already said, the officers initially were not revolutionary. In this regard, I agree with my Mozambican colleague, historian Yussuf Adam, who argues that there was not exactly a decolonization in Africa because there had not been a *Portuguese* initiative - the Africans took over power. However, I think he goes too far: it seems to me incorrect to say that Portugal did not take any initiative. The military coup was a product of the wars in Africa, but it also emanated from a new more liberal context. Within this context, the influential capitalists in Portugal, such as António de Sommer Champalimaud and others were already pushing for decolonization, albeit a neocolonial type of decolonization.

#### **RLS:** DID THE SITUATION IN THE COLONIES FAVOUR PORTUGAL?

**MC:** We need to look at each context separately. Guinea-Bissau was the only country in which the guerrillas could win the struggle militarily. Despite the assassination of Amílcar Cabral, a proclamation of independence was issued on 23 September 1973, before the Carnation Revolution. The *Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (PAIGC) already occupied a substantial portion of the country, and the capital was almost under siege.

In legal terms, the auto-proclamation of independence in 1973 completely changed the circumstances. That is, it was no longer a group of guerrillas rising against Portugal. Portugal was now occupying a foreign country. Several countries immediately recognized Guinea-Bissau. Thus, the general-in-chief in Portuguese

Guinea, António de Spínola<sup>1</sup>, realised that he stood no chance of winning the war in Guinea-Bissau and wanted to negotiate with Amílcar Cabral. This is the reason the *Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado* (PIDE) killed Amílcar Cabral to prevent the negotiations from happening.

In Cape Verde, there were plans to launch guerrilla warfare, with preparations in Cuba. There was an attempt to disembark 50 men trained by the Cubans on Santo Antão Island. However, this never materialised. Nevertheless, to understand the situation in Cape Verde we need to go back in history. The Cape Verdean society was formed by slaves coming from various parts of West Africa and by white settlers. It is a very different social formation from that in continental Africa. The contemporary social formation of Cape Verde shares more similarities with the Antillean societies than with Senegal and Guinea-Bissau. In Cape Verde, there is no ethnicity, no lineage, no clans, no age-based classes, no chieftaincies, and no traditional leaders.

There was a tendency within the elite there to think of the Cape Verdean identity as a regional Portuguese one, the tendency to place the small motherland within the bigger motherland, Portugal. There was also an antifascist struggle, but not anticolonial before the sixties. This was an attempt to transform Cape Verde into an autonomous region of Portugal like Madeira or Açores. If fascism had not existed, this was how the archipelago would probably have evolved. It would have been similar to what happened in France, with the Islands of Martinique, Guadalupe and Guyana integrated into the French Republic.

The economic situation in Angola was very good because of the oil discovered in Cabinda in 1958. The African elite in Angola has always been more

important than in Mozambique. In many aspects, the city of Luanda was more modern than Lisbon. However, the three liberation movements there — the MPLA, the *Frente Nacional para a Libertação de Angola* (FNLA), and the *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA) were divided and constantly in conflict with each other. Thus, in Angola, Portugal could have technically won the war against independence. However, there was also the psychological aspect of the war. The officers questioned the merit of continuing the conflict when all other African countries had already achieved independence.

In Mozambique, FRELIMO was already progressing towards Manica and Sofala in 1973, after consolidating its presence in Tete. This came as a complete surprise to the settlers because colonial government propaganda claimed that the guerrillas were confined to the northern part of the country when, in reality, they were already penetrating the central provinces. The settlers realized that FRELIMO was near Beira, the second-most important port.

That said, Portugal was managing the situation. In fact, at the beginning of 1974, FRELIMO believed that it would need ten more years of armed struggle to defeat Portugal militarily. However, because of the first confrontations in Manica and Sofala, in which a Portuguese farmer was killed (which was very rare in Mozambique), the white population demonstrated in front of the army headquarters in Beira. This demonstration was also accompanied by acts of violence *against* the army.

Portuguese officers were not part of the bourgeoisie. They already felt marginalized and increasingly realized that the settlers, who had big houses, were demonstrating against the army's ineffectiveness. This created a sentiment

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<sup>1</sup> António de Spínola (1910-1996) was a military officer and conservative politician. He became the first President of Portugal after the end of the *Estado Novo*.

within the army that they were dying for the rich, expendable. Founded in Guinea, the *Movimento dos Capitães*<sup>2</sup> emerged in Mozambique in the context of a divide between the white population and the military hierarchy.

**RLS: There are two dominant narratives about the 25 April Revolution in Portugal and independence in Africa. One seems to claim that the revolution led to independence in Africa, while the other seems to argue otherwise. Which would you place closer to the truth?**

**MC:** After ten to thirteen years of war, depending on the context, the progress of the guerrillas started having a psychological impact on the colonial army who began to realize that they could not win the war. With this realisation, they questioned the need to continue. Thus, there was some form of decolonization because the army and the bourgeoisie began to move in that direction due to the struggle of the African people. The African liberation movements did not defeat Portugal militarily but created a new political context.

**RLS: THE 25 APRIL REVOLUTION HAD DIFFERENT OUTCOMES IN PORTUGAL AND ITS COLONIES. WHILE IN PORTUGAL, THE REVOLUTION IS CELEBRATED AS PAVING THE WAY TO DEMOCRACY, IN THE AFRICAN COLONIES THE OUTCOMES WERE REGIMES THAT, DESPITE BRINGING ABOUT INDEPENDENCE, CANNOT BE CONSIDERED DEMOCRATIC. HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN THIS? IS THERE ANY LINK BETWEEN THE REVOLUTION AND THE NATURE OF POST-COLONIAL REGIMES IN LUSOPHONE AFRICA?**

**MC:** There was a dialectical relationship between the revolutionary processes in Africa and Europe. In the twentieth century, there were three sectors of revolution: the capitalist countries, the so-called socialist countries, and the third world. In this case, 25 April was a

conjugation of two of these three sectors of the global revolution.

Democracy undeniably arrived in Portugal on 25 April. But if you look at the political structure designed by the MFA, including its left-most wings, you realize that they were not proposing parliamentary elections for Portugal. They were proposing a military approach to structuring society: a pyramidal structure of committees without political parties. This remained on paper only, because the situation on the ground did not allow for its implementation. The Portuguese people wanted democracy and elections, free trade unions, etc.

However, you asked a very important question. Whenever I meet former members of the Movement and captains of the armed forces, I find that they agree that they dismantled the single-party regime in Portugal. When I ask if they realize that they also helped establish the one-party regime in Africa, I am left with the impression that they do not understand the connection. Their response is always that what they did was to end the war and decolonize.

However, the reality is that the MFA not only allowed but supported the establishment of single-party regimes in Africa. We must pay attention to what I mean here. I am not criticizing independence. Samora Machel was right to say that they were not going to conduct a *referendum* because you do not ask a slave if he wants to be free or not. In that context, it was obvious that everyone wanted freedom. But that does not mean there should not be *elections*. The absence of a referendum should not mean that power is handed over to a single party, especially without elections.

In the case of Angola, Portugal had to take into account the existence of three rival liberation

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<sup>2</sup> *Movimento das Forças Armadas*, also known as *Movimento dos Capitães* (MFA, movement of the Army or Movement of the Captains) was the movement of soldiers who initiated the 25 April Revolution in Portugal.

fronts. The Alvor Agreement<sup>3</sup> (January 1975) provided for a joint government between Portugal and these three movements. But this did not mean democracy, because no other party could be created. There was a sort of “single-tripartism”. Civil war soon broke out, as each of the three parties wanted to govern.

The idea of the single party was very dominant during that period. It was strongly linked to the idea of the nation. Yet, the Creole elites within the ranks of the colonial administration always harkened back to the colony when imagining the new country - a land that was not a nation. As you might know, I do not use the expression “national liberation struggle”, because a national liberation struggle is aimed at liberating a nation that already exists. In the African context, the struggle was to liberate the African people, it was an anti-colonial struggle, not a national liberation one. I do not wish to delegitimize these struggles but what I mean is that these struggles were not to liberate the precolonial African nations but to drive out the coloniser and produce a new, modern, European-style nation *against the precolonial African nations*.

This speaks to what I call the paradigm of “authoritarian modernization.” The idea is that a nation has to be built rapidly and at all costs. In this paradigm, all other forms of identity are regarded as obscurantism, tribalism, ethnicism, etc. This was even more pronounced in Mozambique than in Angola. To forcefully unify people, ethnicities, tribes, etc., in other words, precolonial nations, a single ruling party had to be established. In reality, the single parties did not unify anything. Instead, they caused considerable divisions including within the parties themselves.

At that time, when the UN and the Organization of African Unity (OAU)<sup>4</sup> recognized an anticolonial movement, it always recognized one as the “sole and legitimate representative” of a particular people. For example, this was the case for the South West African People’s Organisation (SWAPO) in Namibia and FRELIMO in Mozambique. This means that the international community recognised that it would be the only party even before the given territory became independent. The idea was readily accepted at the time *for Africa* but not for South America or Europe. Consequently, the idea of single-party states had nothing to do with Marxism-Leninism. It was a justification that emerged at a later stage.

For example, Mobutu in Zaire, who had nothing to do with the Left, also established a single-party state, the Popular Movement of the Revolution (PMR). The PMR’s political structure was very similar to MPLA and FRELIMO: the idea was that to create the nation from the colony, you needed to unify the people with authoritarianism. The ruling elite, since it was not a bourgeoisie with capital to invest, survived because it controlled the state. To maintain that control, it was better to have a single-party state.

Nevertheless, despite the emergence of these single-party states, decolonization in itself must be seen as a democratic process. That said, this type of democracy was inert. The African revolutions ended the very day that the single parties took power. I do not mean they did not accomplish anything positive, but the authoritarian regimes prevented the continuation of the revolutionary, democratic process. It prevented the people from taking power.

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<sup>3</sup> It was the agreement which granted independence to Angola from Portugal. It was signed in January 1975 by the Portuguese government, MPLA, FNLA and UNITA. The agreement established a transitional government composed of the signatory parties.

<sup>4</sup> The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was established on 25 May 1963 in Ethiopia and it was replaced by the African Union on 9 July 2002. It was initially established to eradicate colonial and neocolonialism in Africa and to promote political and economic integration in Africa.



What I am trying to stress here is that the single-party states in the PALOP countries in 1974-5 have nothing to do with Marxism. It was not because these parties adopted so-called Marxism-Leninism that they adopted the one-party system. On the contrary, it was because they wanted to adopt the one-party system that, in a particular cultural context, they adopted "Marxism-Leninism".

**RLS:** POST-REVOLUTION, PORTUGAL HAS BEEN CRITICISED FOR ALLOWING THE AUTOMATIC TRANSFER OF POWER TO THE LIBERATION MOVEMENTS INSTEAD OF OPTING FOR ELECTIONS OR REFERENDUMS TO ALLOW THE PEOPLE TO ELECT A GOVERNMENT. HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO FRELIMO AND MPLA'S PATH TO POWER AND HOW THEY APPROACH POWER TODAY?

**MC:** I have already partially answered this question. Concerning their path to power, it is true that the 7 September 1974 accords between the Portuguese and FRELIMO did not mention democratization. Portugal simply agreed to transfer total power to FRELIMO, after a period of joint government. Between 7 September 1974 and 25 June 1975, the government was run by both Portugal and FRELIMO. However, everyone knew that FRELIMO would take power without elections after that and small parties were prohibited even before independence.

Had there been elections, FRELIMO certainly would have won because the other parties were not part of the armed struggle. The *Comité Revolucionário de Moçambique* (COREMO) had waged a small armed struggle but suffered double repression, being itself massacred by the Portuguese and FRELIMO. Other small parties emerged during the period between 25 April and 7 September, but they did not have any social base and probably would have received only 5 percent of the vote at the national level, perhaps more in certain places. One of these parties was the one of Uria Simango, the former vice-president of FRELIMO who returned to Mozambique. He would have managed to win

some votes in some places but never countrywide.

Thus, even if FRELIMO had won 90 percent of the votes that would have always resulted in some non-FRELIMO members of parliament, which would have prevented the total fusion between the state and the party. However, FRELIMO used elections to integrate the population by encouraging the people to nominate party candidates but not to discuss political orientation.

Your question mentions two important things that I think are part of the political process and the sociology of power throughout history. Let me compare Cape Verde with Mozambique, for example. In Cape Verde, after the democratic changes in 1991, the opposition took power. They remained in power for ten years. Thereafter, the *Partido Africano da Independência de Cabo Verde* (PAICV) assumed power for the next 10 years. After that, the opposition came back. Broadly speaking, these parties apply the same policies.

This change seems unnecessary but, in reality, it is very important because it limits the same families enjoying power and wealth for 50 years. This is very different. Even if the *Movimento para a Democracia* (MPD) and the PAICV in Cape Verde implemented the same kind of neoliberal policies, in general, the outcomes would have been very different if the same people had remained in power.

In Angola and Mozambique, there is a very strong feeling of family within the ruling political elite. FRELIMO is no longer a political party; it is a social body that controls the state. The MPLA is the same. It is *unthinkable* for these two forces to lose power. They were forced to hold elections after the respective civil wars, but these elections served only to keep them in power. This again speaks to your question about the way they gained power. Without elections, FRELIMO's Central Committee proclaimed



Mozambique's independence. The result was a fusion between the state, economy, and party. The party has remained hegemonic, both practically and ideologically.

Even in the rare cases where a local municipality falls to the opposition, FRELIMO still controls the district government. This happens even in urban areas, leading to an administrative and budgetary struggle between the municipality and the district, because funds are first allocated to the district government, and the elected municipality does not have the money to invest in schools, for example, as promised during the election campaign.

During the 2018–19 peace agreement between then president of the *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (RENAMO) Afonso Dhlakama, and the president Filipe Nyusi, the agreement was that all district governments were to be elected. This was to be a step towards democratization, instead of district governments being appointed by the ruling party even in areas dominated by the opposition. Initially, FRELIMO agreed to these changes but later said they were too costly. The cost stems from the notion that FRELIMO is the state and the state is FRELIMO, which also has implications for the opposition. If district administrators were to be elected, FRELIMO would have to nominate a state secretary in each district to oversee the locally-elected government. This duplication of the state apparatus is very expensive. The cost of that process is a practical consequence of the FRELIMO ideology – no free local power is elected within the territory because FRELIMO is the nation and the nation is FRELIMO. So, the party refused to implement the agreement reached with Dhlakama.

Going back to the historical process, since we are talking about the fiftieth anniversary, in 1975–80, FRELIMO was more popular than the MPLA. The MPLA was extremely repressive of the “faction” movement in 1977, which resulted in probably 30,000 deaths. The MPLA rapidly

became pro-Soviet. Samora Machel enjoyed a good relationship with the Soviet Union and also with China, Cuba, and left-wing Christians.

FRELIMO was more independent and non-aligned than the MPLA. Mozambique was a de facto non-aligned state, and the global Left was more sympathetic towards FRELIMO. During the 1980s, many of my Western left-wing colleagues were impressed by the “popular democracy” in Mozambique because people would gather to discuss potential candidates for the popular assembly, but only FRELIMO's candidates and not the political orientation! It wasn't popular democracy it was popular control.

**RLS:** AFTER THE REVOLUTION AND INDEPENDENCE, POSTCOLONIAL LUSOPHONE AFRICA WAS DOMINATED BY PROLONGED CIVIL WARS IN ANGOLA AND MOZAMBIQUE AND RECURRING COUPS AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN GUINEA-BISSAU. THE MOVEMENTS THAT WAGED THE LIBERATION STRUGGLES IN THOSE COUNTRIES WERE LED BY VERY WELL-EDUCATED AND PROGRESSIVE INTELLECTUALS ASPIRING TO MODERNISE THEIR SOCIETIES, BUT WHEN IN POWER, THESE SAME MOVEMENTS APPEARED UNABLE TO IMPLEMENT PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY LIKE FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS. HOW WOULD YOU ANALYSE THIS FAILURE TO ADHERE TO DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES?

**MC:** This challenge is not confined to Lusophone Africa. We can compare it to the French Revolution. Born out of the struggle against the absolute monarchy in 1789, the French Revolution mutated into terror in 1793 and 1794. One of the revolutionaries himself, Louis de Saint Just, said, “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” It is very important to understand this.

The single party destroys the party itself, because it ceases to be a *party* (i.e. one part of the population) and becomes a social body of power. When Agostinho Neto came to power in the MPLA during the internal struggle in 1962–3, he immediately marginalized Mário de Andrade,

and Viriato da Cruz and imposed a strict dictatorship. People associated with Viriato da Cruz were massacred. This happened immediately after he took power. Yet, Neto was a medical doctor, an intellectual!

In 1974, there were very few people with PhD or even Master's degrees in FRELIMO and a few hundred with Bachelor's degrees. This does not mean you need diplomas to be regarded as an intellectual, but these same intellectuals imposed one-party rule. They imposed an authoritarian paternalistic structure controlled by a very small minority. To remain in power, this small minority had to be extremely violent. Otherwise, they would have been overtaken by the African society. Traditional leaders would have claimed that they were the legitimate leaders, etc.

Another example is the PAIGC. They created a unique situation in the world, where a single party was in power in two distinct states, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. Amilcar Cabral's brother, Luis Cabral, was the president of Guinea-Bissau, and Aristides Pereira, a long-time comrade of Amilcar Cabral, was the president of Cape Verde. In Cape Verde, the party never killed people, it applied very little torture, and there was an opposition newspaper, *Terranova*, the newspaper of the Catholic Church, which was never banned. In Guinea-Bissau, however, the very same party committed numerous atrocities, there were mass graves, etc.

In Mozambique, independence came on 25 June 1975, and a day after, on 26 June, FRELIMO decided to eliminate the role of traditional leaders. They decided to make it look as if traditional leaders never existed. They immediately used violence to enforce power.

I believe that the single party exacerbates the social and cultural challenges in a country. It is hard to build a state where the majority of the population is illiterate, but some very good leaders were illiterate. Leaders who could listen,

debate, understand, etc. For me, the single party is a great tragedy.

Some form of paternalism vis-à-vis Africa also influenced the debate. Some argued that there could be no democracy in Africa because most of its population could not read and write, because there were no nations, and it was important to first build the nation, modernize the people, etc. This authoritarian paternalism was also dominant in the Western anti-imperialist left. What they rejected for South America, namely dictatorships, they advocated for Africa.

**RLS:** IN A 2013 INTERVIEW WITH *PLURAL*, YOU ARGUED THAT THERE WERE NO LEFT-WING PARTIES IN MOZAMBIQUE, MORE SPECIFICALLY, THAT THERE WERE ONLY RIGHT-WING PARTIES. IN YOUR UNDERSTANDING, FRELIMO, A FORMERLY MARXIST-LENINIST PARTY, IS NOW A BOURGEOIS-CAPITALIST PARTY, RENAMO A RIGHT-WING PARTY, AND THE *MOVIMENTO DEMOCRÁTICO DE MOÇAMBIQUE* (MDM) A CENTRE-RIGHT-CHRISTIAN PARTY. IN ANGOLA, THE SITUATION IS SIMILAR. GIVEN THAT THESE TWO COUNTRIES CAME FROM A RADICAL POSTCOLONIAL TRADITION, WHAT MIGHT HAVE CAUSED THE DISAPPEARANCE OF LEFT-WING PARTIES THERE, AND WHAT DO YOU THINK IS BLOCKING THE EMERGENCE OF NEW LEFT PARTIES TODAY?

**MC:** I stand by what I said in the *Plural* interview. There are no left parties in Mozambique. But I do not mean there are no left movements in Mozambique.

In Angola, the situation is a little more complicated. In Angola, there is at least one left-wing party, the Democratic Bloc. The *Bloco Democrático* is a distant descendant of the *Organização Comunista de Angola* (OCA), which was banned by the MPLA, and its militants were imprisoned for many years. Some went into exile in Portugal. It is a very small party, but I can honestly say that they are of the left and not corrupt.

In Guinea-Bissau, there was the *Partido da Renovação Social* (PRS), the party of Kumba

Lalá. In 1994, this party had left-wing demands. Later on, it changed and embraced an ethnicist narrative.

In Mozambique, there have never been left-wing parties. Was FRELIMO left? In my understanding, to be left means to be in favour of putting the people in power, it means listening to the people and answering to the people's demands. I think FRELIMO stopped being left-wing the day it became a ruling single party. Before that, it expressed a single-party ideology, especially after its biggest internal crisis in 1968-9 with the death of Eduardo Mondlane. However, it was not yet in power. When it came to power, it turned itself into a social body. And, after approximately fifteen years (1987-1992), the former "Marxist-Leninist" party from the so-called "worker-peasant alliance" transformed itself into the party of the most modern capitalist sectors in Mozambique.

This inversion also speaks to what happened in the past. Take the Cuban Communist Party as an example. If it were to officially abandon Marxism, it would lead to internal turmoil. In the case of Mozambique, FRELIMO's departure from Marxism was not debated at the Central Committee, nor was it discussed in the Congress. Claiming that Marxism was causing them problems, President Joaquim Chissano decided to abandon it and it was implemented by the party. The fact that FRELIMO and the MPLA abandoned Marxism so easily shows the nature of the Marxism they were using, that it was just a *tool* of power, not an identity. That is why I insist that these parties ceased to be from the left the very day they became ruling parties, regardless of their narratives.

There are left-wing movements in both countries, but, except for the Democratic Bloc in Angola, they have not yet managed to become parties. Many NGOs and feminist movements

are genuinely left-wing. A left party could emerge if the NGOs decide to unite, bring their demands into the political sphere, and contest elections. It might take 30 years to win power, but would be more effective than waiting for splits inside FRELIMO or RENAMO<sup>5</sup>.

Mozambique needs a political party that defends the people every day and not only during election races. One of the main problems with RENAMO is that it does nothing between elections, even when there are injustices taking place in a particular area of the country. RENAMO does not build the party outside elections - but that is precisely what democracy requires.

**RLS:** DESPITE EMERGING FROM THE SAME COLONIAL PAST, CAPE VERDE STANDS OUT FROM THE REST OF LUSOPHONE AFRICA. CIVIL WARS, COUP D'ÉTATS, AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY NEVER SEEMED TO HAVE GAINED GROUND IN THE COUNTRY. TODAY, THE ISLAND REPUBLIC IS ONE OF THE MOST DEMOCRATIC NATIONS IN AFRICA. WHAT INSTITUTIONS LED TO CAPE VERDE'S CURRENT STABILITY?

**MC:** Cape Verde is regarded as a model, although there have also been corruption scandals there. Nevertheless, I agree that it is a model not only for the PALOP countries but also for the rest of Africa. There are not many places where political change does not lead to a political crisis. Does it have to do with particular institutions in Cape Verde? I think not.

In Portugal's African colonies, the status of *indigena* and the *Código do Trabalho Indigena* (Native Labour Code) was to establish the limits of who was not considered assimilated and would be subjected to forced labour. This forced labour lasted for six months per year in Mozambique and for one year every two years in Angola. The status of *indigenato* was never fully implemented in Cape Verde for a simple reason:

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<sup>5</sup> This interview was recorded on April 23, 2024 and therefore does not take into account the recent elections in Mozambique (October 9, 2024).

there were no farms, no big plantations, not many construction projects, etc. Therefore, the Portuguese began to encourage or even force Cape Verdeans to migrate to São Tomé and Príncipe but many others migrated to Holland or North America. So, Cape Verdeans have always migrated because the British ships would stop in Cape Verde en route to America. Cape Verdeans would jump onto the ships and later establish themselves in the US and Canada.

The Native Code was abolished in Cape Verde in 1947. This means people were no longer regarded as subjects but as citizens. It did not mean, however, that they had the right to vote. To vote in fascist Portugal, one was required to know how to read and pay taxes. The type of colonialization in Cape Verde was not the same compared to other countries. There was no bourgeoisie in Cape Verde, but an intellectual elite that was more important than in Angola and Mozambique.

It is also important to note that Portuguese colonialization is not older than other European colonialism. Some point out that the Portuguese arrived at the end of the fifteenth century, but they only managed to reach some small areas along the coast. They then managed to penetrate the Zambezi River. However, the effective domination of the territories of Angola and Mozambique - 95 percent of what constitutes these countries today - only happened at the end of the nineteenth century or even the 1920s, the same as conquests by other European countries.

But in Cape Verde, colonisation actually started in 1460. This means that the creation of the identity at that time was not with the invasion of an African precolonial nation (the archipelago was unpopulated at the time of discovery) but with the production of a slave Portuguese society. The result is that Cape Verde is a nation-state, a creole nation-state. I do not know if we can speak of a Mozambican or Angolan nation. I do not know if the feeling of belonging to a

nation is sufficiently shared among the native population in Angola and Mozambique. Therefore, it was not the same type of colonisation.

Nobody has ever contested the state in Cape Verde. In Mozambique, I remember a FRELIMO cadre from the south who went to the north for a meeting with the peasants and was asked to "return to Mozambique". They meant to return to the capital. This shows that in their perception, Maputo *is* the nation. People have a feeling of exteriority. The relationship between the population and the state is not stable in Mozambique. In Cape Verde, however, this fragility does not exist. And fortunately, there is no oil, diamonds, or gas in Cape Verde, there is tourism. Oil and gas are never good news in Africa.

**RLS:** IN MOZAMBIQUE, AND TO SOME EXTENT ANGOLA AND GUINEA-BISSAU, VIOLENCE, INCLUDING STATE AND NON-STATE VIOLENCE, SEEM TO BE A RECURRING ISSUE POST-INDEPENDENCE. BOTH FRELIMO AND RENAMO IN MOZAMBIQUE AS WELL AS MPLA AND UNITA IN ANGOLA RELIED ON VIOLENCE TO OBTAIN AND MAINTAIN LEGITIMACY. BASED ON THIS HISTORICAL ROLE OF VIOLENCE, IS IT POSSIBLE TO EXPECT ANY FORM OF PEACEFUL POWER TRANSFER, AND WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE NEEDS TO BE DONE?

**MC:** We can dream about it. However, you spoke about the historical role of violence. We need to be careful not to make a reductionist interpretation of Max Weber when he speaks about the state as having a monopoly over legitimate violence. If the state represents its people democratically, it has a monopoly over legitimate violence. The police will certainly arrest a criminal and use violence, if necessary, but that does not mean all forms of violence are legitimate.

In South Africa in particular, there is a reductionist reading of Franz Fanon about the role of violence. When you read Fanon's entire

work, you find that he studied violence, but that does not mean he was apologetic about violence per se. The same Fanon who justified the violence of the Algerian National Front was a doctor who treated ill settlers. That is to say that there is a violence of liberation and a violence of oppression. Therefore, there are different forms of violence.

A peaceful transfer of power happened in Cape Verde although there were specific historical conditions that facilitated this. In Guinea-Bissau, for example, there were various power shifts and several coup d'états. These coups were not meant for liberation or for any other party to return to power, it was the military trying to gain control regardless of which party ruled. This is a negative consequence of the important historical role the guerrillas played during the liberation war in which they could have defeated Portugal militarily. The number of soldiers relative to the population is more significant in Guinea-Bissau than in Mozambique. The army as a social body has too much power. Guinea-Bissau is a country virtually without a state, where the army is the only state institution.

In Angola and Mozambique, everything will depend on social movements. The people need to believe that they can bring about transformation. If the MPLA and FRELIMO lose power in this context, I believe that the use of violence may be superfluous. For example, there was not much violence during the fall of Mobutu in Kinshasa. The same applies to Burkina-Faso, where there was a real revolution ten years ago. But without huge social movements, MPLA and FRELIMO will do anything to stay in power.

There were hunger riots in Mozambique in 2008 and 2010 without political consequences. If something similar happened today, the riots organized by hungry *subjects* could be transformed into riots of *citizens* demanding change. The government may decide to kill everyone, but this could create internal divisions within the security services and the army.

Nevertheless, the biggest problem for Mozambique's democracy is not the existence of FRELIMO as a hegemonic party, but the lack of a capable opposition. If RENAMO, even defeated, would defend the people systematically and organize them, it would be advantageous for democracy in Mozambique.

**RLS:** FORMER FRENCH COLONIES IN AFRICA ARE CURRENTLY EXPERIENCING WHAT SOME CALL A "NEW WAVE OF DECOLONIZATION" CHARACTERIZED BY MOVEMENTS LIKE FRANCE DÉGAGE ("OUT WITH FRANCE") AND ONE COUP D'ÉTAT AFTER ANOTHER. IN THE FORMER PORTUGUESE COLONIES, HOWEVER, EXCEPT IN GUINEA-BISSAU, THERE ARE FEW COUPS, AND THE PORTUGUESE POSTCOLONIAL PRESENCE IS UNCONTESTED. WOULD IT MAKE SENSE TO IDENTIFY TWO FORMS OF DECOLONIZATION WITH THE LUSOPHONE BEING REGARDED AS COMPLETE AND THE FRANCOPHONE AS INCOMPLETE?

**MC:** I think the contexts are completely different. I believe movements like France Dégage express the feelings of a population living under difficult conditions. However, I do not think it is the French presence that they are criticizing; it is the French army's lack of military capacity to defeat the jihadists at issue. To appease the local population, the military officers of these countries used anti-French propaganda.

I am French, but I am not worried that the narrative is anti-France. I have always been absolutely against France's military presence in Africa precisely because France is a former colonizer. If there is a country that should never be involved militarily in Africa, it is France. For me, the return of French soldiers to France is very good news. However, it should not be regarded as the end of French neocolonialism. French companies are still there. The CFA Franc is there. Migrants from those countries continue to look at France as a destination, etc.

Direct state-to-state relationships are indeed declining in West Africa. We are experiencing the weakening of the infamous *Françafrique*, which is positive. It is the end of this particular

quasi-paternalistic relationship between France and its former colonies in which, for example, the son of a certain dictator can use stolen money to invest in luxurious apartments in Paris without any reaction from the French authorities. This is becoming weaker. However, we should not call it a new process of de-colonialization.

The context is completely different for Portugal. Portugal has an extraordinary history: a small country with 9 million people in 1974 and something around 1 million in 1492, managed to colonize large swathes of the planet. Not that it was positive, but we must admit it is extraordinary. When decolonization took place, Portugal was not at all the most important Lusophone country. It was a poor country of 9 million people that modernized by joining the European Community. Angola, for example, was thirteen times bigger than Portugal. Mozambique was seven to eight times bigger. Not to mention Brazil.

Today, the Portuguese population is stagnating while Mozambique's population has already reached 35 million. Even within the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP, a kind

of Lusophone Commonwealth), Portugal is not the most powerful country. It is Brazil, building on its renowned South-South relations. The most important country in the CPLP is not the former colonizer, whereas in the Francophone equivalent, France, the former colonizer, is the most important country. The same can be said of Great Britain within the Commonwealth.

Angola and Mozambique no longer need to decolonize from Portugal, despite the presence of Portuguese companies in those countries. The neo-colonial force in Angola and Mozambique is no longer a country but the neocolonial institutions of international capitalism, the World Bank and the IMF.

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